

INTERACT – RESEARCHING THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS’ INTEGRATION AS A THREE-WAY PROCESS - IMMIGRANTS, COUNTRIES OF EMIGRATION AND COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION AS ACTORS OF INTEGRATION

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Integration Policies Sweden country report

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Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of
Integration

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Integration policies – Sweden country report

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INTERACT - Researching Third Country Nationals' Integration as a Three-way Process - Immigrants, Countries of Emigration and Countries of Immigration as Actors of Integration

Around 25 million persons born in a third country (TCNs) are currently living in the European Union (EU), representing 5% of its total population. Integrating immigrants, i.e. allowing them to participate in the host society at the same level as natives, is an active, not a passive, process that involves two parties, the host society and the immigrants, working together to build a cohesive society.

Policy-making on integration is commonly regarded as primarily a matter of concern for the receiving state, with general disregard for the role of the sending state. However, migrants belong to two places: first, where they come and second, where they now live. While integration takes place in the latter, migrants maintain a variety of links with the former. New means of communication facilitating contact between migrants and their homes, globalisation bringing greater cultural diversity to host countries, and nation-building in source countries seeing expatriate nationals as a strategic resource have all transformed the way migrants interact with their home country.

INTERACT project looks at the ways governments and non-governmental institutions in origin countries, including the media, make transnational bonds a reality, and have developed tools that operate economically (to boost financial transfers and investments); culturally (to maintain or revive cultural heritage); politically (to expand the constituency); legally (to support their rights).

INTERACT project explores several important questions: To what extent do policies pursued by EU member states to integrate immigrants, and policies pursued by governments and non-state actors in origin countries regarding expatriates, complement or contradict each other? What effective contribution do they make to the successful integration of migrants and what obstacles do they put in their way?

A considerable amount of high-quality research on the integration of migrants has been produced in the EU. Building on existing research to investigate the impact of origin countries on the integration of migrants in the host country remains to be done.

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Abstract

Since new rules on labour migration came into force in 2008, Sweden's migration policy has been recognised as being among the most open and liberal in the OECD countries (OECD 2011). Sweden also has a generous asylum system compared with other EU countries, taking large numbers of refugees from countries in conflict such as Iraq and Somalia. Integration is a political priority in Sweden, and is high on the political agenda. The goal of Sweden's integration policies is to 'ensure equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, irrespective of their ethnic and cultural background'.

The country report provides a very brief overview of Swedish integration policies with a special emphasis on cooperation with the States and communities of origin. Particular attention is given by the author to developments that are relevant for the main INTERACT countries of origin.

Key words: Swedish integration policy, migration, integration

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Introduction

The goal of Sweden's integration policies is to "ensure equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, irrespective of their ethnic and cultural background".¹ Integration issues are largely framed in terms of practical issues: jobs, housing, language learning and social benefits. The larger, more difficult question of segregation is much harder to put on the agenda. Indeed, commentators as well as foreign-born residents regularly state – as they did during the 2013 riots – the lack of interaction between Swedish society as a whole and migrants, relegated to poorer neighbourhoods on the fringes of major cities.

Since new rules on labour migration came into force in 2008, Sweden's migration policy has been recognised as among the most open and liberal in the OECD countries (OECD 2011). Sweden also has a generous asylum system compared with other EU countries, taking large numbers of refugees from countries in conflict such as Iraq and Somalia. At the same time, sometimes serious problems with the participation of migrants in Swedish society and the labour market keep recurring. This was the case in the 2013 riots on the outskirts of Stockholm at Husby and elsewhere, and the problem with specific policing measures and with xenophobic politics targeting migrant groups.

In sum, Swedish integration policies might be described as officially liberal, being constrained, though, at different levels in Sweden and often by the EU. The current report probes this issue looking at the following aspects: policy context, support for civil society actors, citizenship rights, main policy actors and most policy initiatives.

Policy context

Integration is a political priority in Sweden, and is high on the agenda of political parties, notwithstanding the decision of the Government to dissolve the former Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality in 2011. One reason for its political importance is the media impact of events such as the 2013 riots, which led to segregation and integration issues being raised across the political spectrum. Critiques have been levelled at the government not just over failed integration policies, but over the fact that the integration minister was the first to intervene during the riots, when the issue was arguably one of law and order, thus, according to critics, conflating unrest within specific migrant communities.²

Another reason for the prevalence of integration concerns is the growing political role and media presence of the far-right Sweden Democrats, which are becoming a crucial force in the Riksdag (parliament) owing to the split between the mainstream political blocs. The Sweden Democrats tap into xenophobic currents in the country by calling for a halt to 'mass immigration'. Since their entry into parliament, the media has given more space to migration, with negative results in terms of the public's perception of refugee reception.³

In other parties, too, Sweden's relatively liberal migration and asylum policies have prompted questions over educational attainment, language learning, accommodation, segregation and employment for new arrivals. Debates on the lack of protection foreign workers' rights have

¹ See government website on integration: <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/116/a/19443> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

² See <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/ask-tar-husbydebatten/> [Accessed 29 July 2014] and the English-language comment by British writer Nina Power, among others: <http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/kulturdebatt/what-was-the-smashing-of-a-few-windows-compared-to-the-destruction-of-the-future-of-many/> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

³ See study by Som-institutet, available on: <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/okat-motstand-mot-flyktinginvandring/> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

repeatedly surfaced since the 2008 labour immigration law, with the opposition Social Democrats and trade unions raising concerns in relation to cases of exploitation.⁴ While these debates continue, new stricter guidelines on recruitment were introduced in January 2012 (EMN 2011: 11).

More recently, another side of this debate resurfaced following Sweden's decision to grant all Syrians arriving in the country a permanent residence permit, after which politicians from the opposition voiced concern about unequal burden-sharing between municipalities (which are responsible for hosting asylum seekers) and the need for more resources to help new arrivals.

All these factors make integration a discussion point in Swedish political discourse, with issues of segregation, labour-market opportunities and asylum-seeker provisions particularly high on the agenda.

Targets of integration policy

Rather than targeting one ethnic or nationality-based group *per se*, policy discourses tend to single out areas of concern, for example, the immigrant quarters on the outskirts of Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg. One sign of this was the integration minister's decision to transfer his team to work for a week from offices in Rosengård, Malmö's highly mediated migrant suburb, in September 2013.⁵ On a broader level, 'urban development' remains – as mentioned – one of the seven strategic areas covered by Sweden's migration policies (Regeringen 2010).

That said, certain groups have been particularly important in policy formulation. Immigrants and refugees from the Middle East (especially Iraq and Iran) and from the Horn of Africa (especially Somalia), the government's own integration report notes, have had a much worse employment outcomes than other groups (Regeringen 2010: 19). Iraqis have also been the biggest group participating in *instegsjobb* (first-step jobs), a subsidised form of first employment linked to participation in Swedish language learning courses for immigrants (Regeringen 2010: 13): they were the focus of a recently concluded official migration study *Ny väg in* (New way in, see below). Initiatives such as the website nyistockholm.se, which gives information on the city and Swedish society to those with a recent residence permit, tellingly carry translations in five languages: English, Persian, Arabic, Somali and Tigrinya (spoken in Eritrea and Ethiopia). In sum, refugee arrivals from these regions are particularly important in policy and media terms, as was seen in recent debates on educational attainment among migrant groups, where televised pictures and narratives tacitly invoked Somalis in particular.⁶

As mentioned, the seven fields of Sweden's integration strategy – faster introduction, work and entrepreneurship, schools, language skills/adult education, anti-discrimination measures, urban development, and basic common values – reach across social, cultural and employment fields. In the 2014 Budget, the government launched a new set of policy initiatives on integration: citizenship ceremonies offered in all municipalities in order to 'use citizenship as a tool for integration'; tailored training programmes run by Swedish *folkhögskolor* (adult-education establishments), including language learning; an extra 20m Skr for work against xenophobia and intolerance, taking the total sum for 2014-17 to 61.5m Skr (€ 7.1m); and larger state support for municipalities that take on many new arrivals.⁷

⁴ For the trade unions' policies, see e.g. http://www.lo.se/start/politiska_sakfragor/politiska_krav_i_korthet/invandring [Accessed 29 July 2014].

⁵ See <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/17592/a/224539> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

⁶ See, for example, this debate on television: <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/sverige/det-ar-valdigt-valdigt-allvarligt> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

⁷ See <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11043/a/224143> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

The most important field of integration work in Sweden, however, is employment. This is not surprising. Sweden has the lowest employment rate among OECD countries for foreign-born residents in relation to the native population, at 82 percent, according to one recent report (Migro 2013). As mentioned, two origin countries with particularly low employment rates are Iraq and Somalia, at, respectively, 39 percent and 25 percent. The shift in Sweden from labour-focused immigration to the reception of refugees in recent decades (notwithstanding the changes since the 2008 reform) have contributed to this state of affairs, according to the Migro report.

One large issue is the fact that highly-qualified migrants and refugees cannot exercise their professions in Sweden as their qualifications are not recognised and as they lack language skills. Funds have been set aside for complementary further education and for the validation of qualifications, but large groups remain under-employed, or employed in sectors far below their skillsets.

In general, labour market integration for *invandrare* (immigrants, a term generally taken to refer to non-western foreign nationals residing in Sweden) has fallen short, not least due to discrimination in the workplace and in society as a whole. As an earlier report has noted, the very categorisation of certain groups as *invandrare* and the stereotypical associations that this category invokes may have contributed to their ‘outsider’ status in different aspects of Swedish society, not least in terms of employment.⁸

Description of integration public policies

In January 2011, the former Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality was dissolved by the centre-right government coalition (EMN 2011: 10). The Ministry of Employment is now responsible for integration policy, with a Minister for Integration (currently Erik Ullenhag, of the coalition’s Liberal party) in charge of these issues. The Minister is responsible, *inter alia*, for: introducing new arrivals into the labour market and Swedish society; compensation to municipalities (*kommuner*) for refugee reception; Swedish citizenship; and urban development.⁹

In 2008 the Government launched an integration strategy for 2008-10, focusing on seven fields mentioned above. Subsequently, a December 2010 reform aiming to speed up integration for new arrivals has been described as the most significant change in Swedish integration policy for many years. More recently, the 2014 Budget – formulated in the run-up to the next general election – includes several new measures on integration. These initiatives will all be discussed below.

In May 2011 the Government set up an intra-departmental working group to develop a new national integration strategy.¹⁰ A new strategy has, however, *not* been formalised, leading to criticism over a perceived absence of a coherent integration policy. The lack of labour market integration for often very highly-educated foreign-born residents remains a particularly serious problem, as critics and politicians acknowledge.¹¹

⁸ See the official 2006 report (De Los Reyes 2006).

⁹ See the minister’s webpage, <http://www.government.se/sb/d/13513> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

¹⁰ See <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/13817/a/177447> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

¹¹ See, for example, this comment by the Confederation of Professional Associations (“Integration policy is completely without a strategy”), available on: <http://www.expressen.se/debatt/integrationspolitiken-ar-helt-utan-strategi/> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

Swedish integration policies are transsectorial, cutting across several fields.¹² The Ministry of Employment is in charge of integration policy, in collaboration with a range of agencies and ministries working on migration-related issues, as follows:

- The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is responsible for migration policy while the Ministry of Employment handles integration policy.
- The Swedish Migration Board (*Migrationsverket*) is the administrative agency responsible for migration, reporting to the MoJ.
- The Police, in charge of border control and returns, also reports to the MoJ.
- Migration courts (*Migrationsdomstolar*) and the Migration Court of Appeal (*Migrationsöverdomstol*) hear migration cases.
- County Administrative Boards (*Länsstyrelserna*), tasked with negotiating with municipalities and stakeholders on the reception of unaccompanied minors.
- The Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), co-ordinating introduction activities for new arrivals.
- The Youth Board (*Ungdomsstyrelsen*), funding NGO work on discrimination.
- Swedish ESF Council, managing funds from the European Integration Fund.
- Diplomatic missions abroad (visas and related issues).
- The National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*).
- The National Board on Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*).
- The National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (*Boverket*).

‘Integration’ remains a contested field, as was seen in the calls for a less community-focused approach during the 2013 riots. The opposition is likely to remove the post of integration minister if it wins the next election, which would make integration work more decentralised and even more focused on specialised agencies, primarily aimed at other issues: the Public Employment Agency, *Skolverket*, etc.). The government, recognising that more work needs to be done, has launched a ‘jobs tour’ focusing on migrant groups while striving to work more systematically across ministries.¹³

As noted above, labour market integration has become the main plank of Sweden’s integration policy. After the 2010 decision to speed up the integration of new arrivals, the Public Employment Agency was given co-ordinating responsibility for introduction activities. The agency, together with the migrant, draws up an ‘introduction plan’ to speed up social and labour market integration. Also, an ‘introduction guide’ (*etableringslots*) assists migrants in the introductory period, during which they are required to participate in civic orientation. While participation in the introduction plan is not compulsory, a new benefit is paid to migrants who do introduction activities regardless of where in Sweden they have settled.¹⁴

The municipalities (*kommuner*) are in charge of refugee reception. They have only taken on this task in an uneven fashion, however, due to its voluntary nature and its dependence on refugees’ own preferences. The shortage of places for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has been serious. The

¹² See the European Website on Integration for further details: http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/en/info_sheet.cfm [Accessed 29 July 2014].

¹³ See <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/15255> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

¹⁴ For details, see <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11289/a/131358> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

government, recognising issues with widely differing burden-sharing, have changed the incentive structure for receiving refugees, but more efforts and more resources are needed.

Since the Public Employment Agency took charge of the new introduction plans, the role of municipalities in labour market integration has been diminished. However, municipalities do provide the civics element of the introduction plan, carried out with central state funding. They also continue to provide Swedish courses (*Svenska för invandrare*, SFI, see above) and other educational opportunities; housing support; and other initiatives targeting youth and children. While the SFI courses are generally seen to bear results, the incentives for student progress were removed since these did not show a marked increase in language performance.¹⁵

Again, actions are not specifically focused on the INTERACT nationalities, with the possible exception of Syrian arrivals from the civil war, whose potential special needs have been highlighted by politicians in recent months.

Policy initiatives

Since the 2008 reforms, employers themselves – rather than, as was previously the case, state institutions – have been trusted to assess their skill needs in terms of foreign workers. This limits the need for pre-departure interventions, but has raised criticism over incorrect recruitment practices.

Official pre-departure initiatives have so far focused on quota refugees; however, one recent project on Iraqi migration, *Ny väg in* (New way in), has looked at drivers and information needs among labour migrants as well (Migrationsverket 2011). This project may end up improving information provision before departure with the aim of encouraging integration (Swedish ESF Council 2013: 5).¹⁶ Barriers to international recruitment include a lack of information and language skills, as well as reliance on middlemen. In light of the report's suggestions, Migrationsverket is now considering measures such as improving its web portal, seeking partnership with associations in the departure country, and outreach through social media (Migrationsverket 2011: 9-10).

As a rule all migrants can avail themselves of the same tools, with the exception of Danes and Norwegians who cannot attend free SFI courses due to language similarities. The focus in the 2010 reform is explicitly on new arrivals, rather than on those already settled in the country, which means that nation-based groups arriving more recently will benefit more from introduction activities (this might be the case, say, with Syrians).

Certain integration-related projects are related to specific nationalities, such as projects for Somali children and Somali women in Stockholm suburbs or the aforementioned Iraq-focused project *Ny väg in*. The INTERACT nationalities have not been the focus of such special interventions in recent years, though the expected influx of Syrian refugees is likely to change that.

There are different initiatives to get migrants into work: *nystartsjobb*, or 'new start jobs', for the long-term unemployed and newly-arrived immigrants, in which the employer is subsidised to take on workers; *prova-på-plats*, a form of structured work experience for those without such experiences; and support for foreign entrepreneurs and business owners through mentorships, advice and networking.

Swedish for immigrants (*Svenska för invandrare* or SFI) has long been a cornerstone of Sweden's integration policy, though financial results-based incentives (the 'SFI bonus') have now been removed. Courses are free, provided by the municipality, and available to migrants who are registered locally; have a residence permit; are sixteen or over; and have a Swedish national registration

¹⁵ On this range of initiatives, see <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/16735/a/208213> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

¹⁶ See ESF Council 2013: 5.

number.¹⁷ Daytime courses usually involve about fifteen to twenty hours a week, and evening courses about six hours a week. Professional specialisations are also available.

A law on discrimination entered into force in 2009, and a new authority was created, the Equality Ombudsman, to ensure that the law is followed and to handle complaints. However, the Ombudsman has been accused of not systematically investigating the many cases referred.¹⁸

Engagement of non-state actors

Among the large number of migrant associations and federations in Sweden, many are involved in integration-related work. The best-organised associations, such as *Assyriska Riksförbundet i Sverige*, have well-developed relations with local and regional authorities, as well as with Swedish and international NGOs. They often play both a formal and informal role in integration-related work (through courses and training, festivals, co-operation and other activities).¹⁹

Migrant associations have been brought into the state's integration work in an uneven fashion, however, through funding and partnership relations with local authorities and other actors. The 2013 riots flag up some of the complexities at play in these relations. The local association Megafonen, based on the outskirts of Stockholm at Husby, was accused of encouraging confrontation with police – something it denied. Megafonen is not a 'migrant association' as such: it describes itself rather as a residents' grassroots organisation, and for a time received funding from Swedish housing bodies. Its work has ranged from political mobilisation in the suburbs to local meetings, seminars and study support, yet, at the same time it has been seen by some commentators as a subversive force at loggerheads with the state.²⁰ Such dynamics are likely to become more widespread with deepening segregation and the continued growth of civil society initiatives among migrants and the 'second generation'.

From the state's perspective, their relations with civil society are evolving. In 2009, the government opened dialogues with about 80 organisations working on integration, concentrating particularly on the introduction of new arrivals. Funding for work on discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance has also involved migrant associations and NGOs, for example through the official Youth Board.²¹

As mentioned, the Assyrian Federation (i.e. Syria and Turkey) is among the associations carrying out integration-related work. The large Chilean community, organised into *Chilenska riksförbundet*, similarly works on advocacy in the fields of labour market equality, voting rights, prohibition of racist organisations, and related topics. *Svensk-Turkiska Riksförbundet* works on awareness-raising on integration issues, among other topics, while the separate *Turkiska Riksförbundet* works on problems faced by Turkish immigrants, including discrimination in the economic, cultural, residential, educational and healthcare fields.²² It organises cultural activities, sports events, summer camps, drugs

¹⁷ On SFI, see for example, the Stockholm site: [http://www.stockholm.se/ForskolaSkola/Svenskundervisning-for-invandrare-sfi/Swedish-for-immigrants-/\[Accessed 29 July 2014\].](http://www.stockholm.se/ForskolaSkola/Svenskundervisning-for-invandrare-sfi/Swedish-for-immigrants-/)

¹⁸ On the Ombudsman, see <http://www.do.se/en/> [Accessed 29 July 2014]. For the critique, see [http://www.dn.se/debatt/do-undviker-systematiskt-att-utreda-etnisk-diskriminering/\[Accessed 29 July 2013\].](http://www.dn.se/debatt/do-undviker-systematiskt-att-utreda-etnisk-diskriminering/)

¹⁹ On Assyriska, see <http://www.assyriskariksforbundet.se/index.php?id=32>.

²⁰ See, for example, the editorial comment in *Dagens Nyheter*, [http://www.dn.se/ledare/signerat/megafon-med-oklar-rost/\[Accessed 29 July 2014\]](http://www.dn.se/ledare/signerat/megafon-med-oklar-rost/) and response to it at <http://megafonen.com/tydliggen-inte-men-helt-klart-kanske-hanne-kjoller-och-megafonen/> [Accessed 29 July 2014].

²¹ See <http://www.ungdomsstyrelsen.se/rasism-intolerans>.

²² On the Chilean association, see http://www.chilenskariksforbundet.se/quienes_somos.html ; Swedish-Turkish association, <http://www.strf.se>; Turkish association, <http://www.trf.nu>; Russians, <http://www.rurik.se> ; China, <http://huaren.se/>.

awareness-raising, and seeks to build links with the Swedish authorities and other immigrant associations. The smaller Chinese and Russian federations have respectively worked on integration-related issues and against xenophobia, among more nation-specific projects, in recent years. While these are the main activities among INTERACT nationalities, the present list is far from exhaustive and does not include all local associations and nationalities: see <http://www.immi.se/organisationer/allmanna-riksorganisationer> for a full list.

A short list of bilateral/multilateral international agreements

The following is a selection of agreements that affect integration, with a focus on international rather than bilateral agreements. For the latter, the focus is on agreements with INTERACT countries. EU-level agreements have not been included.

Convention on the participation of foreigners in public life at local level, 1993 (English):
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/20/61/47/1a1c56a1.pdf>

European convention on nationality, 2001 (English):
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/01/40/36/ee9036ef.pdf>

International convention on the elimination on all forms of racial discrimination, 1971:
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/06/26/24/00017b2d.pdf>

Bilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Sweden and Iraq (English):
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/87/37/70a04e27.pdf>

Bilateral agreement on social security signed by Sweden and Chile, its protocol and modifications, 2007:
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/08/80/92/60f2092c.pdf>

Bilateral agreement with Russia on cooperation in health and social issues, 2010:
<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/18/19/76/9700d32f.pdf>

Bilateral agreement on social security between Sweden and Turkey, 1978, amended 2012:
<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/108/a/224695>

Conclusions

As noted by other commentators, analyses of integration policies show that said policies have been limited in their effects. While the new strategy, in place since 2008, has acknowledged pre-existing concerns, and while the 2010 reforms have involved creating tailored mechanisms for labour market introduction, there is still much work to be done, as politicians themselves recognise. The labour immigration reforms of 2008, while cited as an example of Sweden's openness, have not, as has been noted in reports, succeeded in filling gaps in the Swedish labour market (Migrationsverket 2011: 10). Meanwhile, the considerable skills and qualifications among foreign-born residents all too often go to waste, while social and geographical segregation has continued apace. For all the good intentions, resources and political will that have been channelled towards integration, we should ask whether Swedish policies are adequate to the task, or whether there is simply a problem of incomplete implementation.

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