Smart practices that enhance resilience of migrants

Sweden
COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sweden has been an important destination country for international migrants for several years and was both a destination and transit country in 2015. Around 17 per cent of the inhabitants of Sweden are international migrants. The country is an important destination for all types of vulnerable migrant groups, mainly asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants. As of July 2014, Sweden’s refugee population was around 114,175. Recently, the country has also been used as a transit route for asylum seekers travelling to Finland and Norway. These asylum-seekers travel to northern Sweden to enter Norway or Finland. The number of asylum seekers in Finland increased by nearly ten times between 2014 and 2015 (from around 3,000 to over 32,000) and most transited through Sweden. Although most Syrians remain in Sweden, Iraqis, Afghans and Somalis were more likely to use Sweden as a transit point in 2015.

Asylum applications in Sweden have risen steadily in recent years, from around 60,000 in 2013 to around 163,000 in 2015. In 2015, Sweden received more asylum seekers than ever before. Of

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3 Dalberg, interview with Swedish Red Cross; Dalberg, interview with Finnish Red Cross.
5 Dalberg, interview with Swedish Red Cross.
163,000 asylum applicants, around 115,000 (70 per cent) were men and 70,000 (40 per cent) children. Around half the children were unaccompanied minors. The largest groups of applicants for asylum in 2015 came from Syria (51,000), Afghanistan (42,000) and Iraq (21,000): these countries accounted for around 70 per cent of the applications received. Family reunification and family formation have been significant drivers of migration to Sweden in recent years for citizens of non-EU countries. In 2014, 42,000 individuals gained Swedish residency for family reunification reasons. The introduction of border controls in Sweden and throughout the European Union led to a sharp decline in the number of asylum seekers in the first half of 2016; numbers are currently close to the level in 2013.

Sweden is host to a large irregular migrant population. The number of irregular migrants in Sweden is estimated to be between 15,000 and 80,000, representing approximately 0.5 per cent of the population. According to the Swedish Migration Agency, most irregular migrants in Sweden initially applied for asylum but decided to stay in the country after being rejected, to avoid forced return. Other irregular migrants disappear to avoid transfer to other EU Member States under the Dublin Regulation. In 2014, the Swedish Migration Agency passed over 11,000 cases to the police for forced return, but over 7,000 of these disappeared from their registered places of residence and as a result their removal could not be enforced.

Policy and regulatory framework

Sweden has traditionally been generous to asylum seekers and refugees, which has been a strong pull factor. The country has historically had an open migration policy and welcomed asylum seekers. Sweden has the highest number of asylum seekers per capita and the second highest absolute number of asylum seekers in Europe. The country provides basic health care and education to all migrants regardless of status, and social security and other welfare benefits to all migrants who are asylum seekers or refugees. Sweden also has a comprehensive reception and accommodation system for incoming asylum seekers. While their applications are under consideration, asylum seekers are enrolled in reception units, which provide accommodation and expenses during the waiting period. Two main types of accommodation have usually been provided: apartments rented by the Migration Agency anywhere in the country, or reception centres. Asylum applicants receive daily cash allowances if they cannot support themselves.

In 2013, the Swedish government announced that it would grant permanent residency to all Syrian asylum-seekers; but it has subsequently introduced more restrictive migration policies. Following an increase in asylum applications between 2013 and 2015, Sweden started rolling back its generous

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9 In 2010, the Swedish Board of Health and Welfare estimated there were 30,000 to 50,000 irregular migrants in Sweden.
10 Van Aerschot and Daenzer, The Integration and Protection of Immigrants: Canadian and Scandanavian Critiques (2014).
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
migration policies and introduced border controls in late 2015. Identity checks were reintroduced at the border with Denmark and a bill was drafted that would change residence permits from permanent to temporary and substantially restrict family reunification.\textsuperscript{16} The new bill – expected to come into force in July 2016 – will grant applicants approved for refugee status a three-year residence permit. For individuals eligible for subsidiary protection, the residence permit will be valid for 13 months. Under most circumstances, only refugees granted three-year residence permits will be able to seek family reunification, and only certain family members (notably spouses and children under 18) will be eligible. If refugees fail to apply for family reunification within the first three months of being granted residency permits, they will need to prove that they can support their family financially, including by providing accommodation that is of sufficient size and quality. Rejected asylum applicants older than 18 will no longer have the right to obtain accommodation or a daily financial allowance from the Migration Agency.\textsuperscript{17} This last measure does not include unaccompanied minors or families with children.

The restrictions to migration policies have also affected the quality of services provided. To cope with the influx, services of lower quality have been provided to asylum seekers. Although they remain entitled to receive services, the accommodation and benefits are less generous. For example, asylum seekers have been accommodated in more cramped housing.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Table 1. Main policies or regulations relevant to migrants in Sweden}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aliens Ordinance (Utlänningsförordningen, Statute 2006: 97).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Prostitution and trafficking in human beings (2005).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Information to non-residents who become victims of crime in Sweden (2005).</td>
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<tr>
<td>International instruments for the protection of migrants and their families ratified by Sweden</td>
<td>• 1949 ILO Migration for Employment Convention.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 1975 ILO Migrant Workers Convention.</td>
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\textsuperscript{18} Caritas Sweden, Types of Accommodation Sweden (2016). At: www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/sweden/types-accommodation.
KEY NEEDS OF MIGRANTS

Sweden has a diverse migrant population with a variety of needs, the majority of whom are asylum-seekers and refugees. This section focuses on the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants in Sweden, since they are the groups about whom we were able to find the most information.

Table 2. Summary of the dimensions of resilience of vulnerable migrants in Sweden

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of resilience</th>
<th>Summary of needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regulatory capital</strong></td>
<td>• Sweden has broad protection criteria, protects human rights, and provides generous benefits for asylum seekers. However, a proposed law is expected to narrow the protections that have been offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Irregular migrants, particularly women, can be financially and sexually exploited by unscrupulous employers; existing legal protections need to be enforced.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Financial capital</strong></td>
<td>• Asylum seekers receive a monthly stipend from the government. Some are also eligible to work.(^{19})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Although refugees are entitled to work in Sweden, many find employment difficult to obtain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Irregular migrants often work for low wages or in exploitative conditions, and many are afraid to complain or to demand their rights since they fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{19}\) To work legally, an asylum seeker must obtain a certificate (AT-UND) which exempts holders from having to hold a work permit. To obtain an AT-UND, a person must provide identity papers or prove his or her identity in some other way; must have an application for asylum under consideration in Sweden; and that application must have a sound basis. A person will not be granted AT-UND if he or she has been refused entry to Sweden with immediate effect. If an asylum seeker cannot obtain employment, he or she can get practical experience without pay with companies and organisations. Source: http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Work.html.
they will be deported.

**Physical capital**
- All migrants, including irregular migrants, are entitled to free health basic care in Sweden.
- Asylum seekers receive a financial allowance, free housing, and free health care from the government.

**Human capital**
- All migrant children, including unaccompanied minors and children of irregular migrants, have access to Sweden’s free public education system.
- Information on rights, entitlements and available services is readily available to all migrants.

**Social capital**
- Refugees have traditionally been eligible to reunite with family members in Sweden; however, a proposed new law will make this almost impossible.
- Integration in Swedish society remains a problem for many refugees, who find themselves in suburbs or rural areas without easy access to the wider society.

**Environmental capital**
- Sweden is politically stable and there is a low risk of natural disasters; there are no significant external threats to the safety of migrants.

**Governance/regulatory systems**

Sweden has broad protection criteria for people seeking asylum in the country, protects human rights, and provides generous benefits for asylum seekers and refugees. However, a new bill threatens to narrow protection criteria. According to Sweden’s Aliens Act, three categories of people enjoy the right to protection in the country: refugees, individuals in need of subsidiary protection, and individuals otherwise in need of protection. All individuals eligible for protection include persons fleeing persecution under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention as well as those who are at risk of execution, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in their home country. In the past, Sweden has provided permanent residence to refugees and individuals in need of subsidiary protection. However, a temporary bill is likely to limit residence to three years for refugees and 13 months for persons in need of subsidiary protection. In addition, persons otherwise in need of protection will not be entitled to a residence permit.

Many irregular migrants are exploited by unscrupulous employers and are in need of legal protection. A recent United Nations study found that migrants entering Sweden to work often pay

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21 Government of Sweden, Proposal to Temporarily Restrict the Possibility of Being Granted a Residence Permit in Sweden (2016). At: www.government.se/press-releases/2016/05/proposal-to-temporarily-restrict-the-possibility-of-being-granted-a-residence-permit-in-sweden/. Key stakeholders who were interviewed during a country visit considered that the new policy was very likely to be implemented.

22 Ibid.
high fees to recruitment agencies and middlemen to gain employment.\textsuperscript{23} In the restaurant industry, employers sometimes request a payment in exchange for employment. Migrant workers were also found to be victims of various coercive practices, including threats, isolation, surveillance and the confiscation of documents, either during recruitment or in the workplace. Members of a focus group of irregular Mongolian migrants described systematic exploitation. They often working long hours for low wages in hostile conditions.\textsuperscript{24} One participant said: “They violate us, they do anything they want with us”.\textsuperscript{25}

Financial capital

Asylum seekers can work to support themselves in Sweden. However, many are unable to find work. Those in this position receive a small stipend from the government. While they wait for an asylum decision, asylum seekers can apply for an AT-UND card, which allows them to work without having a work permit.\textsuperscript{26} AT-UND status lasts until residence is granted or the asylum application is rejected. However, asylum seekers are typically unable to work in areas that require skill certification and most can therefore find only unskilled employment. Moreover, limitations of language and a tight labour market mean that jobs are not easy to find. The government provides stipends to support unemployed asylum seekers. Single adult asylum seekers who live in state housing or reception centres where food is provided receive an allowance of 24 Swedish Kroner (3 US dollars) per day; those in accommodation paid for by the state but that do not serve food receive 71 Swedish Kroner (9 USD dollars) per day.\textsuperscript{27} More generous allowances are provided to people with families. However, the high cost of living in Sweden means that the stipend is sometimes insufficient to adequately cover needs.\textsuperscript{28}

Although refugees are entitled to work in Sweden, many find it difficult to find work. OECD data suggest that 16.6 per cent of foreign-born individuals were unemployed (a figure likely to be higher for refugees), compared to 6.2 per cent of the native-born labour force.\textsuperscript{29} According to the Swedish Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen), at least 35 per cent of those registered as unemployed in Sweden were immigrants or foreign-born.\textsuperscript{30}

Irregular migrants often work for reduced wages in exploitative conditions, and many do not complain or seek redress because they are afraid of deportation. In focus groups, Mongolian migrants described the exploitative conditions they had endured. One migrant said that she was made to complete double the amount of work for half the pay. Migrants said they were afraid to take cases of abuse to the authorities because they might be deported.\textsuperscript{31}

Physical capital

\textsuperscript{24} Dalberg, focus group with Mongolian migrants.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Migrationsverket, Working While You Are an Asylum Seeker (2016). At: www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Work.html.
\textsuperscript{27} Migrationsverket, Financial Support (2016). At: www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Financial-Support.html.
\textsuperscript{28} Dalberg, interview with an asylum seeker.
\textsuperscript{29} Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data.
\textsuperscript{30} At: www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/utanforskapet-skulle-minska-sa-har-blev-det/.
\textsuperscript{31} Dalberg, focus group with Mongolian migrants.
All migrants, including irregular migrants, are entitled to receive ‘acute health care, dental care, and health care that cannot wait’ at no cost.\textsuperscript{32} Asylum seekers and irregular migrants also have the right to: childbirth care, abortion care, contraception advice, maternity care, and care prescribed under the contagion prevention law. Minors under 18 years have the same right to free health and dental care as other children who live in Sweden.\textsuperscript{33} Local county governments can provide higher standards of health care than those prescribed by law.\textsuperscript{34}

The government gives asylum seekers a stipend and free housing and helps those granted asylum to find permanent housing. The Swedish Migration Agency offers those awaiting an asylum decision temporary accommodation for as long as it is needed.\textsuperscript{35} Housing is provided according to availability, and much of the accommodation is in rural areas. Once asylum has been granted, refugees are allowed to stay in Migration Agency accommodation until the Swedish Public Employment Service or the Migration Agency secure new housing arrangements.\textsuperscript{36}

Human capital

All migrant children, including unaccompanied minors and children of irregular migrants, have free access to Sweden’s public education system. Children seeking asylum have full access to the Swedish school system. Furthermore, the Swedish Education Act regards undocumented children as residents of Sweden, which entitles them to primary education in their municipality, if they start before they reach the age of 18. This right extends to children of rejected asylum seekers who have stayed in the country illegally.\textsuperscript{37}

Adult immigrants in Sweden are provided with language and vocational training. Individuals over 16 years old are eligible for the free ‘Swedish for Immigrants’ (SFI) programme. SFI is a national language programme offered to all immigrants in Sweden and is compulsory for resettled refugees. It used to be, but is no longer, offered to all asylum seekers. Vocational training is also provided to immigrants if the national employment agency (Arbetsförmedlingen) considers that training will improve their chances of obtaining employment. Courses typically last for up to six months; their content depends on labour needs at the time. Trainees receive a stipend and insurance paid by the Swedish government.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32} At: \url{http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Health-care.html}. Note: The 2013 law on health care for foreigners in Sweden who lack permits (\textit{Lag (2013:407) om hälso- och sjukvård till vissa utlänningar som vistas i Sverige utan nödvändiga tillstånd}) provides the same access to health and dental care for both irregular migrants and asylum seekers. See: \url{http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2013407-om-halo--och-sjukvard-till-vissa_sfs-2013-407}.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} At: \url{http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2013407-om-halo--och-sjukvard-till-vissa_sfs-2013-407}.

\textsuperscript{35} Migrationsverket, \textit{Accommodation} (2016). At: \url{www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/While-you-are-waiting-for-a-decision/Accommodation.html}.

\textsuperscript{36} Migrationsverket, \textit{When You Have Received a Decision on Your Asylum Application} (2016). At: \url{www.migrationsverket.se/English/Private-individuals/Protection-and-asylum-in-Sweden/When-you-have-received-a-decision-on-your-asylum-application/If-you-are-allowed-to-stay/Permanent-residence-permits.html}.


\textsuperscript{38} Arbetsförmedlingen, \textit{Are you new in Sweden?} (no date). At: \url{www.arbetsformedlingen.se/For-arbetssokande/Stod-och-service/Fa-extra-stod/Ny-i-Sverige.html}.
Information on rights, entitlements and available services is readily available to all migrants. The Swedish government publicises the rights and benefits to which asylum seekers are entitled. Asylum seekers can check their application status on the website of the Migration Agency, which also provides information on available services. Furthermore, a range of organizations, including the Swedish Red Cross and Caritas, provide information to migrants on the services and rights that are available to them in Sweden.

Social capital

Refugees were traditionally able to reunite with their families. However, a proposed law will make this increasingly difficult. According to Swedish law, any person who is granted refugee status in Sweden can make an application to extend his or her residence permit to a partner or to unmarried children below the age of 18. In 2015, Sweden granted 13,400 family reunification visas. If passed as expected, however, a new law will significantly restrict family reunification. Under most circumstances, only quota refugees and applicants granted refugee status with a three-year residence permit will be eligible for family reunification. In addition, the new bill requires refugees to be able to support family members who come to Sweden unless they apply for family reunification within three months of the date on which their residence permit was granted.

Though Sweden invests significantly in integration, full integration in Swedish society remains a problem for many refugees, many of whom find themselves in suburbs or rural areas without easy access to the wider society. The Swedish government attaches importance to the social integration of migrants. In 2010, the Swedish Establishment Reform was enacted to facilitate the integration of migrants and their families into the labour market and society. The country also invests significantly in integration: the 2016 state budget earmarked 21 billion Swedish Kroner (2.55 billion US dollars) to the integration of newly arrived immigrants. However, an OECD review of integration in Sweden found that skill levels, language fluency, unemployment and discrimination continue to obstruct migrants’ integration.

MAIN RESPONSES

This section focuses on responses to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants in Sweden, since these are key group of migrants about whom we were able to obtain information.

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Overall, Swedish law makes generous provision for migrants, especially when compared to other countries in the European Union. The principal official agency is the Migration Board of the Swedish Migration Agency.

**Table 3. Summary of services provided to asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants in Sweden**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance/regulatory systems (right to leave/transit / stay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Income generation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safety net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Shelter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non food items (NFIs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Education and vocational training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Information on rights**
The **Migration Board** and civil society actors provide clear and easily accessible information to migrants on their rights and the assistance that is available. Notably, an 88-page booklet is published by the **Swedish Network of Refugee Support groups** (FARR).

**Practical information**
The **Migrationsverket website** provides clear and comprehensive information to asylum seekers on the application process. Civil society organizations such as the **Swedish Red Cross** and Caritas also provide practical information to migrants.

**Social Family**
The **Swedish Red Cross** conducts tracing and RFL services for migrants separated from their close family.

**Society**
The government enacted the **Swedish Establishment Reform** in 2010 to facilitate the integration of refugees into society. The reform centralized responsibility for integration, and made integration a responsibility of the national government. Programmes under the reform aim to help refugees build required skills and find work. Programmes also aim to reduce discrimination and improve integration in local communities.

**Environmental**
Sweden provides a safe and politically stable environment for asylum seekers. The government and other providers do not need to provide significant support in this area.

**SMART PRACTICES**

*Please refer to the main report.*