

Caroline Tovatt, “The Integration of Migrants and Asylum Seekers into the Labour Market: the Case of Sweden”, in «Africa e Mediterraneo», vol. 27, n. 88, 2018, pp. 48-53

DOI: 10.53249/aem.2018.88.09

<http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/en/journal/>



Africa e Mediterraneo

C U L T U R A E S O C I E T À

n. 88 | L'integrazione lavorativa di migranti e richiedenti asilo

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Migrants in the
European Union

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qualifications, des diplômes et
des compétences en Europe:
une étape importante vers
l'intégration socioéconomique
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The Integration of Migrants
and Asylum Seekers
into the Labour Market:
the Case of Italy



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Africa e Mediterraneo
Semestrale di Lai-momo cooperativa sociale
Registrazione al Tribunale di Bologna
n. 6448 del 6/6/1995

Direzione e redazione
Via Gamberi 4 - 40037
Sasso Marconi - Bologna
tel. +39 051 840166 fax +39 051 6790117
redazione@africaemediterraneo.it
www.africaemediterraneo.it

**Progetto grafico
e impaginazione**
Giovanni Zati

Editore
Edizioni Lai-momo
Via Gamberi 4, 40037
Sasso Marconi - Bologna
www.laimomo.it

Finito di stampare
settembre 2018 presso
Ge.Graf Srl - Bertinoro (FC)

La direzione non si assume alcuna
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The Integration of Migrants and Asylum Seekers into the Labour Market: the Case of Sweden

Access to the labour market and certification of the skills of migrants in Sweden: a model in progress.

by Caroline Tovatt

In 2015, Sweden was the European country with the largest number of asylum seekers per capita. Besides being a large receiver of asylum seekers and having a liberal regulation for labour market immigration, Sweden also has a highly regulated labour market, which is characterised by a consensus between the labour unions and employer's organizations. These two factors, I would like to stress, make the organisation and the process of the integration of migrants and asylum seekers a highly contested political and policy issue. In this article I will present: a) the organization of the Swedish labour market b) the organization of the asylum process, c) the introduction programme for refugees and finally, I will describe the labour market policy and measures targeting immigrants. Some of the main national measures in this area are: the "fast tracks" program for academics, validation of vocational training and work experience as well as subsidised employment schemes.

Sweden and Immigration

Between 1850-1930 Sweden was a country of emigration. 1.2 million left their home in Sweden to search for freedom and wealth in America. In 1930 only 1 percent of the population was foreign born (Åslund, Forslund, Liljeberg 2017). During the second world war migration was dominated by the immigration of refugees fleeing from the Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews and political adversaries. In the post-war era Sweden experienced an expansive economic growth and saw a steady immigration of labour from southern Europe and Turkey (DELMi 2016, p. 1; DELMI 2017, p. 5). While today, Sweden has an abundant immigration of labour, from 1990 to the present day, this migration has been dominated by asylum seekers, refugees and family reunions.

During 2015 more than 160,000 people applied for asylum, 35,000 of whom were unaccompanied minors. During October and November of that year we were receiving 8,000-10,000 applications a week. At the end of November, the Swedish government changed the regulation which saw a drop in the number of asylum seekers in Sweden.

One of the changes was the introduction of temporary residence for asylum seekers. Despite this, a large amount of the

FIGURE 1: Asylum seekers in Sweden, 2000-2017
Source: Migrationsverket (2018a). Resettled refugees are not included in the statistics.

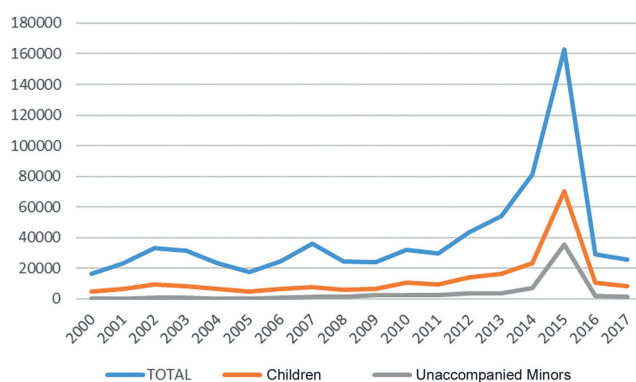
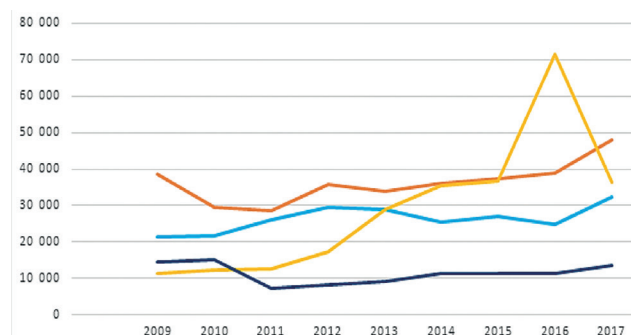


FIGURE 2: Residency permits granted between 2009-2017 in Sweden. For work, to study, asylum seekers and family reunion. Source: Swedish Migration Agency, 2018.





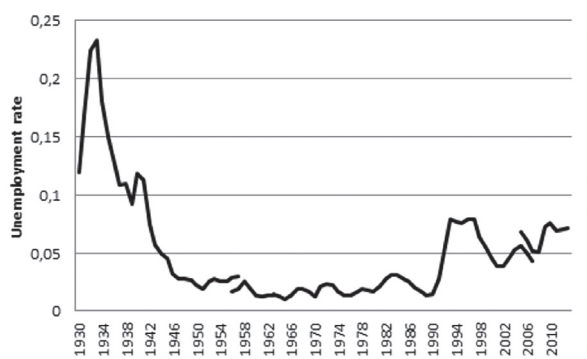
asylum seekers who arrived before October 2015 were given permanent residence permits. Refugees - people with subsidiary protection status or a family member of such a person - still receive permanent residence. Those who migrate for family re-union (including marriage) have represented one of the largest groups to have been given a residency permit since the 1980s. The large number of asylum seekers has challenged Swedish institutions, including reception institutions (*i.e.* Swedish Mi-

gration Agency, Swedish public employment service, municipalities), schools and the housing market (Åslund, Forslund, Liljeberg 2017, p. 3).

The Organisation of the Swedish Labour Market

To understand the situation immigrants face in the Swedish labour market we must briefly understand the history and organisation of the national labour market and the organisation of unemployment in the country. Sweden, as mentioned earlier, has a highly regulated labour market. Its labour is characterized by a legal framework and collective bargaining between unions and employers (social partners). The Swedish way of organizing the labour market is commonly called the “Swedish model”. An important precondition for the success of the Swedish model is the balance of power between the social partners. Unlike many countries, the Swedish workers are highly unionized. The employer organisations represent the interest of employers (Malm Lindberg 2014; Malm Lindberg, Karlson, Grönbäck 2015). Negotiation between the social partners sets the norm for workers’ conditions in both the private and the public sectors. It is also the stage where the social

FIGURE 3: Unemployment rate in Sweden 1930-2010.
Source: Håkansson, Tovatt 2017.



partners set and regulate salaries and other terms of employment and covers 90 percent of all employees (AER 2018). The remaining 10 percent, who are not covered, are referred to as atypical workers. They include fixed-term employees, the self-employed, and employees of agencies or informal workers. Those not covered by collective bargaining are often employees in the smallest private firms in the service sector.

Unemployment and the Swedish Public Employment Service

The Swedish public employment service has been, and still is, mainly responsible for the organisation of unemployment and is tasked with implementing active labour market policies. Historically, the active labour market policies have had a strong focus on education, labour market training and subsidized employment. Unemployment has, from the end of the Second World War to 1991, been relatively low, some years around 2-3 percent (Figure 3).

The main objective of the Swedish Public Employment Services is to match employers with potential jobseekers. From 2010, national programmes also became responsible for facilitating the insertion of immigrants into their area of expertise within the Swedish labour market. The agency has a number of initiatives which are tailored to meet all newly arrived immigrants, but there are also specific initiatives that are tailored to meet the needs of specific categories of newly arrived immigrants. Before I describe these, I will give an overview of migration and the labour market.

Migration and the Labour Market

Today migration to Sweden is dominated by refugees and their relatives. But as mention above, migration to Sweden in the post-war era was, to a large extent, labour immigration from southern Europe. Some were recruited by the Swedish public employment service, others followed in the tracks of older peers, relatives and friends. Most of the labour migrants worked in the industrial sector (Tovatt 2013). They were seen to complement the Swedish work force and were not given much attention or taken into consideration by the Swedish active labour market policies during this period. Until the middle of the 1960s, migration to Sweden was almost free and the welfare system included everyone living in the country, even foreigners. During that period, immigrant women were part of the workforce to a greater extent than the native-born women (DELMi 2017, p. 5). In 1972 the unions started to reject applications from labour migrants and only citizens from the Nordic countries were allowed to work in Sweden. From 1970 to 2008, immigration was synonymous with refugees from conflict areas. And when unemployment in the 1990s rose, immigrants began to represent an issue for Swedish labour market policy(ies). Foreigners have since then had difficulties in the Swedish labour market and have suffered from unemployment and exclusion. In view of this, it is important to point out that the employment of foreigners in Sweden varies considerably due to education levels, length of residence and country of birth. Research has highlighted five factors that can explain the major differences in the labour market participation between natives and foreigners (DELMi 2015, pp. 3-27):

- The reason for immigration (it takes longer for asylum seekers and their relatives to get work compared to labour immigrants)
- Lack of relevant human capital (education, experience and Swedish language ability)
- Lack of relevant social networks (informal contacts)
- High thresholds in the labour market (lack of simple jobs and high entry salaries)
- Discrimination (discrimination during recruitment)

Below I have collected some new statistics from the labour market participation. Figure 4 shows that 80 percent of natives (blue) and 67 percent of foreigners (green) are part of the work force. Figure 5 shows that the employment gap is larger for women than for men. The participation of foreign women (yellow) in the labour market is 63 percent. It is important to point out that the rate of participation of native women in the labour market is the same as that of native men. Compared to other countries, Sweden has a higher rate of female participation in the workforce. With regards to this, it is important to point out that the proportion of foreign women in the Swedish labour market is higher than the proportion

FIGURE 4: PART OF THE WORKFORCE

Source: The Swedish public employment service, 2018

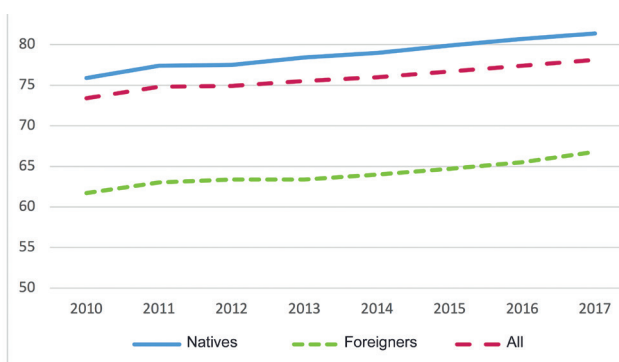


FIGURE 5: PART OF THE WORKFORCE, NATIVE AND FOREIGN MALES AND FEMALES.

Source: The Swedish public employment service, 2018

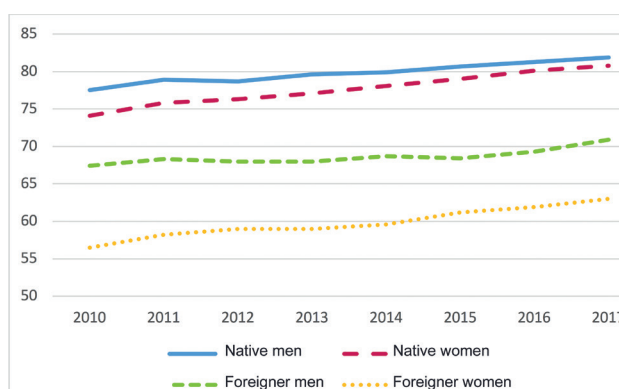
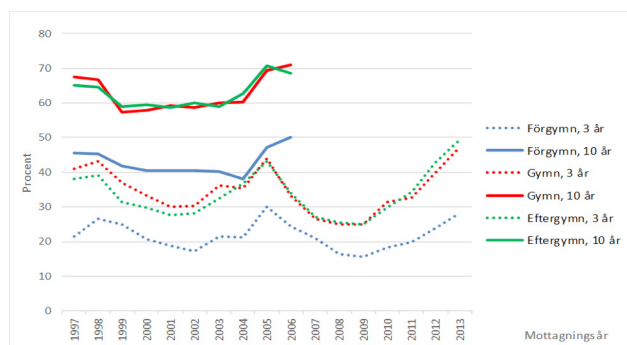


FIGURE 6: REFUGEES, AGED BETWEEN 20-64 YEARS, PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE, 3 AND 10 YEARS AFTER ARRIVING IN THE MUNICIPALITY.

Education levels and year of reception. Up to 9 years education, up to 12 years education, post-education. The dots represent 3 years and the line represents 10 years after arriving in the municipality.



of native women in the Italian and Spanish labour markets (DELMi 2015, p. 3; OECD 2014, pp. 124-126).

Labour Market Policy and Measures Targeting Immigrants

In a country with a very regulated labour market and a strong welfare system, immigration has created many challenges for the Swedish institutions. Below I will describe a few of the measures targeting immigrants; the introduction programme, validation and recognition of education and skills, “fast tracks” and subsidised employment. The question of discrimination is not included in this overview, but the law against discrimination has been tightened over the last 15 years and employers have a duty to work against discrimination at the workplaces.

The Organization of Asylum and Introduction Processes

The Swedish Migration Agency is responsible for the asylum process. Since 1994, the asylum seekers have been able to live at a refugee facility or arrange their own accommodation. When the asylum process is complete, the asylum seekers that are considered to be in need of protection are given residency permits. They are then placed in a municipality and are registered at the Swedish public employment service to participate in a two-year programme commonly known as “etableringen” or as the introduction programme (Quist, Tovatt 2014; Tovatt 2013).¹ In addition to job-searching activities, they attend a Swedish language course, Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). The programme provides the newly arrived immigrants with a social orientation course (information about the Swedish society) as well as skills assessment (validation) and other services that are considered as relevant to facilitate the inclusion in the Swedish labour market. These services are often tailored to meet the needs of specific categories of new arrivals such as academics, and people with different vocations or abilities. The nature of the program often combines further education (courses) with

L'integrazione nel mercato del lavoro di migranti e richiedenti asilo. Il caso della Svezia

Diventato da Paese di emigrazione (fino al 1930) a Paese di immigrazione, la Svezia ha uno stato sociale ben sviluppato con un'elevata partecipazione, sia maschile che femminile, al mercato del lavoro.

Nel 2015 la Svezia presentava il maggior numero di richiedenti asilo *pro capite* tra i Paesi europei, ed è oggi caratterizzata da una politica di accoglienza molto efficace, sotto la responsabilità dell'Agenzia svedese per la Migrazione, e da un mercato del lavoro altamente regolamentato, facilmente accessibile ai migranti. A partire dal 2010, il Servizio pubblico nazionale per l'Impiego ha assunto il compito di facilitare l'inserimento degli immigrati nell'area professionale del mercato del lavoro svedese corrispondente alle loro competenze. Grazie ad alcuni programmi governativi, l'agenzia è in grado di attuare una serie di iniziative personalizzate per mettere in contatto la domanda con l'offerta, ma anche azioni mirate a soddisfare le esigenze di specifiche categorie di immigrati appena arrivati.

In aggiunta alle opportunità di collocamento (il 67% di cittadini stranieri è impiegato come forza lavoro), una volta accolto, il cittadino straniero ha l'obbligo di frequentare un corso di lingua svedese, un corso di orientamento sociale (informazioni sulla società svedese) e viene sottoposto a una valutazione/validazione delle proprie competenze. Il Consiglio svedese per l'Istruzione superiore valuta e riconosce le qualifiche e le confronta con la norma educativa svedese. Qualora queste non siano considerate complete o soddisfacenti, sarà possibile l'accesso a una serie di corsi supplementari per completare la formazione teorica e pratica, al termine della quale sarà rilasciata una licenza o un'autorizzazione speciale che ne certifichi le competenze.

Inoltre, particolare attenzione è rivolta a quei settori che presentano una risposta inferiore alla domanda del mercato, ad esempio quello relativo a personale sanitario, cuochi, insegnanti, esperti elettrotecnici, lavoratori nel settore del legno; in questo caso, in presenza di una formazione accademica o professionale rispondente alla domanda, il nuovo arrivato potrà essere immediatamente impiegato.



work experience. Newly arrived immigrants are also given support to start their own business.

In order to speed up the process and at the same time increase the proportion of immigrants who work in parity with their education or profession, Sweden has started something that I call a “fast track”. The measures are the responsibility of the Swedish public employment service but have been developed in dialogue and agreement with the unions and employers’ organizations (Arbetsförmedlingen 2018). Particular focus is put on the professional fields where employers find it difficult to find the suitable competencies, such as healthcare staff, chefs, teachers, electrotechnical experts, jobs in the wood industry, and so on (Åslund, Forslund, Liljeberg 2017, p. 3). The migrant, with an academic or vocational training, can in some cases skip the introduction programme and chose this alternative route. The fast track for newly arrived academics is open for those who have studied at a foreign university for at least three years. The support structure includes competence mapping, career guidance and qualified internships in the area of education. Both workers and employers have access to support throughout the process.

Subsidised Employment Schemes

Since the 1990s - when the unemployment rates rose in Sweden among foreigners - plenty of measures targeting immigrants have been tried out by the labour market policies. Job experience training together with a support structure from the

Swedish public employment service, job coaching during the job-search period and diverse forms of subsidized employment have been tested in different periods and with different focus (DELMi 2015, p. 3). Some of them have been universal - and included unemployed natives - and some have focused solely on immigrants. “Anställningsstöd” was aimed at the unemployed, and worked by giving the employer a subsidized salary of 50 percent for the first six months. “Instegsjobb”

was aimed exclusively at immigrants and sought to combine work experience with Swedish language lessons (15 hours every week). The employer got 80 percent of the salary. “Nystartsjobb”, the employer got 48 percent

of the salary for the same period in which the unemployed person had been out of work, *i.e.* one-year unemployment means one-year of subsidized salary. “Sänkta arbetsgivaravgifter”, means lower costs of social benefits for employers who employ someone aged between 18 and 25 years.

When the measures have been evaluated they have not proved to be very effective. As Åslund, Forslund and Liljeberg conclude: «But it is hard to point to one single factor that could change things in a major way. On the other hand, this is rarely the case with complex social challenges concerning a wide and very heterogeneous population. However, poor outcomes also mean potential to do better, and our data does contain examples of refugees arriving under less than beneficial circumstances, but progressing significantly» (2017, p. 39).

*
In a country with a very regulated labour market and a strong welfare system, immigration has created many challenges for the Swedish institutions.
 *

Education that includes a professional identification, such as a doctor in medicine, nurse, teacher, and so on, needs a Swedish licence or special authorisation. © COD Newsroom

Validation/Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

One area of change which has been developed over the years is a mechanism to facilitate the recognition of a foreign education, a foreign diploma. Until 1987 it was up to each individual employer to decide if a specific foreign qualification corresponded to a Swedish education, or not. The exception in this regard was in the health sector, where the recognition of health professions was conducted by a specific government agency. From 1987 the Swedish national agency for higher Education was responsible for assessing foreign degrees. However, until the mid-1990s, the validation or recognition was characterized by strict equivalence, which meant that courses from foreign education institutions had to correspond exactly with the Swedish comparative object. Over time, recognition of this became more comprehensive and general (Tovatt 2013). Today the Swedish Council for Higher Education evaluates foreign qualifications. This governmental agency evaluates and recognises the qualifications and compares them with the Swedish education norm in the area. If the educational course was not completed before the migrant left the country of origin, the Swedish Universities have the duty and responsibility to recognise the “reell kompetens” and help the migrant to find supplementary courses to complete her/his degree. Still, a lot of migrants with a university degree do not work according to their qualifications.

Education that includes a professional identification, such as a doctor in medicine, nurse, teacher, and so on, needs a Swedish licence or special authorisation. This licence is proof that a practitioner has the skills and qualifications that a profession requires. Standard procedure dictates that the education is examined, then knowledge, competence and suitability are tested against the requirements identified by a respective profession through a knowledge test and a practical exam (Valideringsdelegationen 2018). This process is closely coordinated with professional organisations from various vocations in Sweden, as well as through communication with the social partners. The authority of the Swedish national agency for higher vocational Education is a standard for validation in a different vocation. The validation process is complex and involves an assessment of theoretical and practical skills (Teräs, Osman, Lasonen 2018). During the process the migrants can prove that they have the skills they claim to have practised in their home country.

Concluding Remarks

Sweden has a relatively short history of immigration. The increasing number of refugees has increased the need for labour market measures aimed at migrants. Sweden is a well-developed welfare state with a high labour force participation, for both men and women. Institutions and governmental agencies have developed their practices to facilitate migrants' integration in the labour market. Nonetheless, there is still a gap between natives and foreigners in labour market participation, especially among the low-skilled groups who come from countries outside of Europe.

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Caroline Tovatt

Delegation secretary at The Migration Studies Delegation, she has a PhD in Migration and Ethnicity. She earned her doctorate in 2013 at Linköping University, Sweden, with her thesis *The Janus Face of Recognition: The significance of social capital in working life careers*, Santérus Academic Press.