

# **The Integration of Immigrants in Sweden: a Model for the European Union?\***

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**Abstract:** In an overall ranking by the Migration Policy Group of 2006 measuring immigrant integration policies in 28 countries, Sweden scored more points than any other country. This result is especially interesting given that Swedish integration policies differ considerably from integration policies applied in other EU countries. Whereas in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and France integration conditions have become increasingly restrictive in recent years, in Sweden the participation in integration courses is still voluntary and no integration requirements must be met for long-term residence or citizenship. Moreover, the Swedish integration programme is characterized by an increasing number of labour-market related integration measures. Yet, in contrast to the Migration Policy Group ranking, data collected from the OECD and Eurostat seem to indicate unfavourable integration outcomes in Sweden, at least in terms of labour market participation. The gap in employment rates between the native and foreign-born population in Sweden widened during the 1990s and has not narrowed significantly since then. This means that the outcome of Swedish integration policies is at least ambiguous, which makes the use of Sweden as a model for integration policies in other EU member states inconceivable.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, the integration of immigrants has moved to the top of the policy agenda of the European Union and individual member states. EU institutions and national actors have realised that the integration of immigrants plays a crucial role in accruing the maximum benefits of immigration in terms of human capital accumulation and economic progress. At the same time, the fear of terrorist attacks and the growing visibility of religious fundamentalism have highlighted the importance of integration in terms of social cohesion. Consequently, the EU institutions and most member states have become increasingly active in developing integration strategies and searching for solutions to the pressing challenge of immigrant integration.

At the EU level, the Hague and the Stockholm programmes identified the integration of immigrants as a major policy priority. Even though there is no formal common definition of integration in the EU, the Justice and Home Affairs in 2004 adopted a set of “Common Basic Principles on Integration”, which define integration as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the Member States. The Principles identified employment, knowledge of the host society’s language and culture, education, equal access to goods and services as well as political participation are identified as crucial elements of integration policies in the EU. The two major financial EU instruments for integration, the European Integration Fund (EIF) and the European Refugee Fund (ERF) have recently been critically evaluated by the European Court of Auditors, which found that the effectiveness of

EU programmes for integration of third-country nationals is hampered by complex design and inadequate coordination between funds (European Court of Auditors, 2012).

At the national level, a number of EU member states have introduced obligatory integration programmes for incoming immigrants and “citizenship-tests” or other integration-related requirements for the acquisition of citizenship and long-term residence status (Carrera and Wiesbrock, 2011). This has led several authors (Joppke, 2007; Green, 2007) to claim that the use of national models no longer makes sense, as integration policies are converging and moving towards assimilationism. The Netherlands is often cited as a forerunner in the field of integration policies, with states such as Germany and Denmark copying its mandatory approach. Joppke in particular has argued that the convergence of integration policies has made the use of distinctive national models obsolete (Joppke, 2007: 2). Other scholars, such as Jacobs and Rea (2007) have stressed the continuous distinctiveness of integration policies in Europe and the value of working with different models. According to them, the traditional classifications of integration policies might have to be altered but there are still sufficient differences in policies towards immigrants that the analytical distinction of integration models continues to make sense (Jacobs and Rea, 2007: 265).

It is beyond doubt that national integration policies in Sweden or any other EU member state cannot be seen as an isolated phenomenon but have to be studied in a regional and international context. National immigration and integration policies in all EU member states are influenced by parallel developments in other European countries, policies adopted at the Union level and international events (Sodergran, 2000). In spite of the absence of a central coordination of integration measures at the Union level, member states orientate their own integration schemes alongside the measures and models adopted in other countries. The “success” of integration policies is constantly compared with that of other European countries and strategies that work well elsewhere are adopted or at least discussed by the national legislator. It is likely that national governments pay particularly close attention to integration policies and results of their close neighbours. In the case of Sweden, the other Scandinavian countries and in particular Denmark, which pursues a rather different approach to the integration of immigrants, constitute an important reference framework for the success of integration policies.

The example of Sweden appears to be a case in point for arguing that even though the trend towards increasingly restrictive integration measures cannot be denied, there are still major differences between the countries in terms of their objectives and integration strategies. In Sweden the main objective of integration measures is to promote the socio-economic inclusion and independence of immigrants within the context of a society based on the principle of diversity. As to the contrary, in countries such as Denmark, the assimilation of immigrants has been officially cited as the aim of integration policies. This means that in spite of the fact that none of the countries can be categorised strictly under one of the “integration models”, it is undeniable that the emphasis in Sweden is more on multiculturalism, whereas in other countries policies are more assimilationist. Interestingly, even though Denmark and Sweden have a rather similar starting-position in terms of their immigrant population, comprehensive welfare system and historical background, they have taken a very different

path in respect of the issues of immigration and integration. Both countries used to have a very homogenous culture, a situation which has changed in recent years due to immigration but differ in their responses to this challenge.

Sweden was one of the first countries that recognised the importance of immigrant integration. The Swedish government enacted integration measures more than 30 years before officially proclaiming to shift from immigration to integration policies. Already in 1965, the first courses in Swedish for immigrants were launched (Dingu-Kyrklund, 2007: 6). In 1996, the Swedish government officially announced the transition from an immigration to an integration policy. On the basis of the government bill “Sweden, the future and diversity – from immigration politics to integration politics” (Sverige, framtiden och mångfalden - från invandrarpolitik till integrationspolitik) (Prop. 1997 / 98:16) a new integration policy was decided upon by the Riksdag in 1997. The objectives of the new policy were equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their ethnic and cultural background, social cohesion built on diversity and social development characterised by mutual respect within the boundaries of a democratic society, in which everyone should take an active and responsible part. The official shift from an immigration to an integration policy was inspired by the idea of engaging into a broader integration policy aimed at the whole population. Thus, ethnic diversity was seen as the starting point in treating immigrants and the new policy emphasised the existence of rights, duties and opportunities of all members of society and the importance to combat racism and ethnic discrimination. In November 2009 the Swedish government presented a Bill (Prop. 2009 / 10:60) proposing reforms to the national integration policy. The ‘Law on the establishment of certain newly incoming immigrants’ (Lag (2010:197) om etableringsinsatser för vissa nyanlända invandrare) entered into force on 1 December 2010.<sup>1</sup> The reform aims at speeding up the introduction of newly arrived immigrants into working and social life by encouraging them to become actively employed, clarifying the division of responsibilities between governmental agencies and improving the use of skills of new arrivals (see Section 1 of the Law). It does not, however, alter the underlying mantra of Swedish integration policies of equal rights, obligations and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background (Regeringskansliet, 2009: 1).

Since the 1980s, the number of immigrants in Sweden has risen considerably, with a percentage of people born abroad that is larger than in the United Kingdom and close to the percentage in the United States. In some major cities, such as Malmö, almost 25 per cent of the population has been born abroad (Ekberg, 2006). Nonetheless, rather than following the trend towards increasingly restrictive integration conditions, Sweden has continued to pursue a rather liberal policy towards its immigrant population based on the principles of diversity and multiculturalism. This stands in sharp contrast to the development in many other Western European countries, where more restrictive legislation has been introduced in the face of a growing immigrant population. The official objectives of integration policies in Sweden are (1)

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<sup>1</sup> The new rules apply to new arrivals who have entered the country after the end of November 2010 and who have the permission to enter as well as those who have been granted a residence permit after the end of October 2010.

equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all, regardless of ethnic or cultural background; (2) a community based on diversity; and (3) a society characterised by mutual respect and tolerance, in which everyone can take an active and responsible part, irrespective of background (Regeringskansliet, 2002). Thus, as opposed to policies in many other European countries, Swedish policies are explicitly based on principles of multiculturalism and diversity. This stands particularly in contrast to countries, such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where the multicultural policies applied in the 1980s are perceived to have failed.<sup>2</sup> It is particularly notable, that integration policies in Sweden have taken a completely different direction than in Denmark, which has one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe and applies mandatory integration conditions that are enforced by means of financial and residential sanctions (Wiesbrock, 2009).

At first sight the Swedish approach of multiculturalism and diversity that differs markedly from other European countries appears to have been successful in fostering the integration of immigrants. In an overall ranking by the Migration Policy Group in 2006 measuring immigrant integration policies in 28 countries, Sweden scored more points than any other country. Yet, the question arises whether such a positive evaluation of Swedish integration policies is confirmed by other studies and indicators and whether the Swedish approach of integrating immigrants could serve as a model for other countries in the European Union. The following paper will therefore 1) depict the outstanding characteristics of the Swedish integration programme in comparison with other member states, 2) evaluate the success of Swedish integration policies with an emphasis on labour market integration; and 3) consider to what extent Swedish integration measures that have proven to be successful could be applied in other member states.

## **2. The main characteristics of the Swedish integration programme**

In comparison with integration measures applied in other Western European countries, integration policies in Sweden have four main characteristics: 1) participation is voluntary; 2) the content of the programme is employment-oriented; 3) until recently the programme was highly decentralised, with the implementation taking largely place at the level of the municipalities; and 4) naturalisation is seen as an important element, rather than the ultimate goal of the integration process.

### *2.1. The voluntary nature of integration measures*

In the majority of Western European Countries, mandatory integration courses and /or integration tests have been introduced during the last decades. The non-compliance with the integration conditions or the failure of the integration test is generally followed by harsh residential and financial consequences. States try to ensure that their integration requirements

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<sup>2</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s the Dutch government applied a liberal- multicultural approach. At that time the Netherlands had the reputation of being one of the most multicultural and welcoming countries in Europe. Yet, during the 1990s the perception slowly gained momentum that the policy of multiculturalism had failed to achieve a successful integration of immigrants in the Netherlands. See Jacobs, 2000: 3–13; Van Niekerk, 2002: 345–358.

are fulfilled either by providing incentives for those who are successful in their integration process or by attaching sanctions to the failure of integration tests. In most states, there are financial sanctions, (such as the imposition of fees or cuts in social assistance) and residence-related sanctions (such as the denial or the postponement of being granted a long-term residence permit) (Carrera and Wiesbrock, 2011).

This is not the case in Sweden, where participation in integration measures is voluntary. Immigrants in Sweden have the right to receive free instruction in the Swedish language but are not obliged to participate. The 2010 Act applies to certain categories of newly arriving immigrants<sup>3</sup> (mainly refugees and persons enjoying temporary or subsidiary protection) between the age of 20 and 65 and their family members.<sup>4</sup> It has been proposed to extend the right to participate in introduction measures to all newly arriving immigrants holding a residence permit for at least one year, with the exception of visiting students. Orientation should thus also be offered to family members, individuals with work permits for more than a year and registered EU/EEA nationals (SOU 2010:37). All eligible persons<sup>5</sup> have the right to conclude an ‘establishment plan’ (*etableringsplan*) with the Employment Service, giving them access to Swedish language courses under the Education Act (1985:1100), civic orientation and activities aimed at facilitating entry into the labour market.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear to what extent the new establishment plan differs from the integration plans that were previously concluded between the municipalities and newly arriving immigrants.

The provision of free language tuition is based on the principle that everyone should have the right to develop and learn Swedish as well as his / her own language and can be seen as a “privileged second-language programme” (Lindberg and Sandwall, 2007: 81). In 2009 a nation-wide final language test was introduced, granting financial incentives to newly arrived immigrants who complete a Swedish language course with a pass grade within a period of 12 months. Since the entry into force of the new integration priorities in December 2010, new arrivals are given ‘civic orientation’, providing them with basic information on Swedish society (Regeringskansliet, 2009).

The offer of assistance in the integration programme from the side of the Swedish government is not limited to the provision of language and civic tuition. In particular during their initial period of residence (up to two years after arrival) immigrants find themselves in an introduction period, during which they receive “customised support” in order to increase their opportunities to achieve the long-term target of self-support and participation as part of society (Integrationsverket, 2006). As a direct consequence of the voluntary nature of

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<sup>3</sup> This includes refugees and those enjoying subsidiary protection or awaiting resettlement, persons who cannot be expelled on grounds of international law or whose expulsion decision cannot be enforced, aliens who find themselves in such particularly distressing circumstances that they should be allowed to stay in Sweden as well as those enjoying temporary protection or testifying in proceedings before an international court or tribunal (see Chapter 5, Sections 1, 2, 4 and 6, Chapter 12, Section 18 and Chapters 21 and 22 of the Swedish Immigration Act (2005:716)).

<sup>4</sup> Section 2 of the Act 2010:197.

<sup>5</sup> The right to enter into an ‘establishment plan’ does not apply to newcomers who are employed on a full-time basis, who attend secondary school or who are unable to attend at least 25% of the introduction measures due to illness or other physical or mental impairments (see Section 6 of the Act 2010:197).

<sup>6</sup> Sections 6 and 7 of the Act 2010:197.

integration measures, a failure to participate or pass the language course does not have any residential or financial consequences. Sweden does not require immigrants to take an integration test in order to be granted access to permanent residence rights. Passing the language test is not a prerequisite for access to long-term resident status or citizenship. Revocation of the residence permit is thus not available as a mechanism to sanction non-compliance with the integration plan.

Yet, even in Sweden, where the introduction programme is followed on a voluntary basis, newly arriving immigrants may be compelled on grounds of financial reasons to participate. Immigrants who have concluded a settlement plan with the Public Employment Service are bound to actively participate in the programme in order to receive full social benefits. A failure to live up to the terms of the integration plan may lead to cuts in the introduction allowance. Only new arrivals participating in activities under the establishment plan have the right to an 'establishment allowance' (*etableringstillägg*) and housing benefits.<sup>7</sup>

### *2.2. The employment-oriented nature of the introduction programme*

The introduction programme starts off with the conclusion of a settlement plan between the new arrival and the Public Employment Service. The municipalities are also involved in drafting such an agreement. The settlement plan lies down the specific action to be taken so as to bring the immigrant into paid employment, including tuition in Swedish language and culture as well as educational courses and vocational training. Swedish language courses are of particular importance, as most immigrants do not understand or speak any Swedish upon their arrival in Sweden. The language courses start off with an evaluation of the language skills of the participants in order to distribute them over four levels of language proficiency. The content of the language course is largely employment-related, with the possibility to become fluent in work-related terminology by taking place in work-placements and other labour-related measures. The language instruction is finalised with a language test, conducted in a standard form at the national level. The final goal of the language course is to make the immigrant "ready" for the labour market, signifying a specific level of competence sufficient for labour market insertion. Language proficiency indicating "readiness" for the labour market is a prerequisite for the labour office to consider the application of an immigrant for services or labour market measures. As the required extent of knowledge of the Swedish language differs according to the career pursued, the concept of readiness for the labour market also depends on the individual background and the intended occupation of the person concerned.

Apart from the labour-market focus of the language course, vocational training and other employment-related measures have for many years been part of the introduction programme. In particular since the year 2000 several measures have been taken in order to facilitate the labour market integration of immigrants, such as the provision of funds to job centres with a large immigrant population. From September 2003 to December 2005 the Swedish Labour Market Board engaged into a labour market experiment, called "Work Place Introduction" for persons of foreign origin. The specific target group of this programme were job seekers

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<sup>7</sup> Section 15 of Act 2010:197.

with a sufficient knowledge of Swedish but starting problems due to the absence of work experience in Sweden. This situation was to be reversed by providing assistance to jobseekers and employers at an early stage in the application process, in particular by identifying the jobseekers' qualifications and aspirations, matching them with the wishes of interested employers and providing assistance during the first stage of insertion into the workplace for a period of six months. During this period of time the employer was generally expected to pay a salary to the employee.

This pilot project was followed up by two new employment-related measures introduced as part of the 2010 integration policy reform. So-called step-in jobs were created, being subsidised employment offered to unemployed newly arriving immigrants in combination with Swedish language courses. A subsidy amounting to 75% of employer wage costs is aimed at allowing for a faster integration into the Swedish labour market. In addition, building on pilot projects that have been employed in parts of the country since 2009, newly arriving immigrants receive information on where in Sweden their (potential) skills are demanded, so as to reach a better matching between individual skills, labour market needs and training supply (Regeringskansliet, 2009:2).

Further employment-related measures are targeted at immigrants who are into employment but follow a work for which they are over-qualified. These immigrants are to be brought into a position that matches their qualification by means of supplementary education. The supplementary education is to be paid either by an employer who can offer the immigrant a more qualified job or, in the absence of such an offer, by the job centre (Lemaître, 2007: 16, 17).

Moreover, the involvement of actors of the host society in national integration strategies is a major priority. One example are labour market agreements between the government authorities and parties involved in the labour market such as unions, employees, administrative authorities and municipalities in order to allow immigrants to obtain work experience, e.g. by means of participation in a traineeship programme (MPG, 2007: 50–52). Since December 2010 new arrivals are assisted in finding a job by an independent 'introduction guide', working on the instruction of the Public Employment Service and being chosen by the immigrant him/herself (Sections 11 and 12 of Act 2010:197). Moreover, a three-year mentoring scheme matches newly arriving immigrants with local mentors on the basis of their occupation and education with the aim of introducing them into a social network (Regeringskansliet, 2009:2).

At the moment of finalising the introduction programme immigrants are considered to be available for the labour market on equal terms as native Swedes. The establishment plan ceases to apply as soon as the relevant period of time as indicated in the establishment plan (max. 24 months) has expired or when the new arrival has had a full-time employment for at least six months or is studying at university level and will be provided assistance under the Student Financial Aid Act (1999:1395) (Sections 7, 8 and 9 of Act 2010:197). Thus, at the end of the introduction period immigrants are no longer subject to specific measures but can profit from the general employment measures that are also available to Swedish citizens, such

as recruitment incentives, self-employment start-up grants, job search training and work experience at a workplace.

### *2.3. Decentralisation in Swedish integration policies*

Integration policies in Sweden used to be highly decentralised, with the implementation taking largely place at the level of the municipalities. Previously, each municipality was responsible for formulating its own policy objectives as well as to carry out regular evaluations on the implementation of the integration programme. An integration plan for each newly arriving immigrant included in the programme had to be drafted by the municipalities, laying down the measures and resources needed for the education and training of individuals on their way to economic self-sufficiency (Franzen, 2004: 1–5).

Thus, the Swedish municipalities used to be fully in charge of providing and administering the introduction programme. In that context they were responsible for offering immigrants housing, language courses, a general introduction into Swedish society as well as in the case of need social support and psychological treatment. The municipalities voluntarily concluded agreements concerning the number of settling refugees and obtained funding from the Swedish government for the number of asylum applicants received. The money was administered and paid out in form of a fixed lump sum for each person received and was to be spent on measures such as living expenses, housing, language courses, vocational training and child-care facilities for immigrants. The large bulk of this money, however, was absorbed by so-called ‘income allowances’ for persons participating in the introduction programme.

There were considerable differences between municipalities as regards the precise extent and implementation of the introduction allowances. The amount was calculated on the basis of the regular social assistance or the minimum wage and varied between Euro 350 to 800 per month per person (2007). The municipalities also operated various different regimes concerning the implementation of the allowance, such as the grant of means-tested allowance above normal social assistance or the continued provision of an introduction allowance in case a person enters into paid employment. Also the length of the introduction period varied greatly from municipality to municipality (Lemaître, 2007).

As part of the recent reforms, Swedish integration policies have undergone a notable process of centralisation. Whereas previously the main responsibility lay with the municipalities, in December 2010 the Swedish Public Employment Service took over a coordinating responsibility for introduction measures. On 10 September 2010, the Swedish government adopted a new regulation on state compensation during the introduction period. With the overall responsibility for the introduction programme having moved to the Employment Service, the central agency also decides on financial assistance granted to individuals. The reform thus does away with the differences between municipalities regarding the granting of introduction allowances and is intended to accelerate newcomers’ integration into the labour market. The municipalities continue to play a role in the reception of newcomers, amongst others in respect of housing, schooling and education.

### *2.4. Access to Swedish nationality*

Swedish nationality can be acquired more easily than the citizenship of most other Western European countries (with the exception of Belgium).<sup>8</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that there are currently no requirements on language proficiency or integration tests on Swedish history and political institutions in order to become a Swedish national (Dingu-Kyrklund, 2007: 30–45). Even though proposals to introduce a Swedish language requirement into the citizenship law now and again re-appear in election campaigns, such proposals have so far not been turned into reality. It is interesting to note that in 1858 the Swedish nationality law contained some kind of integration condition, as the King had the right to naturalise foreigners by royal decree if they fulfilled certain requirements. Amongst other things, foreigners had to acknowledge Lutheranism. Moreover, until the mid-1970s applicants for citizenship had to fulfil a condition of Swedish language proficiency, which was abandoned in 1976 (Lokrantz-Bemitz, 2004: 75).

Nowadays, naturalisation in Sweden is possible for adults with a clearly documented identity. Moreover, the applicant must have been permanently domiciled in Sweden for five years and be in possession of a permanent residence permit. The residence requirement is reduced to four years for stateless persons or refugees according to the Geneva Convention and to two years for Nordic citizens. Further conditions for naturalisation under Section 11 of the Swedish Citizenship Act are that the person has lived and can be expected to continue to live a respectable life in Sweden (good conduct clause). This means that Swedish citizenship may be rejected or postponed for a certain period of time if the applicant has been convicted for serious criminal offences or has failed to pay his taxes, fines, fees, or child alimony, or is guilty of other misdemeanours. The period of time for which naturalization is postponed should be proportionate to the seriousness of the crime. It must be stressed that immigrants do not possess an absolute right to acquire Swedish citizenship. Even if all conditions are fulfilled the Swedish authorities enjoy discretion on whether to approve an application for naturalisation. Only in cases where the authorities have not given a reasonable interpretation to the provisions of the Citizenship Act can such a naturalisation decision be revoked (Sandesjo and Bjork, 2005: 80).

In addition to this relatively liberal naturalisation regime, Swedish nationality law is favourable towards dual nationality. The Swedish tradition in the Citizenship Acts of 1894, 1924 and 1950 has been to avoid dual citizenship, partially as a result of Nordic cooperation in nationality matters. The Citizenship Act of 2001, which is the first codification that has not emerged in one way or another out of Nordic cooperation, departed from this earlier rejection and fully embraced dual citizenship. In line with this policy shift, in the same year of 2001 Sweden denounced the 1963 Convention on the Reduction of Cases of Multiple Nationality and ratified the 1997 European Convention on Nationality, which is neutral in respect of the concept of dual nationality. Reasons for the liberal citizenship law in Sweden can be found in the general emphasis on multiculturalism of Swedish policies. Moreover, historically the main issue in respect of immigrants has not been the acquisition of citizenship but the granting of a

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<sup>8</sup> Belgian nationality is available for most migrants after three years of residence in Belgium. Moreover, when acquiring Belgian nationality, the former nationality will normally not be lost, unless this is required by the legislation of the country of origin. For a comparative overview see Baubock et al., 2006.

right to reside. This is due to the fact that residents in Sweden enjoy almost the same rights as citizens, except for the right to vote in national elections and an absolute protection from deportation (Dingu-Kyrklund, 2007: 3).

### **3. An evaluation of Swedish integration policies**

Due to the distinctiveness of the Swedish approach in a European context, the question arises where Sweden stands in terms of success of its integration policies in a comparison with other EU countries. Apart from labour market integration, which can be measured on the basis of labour market participation and unemployment rates (even though also these indicators might be controversial), it is very difficult to evaluate integration policies. As there is no straightforward way of measuring the degree of immigrant integration into the host society, any assessment of integration policies inevitably has a normative dimension. The Migration Policy Group in its Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), has used a number of indicators, including labour market integration, long-term residence and family reunification rights, political rights, access to nationality, antidiscrimination policies and public opinion.

In an overall ranking by the Migration Policy Group in 2006, measuring immigrant integration policies in 28 countries, Sweden scored the top mark of 88 out of 100 points. On a scale from “unfavourable” policies to “best practice”, Sweden managed to score best practice on every indicator in respect of labour market integration. This includes the following indicators: labour market access,<sup>9</sup> security of employment,<sup>10</sup> labour market integration measures<sup>11</sup> and rights associated with employment.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, on all other strands even if the points do not reach the standard of “best practice”, Sweden scored more points than any other country included in the ranking. Consequently, Sweden was the country considered by the Migration Policy Group to have most favourable policies for promoting integration.

However, at least in respect of labour market integration, figures drawn from the OECD, Eurostat (European Union Labour Force Survey), as well as studies carried out by the Swedish Integration Board point to different outcomes. In spite of a comprehensive set of labour-market related integration measures, labour market participation rates of the foreign-born (men and women) in Sweden are still rather low. In 2004 / 2005 labour market participation rates amongst foreign-born men in Sweden were around ten percentage points lower than amongst native-born men. With respect to women, the difference in labour market participation rates between the native-born and the foreign-born was even greater. In fact, disparities in participation rates between immigrants and natives in Sweden are high in an overall comparison of OSCE states. Moreover, the gap in labour market participation in

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<sup>9</sup> The indicator of labour market access is based on the extent of equal access as EU nationals to employment and self-employment and procedures for recognition of diplomas.

<sup>10</sup> The indicator of security of employment is based on the procedures for renewing work permits of third-country nationals and on whether the termination of the contract is a reason to revoke or refuse to renew the work/residence permit.

<sup>11</sup> The indicator of labour market integration measures refers to equality of access to vocational training/study grants, measures to further integration in the work place and state facilitation of recognition of skills and qualifications.

<sup>12</sup> The indicator of rights associated with employment includes membership and participation in trade unions as well as the possibilities of changes in the third-country nationals' working status/permit.

Sweden has widened between 1993 and 2003, whereas other countries have seen a decreasing difference during the same period of time (Migration Policy Group (MPG), 2007: 7). It is remarkable that in Sweden the average labour market participation rate for foreign citizens in the early post-war period was about 20 per cent above the level for native Swedes but has deteriorated continuously since the 1950s (Ekberg and Gustavsson, 1995).

In 2008 in Sweden, the unemployment rate of foreign-born persons aged 25-54 was much higher than for native-born persons in this age group (11% compared with 3%). This means that foreign-born persons were almost four times as likely to be unemployed as natives. The difference in unemployment rates between the foreign-born and native-born population is higher than in any other EU countries with the exception of Belgium. In some other Member States, such as the UK, the percentage of foreign-born persons, who are unemployed, is only slightly higher than that of native-born persons (6% in comparison with 4%). It is particularly notable that, in spite of an elaborate introduction programme, the difference in unemployment rates between native- and foreign-born persons in Sweden has deteriorated markedly in recent years. According to recent data, Sweden performs worse in this respect than countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands, which used to have a higher difference in unemployment rates between native- and foreign born than Sweden (see Table 1). In addition, Sweden stands out in having particularly high overqualification rates of foreign-born persons, in comparison with natives (31% in comparison with 11%). Thus, three times as many foreign-born persons as Swedes are in employment that does not correspond to their qualifications.

*Table 1: Unemployment rates of native-born and foreign born persons aged 25-54 in 2008<sup>13</sup>*

	Native-born			Foreign-born		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Denmark	2	2	2	6	5	7
Netherlands	2	1	2	5	4	6
Sweden	<b>3</b>	3	3	<b>11</b>	10	12
UK	4	4	4	6	6	7

The limited success of the Swedish introduction programme is also apparent from a Swedish Integration Board study, which reveals that more than half of the immigrants starting such a course (55%) do not complete it. Moreover, immigrants who have participated in the introduction programme are less likely to be into employment than those who have not taken part in the course. 43 per cent of immigrants who do not take part in the Swedish introduction programme enter into employment, whereas only 18 per cent of those who have taken the course take up work directly afterwards. This coincides with the findings of an OECD study on labour market integration of 2007, (Lemaître, 2007), according to which the offer of Swedish language instruction is merely taken up by around half of the immigrants. Even amongst those participants around 50 per cent do not take 300 hours of language classes. Those who take full advantage of the possibilities of language instruction amount thus to merely 25 per cent of the immigrant population. The OECD found that language instruction of

<sup>13</sup> Source: EU Labour Force Survey 2008.

between 300 and 500 hours taken during the first two years of residence improves the labour market perspectives of immigrants. Yet, an even more significant impact on employment prospects is achieved by labour-market training and early employment. The OECD considers the average length of the introduction period in Sweden of around two years as too long, considering the adverse effect of absence from the labour market during this period of time. Even though some knowledge of the Swedish language is beyond doubt necessary for labour market integration, the OECD has underlined that a rapid insertion into the labour market, without any prolonged periods of instruction and training, is at least as crucial for the integration process. Therefore, the focus should be set on short and high quality language instruction, whilst avoiding the pursuance of a knowledge level that goes beyond what is demanded by employers.

Even though the initiation of language courses might assist immigrants in acquiring knowledge about the language and society of the host state, it entails the risk of secluding foreigners from the labour market and the host society. This is the famous “lock-in effect” of integration measures: if immigrants participate in integration measures, they will be prevented from using this time more efficiently in seeking work or taking part in the every-day life of the host society in other ways. In that way, integration courses might increase segregation rather than promoting the integration of third country nationals. Thus, even though in general the introduction programme contributes to the integration process, it entails the risk of “clientalizing” immigrants. The public management and control of immigrants’ daily life affairs will tend to make them passive subjects of the state, rather than turning them into autonomous and self-sufficient individuals. Hence, Swedish immigration policies have been criticised for leading to “learned helplessness” of immigrants, due to the large extent of welfare services, public control and management of immigrants’ lives, subjecting them to a rigid bureaucratic regime (Jederlund, 1999: 2, 3). This can have the effect of increasing their reliance on social assistance and public assistance rather than turning them into active, self-sufficient citizens of Swedish society.

Moreover, different introduction activities in Sweden may have divergent effects on the immigrants’ employment probability in a short-term perspective. Whilst some activities appear to have a positive effect, other activities do not seem to have any impact or even negative effect on the individuals’ probabilities of getting a job. In particular, they have argued that labour market practice and other labour market contacts, such as organised visits in workplaces have a significant positive effect on immigrants’ employment probabilities, whilst other factors, such as language practice do not significantly affect the probability of getting employed (Svantesson and Aranki, 2006).

#### **4. Conclusion: Sweden as a model for other member states?**

The evaluation of Swedish integration policies leads to mixed results. Swedish integration policies have certainly been well informed and ambitious. Yet, the results in respect of the success of Swedish integration measures, in particular in respect of labour market integration are ambiguous. On the one hand the policies applied have done little to improve unemployment rates of the foreign-born and the introduction programme (whilst improving

language skills) has the negative effect of delaying entry into the labour market. On the other hand, the labour market measures that have been applied on an increasing scale in recent years (such as work placement and job subsidies) seem to work. Moreover, apart from labour market outcomes the policy framework in Sweden is welcoming towards foreigners with liberal family reunification rules, the absence of any mandatory integration course or test and relatively easy access to long-term residence status and citizenship. By embracing dual nationality the Swedish government has acknowledged the existence of multiple belongings in a globalised world and identified dual citizenship as an important way of encouraging the integration of immigrants. Be that as it may, the ambiguous outcome of an evaluation of Swedish integration policies make it inconceivable to speak of Sweden as a model for the European Union.

The results of an OECD study carried out in a number of OECD countries in 2007, as well as a study of the same year amongst selected OSCE participating states, indicate that the labour market integration of immigrants is largely related to factors other than the application of integration measures. Labour market outcomes of first- and second-generation immigrants are the result of a combination of factors, including the education system and the structure of the labour market. It is almost impossible to evaluate precisely to what extent integration policies have influenced the labour market performance of immigrants.

In the case of Sweden, there are a number of reasons that have had the combined effect of an unfavourable labour market performance of immigrants. First of all, the large majority of immigrants to Sweden over the last fifteen years (around 60–80%) have been persons immigrating for humanitarian reasons and their family members. These humanitarian and family-related migration flows do not correspond to cyclical labour market demand but are rather related to the existence and severity of ethnic conflicts and civil war all over the world. As a consequence, there has been a continuous stream of family migrants and refugees, even at times where unemployment levels are high amongst the native population, making it difficult for them to obtain employment at the time of entry. It has been shown that admission status, being the reason for migration, has a substantial impact on employment integration in Sweden (Bevelander 2011: 22-43). In particular, family reunification migrants have a faster employment integration in the Swedish labour market than asylum claimants and resettled refugees. It remains to be seen how the composition of migration flows will alter in the long-term after the reform of labour migration policies in December 2008 (Prop. 2007/08:147).

Secondly, Sweden was one of the countries that experienced the most severe economic downturn and high levels of unemployment during the 1990s. From the beginning of the 1990s to 1997 unemployment rates in Sweden rose from approximately 2 per cent to 10 per cent. Other countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom registered a strong increase in employment rates during that period of time. Thus, whilst the most significant increase in the immigrant working-age population in Sweden took place from 1993 to 2003 (with an increase of 5.1%), at the same time, the period of the 1990s was characterised by a weak labour market performance and rising unemployment rates. This means that immigrants arriving in Sweden during the time of the severe economic recession of the 1990s were faced with highly unfavourable employment conditions. Since 1997 overall employment rates in

Sweden have recovered, but are still considerably higher than before the economic downturn of the 1990s. This general trend has manifested itself even stronger amongst the immigrant population, with unemployment rates amongst foreign born remaining high even after the economic recovery in the late 1990s and beginning of the 2000s (Lemaître, 2007: 18–23).

It remains to be seen how the employment rates of foreign-born individuals in Sweden will evolve after the global financial crisis. Immigrants are generally affected more harshly by economic recession than native citizens. In particular immigrants from non-European countries are faced with a high risk of unemployment during times of economic crises and the employment and income gap between native citizens and immigrants becomes significantly wider during such periods of time (Arai and Vilhelmsson, 2004). Even in a long-term perspective the earnings of non-European immigrants continue to be low (Aslund and Rooth, 2006: 422–448). The same trend can be expected in times of economic recovery from the global financial crisis.

A further explanatory host-country related factor is the relatively small size of Sweden in terms of population and the absence of any remarkable colonial legacy. For those reasons, Swedish is a language that is hardly known and studied as a foreign language around the world. This means that, with the exception of those persons obtaining jobs with English as a working language, most immigrants have to undergo an initial language training period after having arrived in the country. This delays their entry into the labour market and makes the selective hiring of knowledge migrants in the country of origin more difficult.

It is interesting to observe that the differences in education attainment between native citizens and foreign-born does not have a significant impact on the disparities in employment rates. Due to the recruitment of guest-workers in the 1950s and 1960s, a large number of migrants in Sweden has a relatively low level of education (up to secondary education). Yet, gaps between the employment rates of native and foreign born residents can be observed at all skill levels. In fact, even though education has a positive impact on the employability of migrants, the gaps in employment rates between natives and foreign-born are wider at the high end of the skills spectrum. This is due to the fact that the relative increase in employment with educational attainment is larger amongst natives than amongst foreign-born (OECD, 2008). Immigrants with tertiary education and above often have difficulties in respect of the recognition and value of their qualifications obtained abroad. This is at least partly due to the fact that employers tend to consider foreign formal qualifications to be inferior to national ones. This is especially the case if employers are faced with a highly diverse immigrant population, making it difficult for them to compare different qualifications and to recognise certain foreign qualifications as being of an equivalent value.

Furthermore, the unfavourable labour market performance of immigrants can be related to a lack of country-specific human capital, such as knowledge of the host country's language, working practices, norms and behaviour. It appears difficult for immigrants to obtain the same or similar labour market outcomes as native born citizens, even after having lived in the host country for a considerable period of time. Their unemployment rates and level of wages tend to be lower even after having acquired host-country specific skills, such as the national

language and knowledge of local customs and norms (Grand and Szulkin, 2000: 65–88; Bevelander and Nielsen, 2001: 455–471; Nekby, 2002).

A further determinative factor hampering the integration prospects of third country nationals are instances of discrimination at the workplace. Direct or indirect discrimination of third country nationals by private or public employers occurs in relation to access to work, the level of pay, promotion possibilities and working conditions. Employers in Sweden are often reluctant to employ persons with an immigrant background and largely prefer to take natives. Moreover, immigrants might be faced with discrimination in relation to working conditions and promotion decisions (Integrationsverket, 2006b). Such adverse treatment most certainly discourages third country nationals in their working efforts and reduces their motivation to stay in employment. Even though Swedish policies emphasize the values of diversity and multiculturalism, at the individual level employers tend to favour future employees who comply with the norms and values of mainstream society. This is in spite of the fact that the new discrimination act (Diskrimineringslagen SFS 2008:567), which entered into force in January 2009, introduced large fines for employers who are found to be engaged in discriminatory hiring practices. Moreover, social networks and informal channels play a crucial role in the recruitment of labour in Sweden. Immigrants face difficulties in becoming part of such social networks and informal recruitment channels that have often been built up for generations (Andersson, 2007: 63).

Lastly, the tradition of social engineering and the “clientalization” of migrants have contributed to the limited success of Swedish integration policies (Kamali, 1997; Westin, 2002: 3). The comprehensive Swedish welfare system, in which most aspects of a migrants’ life are regulated by the state, negatively affects migrants’ auto-reliance and self-initiative. Extensive reliance on the state as a care-taker can lead to a situation of “learned helplessness” (Lindbeck, 1986: 77), reducing the chance for migrants to become integrated into the regular labour market. It has been argued that the specific combination of a strong welfare state and multicultural policies, which grant immigrants easy access to equal rights and do not provide strong incentives for host-country language acquisition and interethnic contacts, produces low levels of labour market participation (Koopmans, 2010: 1). Countries that either have more restrictive or assimilationist integration policies or a relatively lean welfare state have been found to achieve higher labour market participation rates. Thus, reasons for the success or failure of integration measures are complex. Apart from the composition and time of arrival of the immigrant population, economic growth rates in the host country and instances of direct or indirect discrimination play an important role in determining immigrants’ labour market outcomes.

Apart from the fact that integration policies are only a (minor) factor in shaping the integration of immigrants into the labour market and host society, the “copying” of successful integration strategies is unlikely to be successful. In the face of an EU population that is dominated by fears of the economic and social implications of immigration, shifts towards a voluntary model in other EU member states are likely to be met with fierce opposition. Thus, even if it was indisputable that Swedish integration policies are highly effective in fostering the integration of immigrants, it would be unrealistic to assume that the

Swedish 'model' can be transferred to other member states. In fact, in the light of recent political developments, there is a higher probability that Swedish integration policies will come closer to those of its European neighbours. Integration policies in all member states are evolving and changing at a rapid pace, depending largely on the current political climate and composition of the government, including the role and participation of extreme right-wing parties. Assimilationist integration policies are at least partially a result of the specific political power structure at a particular point in time (Jacobs, 2004: 415, 416). It remains to be seen to what extent Swedish immigration and integration policies will become more restrictive in the near future. The anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats (SD), which for the first time entered national parliament in 2010, are gaining popularity and could well reach more than 10 % in the next elections (Svenske Dagbladet, 2012). Current polls show that neither the Alliance government nor the red-green opposition bloc would receive a majority votes if Swedes went to the polls today. The SD could thus well turn out to play a 'kingmaker role' in forming a new government in the future. The examples of Denmark and the Netherlands show how powerful and influential such a position can be. Consequently, it is not unlikely that after following other EU member states (the Netherlands, France, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Britain) in witnessing a rise of the far-right, Sweden will abandon its liberal, inclusive approach and adopt equally restrictive integration policies.

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