



Increasing the budget and tightening border controls to meet the refugee situation in Sweden

JOHAN FRITZELL – EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK

ESPN FLASH REPORT 2016/9

The Swedish legislation will be temporarily brought into line with the minimum requirements in international conventions and EU law. At the same time, expenditure on migration will increase by €1.12 billion, primarily to improve the capacity of the municipalities to deal with the refugee crisis. Tightening border controls with for example ID checks have been introduced.

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Description

The current refugee wave across Europe has been handled very differently among EU countries. In terms of numbers, Sweden has in 2015 received more asylum seekers per inhabitant than any other EU country, and the autumn 2015 projections from the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) suggested that Sweden in 2015 would receive between 140,000 and 190,000 asylum seekers in total, which would be an all-time high. The big range indicates how uncertain the projection was; the official figure at the time of writing this Flash Report (mid-January 2016) is that it ended up with 163,000 asylum seekers during 2015. Almost a doubling compared to earlier all-time high during the 1992 Balkan war.

This situation has led to a severe shortage of housing, as well as difficulties in providing an organised reception for new asylum seekers, especially for the many unaccompanied minors. The number of unaccompanied minors among the asylum seekers increased from 7,049 in 2014 to 35,369 in 2015.

The pressure on and efforts by municipalities and county councils, as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society at large, have been substantial, but there have been signals from municipalities and public authorities that they have now reached the limit of their capacity to handle their

tasks. This is the background for the submission by the Government to parliament, on 12 November 2015, of an amended budget which proposes an increase in spending on refugees of SEK 11 billion (~ €1.12 bn). The total expenditure on "migration" is around SEK 18 bn (€1.77 bn). The amendment was agreed upon also by all opposition parties in the parliament except the anti-immigrant party (Sverigedemokraterna) and has taken effect in December 2015.

The bulk (SEK 9.8 bn) of the total amount will be a one-off funding to municipalities and county councils, but smaller amounts will also be paid to NGOs. Almost 1 bn will be assigned to housing and benefits for the asylum seekers. The funds will be distributed taking into account not only the number of new asylum seekers, but also the proportion of children and adults in relation to the total population within the municipality. Unlike other new policies adopted, this amendment will lead to an increase in the deficit of the government budget. To put the amount in perspective the total amount for health and social care in the Swedish budget is roughly six times larger.

Simultaneously, the Government has made the following proposals to reduce the number of asylum seekers:

- Swedish legislation temporarily brought into line with minimum requirements in international conventions and EU law, which are less flexible than those usually applied by Sweden.

- Temporary residence permits for all persons in need of protection, except for refugees accepted as part of EU agreed quotas.

- Limited rights to family member immigration for persons with temporary residence permits in need of protection.

- Application of a maintenance requirement to all family member immigration, except when refugees apply for family reunification during the first three months after having been granted refugee status.

- Provision on residence permits on grounds of exceptionally/particularly distressing circumstances replaced by a provision allowing a residence permit to be granted on humanitarian grounds in certain exceptional cases.

- Introduction of medical age determination of asylum seekers when doubts remain about declared age.

- Introduction of temporary internal border controls since November 2015.

- In December 2015, the government presented a bill for a new act on "special measures in the event of serious danger to public order or domestic security". The parliament quickly approved the act which gives the government the authority to introduce ID checks in connection with travel by bus, train or passenger ship to Sweden from another state.

Outlook & Commentary

While the amended budget is uncontroversial, the proposals to reduce the number of asylum seekers have sparked an intense debate both regarding the general thrust of the package of proposals and its specific components. The Left Party and some NGOs are genuinely critical of the package, as they see it as the end of a generous Swedish policy towards forced migrants. The Liberal Party has criticised the family reunification component and the Centre party the ID checks. Among academics, the economist Joakim Ruist⁵ has argued that the package will not improve the situation and that the solution is to establish a quota for the future and fill it with applicants from outside the EU in order to reduce trafficking and dangerous boat trips.

The outlook is almost entirely dependent on how the rest of the EU countries react in the near future. An illustration of this is that Denmark reacted immediately by deciding to impose border controls as from early January 2016. This may be the first of a chain of similar decisions. If Germany changes its policies, this might increase the pressure on Greece and other border countries. The outlook will largely depend on how policies are implemented on the ground.

Further reading

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/News-archive/News-archive-2015/2015-11-05-Prognosis-very-uncertain---EU-actions-crucial.html>

<http://www.migrationsverket.se/Andra-aktorer/Kommuner/Omsamkommande-barn-och-ungdomar/Statistik.html>

<http://www.government.se/press-releases/2015/11/amending-budget-in-response-to-refugee-situation/>

<http://www.government.se/government-policy/the-governments-work-regarding-the-refugee-situation/>

<http://joakimruist.blogspot.se/2016/01/effekter-av-granskroller.html?view=timeslide>

Authors

[Johan Fritzell](#), Aging Research Center, Karolinska Institutet & Stockholm University