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Motivations, experiences and consequences of returns and readmissions policy: revealing and developing effective alternatives



Executive Summary

Development of the Return and Readmissions policy across Europe: Multilevel analysis

Case Study: **Sweden**

Authors: Aida Ibricevic, Zoran Slavnic, Branka Likic-Brboric

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This document provides a concise summary of the key findings from WP1 Swedish national report. For detailed analysis, evidence, and comprehensive insights, please refer to the full report. The information in this summary should not be considered complete or fully representative of the entire study.

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1. Historical overview

Since the early 1990s, Swedish migration and refugee policies in general, and R&R policy in particular, have experienced significant transformations. In the 1990s, Sweden's migration policy was widely regarded as one of the most liberal in the Western world, emphasizing permanent residence permits and subsequent integration based on multicultural principles of freedom of choice, partnership, and equality (Ålund and Schierup, 1991; Slavnic, 2008). However, by the mid-1990s, temporary residence permits were introduced, with a focus on repatriation. Justifications for these measures were often framed around the notion that the most favourable solution for refugees lay in their eventual return to their homelands following the resolution of conflicts (Slavnic, 2000).

By the mid-1990s, temporary permits and repatriation gained prominence in Swedish refugee policy, while integration principles shifted from multicultural ideals to a requirements-based approach. Despite policy adjustments, the language used often lagged behind actual policy shifts, maintaining a veneer of generosity despite increasing restrictions and demands on beneficiaries (Slavnic, 2002, 2008).

A pivotal shift occurred in 2015/16 when Sweden adopted more stringent immigration and refugee policies, aligning with the lowest standards observed in the EU at that time. Prior to 2015/16, Swedish policy-makers were discussing increasing legal migration routes to Sweden and finding ways to regularize currently undocumented migrants, with the new narrative shifting away from human rights.

2. Latest developments

However, the political discourse on return has recently even more radically shifted, away from legal certainty and human rights/humanitarian concerns and towards effectiveness/efficiency. The radical shift comes about after the 2022 general elections in Sweden and the signing of the Tidö agreement. Some of the proposed changes regarding asylum, migration, and returns include:

- Proposal to establish “return centers” where the asylum seekers would live from beginning of asylum review to the time that they either leave Sweden or gain protection and obtain a residence permit;



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- Proposal to increase the expiry time of return decisions from four to five years and to change how this time period is calculated, requiring rejected asylum seekers to leave Swedish territory as their returns are processed;
- Proposal to remove or significantly limit the option to “change tracks” making it impossible for rejected asylum seekers to be considered for a residence permit based on employment;
- Proposal to require public employees (including school teachers and administrators) to “report” known cases of undocumented migrants.

The above are some examples of a thorough and systemic re-engineering of the Swedish asylum, migration, and integration system which is overwhelmingly characterized by a further erosion of migrants’ rights in formulation of laws and their implementation and the championing of a nativist political discourse, as envisioned by the TIDÖ agreement.

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3. References / Further reading

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