

Adult Education and Integration in Sweden

Education, labour market and business politics are central elements in the Swedish integration policy.

The integration policy is primarily based on measures of general character rather than initiatives targeted specifically at immigrant groups. Specific efforts are only in exceptional cases regarded as justified. When specific measures are used, they are based on individual needs and requirements. There are however special measures for newly arrived immigrants, including “Swedish for immigrants” (Sfi).

The primary goal of the integration policy is to prevent that immigrants are isolated (utanförskap). Therefore the policy prioritises efforts targeted at immigrants with a low employment rate.

Sweden has been an immigration country since the 1960's. Today about 15 per cent of the population is born in another country, and immigrants constitute about 25 per cent of the workforce.

Sweden is the fourth largest recipient country of refugees. In 2005/06 refugees constituted 23 per cent of the total number of immigrants. Through the last decade immigration has primarily consisted of refugees and family reunification.

Labour immigration measured as persons with permanent work permit is marginal. An increasing number of immigrants is however obtaining temporary work permit. In late 2008 new rules for labour immigration were established, making it easier for people outside EU to go to Sweden to work.

The primary goal of the integration policy is employment, focusing on initiatives to increase supply as well as demand for labour. The basic idea is that people who are assessed to be able to work must look for work, follow an education or the like to be eligible for support. Still more economic incentives have been introduced to encourage newly arrived immigrants to learn Swedish and find a job quickly.

The enhanced focus on work rather than education has led to a diminished supply of adult education initiatives in general, including initiatives for immigrants. Validation is a central measure in the integration effort, and the use of validation has increased over the last years.

The political strategies are targeted at initiatives leading to self-support, work and language skills. The overall goal of the Swedish integration effort is equal rights, obligations and possibilities for all, regardless of ethnic and cultural background. It is a community based on diversity, community development characterized by mutual respect for differences within the frames of democracy and a society free of discrimination.

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Resources

Ministry of Education and Research: <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/2063>

Swedish Migration Board: http://www.migrationsverket.se/info/start_en.html

The Swedish Adult Education Association (SAEA):

<http://www.studieforbunden.se/Pages/english.html>

The Swedish National Agency for Education: www.skolverket.se