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Sweden country report

Government responses to increased influx of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23

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Abstract: This country report describes asylum, immigration and integration governance and policy changes from 2015-June 2023 in Sweden. It particularly focus on developments in the periods of high influxes of protection seekers to Europe in 2015/16 and 2022/23

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- 1) review of existing research and government reports
- 2) document analyses of relevant legislation and policy processes
- 3) interviews (conducted in August) with relevant stakeholders: The Swedish Migration Agency, The Public Employment Agency, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), the Swedish Council for Higher Education

Lastly, The Swedish Migration Agency, The Public Employment Agency and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) were sent an early draft of the report, with specific remarks and questions to quality assure that relevant policy processes were included and presented.

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It is important to specify that the analysis include changes up until June 2023.

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1 Welfare regime, immigration history and political situation

After the Second World War, Sweden established a social-democratic welfare state building on principles of universalism, solidarity, and equality. Concerning immigration and integration, Sweden has often been promoted as the multicultural flagship (Borevi 2010).

The Government Bill in 1968 emphasising the principal of equality towards immigrants sat an important guideline for immigration policies. During the mid-1970s, the Swedish immigration policy included immigrants as part of the welfare system, and addressed the importance of specific measures targeting immigrants, even though integration measures such as Swedish language training and information about the social system had to be bottom-up initiatives. At the time, immigration policy was not a politically important area and compared with other fields, immigration was relatively insignificant in the state budget (Brochmann & Hagelund 2010). Usually, the social welfare service was given the responsibility of refugee reception, and immigrants generally had the same right to services and financial assistance as any other resident in the municipality.

Due to an increasing number of refugees in the mid-1980s, Sweden started to move from a rather liberal immigration policy and introduced some restrictions. Sweden was no longer able to approve all asylum applications. Towards the late 1990s, a new migration policy introduced a time-limited residence permit to be used in the case of mass refugee influx (Prop. 1996/97:25). Nevertheless, although some restrictive measures were introduced, compared to other European countries, Sweden has had relatively liberal immigration policies.

The national government had the overall economic responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees, while other responsibilities were divided between the state and municipalities. Until 1985, Sweden had not created targeted integration policies for refugees. The first steps came in 1985, where municipalities received a greater responsibility for language and civics training through the Introduction Act, that gave municipalities the possibility to provide (state-funded) integration programmes for refugees and reunited refugee families. However, it was both voluntary for the municipality to provide such programmes and for the refugees to participate, and the provision of integration programmes varied substantially across the country (Hernes et.al. 2022: SOU 1992: 133, 25). The municipalities were encouraged – but not obligated – to pay immigrants a special “introduction benefit”, instead of social benefits, to avoid stigmatisation of immigrants and refugees (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2010). This autonomy for the municipalities led to a very differentiated integration programme and benefits across the country. In 2010, a new Establishment Reform was launched shifting the responsibilities of the integration programme from the municipalities to a national agency, the Swedish Public Employment Service, to ensure “equal conditions for establishment in work and social life” (Prop. 2009/10:60, 49). The municipalities kept the responsibilities of providing housing and language and civics training.

1.1 Political situation and main policy processes in 2015/16 and 2022/23

In October 2014, the Social Democratic Party (S) and the Green Party (Mp) formed a left-wing minority government. During the government’s first two years in office, they did not

make any substantial changes to the integration policies. However, changes were made as a direct response to the refugee influx in 2015. The distribution of refugees through Europe was very uneven, and Sweden had taken on a huge number of asylum seekers compared to other European countries. The government and the centre-right opposition parties (the Conservatives (M), the Centre Party (C), the Liberals (L) and the Christian Democrats (KD)), agreed on an asylum and integration conciliation. Following the conciliation, a new temporary three-year law was introduced that restricted the rights for permanent residence and family reunification (Hernes 2018). The government quickly followed up the conciliation and continued to adjust the Swedish asylum regulations, aiming for the minimum EU level (EMN 2018). At a press conference in November 2015, the Prime Minister presented these restrictions as undesirable but unavoidable (Hagelund 2020). The huge amount of asylum seekers entering Sweden put great pressure on the Swedish asylum and welfare system, and it was argued that it was necessary for the Swedish Government to reduce the number of asylum seekers.

Most of the legislative changes made in 2015/16 were temporary acts, however, most changes were later extended and/or made into permanent law in the following years, particularly in a larger change to the Immigration Act of 2021.

Up until 18 October 2022, the Swedish Government consisted of the Social Democratic Party (S) and the Green Party (Mp) (left government the final year) in a minority government, with a cooperation agreement with the Centre Party (C) and the Liberals (L). After the 2022 election, a new government was announced, consisting of the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L). However, for the first time in Sweden, the government also had support from the right-wing party called the Sweden Democrats (SD). There was not any major political policy processes or larger political compromises after the influx of protection seekers from Ukraine. Sweden was bound by the legislative changes within the European Union and the EU Temporary Protection Directive, providing displaced persons from Ukraine minimum rights to the labour market, school, health etc. Sweden has not – like the other Scandinavian countries – made specific laws for displaced persons from Ukraine, but mainly incorporated them as a target group under the existing Reception of Asylum Seekers Act (LMA), but with some minor alterations (Korsrud 2023). This implies that persons who are granted collective temporary protection in Sweden continue to have similar rights as other *asylum seekers* in Sweden have, but do not transition to the extended rights that other protection seeker groups get when/if granted a residence permit.

2 Asylum flows to Sweden, 2012- July 2023

Like other European countries, the influx of protection seekers to Sweden has changed considerably over the last ten years. In addition, there is demographic variation within and between cohorts from different sending countries. Here we present an empirical background on these asylum flows and permits, which provide context to the government response to the situation in 2015/16 and 2022/23, respectively.

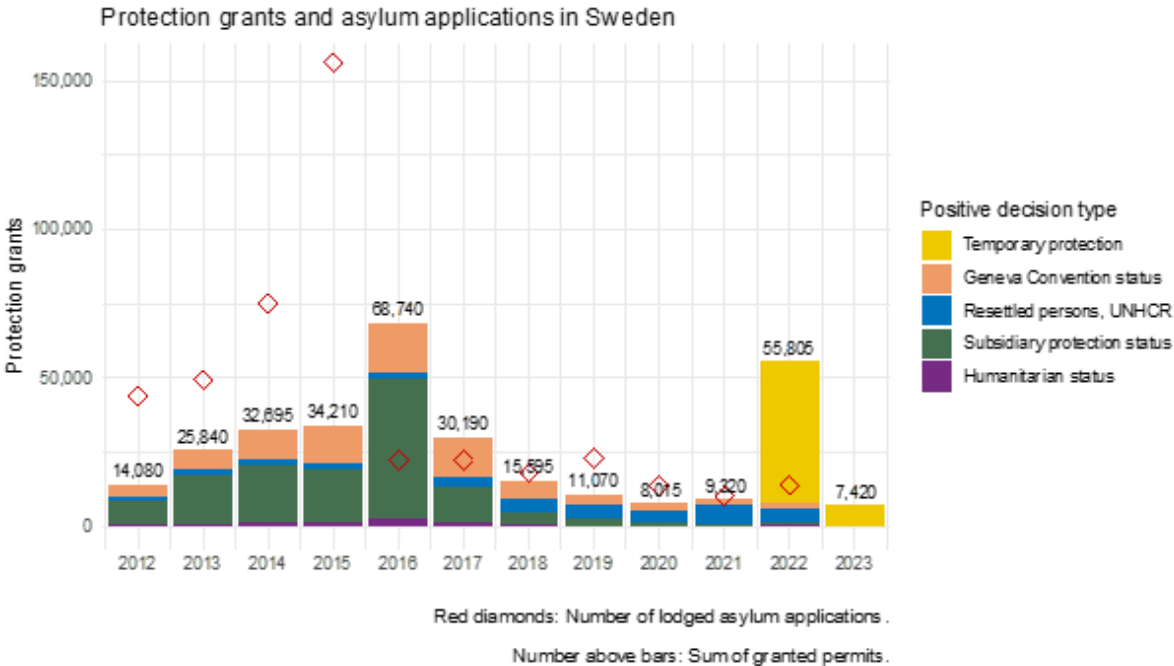
2.1 Statistics: Asylum flows and permits 2012-2023

Like the other Northern European countries, the flow of displaced persons to Sweden is heavily impacted by the two major displacement events leading to high influxes of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23. However, there was a substantial number of asylum claims already in 2014 – about 75,000, when the total inflow to the EU was 560,000. This number doubled to 150,000 asylum requests in 2015, dropped below 25,000 in 2016, and sloped off towards 10,000 in 2021. In 2022, the large influx of 47,000 displaced persons following the war in Ukraine contributed to a total of 55,806 granted residence permits. Figure 1 displays the total number of asylum applications (red diamonds), and residence permits for persons granted protection 2012–2023. Note that residence permits are often granted a year (or two) after application due to long processing time.

Data on asylum flows
 Data on asylum flows are sourced from Eurostat Asylum Statistics. These data are based on **administrative sources**, supplied to Eurostat by statistical authorities, interior ministries or related immigration agencies. The data presented in this chapter is a combination of five different datasets provided by Eurostat: decisions on and beneficiaries of temporary protection, first-time asylum applications, resettlement refugees, and first-instance decisions on asylum applications.

Source: [Information on data - Migration and asylum - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

Figure 1: Persons granted protection in Sweden by protection decision vs. lodged asylum applications 2012–2023.



Data: Eurostat (migr_asydcfsta, migr_asytpfm, migr_asyresa, migr_asyappctza).

Before 2019, most permits were for subsidiary protection. Of these, it was largely Syrians, Afghans and Eritreans who were granted subsidiary protection before 2015. During 2015–17, a majority of Syrians received these types of permits as well – about 64,000 of 70,000 positive protection decisions were of this permit type. While protection under the Refugee Convention (Geneva Convention) has primarily been given to Eritreans, many Syrians and Afghans received these permits as well. Over time, the percentage of women among those granted protection has varied: From 40% before 2014, to around 30% during 2014–2017, and then rising to 40% in 2019–2021 before spiking at 58% in 2022.

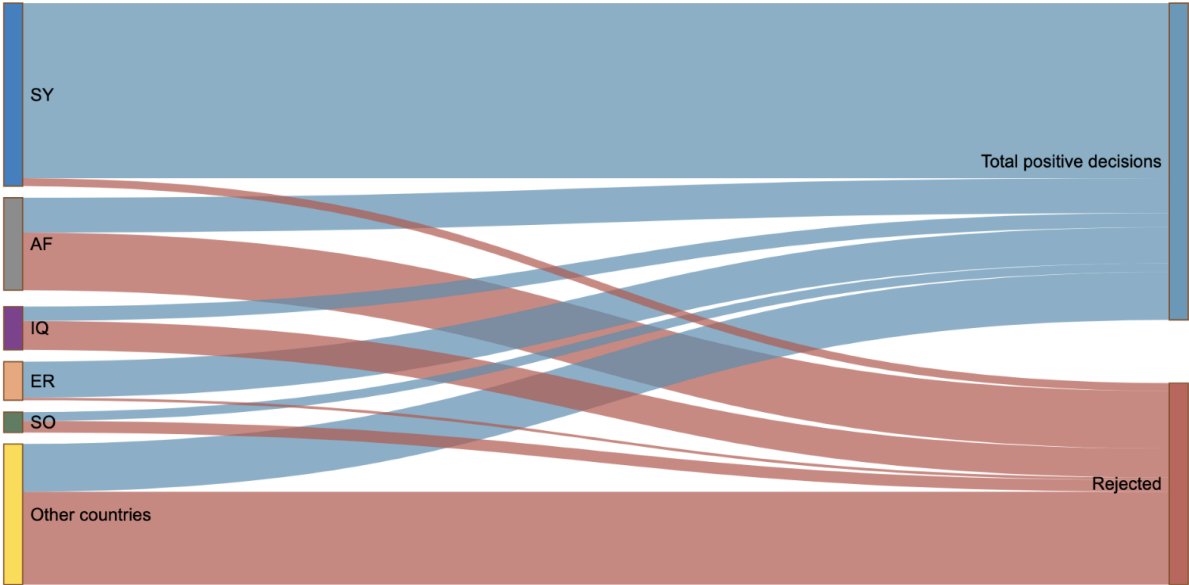
2.2 Situation in 2015/16

In 2015, the number of asylum seekers to the EU soared to 1.25 million, up from 560,000 the year before. Another 1.2 million arrived in 2016. In both years, half of the ~1.2 million were Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis ([Eurostat 2016](#)). In the same vein, asylum arrivals to Sweden doubled from 2014 to 2015 (Figure 1, red dots). Sweden received the third most immigrants in the EU, comprising 12.4% of all EU arrivals, with a high applicant ratio (16,016 applicants per million inhabitants), second only to Hungary (17,699) and far outnumbering the other countries ([Eurostat 2016](#)). Like the other three Nordic countries, Sweden experienced a drop in arrivals from 2015 to 2016, falling by 86%. The largest sending countries in both 2015 and 2016 were Syria (33% and 21%), Afghanistan (26% and 10%) and Iraq (13% and 9%) – resembling the EU total – but the percentage of Afghans to Sweden in 2015 was twice as high as the EU average.

There were apparent differences in the demographic composition of those who were denied and granted asylum in this period. Of the positive decisions in 2015–2017, 36% were female and children (under 18 years of age), but among the rejected asylum seekers, 26% were female and 25% were children. Many of the young people were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Asylum arrivals of these minors surged in 2014 and 2015: More than 7000 and 34,000 arrived in these two years, respectively ([Eurostat 2023](#)). In 2015, nearly a fourth of all arrivals were UASC (22%), and 65% of these were from Afghanistan. The number of UASC was remarkably high compared to the years before and after: it fell to 2100 in 2016 and has remained at 500–1000 ever since.

Among refugees granted protection in 2015–2017, the dependency ratio, defined as the ratio between young and old divided by the working age population, was low for Eritreans (10%), meaning that 90% were of working age. Due to large numbers of children under 14 years of age, refugees granted protection from other dominant sending countries had a lower percentage of working-age refugees. This contributed to lower dependency rates for Syrians (36%), Afghans (25%), Iraqis (47%) and Somalis (27%). This pattern resembled that of the other Scandinavian countries.

Figure 2: Relative shares of asylum seekers from the five largest sending countries to Sweden, by asylum grants (blue) and rejections (red) in the period 2015–2017*.



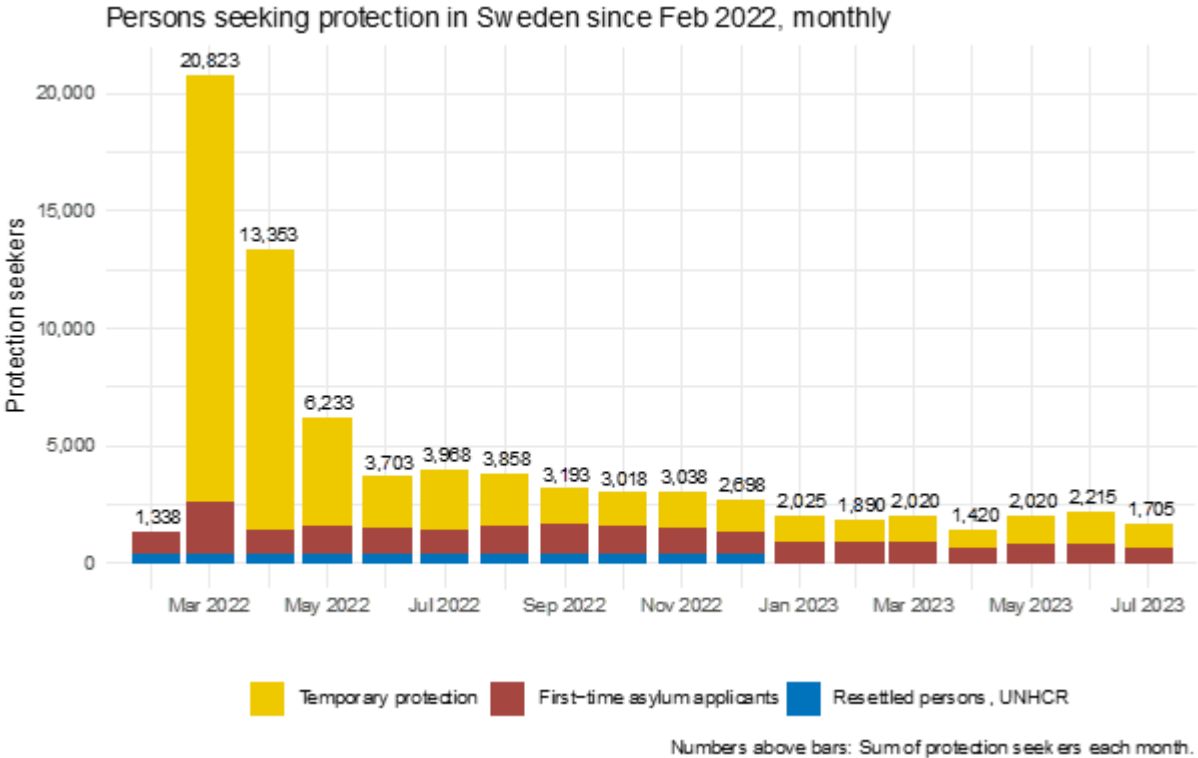
Data: Eurostat (*migr_asydcfsta, migr_asytpfm, tps00195, migr_asyappctza*).

Like the other Scandinavian countries, almost all Syrians (96%) and Eritreans (93%) were granted protection, while approval rates for asylum seekers from other dominant sending countries were far lower: Afghans (38%), Somalis (43%) and Iraqis (33%), apparent in Figure 2. The overall approval rate for all 205,000 processed asylum applications in this three-year period was 61%.

2.3 Situation in 2022/23

Nearly 56,000 migrants were granted protection in Sweden in 2022, of which 47,405 were displaced persons from Ukraine, following the decision by the EU to trigger the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in March 2022 (Figure 1, above). While this was a considerable inflow, it was not unprecedented, as the number of protection seekers arriving in Sweden was three times larger during the 2015 refugee crisis. Regarding regular asylum applications (excluding TPD decisions), about 14,000 asylum seekers applied for protection in Sweden in 2022. Relatively speaking, this is not a high number in a Swedish context, as all of the preceding ten years have had higher numbers of asylum applicants, with the exception of 2020 and 2021 (which were affected by pandemic lockdowns), (red diamonds, Figure 1).

Figure 3: Asylum applicants, persons granted temporary protection after the invasion of Ukraine, and resettled persons in Sweden since Feb 2022.



Data: Eurostat (*migr_asyappctzm, migr_asytpfm, migr_asyresa*). Note: Data on resettlement refugees is only available for 2022.

After the high influx during the spring of 2022, arrivals of protection seekers have stabilised around 2000 a month in 2023, and more than half are displaced persons from Ukraine. Of all permit holders, 31% are minors (under 18 years of age), and 67% of the adults are women. The percentage of elders was higher among displaced persons from Ukraine compared to previous cohorts in 2015/16.

The Swedish authorities track the number of temporary protection holders who leave the country and produce an estimate on currently residing protection holders every month. In some countries, many displaced persons from Ukraine have moved on since they first obtained a temporary residence permit. According to these stocks data, which may be biased or incorrect, 41,000 immigrants from Ukraine resided in Sweden as of August 2023 ([Eurostat 2023](#)). This comprises 0.4% of the Swedish population, lower than the EU average of 0.9%.

3 Governance and multilevel responsibilities

3.1 National responsibilities and actors

At the national level, the immigration field has always been placed within the Ministry of Justice. The integration portfolio, however, has undergone continuous organisational changes and been placed within ministries of culture, enterprise, justice, integration and equality (Hernes 2020b). With the Establishment Reform in 2010, the responsibility for integration was placed under the Ministry of Employment and has remained there since.

The main agencies within the field are the Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Public Employment Service. The predecessor to the Migration Agency (the Immigration Agency) was established in 1969, and the Migration Agency now holds the responsibility for the applications of anyone seeking protection in Sweden, their reception during the application, and applications for permanent residency, citizenship or people visiting Sweden (Swedish Migration Agency 2022a). The agency is also responsible for government grants to the municipalities (Hernes & Tronstad 2014).

With the Establishment Reform in 2010, the Public Employment Service was given the overall responsibility for integrating newly arrived immigrants into the labour market, and to provide integration programmes. This responsibility included developing individual integration plans (*etableringsplan*) together with the protection holder, and in dialogue with the municipality, government, and other relevant organisations (Hernes & Tronstad 2014). Further, the Swedish Public Employment Service was responsible for making settlement agreements with the municipalities. The Swedish Public Employment Service still holds the responsibility for providing integration programmes.

In addition, the Social Insurance Agency share responsibility with the Public Employment Service for paying allowance to participants within the introduction programme (Hernes & Tronstad 2014), and the Swedish Council for Higher Education is responsible for approving foreign education.

3.1.1 Changes after 2015

As a response to the high influx of asylum seekers, the Swedish government did not alter the overall ministerial responsibilities for immigration and integration, but the Ministry of Employment shifted the title of the minister to the Minister of Employment *and Integration* from 2016, emphasising an increased focus on this policy area.

The responsibility between agencies also remained unchanged, with one minor exception: the responsibility for administrating settlement quotas for regions/municipalities was moved from the Swedish Public Employment Service to the Swedish Migration Agency on January 1, 2017. The decision was made in mid-2016, but the Public Employment Service kept the responsibility throughout 2016 (see detailed description of changes in the settlement model in chapter 7). The exponential increase in asylum applications put huge pressure on the Migration Agency, and during 2015-2016, the annual budget for the Migration Agency increased two times to meet the challenges (EMN, 2018).

From 2017-2023, there were some adjustments between the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Employment concerning specific topics on segregation and integration, but the main responsibilities were intact. The responsibilities of national agencies were not altered.

3.2 Divided responsibilities between different levels of government

The responsibilities for people seeking protection in Sweden have been divided between different levels of government.

In the period between registration and granted protection, the national Swedish Migration Agency has the overall responsibility for persons seeking protection, but the municipalities have the responsibility for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the time of registration.

As of 2010, the responsibility for integration measures has been divided between the central and local government. Although the overall responsibility for the integration programme for refugees is located at the national level with the Public Employment Service, the municipalities are still responsible for providing housing, language and civics training after a protection permit is granted. In addition, municipalities must provide initial financial assistance to protection holders up until the state funded introduction benefit is offered. The time between settlement in municipalities and provision of the introduction benefit can take several months. Municipalities also provide social care and, if necessary, supplementary financial assistance to participants in the introduction programme as the introduction benefit hasn't been calculated since 2010 and therefore doesn't always cover expenses (Interview Swedish Migration Agency).

State funding to municipalities is given in relation to settlement and integration of refugees and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The municipality receives an automatic per capita grant for two years for refugees who settle in their municipality. The grant is supposed to cover all cost related to the reception and help with settling refugees, Swedish language training (SFI), civics courses, interpreters, and other measures to enable settlement. Municipalities that entered agreements with the national government to settle refugees also received an annual base amount (removed in 2020) for having entered such agreements. The base amount was a fixed amount and was not affected by number of refugees the municipality agreed to settle. In addition, municipalities could previously be entitled to performance-based grants which was based on the number of settlements compared to number of residents compared to other municipalities (Hernes & Tronstad 2014), implying that they could get higher grants if they agreed to settle a relatively high number of refugees. However, performance-based grants are no longer provided.

Furthermore, municipalities may also apply for different types of grants. In connection with measures for vulnerable groups, they may apply for a reimbursement of up to 75% of special costs they have had during the integration period. They may also apply for a coverage of financial benefits due to health and illness of refugees who are unable to participate in the establishment programme (Hernes & Tronstad 2014).

For the responsibility to host unaccompanied asylum-seeking children after registration, the municipalities get a combination of annual base amount and compensation per day per child.

The regional level, through the County Administrative Board, is responsible for guiding, coordinating and advising the municipalities within their region on integration issues, and also manage some grants related to reception and integration that the municipalities may apply for.

3.2.1 Changes from 2015

The overall multilevel organisation did not undergo any major changes in 2015/16, except for a change in the central-local governance responsibilities concerning settlement and dispersal of protection holders. A new model was introduced that increased the central steering of the dispersal of protection holders. With the new legislation of 2016, there was no longer agreements between specific municipalities and the government, and the Swedish dispersal system changed to a more steered settlement model (Hernes 2017; Prop. 2015/16:54.).

The central government strengthened the funding to the municipalities in this period, to improve their ability to cope with the high influx. From 2016, the municipalities got about a 50% increase in the per capita funding for protection holders (Forordning 2010:1112; Interview SALAR¹). The government also introduced temporary extra funding from 2016-2020 to municipalities and regions (about SEK 10 Billion per year). In the beginning, it was mainly distributed based on the number of asylum seekers and new arrivals per municipality/region, and successively transitioned to the general state contribution which is distributed according to population (Prop. 2015/16:47, Interview SALAR). The per-capita funding for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children was actually reduced in this period. The compensation was cut by 30 percent for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and by 60 percent for 18+ with residence permits. SALARs survey for 2018 showed that this cost the municipalities at least SEK 1 billion during the first year. Since 2019, SALAR has demanded that the compensation should be raised again (SALAR 2019).

The number of arrivals from Ukraine from February 2022 pressured the immigration and integration system severely. However, since displaced persons from Ukraine with temporary protection continue on asylum seekers rights (and the Migration Agency continue to hold the responsibility for this group even after they are granted temporary protection), municipalities would not normally receive extra funding for this group. In 2022, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions sent a proposal to the Government asking for further financial assistance to compensate for the municipal effort made to meet local challenges (SALAR 2022). Later in 2022, municipalities received temporary financial support for costs during 2022/23 that were related to the reception of displaced persons from Ukraine (Swedish Migration Agency 2023a). In July 2022, changes were made to the Settlement Act which obligated municipalities to arrange accommodation for displaced persons from Ukraine according to instructions from the Swedish Migration Agency. The new legislation is based on the same principles as the Settlement Act (Migrationsrätt, Lag om ändring i lagen (1994:137) om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl. 2022). Most displaced persons from Ukraine now live in municipal accommodation unless they have arranged their own accommodation. When settling displaced persons from Ukraine, municipalities will receive government funding if they are delegated the responsibilities for displaced persons from Ukraine from the Migration Agency (Forordning 2017:193). In June 2023, the government also introduced an extra grant of SEK 100 million (nationally) for municipalities to offer Swedish language training to displaced persons from Ukraine. However, this amount will not be enough to cover the municipalities costs for this service if the majority of the group wants to take language training (Interview SALAR).

¹ SALAR is the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

3.3 Formal responsibilities for non-public actors

3.3.1 NGOs and other non-profit actors

In Sweden, NGOs are not delegated a formal role in the asylum or integration procedure from the government, but still provide several services.

In the application process, several NGOs offer consultation to asylum seekers. The Swedish Red Cross offers legal support through a hotline as well as by appointment, and its lawyers can act as legal counsel (AIDA 2021). The Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups, FARR, is one of the non-profit organisations that provide asylum seekers with a booklet of good advice regarding the asylum-seeking process (FARR 2022). Another organisation is The Swedish Refugee Law Centre which is a politically and religiously independent organisation that provides asylum seekers or other protection seekers with free legal help regarding their application. In addition, the Swedish Office of Amnesty International and the Church of Sweden are both distributors of online information to the protection seekers (AIDA 2021).

There were no formal changes in the responsibilities for NGOs in 2015/16. However, NGOs and civil society at large participated to a much greater extent than previously in mobilising and managing the challenges that arose from the refugee influx (EMN 2018). They met protection seekers at central stations and ferry terminals before the government agencies had managed to get themselves organised in these locations. NGOs also aided in several other ways, for example by organising accommodation and employment (SOU 2017:12). Similarly to 2015/16, in 2022/23, there was an increased engagement from civil society and NGOs related to reception, language training, help with housing and employment, etc.

3.3.2 Private for-profit actors and private persons/households

For-profit private actors have not had a formal delegated role in the integration processes, but the municipalities and employment offices may use private contractors to provide certain services (e.g., language training, employment measures etc.). As mentioned, the Migration Agency are still responsible for reception centres and accommodation for those who do not find their own housing. However, while the reception centres were previously all run by public authorities before 2015, during the high increase in 2015/16, they expanded the reception by contracting out accommodation services to private actors.

From 2018, as part of a general political compromise, the Public Employment Service had to, a larger degree, privatise its services, which also had implications for the service provision in the integration programme. The Public Employment Service still holds the overall responsibility for the integration programme, but the actual service provision (e.g. job matching and other employment measures) is to be contracted out to private actors (Januariöverenskommelsen 2018).

Concerning tripartite cooperation, the Swedish Migration Agency are in dialogue with the larger employer/employee organisations, especially those relevant for the work permit process, but they have no formal agreements. The forums are primarily intended for dialogue and exchange of information.

3.4 Coordination measures in times of high influxes

Although the national level did not undergo any major structural changes after the 2015 influx, the coordination activities between ministries was strengthened (EMN, 2018), and the government exploited existing institutional structures for the crisis management. In 2008, Sweden established the Swedish Crisis Management Coordination Secretariate, a body which seeks to develop, coordinate and follow up crisis management between different ministries (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023; Interviews). The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency also had a coordinating role. The agency had an existing structure for producing status reports and organising collaboration conferences. During the situations, they continuously provided the government with status reports, which gave an overall picture of how the agency considered the objectives for how security was affected in various ways. The agency also organised a large number of collaboration conferences bringing together central government agencies and civil society. The results of this work were passed on through information published on the website *krishantering.nu* (SOU 2017:12, p. 29).

Concerning multilevel coordination, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) had a coordinating role between different municipalities and county councils and vis-à-vis the government. They were included in weekly meetings where they were able to raise issues that needed to be dealt with based on the perspective of the municipalities and county councils (SOU 2017:12). The County Administrative Boards also took on a role as regional coordinating actors. Some county administrative boards used specific crisis management structures, whereas others worked within their regular structures (SOU 2017:12).

Sweden have used these established coordination structures also related to the arrivals of displaced persons from Ukraine.

4 Protection statuses and permits

As an EU member state, Sweden is a subject part of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). As shown in Figure 1, the main protection statuses before 2015 were subsidiary protection and UN Convention refugees. The Aliens Act of 2005 also introduced a protection status on humanitarian grounds, called “Protection due to exceptionally distressing circumstances (*uppehållstillstånd på grund av synnerligen ömmande omständigheter*). The status is granted if there are no other grounds for protection, but the circumstances are such that a residence permit should be granted due to an overall assessment of the alien’s situation, particularly the alien’s state of health, adaptation to Sweden and their situation in the country of origin (EMN 2019).

Sweden does not have any special statuses available for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. However, children have a lower threshold for meeting the criteria for what is stipulated as particularly distressing circumstances for the protection status “protection due to exceptionally distressing circumstances” (EMN 2019).

Protection beneficiaries (refugees and stateless persons) in Sweden can get issued a travel document which allows for travel to all countries, except for their home country (AIDA 2021, 112; Immigration Act 2005, § 4). Protection beneficiaries with a permanent residency can travel abroad for up to one year without having their residency withdrawn. If notifying the Migration Agency, permanent protection beneficiaries can stay outside the country for up to two years and still keep their residence permit. Protection holders with a temporary residence permit, are allowed to travel in and out of Sweden during the time the permit is valid (Swedish Migration Agency 2023b). Protection holders may also apply for a grant covering the travel if moving out of Sweden.

4.1 Changes after 2015

As a response to the high influx, the government introduced a temporary law restricting rights for persons who sought protection (Lag 2016:752). The two main protection categories for protection – UN Convention refugees and subsidiary protection remained but permits under these protection statuses became temporary instead of permanent (see chapter 8 on regulations for permanent residency). Further, the possibility of being granted a residence permit due to “particularly distressing circumstances” was limited. A residence permit on this basis could only be granted if it would be contrary to a Swedish convention commitment to reject or deport the foreigner.

Almost 35,000 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in Sweden in 2015. Even though Sweden still didn’t have any specific statuses for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, a Temporary Act was implemented in July 2018. The act was a reaction to the restrictions made for granting residence permits and long processing times. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children above the age of 18 who had received an expulsion order, or would receive one, could apply and receive a residence permit due to studies at upper secondary level (EMN 2019; SALAR 2021). However, they had to meet certain criteria, and should:

[...] have applied for asylum on 24 November 2015 or earlier, be at least 18 years old when he/she was issued a decision on expulsion or deportation, and has waited for more than 15 months for such decision. For those who graduated, there was the opportunity to apply for a temporary residence permit for six months to search for work. Last day for application under the Temporary Act was 30 September 2018 (EMN 2019, 21).

In 2021, as part of a larger revision of the Immigration Act, the category of “Protection due to exceptionally distressing circumstances” was removed. Additionally, many of the temporary changes concerning temporary residence permits as a new rule became permanent law.

4.2 Changes in 2022 concerning collective temporary protection

In 2022, as an EU member state, Sweden followed the EU Temporary Protection Directive which allows displaced persons from Ukraine a residence permit if they meet certain requirements. According to the Swedish Migration Agency, displaced persons from Ukraine can receive a residence permit under the TPD if they:

- are a Ukrainian citizen and have lived in Ukraine; **or**
- have the status or residence permit of a person in need of protection in Ukraine; **or**
- are an accompanying family member of someone belonging to either of the two groups described above (Swedish Migration Agency 2023c).

In addition to fulfilling the requirements above, displaced persons from Ukraine applying for protection under the TPD must provide a passport or other identification that documents they belong to one of the groups listed above. Displaced persons from Ukraine who arrived in Sweden on, or after, October 30, 2021, and who did not already possess a residence permit that allowed them to register with the Swedish population register, could be entitled to protection under the TPD. This is an addition made by the Swedish Government on April 7, 2022 (Berlina 2022). Those who do not meet the criteria listed above, but still need protection, can apply for individual asylum. As long as the Temporary Protection Directive is in force, those covered by the TPD may not apply for other types of permits, such as work permits (Swedish Migration Agency 2023c).

Displaced persons from Ukraine do not get the same rights as those who are granted protection under other protection categories but continue to have the same rights as other *asylum seekers*. They are not registered in the Swedish Population Register nor are they entitled to a personal identity number (as those with refugee status or with subsidiary protection status) (Berlina, 2022). The lack of a personal identity number limits displaced persons from Ukraine’s rights in Sweden (which will be described in the preceding chapters).

The Swedish Migration Agency will not revoke residence permits for displaced persons from Ukraine in cases of short visits to Ukraine. They are allowed to leave Sweden and return as long as the residence permit is valid, and they have the right to travel freely within the EU for up to 90 days during a six-month period. However, this may affect rights to housing and financial support (ECRE 2023, Swedish Migration Agency 2023b). When leaving Sweden, the rights to aid under the Act on Reception of Asylum seekers might be lost. If the permit is still valid when returning, they might be entitled to again receive support. There is no guarantee they will be able to stay in the same place as previous if they need help with accommodation when returning. Displaced persons from Ukraine are not be able to apply for grants covering the travel if moving back to Ukraine (Swedish Migration Agency 2023b).

5 Registration and application process

5.1 Registration process and governmental responsibilities

When seeking protection in Sweden, applicants hand in their application at the Swedish Migration Agency. Protection seekers cannot hand in their application before entering Sweden. When entering Sweden, protection seekers inform the border police about their intention of applying for protection. The border police are at international airports, ferry terminals and where trains and busses enter the country. The border police will first ask a few questions before they refer protection seekers to the Migration Agency (Swedish Migration Agency 2023d). When asylum seekers apply for protection, the Migration Agency will take fingerprints of the protection seeker and check whether they already have applied for asylum in another country with regards to the EU Dublin Regulation (Swedish Migration Agency 2023d). After handing in the application, the Migration Agency must inform applicants of UNHCR and other NGOs that may provide services for asylum seekers (AIDA 2021).

Due to the large increase in asylum applications in 2015, the Swedish Migration Agency received additional funding to increase their capacity. Nevertheless, the processing time continued to increase in 2016-2017, due to the large number of applications in 2015 (EMN 2018). Some measures were implemented to tackle the large increase. In 2015, the registration of new applicants was prioritised over the processing of applications. They extended the opening hours of asylum application units and opened new ones (EMN 2018). Some simplifications were made to the registration and application procedures, but the main components were the same.

5.2 Simplified procedures for displaced persons from Ukraine in 2022

To apply for temporary protection in Sweden, the applicant must currently be in Sweden and provide identification documents. However, the application procedure differs from that of other asylum seekers (who seek individual asylum). The Migration Agency has developed an online application portal where displaced persons from Ukraine may apply for protection if they have a biometric passport (other protection seekers still have to hand in their application physically at the Migration Agency). Persons applying through the online portal, and who have made their own accommodation arrangements, do not need to physically meet with the Migration Agency until after they have had their application processed. However, if they need help with accommodation or need financial support, they must visit the Migration Agency in person. For financial support, they may also send a signed application form by post (Swedish Migration Agency 2023e; ECRE 2023).

In Sweden, temporary protection was preliminarily given for one year, and displaced persons from Ukraine had to apply for a renewal (until 2024-03-04) if they wished to keep their protection status (and connected rights) after the first year. The application for renewal was to be submitted through an online portal which was available from 1 February to 4 March 2023. Those who did not apply for a renewal would lose their protection status and connected rights (e.g., to work, get financial assistance, accommodation etc.). Those who did not renew their permission within the deadline, but wished to remain in Sweden, had to reapply for protection, as well as for accommodation and financial support (Swedish Migration Agency 2023f).

The government has also made contingency plans to increase capacity regarding asylum services if necessary (ECRE 2023; Swedish Migration Agency 2022b; Swedish Migration Agency 2022c).

6 Accommodation and services during application process

The Reception of Asylum Seekers Act (LMA) governs the settlement of, and assistance to, asylum seekers. Applicants may choose to find their own accommodation (*eget boende, EBO*), or live in reception centres (*anläggningsboende ABO*) provided by the Swedish Migration Agency. When asylum seekers choose to self-settle, they may live with family, friends or alone. However, the asylum seeker must cover their own living expenses, but will still keep their rights to a daily allowance and other special contributions. While waiting for the application to be processed, the Migration Agency still holds the responsibility for the asylum seeker (Korsrud 2023; Swedish Migration Agency 2022d).

National legislation does not regulate rights or obligations to other integration measures during the application phase. Bounded by the CEAS, Sweden must provide certain standard conditions at reception centres. Amongst other things, these include education for minors and access to employment within a maximum period of 9 months (European Commission 2023). Additional offers at the reception centres are provided by volunteer organisations. Some municipalities also offer language training, civics courses and provide information regarding the labour market and health care (Korsrud 2023). As these kinds of measures and initiatives are not nationally regulated, asylum seekers may be offered different activities depending on their location (Korsrud 2023).

6.1.1 Changes in 2015 – upscaling capacity through new and existing structures

Sweden did not alter the main rights and principles for accommodation during the application procedures after 2015. However, the increased number of asylum seekers pressured the number of available spaces for accommodation in the national reception centres, which resulted in two parallel strategies. Firstly, changes were made to the LMA Act regarding the right to accommodation and allowance when the asylum application has been denied. From June 1, 2016, those who have received rejections on their asylum application or received an expulsion order, and who haven't left the country, lose their rights to daily allowance and accommodations in asylum centres provided by the Swedish Migration Agency (with the exception of adults with children/families) (Swedish Migration Agency, 2022).

Secondly, the Swedish Migration Agency upscaled their reception capacity considerably as they normally run the reception services with their own staff (either renting apartments or larger facilities). In addition to upscaling such public reception services, a number of procurements were announced where bed space, with or without food, was included and that the operation was provided by a supplier who submitted a tender.

In 2020, a new rule was introduced which generally limited asylum seekers' settlement possibilities. The change implied that if an asylum seeker chose to reside within an area that was reported by the municipality to be an area with social and economic challenges, rights to special grants and daily allowance could be withdrawn (Korsrud 2023; Swedish Migration Agency 2023).

From 2021, protection seekers over the age of 15 years had to participate in a one-day mandatory social introduction class organised by the Migration Agency (previously a two-hour class). The introduction provides information about the asylum process and rights and

obligations for asylum seekers, along with information about what it is like to live in Sweden (laws, rules, norms and values) (Ministry of Justice, 2021, Swedish Migration Agency, 2023).

6.1.2 Policy response in 2022/23

Displaced persons from Ukraine were included as a group subject to the LMA Act, which regulates rights to self-settlement and/or publicly assisted accommodation during the application period. Thus, displaced persons from Ukraine have the same rights and restrictions as other asylum seekers in Sweden during the application process.

7 Settlement and intra-national distribution

7.1 Settlement models before 2015

The Swedish settlement model has undergone several changes over the years. Up until the 1980s, the choice of housing and where to live had been (more or less) out of state control, resulting in a high concentration of protection holders in just a few cities. In the late 1980s, a new system was introduced giving the Immigration Agency (later Migration Agency) the responsibility for settling protection holders in agreement with municipalities (Brochmann & Hagelund 2010). However, in 1994, Sweden introduced self-accommodation as a new main principle in their accommodation model for asylum seekers, a principle that still prevails today. Asylum seekers were now able to arrange their own accommodation while waiting for their asylum application to be approved (Borevi & Bengtsson 2015; Prop.1993/94:94, 34). Likewise, after being granted a residence permit, persons who found their own accommodation were allowed to settle freely in Sweden, without losing any rights to financial assistance or integration measures. Protection holders who were not able to find their own accommodation would be settled by the Migration Agency, who made voluntary agreements with selected settlement municipalities (Borevi & Bengtsson 2015).

Questions regarding the Swedish settlement model has reappeared on the agenda several times. Due to a large increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, there was a lot of pressure on particular municipalities. Thus, from 2014, the Migration Agency was given the authority to allocate unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to municipalities, instead of the previous system based on voluntary central-local agreements. Thus, this implied increased central steering of the Swedish settlement model, but only for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Hernes 2017). Unlike for other groups, the allocation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to municipalities happens right after registration (and not after a granted residence permit), because the responsibility for unaccompanied minors is a municipal one, and not that of the Migration Agency.

7.2 Changes in 2015/16

Challenges with the previous settlement model became prominent during the influx of 2015, as the system of voluntary central-local agreements did not provide enough settlements for those who had been granted residence permits. The government did not change the right to self-settlement, but changed the system for those who had initially lived at reception centres and would be settled through public assistance. In March 2016, a new Settlement Act was implemented introducing central allocation of all protection holders who do not self-settle, thus, abandoning the previous principle of voluntary central-local agreements. The central allocation is based on formal distribution criteria regulated in the Settlement Act. The main criterion is the municipal population size, but the distribution criteria also consider the municipality's labour market conditions, total reception of newly arrived and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and the number of protection seekers staying in the municipality (Lag 2016:38). Regarding the number of protection seekers to be settled in each municipality, the government decides, based on a suggestion from the Migration Agency, how many protection seekers will be distributed to each regional County Administrative Board. Further, the regional County Administrative Board negotiates with the municipalities on the local distribution and has the final decision within the County. The Migration Agency has the authority to decide the distribution of unaccompanied minors to municipalities.

Sweden received the largest share of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children among all European OECD countries in 2015. To accommodate the challenges following the large increase, “supported accommodation” was introduced as a supplement to placement in foster and care homes (OECD 2017).

7.3 Changes in 2022/23

Displaced persons from Ukraine are not covered by the Settlement Act for protection seekers who have been granted protection but are regulated through an amendment in the Reception of Asylum Seekers Act (LMA). The main principles for settlement for displaced persons from Ukraine are the same as for other groups, which means that they may either arrange their own accommodation or get accommodation through public assistance (accommodation facilities provided by the Swedish Migration Agency, or housing provided by municipalities) (Swedish Migration Agency 2023h, Korsrud 2023). This latter alternative, municipal housing, was implemented in July 2022, when the Swedish government adopted a new legislation where municipalities received a greater responsibility for housing displaced persons from Ukraine. Based on mainly the same set of distribution criteria as under the Settlement Act, the Migration Agency were given the responsibility to allocate displaced persons from Ukraine to municipalities, and the municipality now has one month to arrange accommodation after the individual allocations are made (Korsrud 2023).

As mentioned above, in 2020, the government implemented a new regulation limiting financial assistance for protection seekers and protection holders who settled in areas which are on the Swedish Migration Agency’s list of residential areas with social and economic challenges. This restriction also applies to displaced persons from Ukraine (Swedish Migration Agency 2023h).

8 Permanent residency requirements

8.1 Permanent residency requirements

In Sweden, protection seekers used to be granted permanent residency immediately after they were granted asylum. Prior to the refugee influx in 2015, there were no qualifying measures for obtaining permanent residency other than obtaining the asylum-status (Hernes 2018). For example, in 2013, the Migration Agency granted all protection seekers from Syria permanent residency (Migrationsverket 2022a).

In July 2016, the large parliamentary majority introduced a temporary act (Lag 2016:752) concerning permanent residency, abandoning the previously liberal rules that gave protection beneficiaries a permanent residency immediately after being granted asylum. Those who were granted refugee status now received a temporary residence permit lasting three years, however, UN Quota refugees were excepted and got permanent residency immediately. Those covered by the subsidiary protection status were given shorter permits for 13 months, after which they could extend their permit through application if they were still considered to need protection when their permit expired (Hudson et.al. 2021; OECD 2017). Sweden also introduced an employment “fast track”, which gave these two groups the opportunity to obtain a permanent residency more quickly if they were employed at the time that they would renew their protection permit (Hernes 2018).

Prior to the situation in 2022, two changes were made in the rules for permanent residency. First, in the (temporary) Swedish Upper Secondary School Act of 2018, refugees and persons with subsidiary protection were among the target groups that could be granted a permanent residence permit upon completion of studies at upper secondary level if they could support themselves financially as an employee or a self-employed person. The regulations were later made permanent in 2021 with minor alterations (Prop 2020/21:182). Second, in 2021, Sweden changes their rules for obtaining permanent residency. First, the temporary acts that introduced temporary permits for people seeking protection in 2016 became a permanent rule (Lag 2021:765). Second, new requirements for obtaining permanent residency were introduced - rules that applied to all immigrants (with minor exceptions). The new requirements for obtaining permanent residency included 1) minimum three-year residency before application, 2) a self-sufficiency requirement (only including personal income/means, and not that of family members), and 3) that you live an “orderly life”. The latter requirement is forward-looking, meaning that to obtain a permanent residence permit, it must be expected that you will live an orderly life in the future.

Concerning displaced persons from Ukraine, the time spent in Sweden do not lead to a permanent residence permit (Migrationsverket 2023h).

9 Family reunification

Sweden's family reunification rules have historically been relatively liberal. An early study of the implementation of the Family Reunification Directive found that Sweden was one of only two states *not* to impose any kind of economic requirement for sponsors (Groenendijk et al 2007). A financial support requirement for all immigrant was subsequently introduced in 2010, which still placed Sweden on the liberal end in Europe - and certainly in Scandinavia - as the requirement "require[d] only self-support of the sponsor, but *not* the ability to economically maintain an incoming relative" (Bech et al 2017). However, in line with the Family Reunification Directive, Sweden had exemptions from income and housing requirements for refugees, but only with regard to family relationships that predate arrivals (i.e. pre-flight spouses and children) (Groenendijk et al 2007, 41). Otherwise, refugees who wanted to apply for family reunification were entitled to do so if the applicant could support themselves (Hudson et.al. 2021).

9.1 Changes after 2015

As part of the temporary act, Sweden's family reunification rules reverted to the minimum requirements in the Family Reunification Directive (Lag 2016:752). The government stated clearly that the purpose of restrictive family reunification rules was to discourage persons from applying for asylum in Sweden (AIDA Sweden 2021, 102). A stricter income/maintenance requirement was introduced, so that any sponsor wishing to bring family members to Sweden had to be able to support themselves and their family members, as well as having an adequate housing. In accordance with the minimum rules in the Directive, Convention refugees were still exempted from these material requirements, but only if they applied within three months and with respect to pre-flight family members. These temporary rules were made permanent in a larger revision of the Immigration Act in 2021.

Family reunification was suspended for subsidiary protection holders for the initial three-year duration of the temporary act. When the act was extended in 2019, this suspension was lifted, and subsidiary protection holders were given access to family reunification. Those who had been waiting to apply were given three months to do so without having to meet housing and income requirements (AIDA Sweden 2021).

As mentioned, the temporary restrictions introduced in 2016 was made permanent as part of the larger revision of the Immigration Act in 2021 (Lag 2021:765). No changes were made for family reunification for displaced persons from Ukraine.

10 Integration measures

During the asylum procedure, applicants do not normally have the right to work in Sweden. In order to have the right to work during the application process, the asylum seeker has to apply for a work permit. To be eligible for such a permit, the applicant has to 1) provide proper identity papers or in some other way help to prove their identity, 2) the application must be considered in Sweden, and 3) there have to be solid reasons for the application for asylum. You will not be granted a work permit if you have been issued a refusal of entry with immediate effect (Swedish Migration Agency 2023g).

From 2010, Sweden centralised the responsibility for the integration programme with the Establishment Act (for those who had been granted a protection permit), when the responsibility for integration programmes for protection holders was moved from the municipalities to the Public Employment Service. The integration changes that followed the new Act is usually described as a bill of rights and gave the (formal) right to integration programmes for the first time. With the reform, all refugees were to register with the Swedish Public Employment Service for establishment talks, plans, coaching and introduction benefits (*etableringsersättning*). The establishment plan was to cover a maximum of 24 months; it included language and civics training (still provided by the municipalities) as well as measures to prepare for workforce participation (performed by the Swedish Public Employment Service or other agents). Programme participation was a legal right for the target group, but not an obligation. However, financial sanctions could be imposed on the target group in cases of non-participation – weakening the voluntary aspect.

10.1 Policies from 2015

In 2015, through a tripartite agreement, the Swedish Government introduced a new fast track (*snabbspåret*), which aimed to build on the protection holder's prior qualifications. The target group was newly arrived refugees who already had an education or experience from specific industries in demand in the Swedish labour market. By building on the protection holder's previous qualifications, the aim was that participants would not only get a job, but a relevant job related to their prior education and qualifications (Hernes et al. 2022).

In 2018, the Establishment Act was revised to make the legislation more flexible and similar to the Public Employment Service's responsibilities towards other unemployed target groups. For example, from 2018, the introduction programme was no longer a formal right, but the Public Employment Service makes a decision based on a labour market policy examination. Furthermore, these regulatory adjustments gave the Public Employment Service the possibility to impose sanctions on refugees for non-participation in the integration programme, similarly to how other unemployed persons may be financially sanctioned for non-participation in other employment programmes. Another important adjustment was that the Public Employment Service could expand the length of the individual plans beyond the 24 months of the establishment programme and residence permit, based on the individual immigrant's needs. There was still a maximum of 24 months, but the length could be expanded for example, if they were on parental leave. The changes in 2018 also strengthened the focus on education and qualification. Compulsory education was introduced as a new measure in the integration programme for participants who had lower education levels on arrival. Such persons – if they were considered unable to gain employment after a two-year programme – could be required to take further education in order to receive financial assistance. The aim here was to strengthen and improve immigrants' chances of obtaining the high qualifications demanded on the Swedish labour market (Hernes 2022).

10.1.1 Integration rights and exceptions for displaced persons from Ukraine

As the application process for displaced persons from Ukraine is very short, they do not have the right to work during the application process, but they have the right to work once they have received a (positive) decision on their application (Swedish Migration Agency 2022d).

During the application period, displaced persons from Ukraine do not participate in the civics training offered to asylum seekers. Instead, they are offered a digital version where they run through the material on their own. The digital civics course is mandatory, however, as with other protection seekers, there are no sanction possibilities.

The main difference for those granted collective temporary protection, is that they do not transition over to be entitled to the same integration rights as other groups that have been granted a protection status. Displaced persons from Ukraine – as asylum seekers – are not registered within the population and are therefore not entitled to an integration programme. Neither are they *entitled* to language training, although many voluntary institutions do offer language courses and training. However, these courses are usually limited in both space and time, so everyone might not get the opportunity. From July 2023, municipalities have the opportunity to offer SFI to displaced persons from Ukraine, though they are not obligated to do so. Nor does Sweden offer specific measures to integrate displaced persons from Ukraine into the labour market (Korsrud 2023; Berlina 2022). Seeing as they are not registered in the Swedish Population Register, they also have limited options to get general support measures from the Public Employment Service, because the agency depends on such registration to provide insurance for labour market measures such as work practice. Displaced persons from Ukraine do not have access to initiatives such as employment training, validation of competencies, work experience or different programmes provided by the Employment service. However, they can receive help and guidance applying for jobs, and it is possible (if they meet certain criteria) to receive some form of individual recruitment incentive because in that case, the insurance is handled by the employer (Swedish Public Employment Service 2023).

11 Financial assistance to the protection seeker

11.1.1 Financial assistance during application process

During the application process, asylum seekers get a daily allowance that should cover costs for food, clothing and shoes, leisure activities, hygiene items and other consumables. The daily allowance must also cover general expenses for health and medical care, dental care and medicines. When free food is included in the accommodation, a reduced daily allowance is provided. The daily allowance is regulated (Förordning (1994:361) om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl.) and specifies different amounts depending on age, number of children, and whether the applicant live alone or with others. The level of the daily allowance has had a stable fixed rate for many years (not index regulated), and the low levels have been a topic of debate in recent years (Interview Swedish Migration Agency). In addition to the daily allowance, asylum seekers may also apply for additional funds for very specific services or purposes (dental, winter clothes, etc.), through needs-based individual evaluations.

11.1.2 Financial assistance after granted residence permit/settlement

With the Establishment reform in 2010, participants in the state-led integration programme received financial assistance with a daily rate depending on their full participation. Participants may participate full-time or part time – 75%, 50% or 25% –, depending on any health issues, part-time work etc. and the daily rates are adjusted accordingly. The integration benefit is designed as an individual benefit, implying that it is independent of the household's overall economy, in order to incentivise both men and women to participate in the programme (Borevi, 2010). Furthermore, participants can receive additional benefits if they have children living at home under the age of 20 who are not self-sufficient, and participants living alone are able to receive housing benefits. The integration benefit is linked to programme participation, thus invalid absence from programme activities will imply reductions in the benefit (Hernes & Tronstad 2014).

As displaced persons from Ukraine continue to be subject to the regulations of asylum seekers, they are not entitled to an integration benefit (which is higher than the daily allowance for asylum seekers). Instead, they continue to receive the same financial assistance as asylum seekers also after being granted a residence permit. As the daily allowances for asylum seekers are lower than the integration benefit, displaced persons from Ukraine get lower levels of financial assistance compared to groups with other protection statuses that are granted a protection permit.

12 Healthcare services

The healthcare services in Sweden are largely tax-funded and therefore free or only cost a small amount. The healthcare in Sweden is decentralised, and therefore there may be some regional differences. However, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs ensure equal health quality across the country (Sweden 2023).

Persons seeking protection in Sweden are entitled to emergency healthcare and dental care, and health care that is urgent. Additionally, they are entitled to childbirth care, abortion care, advice on contraception, maternity care and healthcare under the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act (a law intended to prevent the spread of contagious diseases). Children and young people under 18 seeking asylum are entitled to the same healthcare and dental care as children residing in Sweden. Healthcare is largely free of charge for children, but this can vary depending on where you live. Medicine for children is free if there is a prescription from a doctor. All asylum seekers are offered a health assessment when they seek asylum. They also pay a lower patient fee and costs for most prescription medicines (Swedish Migration Agency 2023i).

Persons who are granted a protection permit have the same rights to healthcare as other residents in Sweden.

12.1.1 Policy response in 2022/23

Seeing displaced persons from Ukraine have the same rights as asylum seekers, persons over the age of 18 continue to only have access to emergency medical care, emergency dental care and other medical care that is urgent (ECRE 2023, Swedish Migration Agency 2023h). It is also possible to receive other health services such as abortion and maternal health care. Their limited access to health services has been strongly critiqued (Nordentoft 2023).

As for other asylum seekers, displaced persons from Ukraine are also offered a free health exam once their application has been approved. They will also receive a lower fee when visiting healthcare services as long as they show their residence permit.

However, children under the age of 18 will have access to the same health care and dental services as other Swedish children. Previously, collective protection holders could first receive healthcare after a decision on residence permit. This was changed through an amendment to the LMA 2022 (July 1) so that displaced persons from Ukraine were to be covered by the LMA from, and including, the day they applied for protection (Interview, The Swedish Migration Agency).

13 Pre-school and mandatory schooling for minors

All asylum-seeking children and young people living in Sweden have the right to attend pre-school and school. It is the responsibility of the municipality to ensure that they get to attend school under the same conditions as other children and young people in the municipality. This applies to pre-school, primary school, and upper secondary school. In order to have the right to attend upper secondary school, young asylum seekers must begin their studies before they turn 18.

Asylum-seeking children have the same right to pre-school as other Swedish residents. However, municipalities will only receive state compensation for children who are three years or older who participate 15 hours per week, even though there might be children younger than three years who participate full time (Interview SALAR).

In 2016, a new regulation was put into force giving newly arrived students a mandatory mapping/assessment of knowledge and previous education. It also issued regulations on the organisational level of introductory classes and changes in the number of classes or teaching hours for students (EMN 2018).

Displaced children from Ukraine applying have access to pre-school, primary school, lower secondary and upper secondary education, similarly to other groups who seek protection (and other residents in Sweden) (Swedish Migration Agency 2023i). Scholarships for Ukrainian scientists are also available, and displaced persons from Ukraine also have access to vocational education if they meet the language requirements (Berlina 2022; OECD 2022).

14 Overall analysis

Sweden has a long history of welcoming high numbers of refugees. This escalated in 2014-2016, where Sweden received over 200,000 asylum seekers, which resulted in many governmental changes, both immediate changes to tackle the large influx, but also a more long-term restrictive turn, concerning permanent residency, family reunification, protection statuses etc. Many of the temporary restrictions made in 2015/16 were also made permanent later on.

Sweden continued to implement restrictions also in the years after the refugee influx of 2015/16. In 2020, the government implemented a new regulation limiting financial assistance for asylum seekers and refugees who settles in areas which are on the Swedish Migration Agency's list of residential areas with social and economic challenges. Sweden still holds a fairly liberal settlement model, especially compared to Denmark and Norway, however, with these measures, Sweden is moving in a restrictive direction also regarding the settlement model.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has led to millions of people displaced from Ukraine. The high number of displaced persons from Ukraine have really substantiated Sweden's change from having some of the most liberal immigration and integration policies in Europe, to having some of the most restrictive regulations for displaced persons from Ukraine. They do not transition over to being entitled to the same financial and integration rights as other protection holders and have limited access to health care.

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