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THE EVOLUTION OF SWEDEN'S MIGRATION POLICY: FROM HUMANITARIANISM TO SECURITISATION

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Received 16 August 2025

Accepted 11 March 2026

doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2026-2-5

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Dmitriev R. V., 2026

The European migration crisis has emerged as one of the key challenges for Sweden, a country long known for its liberal stance toward refugees and asylum seekers. The large-scale influx of asylum seekers exposed vulnerabilities in the national reception system, aggravated issues of social integration, and contributed to the growing criminalisation of migrant communities. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of Sweden's migration policy since 2015, viewed in the context of EU-wide reforms and domestic demands for stronger security measures. The methodological framework draws on systemic and comparative approaches. The empirical foundation is based on Statistics Sweden data on the number of asylum seekers, legislative acts, and analytical reports. Over the past decade, Sweden has shifted the focus of its migration policy, moving from a primarily humanitarian orientation toward refugees and asylum seekers to a pragmatic approach that combines restrictive measures with integration initiatives. Among the tools employed by the Swedish authorities to reduce migration flows are stricter asylum regulations, the expansion of readmission, voluntary and forced return programs, broader grounds and longer durations for entry bans in cases of deportation, and the establishment of infrastructure for reception and return centers. The analysis demonstrates that these reforms have reduced Sweden's attractiveness to migrants and increased control over migration flows; however, they have not resolved the long-term challenges of social integration and territorial segregation of migrants, which remain highly relevant in the country.

Keywords:

Sweden, migration policy, asylum seekers, refugees, irregular migration, readmission, securitisation, EU Migration and Asylum Pact

To cite this article: Agafoshin, M. M., Gorokhov, S. A., Dmitriev, R. V. 2026, The Evolution of Sweden's Migration Policy: From Humanitarianism to Securitisation, *Baltic Region*, vol. 18, № 2, p. 95–110, doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2026-2-5

Introduction

The European migration crisis that emerged in the mid-2010s became one of the most significant and complex challenges faced by the European Union in recent history. Both forced and irregular migration flows from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia increased sharply and reached their peak in 2015, exposing structural weaknesses in the EU’s capacity to manage migration and secure its external borders. The crisis also revealed deep divisions among member states over the implementation of a common migration policy and the allocation of responsibility within the European Union [1–3].

At the height of the crisis in 2015–2016, European Union member states adopted markedly different approaches to granting international protection and integrating newcomers, ranging from relatively open policies aimed at broad access to asylum and comprehensive integration [4–6] to more restrictive strategies emphasising tighter border controls, withdrawal from relocation mechanisms, and reduced social obligations towards asylum seekers [7; 8]. This divergence not only complicated the development of a coordinated EU-wide response but also deepened political tensions within the Union.

Although the peak of the crisis had passed, migration pressures remained high. Between 2017 and 2024, the annual number of asylum applications consistently exceeded 500,000, with the exception of 2020, when figures declined due to border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 1).

Table 1

Total number of asylum applications
in the EU and Sweden (thousand), 2014–2024

Year	EU	Sweden	Year	EU	Sweden
2014	594.2	81.2	2020	476.4	20.2
2015	1282.7	162.5	2021	638.4	20.4
2016	1221.2	28.8	2022	960.7	23.8
2017	677.5	26.3	2023	1130.4	17.0
2018	632.6	28.6	2024	998.1	11.1
2019	702.8	30.3			

Compiled based on Eurostat data.¹

At the same time, growing pressure on reception systems, combined with slower economic growth and persistent challenges in integrating migrants, contributed

¹ Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex — annual aggregated data, 2025, Eurostat, URL: https://doi.org/10.2908/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZA (accessed 12.07.2025).

to rising anti-immigrant sentiment across Europe. This shift in public opinion fueled increased support for right-wing parties at both national and EU levels [9; 10]. In turn, the changing political climate prompted gradual reforms of EU migration policy, culminating in the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2024.¹ The new framework places greater emphasis on securitisation and externalisation, introducing a set of measures that strengthen control of the EU's external borders and establish reception and registration centres in cross-border areas. It also underscores enhanced cooperation with countries of origin and transit, particularly through readmission agreements, and prioritises both voluntary and forced returns of third-country nationals residing in the EU without legal status [11; 12].

Under the Pact, all EU member states are expected to align their national legislation with the new framework by 2026. Sweden provides a particularly illustrative case in this respect. Historically known for its liberal migration policies, including toward refugees, the country experienced a large influx of asylum seekers during the crisis, which led to growing social and political tensions [13]. Ongoing integration challenges, the concentration of migrants in peripheral urban areas, and their high level of criminalisation led to a gradual shift toward stricter migration policies, even before the Pact was adopted.

Migration challenges in Sweden

For decades, Sweden's migration policy was based on the principles of multiculturalism. The country also promoted itself as a "humanitarian superpower," maintaining high standards for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. These standards included legal and financial support, access to housing, healthcare, and education, as well as the opportunity to study in one's native language [14; 15]. A massive influx of asylum seekers began in 2012, when applications rose by nearly 50 % compared to previous years, reaching 43.9 thousand. The process peaked in 2015 at 162.5 thousand applications,² resulting in a significant increase in public spending on migration-related programs. Government expenditures on the Migration Agency, accommodation, social benefits, integration measures, and efforts to reduce spatial segregation reached their highest level in 2017, totalling nearly SEK 71 billion (approximately €7.4 billion) (Table 2).

¹ Pact on Migration and Asylum, 2024, *European Commission*, 21.04.2024, URL: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en (accessed 20.06.2025).

² Asylsökande, antal efter medborgarskapsland, kön, period och år, 2025, *SCB*, URL: <https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/> (accessed 20.06.2025).

Table 2

**Dynamics of Swedish migration
and integration policy expenditures 2014–2020, SEK million**

Expenditure area	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
8. Migration	12,551	18,725	41,251	40,034	19,624	11,847	9,579
13. Gender equality and the integration of newly arrived immigrants	12,225	15,362	19,200	23,931	22,217	16,942	8,516
1:2. Municipal compensation for refugee reception	6,968	8,967	12,013	15,167	16,167	11,884	7,042
1:3. Establishment compensation for some newly arrived immigrants	2,685	3,687	4,226	5,355	4,925	3,563	— ¹
14. Labour market and working life ²							
1:14. Establishment compensation for some newly arrived immigrants	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,288
25. General grants to local government							
1:4. Support in the context of the refugee situation	—	9,800 ³	—	7,000	7,000	5,000	3,000
<i>Total</i>	24,776	34,087	60,451	70,965	48,841	33,789	23,383

Based on budget expenditure reports from the Swedish Agency for Financial and Public Management.⁴

¹ From 2020, this item was transferred from Expenditure Area 13 to Expenditure Area 14 “Labour market and working life”. Under the new budgetary structure, this expenditure was allocated, in particular, under item 1:14 “Establishment compensation for some newly arrived immigrants”, while integration measures became increasingly linked to the financing of active labour-market policy programmes, including item 1:3 “Costs of labour market policy programmes and measures”.

² Only expenditures under item 1:14 have been taken into account, as item 1:3 covers the financing of all programmes implemented by the Swedish Public Employment Service, not only those targeting newly arrived migrants, but also unemployed persons, individuals with disabilities, young people, and other vulnerable groups.

³ In 2015, due to the crisis, item 1:5 “Temporary support for municipalities and county councils” was added to the amended budget. Source: Extra ändringsbudget för 2015, *Sveriges riksdag*, URL: <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/BE254F7D-D274-4230-8CE3-5CBB83F16469> (accessed 05.07.2025).

⁴ Utfallet för statens budget, ESV, URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2015/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2014>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2016/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2015>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2017/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2016>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2018/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2017>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2019/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2018>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2020/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2019>; URL: <https://www.esv.se/press-och-publicerat/publikationer/2021/utfallet-for-statens-budget-2020> (accessed 05.07.2025).

The crisis exposed the limited capacity of Sweden's infrastructure and social services to handle such a large influx of forced migrants. The Migration Agency had to accommodate asylum seekers in hotels, sports halls, and temporary camps. Many of them were relocated to remote municipalities that lacked adequate infrastructure. At the same time, the country faced shortages of qualified interpreters, social workers, and officers of the Migration Agency. While the Agency was designed to process up to 4,000 applications per week, by the autumn of 2015, the number had risen to 16,000¹, causing significant delays. The education system also came under pressure, as schools had to integrate a large number of children who did not speak Swedish and had very different levels of prior education, which complicated the integration process even more [16].

A significant consequence of the increase in the number of migrants was the intensification of their spatial segregation. The law on the reception of asylum seekers adopted in 1994² allowed refugees to be accommodated either in government-provided social housing (*Anläggningsboende*, ABO) or in independently chosen housing (*Eget boende*, EBO) [17]. Refugees who chose accommodation under the ABO system could not select the municipality themselves and were generally distributed by the authorities to small settlements across the country; those who made use of the EBO option typically settled with relatives or acquaintances in large cities [18; 19]. The possibility of independently choosing a place of residence, combined with a shortage of available social housing during the peak of the crisis, led to a concentration of newcomers in the peripheral areas of large cities. These territories, which had a high proportion of foreign residents, higher crime rates, rejection of the norms and values of Swedish society, and the spread of fundamentalist values and radical ideas, were identified by the authorities as “vulnerable areas” (*utsatta områden*)³ and “areas of social exclusion” (*utanförskapsområden*)⁴ [13; 20; 21].

From temporary measures to systemic restrictions

In response to migration-related challenges, the Swedish authorities resorted to emergency measures aimed at rapidly regulating the situation and minimising the consequences of the crisis [22]. Already in late 2015, border controls were

¹ RiR 2017:4, *Riksrevisionen*, URL: <https://www.riksrevisionen.se/granskningar/gransk-ningsrapporter/2017/lardomar-av-flyktingsituationen-hosten-2015---beredskap-och-hantering.html> (accessed 05.07.2025).

² Lag (1994:137) om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl., *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=1994:137> (accessed 12.07.2025).

³ Utsatta områden — polisens arbete, 2024, *Polisen*, URL: <https://polisen.se/om-polisen/polisens-arbete/utsatta-omraden> (accessed 08.07.2025).

⁴ Lista över alla 180 områden på Utanförskapets karta, 2024, *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/arbete-mot-utanforskap/lista-180-omraden-pa-utanforskapets-karta/> (accessed 08.07.2025).

introduced at the border with Denmark on crossings via the Øresund Bridge and at the border with Germany in ferry traffic.¹ In July 2016, Sweden adopted an “Act on Temporary Restrictions on the Possibility of Obtaining a Residence Permit”,² aligning its asylum standards with minimum EU and international requirements. This act marked a shift away from its previously liberal approach to asylum and protection. A central provision of the reform was the abolition of permanent residence permits, which were replaced by temporary permits: up to three years for refugees under the Geneva Convention criteria, and 13 months for individuals granted subsidiary protection.³ The extension of temporary residence permits was granted only if the grounds for international protection persisted, integration proved successful, and the applicant had no criminal record. In addition, a ban on family reunification was introduced for persons with subsidiary protection status. Refugees were also subject to strict economic requirements concerning income levels and the ownership or rental of adequately sized housing.

To address the problem of the spatial segregation of foreign nationals, the government adopted the law “On Settlement of Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants”⁴ which established quotas for the mandatory distribution of refugees and persons with subsidiary protection across all municipalities nationwide. Responsibility was distributed depending on factors such as municipal population size, unemployment rate, the number of previously received forced migrants, and housing availability. However, the law did not provide for penalties, administrative sanctions, or other punishments for migrants who left their assigned municipality on their own initiative. Upon moving to another municipality, newly arrived migrants lost access to integration programmes, social benefits, and housing assistance.

These measures reduced Sweden’s attractiveness as a country of asylum, which was reflected in both the absolute and relative figures of asylum applications. While in 2015 Sweden accounted for 12.7 % (162.9 thousand) of all applications submitted in the EU, the number dropped significantly in subsequent years: to 2.4 % (28.8 thousand) in 2016, 3.9 % (26.3 thousand) in 2017, and 4.5 % (28.6 thousand) in 2018 (Table 1).

¹ Lag (2015:1073) om särskilda åtgärder vid allvarig fara för den allmänna ordningen eller den inre säkerheten i landet, *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2015:1073> (accessed 09.07.2025).

² Lag (2016:752) om tillfälliga begränsningar av möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige, *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2016:752> (accessed 09.07.2025).

³ This group is not recognized as refugees but is entitled to international protection due to the risk of the death penalty, corporal punishment, torture, or a high likelihood of injury as a result of armed conflict in their home country.

⁴ Lag (2016:38) om mottagande av vissa nyanlända invandrare för bosättning, *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://rkrattsbaser.gov.se/sfst?bet=2016:38> (accessed 12.07.2025).

Nevertheless, the consequences of the crisis, such as problems of social and economic integration of culturally distinct migrants, their territorial isolation, rising crime, and the overburdening of social services and infrastructure, led to a noticeable shift in Sweden's socio-political discourse [23]. The 2018 parliamentary elections demonstrated growing public support for the right-wing populist party, the Sweden Democrats, which advocated stricter migration policies, enhanced security measures, and the protection of cultural identity. Their electoral results increased from 12.9 % in 2014 to 17.5 % in 2018, complicating the formation of a governing coalition [24; 25].

Changes in the parliamentary landscape forced moderate and left-wing parties to revise their positions on migration policy [26], leading to a tightening of migration and integration legislation in the country. Thus, on January 1, 2020, an amendment to the law on the reception of asylum seekers came into force,¹ intended to prevent segregation and the formation of parallel communities. Restrictions were introduced on asylum seekers' right to independently choose their housing (EBO), and if they moved to one of the designated "vulnerable areas" (*utsatta områden*), they lost their entitlement to state financial support [27]. In turn, on June 19, 2021, the act "On Temporary Restrictions on the Possibility of Obtaining a Residence Permit in Sweden" expired. It was replaced by permanent amendments to legislation establishing that all initial residence permits for refugees and other categories are granted temporarily.² Permanent residence became available no earlier than after 3 years, subject to financial self-sufficiency, adequate housing conditions, completion of integration programs, and compliance with income and housing requirements for family reunification.

The Tidö Agreement and subsequent reforms in the context of the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum

Despite tighter migration legislation, public concern over rising crime associated with parts of the foreign-born population has not diminished. Ethnic criminal groups operating in "vulnerable areas" have been responsible for a significant share of sexual offences, gun violence, and incidents involving

¹ Lag (2019:1204) om ändring i lagen (1994:137) om mottagande av asylsökande m.fl, *Svensk författningssamling*, URL: <https://svenskforfattningssamling.se/doc/20191204.html> (accessed 15.07.2025).

² Prop. 2020/21:191 Ändrade regler i utlänningslagen, *Regeringskansliet*, URL: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2021/04/prop.-202021191> (accessed 15.07.2025).

explosives.¹ According to the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, the share of crimes committed by individuals of foreign origin² increased from 36.7 % in 2007 to 48.2 % in 2018, with their likelihood of committing crimes estimated to be 2.5–3.2 times higher than that of the native population.³

The growing focus of the political agenda on crime, violence, and migration-related issues contributed to increased support for the Sweden Democrats, who received 20.5 % of the vote in the 2022 parliamentary elections and became the second-largest political force in the country for the first time. To form a stable governing coalition, the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberals agreed, breaking a long-standing political taboo, to cooperate with the Sweden Democrats [28]. In this context, the four parties signed the Tidö Agreement (*Tidöavtalet*)⁴, which established a joint programme consisting of seven “areas of cooperation” for the period 2022–2026, including migration and integration, as well as crime prevention.

The Tidö Agreement provides for a stricter migration policy seeking to reduce both labour and humanitarian migration. To limit the inflow of low-skilled labour, the Swedish government introduced, from 1 November 2023, a requirement that applicants for work visas must secure employment with a salary of at least 80 % of the national median wage, with a planned increase to 100 %.⁵ In order to align national legislation with minimum European Union standards, the authorities also reduced the refugee resettlement quota under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees programme from 5,000 to 900 people beginning in 2023. In addition, the minimum age of a spouse or partner eligible for family reunification was raised from 18 to 21.⁶

¹ Sweden hit by ‘unprecedented’ levels of gang violence, 2023, *The Guardian*, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/13/sweden-gang-violence-shootings-explosions> (accessed 18.07.2025) ; Facts about migration, integration and crime in Sweden, 2025, *Government Offices of Sweden*, URL: <https://www.government.se/articles/2017/02/facts-about-migration-and-crime-in-sweden> (accessed 18.07.2025).

² This category includes: (1) individuals born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents; (2) Swedish citizens born abroad; (3) non-residents.

³ *Misstänkta för brott bland personer med inrikes respektive utrikes bakgrund*, 2021, *Brå*, URL: <https://bra.se/rapporter/arkiv/2021-08-25-misstankta-for-brott-bland-personer-med-inrikes-respektive-utrikes-bakgrund> (accessed 19.07.2025).

⁴ *Tidöavtalet — Överenskommelse för Sverige*, 2022, URL: <https://mb.cision.com/Public/4669/3648119/994c611dffa285e6.pdf> (accessed 21.07.2025).

⁵ *Förslag på yrken som kan undantas nytt lönekrav för arbetstillstånd*, 2025, *Migrationsverket*, 24.07.2025, URL: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/nyhetsarkiv/nyhetsarkiv/2025-07-24-forslag-pa-yrken-som-kan-undantas-nytt-lonekrav-for-arbetsstillstand.html> (accessed 21.07.2025).

⁶ *Du vill ansöka Bo med partner*, *Migrationsverket*, URL: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/du-vill-ansoka/bo-med-nagon/bo-med-partner-barn-eller-annan-slaktning/bo-med-partner.html> (accessed 21.07.2025).

In January 2025, amendments were adopted to counter spatial segregation among migrants.¹ Under the new rules, asylum seekers are required to reside exclusively in housing provided by the Migration Agency. Non-compliance may result in the loss of financial support and can lead to the withdrawal or rejection of the asylum application and subsequent deportation.

A key task in Sweden's migration policy reform, in line with the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, has been strengthening readmission measures and both forced and voluntary return procedures for people who have lost or been denied the right to remain in the country. Sweden has intensified its participation in EU negotiations on agreements with third countries linking visa facilitation and economic assistance to the readmission of their nationals.²

The "New Swedish Strategy for International Development: Migration, Return, and Voluntary Repatriation for 2024—2028" has a budget of SEK 3 billion and sets out two priority areas for Sweden's external and humanitarian cooperation with partner states.³ The first focuses on creating favourable conditions for the return of migrants, particularly through voluntary repatriation. Emphasis is placed on supporting reintegration in countries of origin or transit, including developing infrastructure and social institutions to ensure that returnees have access to basic services, healthcare, and social protection. Strengthening local capacity is also intended to make reintegration more sustainable and reduce the risk of repeated migration.

The second priority involves assisting partner countries in developing effective migration management systems, including strengthening border control, improving asylum procedures, and combating irregular migration, smuggling, and human trafficking. Particular attention is given to countries that fail to cooperate with Swedish authorities. In such cases, diplomatic pressure may be applied, including reductions in bilateral aid and stricter visa policies. These measures reflect the increasing politicisation of readmission procedures and their subordination to domestic migration policy objectives.⁴

¹ En ny ordning för asylsökandes boende, 2024, *Regeringskansliet*, 04.10.2024, URL: <https://regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/lagratsremiss/2024/10/en-ny-ordning-for-asylsokandes-boende> (accessed 15.07.2025).

² Increased number of returns and initiatives for repatriation, 2023, *Government Offices of Sweden*, 28.02.2023, URL: <https://www.government.se/government-policy/swedens-new-migration-policy/oka-atervandandet-och-insatser-for-atervandring> (accessed 22.07.2025).

³ New strategy for Sweden's global development cooperation on migration, returns and voluntary repatriation 2024—2028, 2025, *Government Offices of Sweden*, 10.02.2025, URL: <https://www.government.se/international-development-cooperation-strategies/2025/02/new-strategy-for-swedens-global-development-cooperation-on-migration-returns-and-voluntary-repatriation-20242028> (accessed 22.07.2025).

⁴ Sweden to condition foreign aid on expulsion cooperation, 2024, *Euractiv*, URL: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/sweden-to-condition-foreign-aid-on-expulsion-cooperation> (accessed 22.07.2025).

Since 2022, the voluntary return programme has become a central instrument of Sweden's migration policy [29]. This programme targets individuals who have received a final rejection of asylum or subsidiary protection, as well as those whose residence permits on humanitarian, family, or other grounds have not been renewed. Within this framework, migrants return to their countries of origin with the support of state authorities.

To encourage voluntary departure, a range of measures is offered, including assistance with travel arrangements, reintegration grants (*Återetableringsstöd*), reintegration support (*Reintegreringsstöd*), as well as information and counselling services.¹ The programme also applies to recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who choose to return, in which case they receive a repatriation grant (*Återvandringsbidrag*). From 2026, the maximum amount of this grant is planned to increase from SEK 40,000 to SEK 600,000 per family.² These measures allow Sweden to maintain its reputation as a country adhering to humanitarian standards. However, despite financial incentives and organisational support, a significant number of migrants who were denied residence permits choose to remain in the country irregularly, necessitating forced removals.

In recent years, the use of deportation has intensified, particularly with regard to migrants convicted of crimes. This shift is mostly linked to the rise of organised crime involving ethnic clans with stable hierarchies operating outside the country's legal and social norms. The escalation of criminal activity has prompted authorities to reconsider the balance between humanitarian obligations and internal security, leading to stricter migration policies.

One of the key steps in reforming migration legislation was the amendment of Chapter 8 of the Aliens Act in 2022, allowing for the deportation of foreign nationals sentenced to at least six months' imprisonment. Deportation also became possible for individuals who arrived in Sweden before the age of 15 and had lived in the country for more than five years if they were sentenced to at least two years or committed repeat offences. However, deportation is not automatic. Courts assess factors such as the degree of integration, family situation, length of residence, and potential consequences of removal, especially for those who

¹ Stöd till dig som ska återvända, 2023, *Migrationsverket*, 15.12.2023, URL: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/du-har-fatt-beslut/asyl/stod-till-dig-som-ska-atervanda.html> (accessed 28.07.2025).

² Återvandringsbidrag. *Migrationsverket*. URL <https://www.migrationsverket.se/du-har-tillstand-i-sverige/asyl/atervandringsbidrag.html> (accessed 28.07.2025).

grew up in Sweden and lack strong ties to their country of origin.¹ In practice, deportation is often hindered by the reluctance of countries of origin to readmit their nationals and by administrative and logistical challenges.

In addition to expanding grounds for deportation, the duration of re-entry bans has been revised. For offences punishable by less than six months' imprisonment, the ban is five years; for sentences between six months and 1.5 years, it is ten years; and for more serious crimes, a lifetime ban applies.² Since 13 March 2025, a re-entry ban of up to five years has also been applied to individuals denied protection status or residence permits if they failed to leave the country within the prescribed time (two to four weeks) or were forcibly removed.³

To strengthen control over both voluntary return and forced deportation processes, the Migration Agency was tasked in 2023 with establishing return centres (*återvändandecenter*). These facilities are intended to prevent individuals from evading deportation decisions. Residents are generally not allowed to leave without special permission. During their stay, authorities assist in expediting departure procedures, including document preparation, ticket arrangements, and reintegration support.

At the same time, reforms are being implemented to enhance control over asylum seekers and individuals awaiting removal. As part of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, Sweden plans to stop allocating apartments to asylum seekers and instead place them in reception centres during application processing. Authorities intend to integrate reception and return centres into a unified system, enabling more flexible allocation of housing and resources depending on the stage of each case. Initially, joint centres are planned in municipalities where return centres already exist, including Stockholm, Malmö, Boden, Sigtuna, Mölndal, and Burlöv.⁴ Further expansion is projected

¹ Lag om ändring i utlänningslagen (2005:716) SFS 2022:1015, *Svensk författningssamling*, 28.06.2022, URL: <https://svenskförfattningssamling.se/doc/20221015.html> (accessed 10.08.2025).

² Ibid.

³ Lag om ändring i utlänningslagen (2005:716) SFS-nummer 2025:225, *Svensk författningssamling*, 18.03.2025, URL: <https://svenskförfattningssamling.se/doc/2025225.html> (accessed 10.08.2025).

⁴ Migrationsverket planerar center för asylsökande i sex kommuner, 2025, *Migrationsverket*, 31.01.2025, URL: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/nyhetsarkiv/nyhetsarkiv/2025-01-31-migrationsverket-planerar-center-for-asylsokande-i-sex-kommuner.html> (accessed 10.08.2025).

to increase capacity to 11,000 places through new facilities in Växjö, Alvesta, Lund, Trelleborg, Landskrona, Solna, Uppsala, Flen, Västerås, Vänersborg, and Halmstad.¹

Conclusion

An analysis of Swedish migration policy since the mid-2010s shows a clear shift from a traditionally liberal model, based on strong humanitarian commitments, toward a more pragmatic and securitised approach. The European migration crisis, which triggered these changes, exposed structural weaknesses in Sweden's reception system and the limited capacity of its infrastructure, making it difficult to integrate large numbers of migrants into society. Over time, accumulated challenges such as spatial segregation, rising crime, and the concentration of migrant communities in socially disadvantaged areas have increased public demand for tighter migration control. These developments also reflect a broader Scandinavian shift toward more restrictive policies, particularly influenced by Denmark's consistently stricter approach to migration and asylum.

In response to the worsening migration situation in Sweden and across the European Union, the country introduced a broad range of reforms aligned with European standards, including tighter asylum regulations, the introduction of temporary residence permits, restrictions on family reunification, centralised accommodation schemes for asylum seekers, and the expanded use of deportation orders and entry bans. The authorities also strengthened readmission procedures, developed reception and return infrastructure, and combined voluntary and forced return mechanisms.

As a result of these measures, overall migration flows declined, and Sweden became a less attractive destination for forced migrants. However, these reforms remained largely restrictive in nature and failed to address the deeper socio-economic factors underlying weak integration. Consequently, territorial segregation persisted, while some marginalised communities continued to experience disproportionately high levels of criminal activity.

Therefore, Sweden's experience reflects a broader European trend towards the securitisation of migration policy in response to growing pressures and perceived

¹ Redovisning av uppdraget att förbereda för ett reformerat mottagningssystem (Ju2024/00608), 2025, *Migrationsverket*, URL: https://www.migrationsverket.se/download/18.2cd2e409193b84c506a3408f/1738836108452/Redovisning_uppdrag_att_forbereda_for_ett_reformerat_mottagningssystem.pdf (accessed 10.08.2025) ; Migrationsverket etablerar mottagnings- och återvändandecenter, 2025, *Migrationsverket*, 17.06.2025, URL: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/andra-aktorer/fastighetsagare-och-uthyrare/nyhetsarkiv-for-fastighetsagare-och-uthyrare/nyheter-fastighetsagare/2025-06-17-migrationsverket-etablerar-mottagnings--och-atervandandecenter.html> (accessed 10.08.2025).

internal risks. Importantly, the long-term effectiveness of such policies depends on achieving a balance between migration control, international humanitarian obligations, and successful social integration. Sweden thus exemplifies the continuing challenge of transitioning from its earlier role as a “humanitarian superpower” to a more controlled migration regime while balancing humanitarian and security priorities and reconciling national identity with internal stability in an evolving migration context.

Funding. *The research was supported by the Russian Science Foundation, project №22-18-00123-E “Cross-border population movements: restrictions and prospects of international regulation in the context of the migration crisis”.*

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