

# LABOUR MIGRANTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST ARAB COUNTRIES IN SWEDEN: A PARADIGM SHIFT

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*Middle East Arab diasporas, primarily the Iraqi and Syrian ones, are playing an increasing role in the economy and demography of Sweden. This study aims to describe the formation of economically active diasporas in Sweden over the past three decades. There has been a paradigm shift in the immigration and business activity of people from the Middle East Arab countries in Sweden. Diaspora leadership changes depending on the situation in the countries of origin and migration phenomena driven by political and military shocks. This change affects the migration process and the role of communities in the economic life of the country. The study draws on the work of top research centres and data from leading Swedish and international statistical agencies. The rise and subsequent decline in Syrian immigration, which included labour migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, did not restore the unconditional leadership of the Iraqis among the Arab communities of Sweden. The significant business activity of Syrian immigrants, their professional skills, level of education, and broad business ties make the diaspora a likely leader in the Arab community. These four factors also contribute to easier migrant integration into Swedish society.*

**Keywords:**

labour migration, Arab immigrants, Syrian diaspora, Iraqi diaspora, migration waves, Sweden

## **Introduction**

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In the second half of the 20th century, against the background of the rapid economic growth, Sweden started to accept many immigrants seeking employment, safety and refuge. Labour immigration was of decisive importance for national development and contributed enormously to the emergence of Sweden as a welfare state. Today, when the demographic age has become a factor in the economic aspect of social development, one of Sweden's central social problems is the lack of local working-age population, due to ageing and a low fertility rate [1, p. 30].

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The World Bank data for Sweden demonstrate a steady increase in labour resources during the ‘migration boom’: before 1994, there was a landslide decline in the workforce; until 2000, it remained at a relatively stable low level (4,514 thousand in 2000); since 2004, there has been a gradual growth, up to 5,477 thousand in 2020.<sup>1</sup> This rise is due to the influx of labour from abroad.

To increase the share of the working-age population, the government set out to change the demographic makeup by encouraging immigration. At the core of the migrant inflow to Sweden were immigrants from the Arab countries of the Middle East (in the broad sense: from the Levant, Iraq and even Egypt). Middle Eastern immigrants make up 4 per cent of the total population of Sweden, the Iraqi and Syrian diasporas being the largest in numbers [2, p. 1].

Many authoritative authors admit that labour migration and refugee integration into the receiving economy have an undoubtedly positive effect on the host country [3, p. 117]. For example, the website of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement that ‘the large number of refugees in Sweden did not collapse the Swedish economic system: on the contrary, youth unemployment dropped significantly, remaining at the lowest level in 13 years, while Sweden generally needs immigrants to compensate for the decline in the birth rate and restore human potential’ [4].

Arab immigration to Sweden has attracted the attention of scholars from many research centres around the world. Various aspects of it have been highlighted, including those relating to the economic effect of immigration and the problems of the social and economic integration of Arab immigrants. The religious identity of Arab immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden has also been explored in the literature [5–9].

Many European and Eastern researchers have investigated the social integration of Arab immigrants into Swedish society. Attention has been paid to social isolation, discrimination and the positive aspects of immigrant involvement in culture and business in the host country, along with cooperation in Arab diaspora communities and work teams [10–13]. Other studies provide a general account of the problem, focusing on the long-sought theoretical comprehension of the Swedish multiculturalism policy or summarising its evolution [14].

Relevant information is available from official sources. Comparing it with non-economic data (the degree of adaptation, cultural and religious ties of diasporas, business competition, etc.) seems sufficient to draw conclusions and track the evolution of Middle Eastern diaspora participation in the Swedish economy. The principal sources of the data are the World Labour Organization (ILO), the Swedish Statistical Bureau (SCB), influential international statis-

<sup>1</sup> Labor force, total — Sweden, 2021, *The World Bank*, 15 June 2021, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.IN?locations=SE> (accessed 04.09.2021).

tical agencies (KNOMAD, Statista), etc. Other sources used in the study are messages of social organisations, polls and interviews with individuals participating in this process.

Our study aims to track trends in the formation of economically active Middle Eastern Arab diasporas in Sweden, which occurred over the past three decades against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world agenda and migration phenomena caused by political and military shocks. Our research hypothesis is that the paradigms of Arab immigration and business activity of Arabs in Sweden are shifting. This change concerns principal countries of origin and the visibility of communities in the economy and culture of Sweden.

### **General situation and figures for Sweden**

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The Swedish authorities make substantial efforts to popularise their vision of immigrants as a welcome addition to the workforce and a solution to the national socio-economic problems. Nevertheless, social changes caused by the influx of migrants unsettle the population of Sweden, home to 10,330 thousand people. [15]. Even small inflows of immigrants, refugees and other groups arriving from abroad are noticeable in Sweden because of its small native population. And although the absolute figures below might seem very low (for example, the number of work permits issued), they are substantial for Swedish society.

The problem of refugees (and asylum seekers) is inextricable from the issue of labour migration since Sweden's reformed employment legislation considers immigrants, regardless of whether they are looking for safety or employment, as a potential addition to the workforce. During the 2015 European refugee crisis, '... Sweden reached a historical high in the number of asylum seekers: almost 163 thousand applications were made in that year. Afterwards, the government took action to limit the influx of asylum seekers and to minimize the potential negative impacts of the refugee crisis on Swedish society. ... Notwithstanding these restrictive measures, Sweden agreed in 2017 on the relocation of 2,800 refugees who applied for asylum in Italy or Greece. ... The population composition of the asylum-seekers and refugees in Sweden resembles that of Belgium to a very large degree. The greatest numbers of refugees in Sweden are of Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi origin. ... Overall, about 60 percent of the applicants were male and some 40 percent were female. The majority of asylum seekers are young: more than half of them were below the age of 25' [1, p. 28–29]. Of course, some of them may quickly find employment, formally replenishing the workforce and effectively participating in business and production processes.

As of 2021, 26,172 people born 'in Asia' (13,411 males and 12,761 females) had immigrant status in Sweden. According to the same 2021 data, 813,086

‘Asian-born people had Swedish citizenship (418,295 males and 394,791 females).<sup>2</sup> Immigration to Sweden, according to this source, will amount to about 81,850 people in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

An indirect indicator of the economic activity of immigrants is remittances (usually, money sent home to support relatives or a family business). The KNO-MAD data below, from 1993 to 2020, show surges in the amount of remittance, coinciding with changes in the Swedish internal migration policy and periods of turbulence in the Middle East.

Table 1

**Remittances of labour migrants from Sweden, 1993–2020, million USD**

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
260	231	336	429	411	503	484	539	578	508	568	660	729	930	1 056
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
1 206	1,071	1,160	1,390	1,387	1,624	1,591	1,460	1,633	2,046	2,084	1,917	1,766*		

\* 0.3 per cent of Sweden’s GDP.

Source: Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development, 2021, *Remittance outflows*, May 2021, available at: <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Outward%20remittance%20flows%20May.2021.xlsx> (accessed 06.24.2021).

According to the World Bank Sweden received 131,888 immigrants from Iraq in 2021; 98,216, from Syria; 26,159, Lebanon; 3,898, Jordan; 6,256, Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

A study comparing how immigrants integrate into society in Sweden and Belgium (another European country with a large Arab population) concludes that Sweden has a very high rate of labour market mobility, especially compared to Belgium. ‘Key aspects in this regard are the fact that in Sweden migrants can look for employment from the day they arrive as there are no distinctions made between Swedish and non-Swedish citizens in labour market regulations. ... Access to general support is high in both countries, but it is in terms of targeted support for newcomers that Sweden distinguishes itself from Belgium. In particular, the 2009 Labor Market Introduction Act in Sweden laid out a framework which made it easier for newcomers to learn Swedish and find jobs that match their skills’ [1, p. 31].

<sup>2</sup> Population size, number of deaths, immigrants, emigrants and average population size by region of birth, sex and age. Year 2021–2120, 2021, *Statistics Sweden (SCB)*, September 2021, available at: [https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START\\_\\_BE\\_\\_BE0401\\_\\_BE0401A/BefProgOsiktDetNb/table/tableViewLayout1](https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START__BE__BE0401__BE0401A/BefProgOsiktDetNb/table/tableViewLayout1) (accessed 9.09.2021).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Bilateral Migration Matrix — 2017, 2018, *The World Bank*, April 2018, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data> (accessed 5.05.2020).

The reform sought to reduce state involvement in labour migration management and delegate the decision on who can join the workforce to employers, best informed about what skills are in demand in the labour market. The bill did not spell out the goal of the new policy. Yet, the short-term objective was apparently to compensate for the labour shortage and the long-term to counter demographic challenges by increasing labour supply [16, p. 2].

A likely factor in the attractiveness of Sweden to migrants may be the working conditions in the country far surpassing those in the place of origin. For example, the working week in Sweden averaged 27–27 hours for females and 33–34 hours for males in 2008–2013 [17, p. 13] (according to a different source, it reached 36 hours in 2017: 38 hours in production and 34 hours in hospitality). In the Middle East, the figure was much higher: 44 hours in Egypt (48 in production and 51 in hospitality); 46 hours in Turkey (including 48 and 55 respectively) [18, p. 23].

### **Waves of Iraqi Immigration**

A report from the Institute for the Study of Migration (Malmö, Sweden), compiled for the World Labour Organisation, shows that Iraq was the main country of origin of labour migrants in the Arab East until 2011. In 1993–1997, Iraqis accounted for 7 per cent of labour immigrants in Sweden, comparable to the share of labour immigrants from the rest of Asia combined (8.5 per cent) [19, p. 5].

*Table 2*

**Labour immigration from Iraq to Sweden, 1997–2011**

Period	Number of immigrants	Per cent in immigration flow
1993–1997	11,775	6.9
1998–2002	7,837	5.4
2003–2007	27,005	10.5
2008–2011	22,000	9.2

Prepared based on [19].

Significantly, the report did not contain data on any other country of the Arab East. The reason was the low figures. Yet, information on ‘the rest of the Middle East’ is given for 2008–2011 when the influx of immigrants from the Arab East was substantial, probably in the backwash of the Arab Spring (65,548 people came from the region, comprising 27.5 per cent of all migrant arrivals in the country) [19, p. 5].

These data point to a close relationship between emigration from Iraq to Sweden and political events in the former country. Several years of high emigration numbers, from 1993, can be explained by the heavy economic sanctions imposed against the government of Saddam Hussein after the 1991 Gulf War and the US-

led Desert Storm operation. In addition, Iraq was weakened economically by the eight-year war with Iran, which ended in 1988. Both factors were responsible for the sharp decline in the Iraqi economy, taking their toll on human resources and the capabilities of the state.

The 2003 surge in Iraqi emigration was also a consequence of military unrest. The intervention undermined the country's economy even further and once again brought chaos into social relations. The fear of violence or the loss of income, the feeling of uncertainty and the severance of economic ties spurred the next wave of Iraqi emigration. Sweden, a country with a substantial Iraqi diaspora, has become a favoured destination.

The following years of instability, bitter internal conflicts, operations of the Western forces (for example, the armed crackdown on the al-Sahwa tribal militia project, party to the civil war) [20, p. 109] and the spread of terrorist networks (Al-Qaeda and ISIS<sup>5</sup>) induced emigration from Iraq. Iraqi immigration to Sweden soared. In 2011, turbulence swept the region in the wake of the Arab Spring; emigration peaked again. These factors accounted for the substantial Iraqi immigration to Sweden in 2008–2011.

Table 3

**Immigration from Iraq to Sweden, 2012–2020, people**

Sex	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Males	1,673	1,326	1,469	1,897	2,328	3,640	2,337	1,637	1,002
Females	1,555	1,223	1,433	1,628	1,954	2,897	1,883	1,449	875

*Prepared based on:* Population size, number of deaths, immigrants, emigrants and average population size by region of birth, sex and age. Year 2021–2120 // Statistics Sweden (SCB), September 2021. Available at: [https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START\\_\\_BE\\_\\_BE0401\\_\\_BE0401A/BefProgOsiktDetNb/table/tableViewLayout1](https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/START__BE__BE0401__BE0401A/BefProgOsiktDetNb/table/tableViewLayout1) (accessed 09.09.2021).

According to other 2020 data, 2,271 people who gave Iraq as their place of birth immigrated to Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

At the time, Iraqi newcomers faced competition from Syrian immigrants and refugees. But, as the situation in Syria stabilised, Iraqi labour immigration began to increase again. Indirect evidence for this is data on the number of temporary work permits issued in Sweden to Iraqis.

<sup>5</sup> Both are banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>6</sup> Number immigrants to Sweden 2020, by country of birth, 2021, *Statista Research Department*, Feb 22, 2021, available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/522136/sweden-immigration-by-country-of-origin> (accessed 24.08.2021).

Table 4

**Temporary work permits issued in Sweden to immigrants from Iraq, people**

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
363	556	424	257	223	352	243	342	670	639	520

*Prepared based on:* Beviljade uppehållstillstånd översikter. Statistik 2010–2020 // Migrationsverket, Sept 2021. Available at: <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Beviljade-uppehallstillstand-oversikter.html> (accessed 11.09.2021).

Many Iraqis in Sweden are self-employed. Performing better than the locals, they are far outstripped by the Syrian or Lebanese diaspora in this respect.

Some Muslim newcomers from the countries of the Arab East received social support within multireligious cooperation programmes. Such a programme seeking to establish communication between members of different religious and national Swedish communities and new immigrants has been examined in a study from the University of Winchester. Some of the meetings analysed in the research took place in mosques [21]. The authors conclude: ‘[i]n a predominantly Christian host community, Muslim migrants felt welcomed and assisted as they sought asylum and established new lives in Sweden’ [21, p. 173].

A specific feature of Sweden as a destination for migrants from the Middle East is its established diaspora of Middle Eastern Christians, which has existed in the country for many decades. Perhaps it would be incorrect to refer to this community as an Arab diaspora since the identity of these Christians remains ambiguous despite their coming from Iraq, Syria and Lebanon and being, for the most part, Arab. Many Middle Eastern Christians link their identity to the Aramaic past, some to the Assyrian heritage and others to Phoenician tradition. Various cultural and non-profit organisations are deeply involved in the study of ancient Syriac preserved by some Eastern Churches as the liturgical language. Upon arriving in Sweden, Muslim labour migrants find themselves surrounded by local, albeit highly secularised, Christians and face business competition from Christian compatriots, many of which are well integrated into Swedish society. Most of Middle Eastern Christians come from the north of Iraq (Assyrians) and Syria (Jacobites) [22; 23]. Not so much the absolute numbers of the Arab Christian diaspora in Sweden as its visibility in the information landscape of their homelands conduces to the integration of newly arrived migrants and refugees from Syria and Iraq into Swedish society.

While recognising that the Middle Eastern Christian diasporas in Sweden are only nominally Arab, it is crucial to bear in mind that Christianity may be the common ground between the diaspora and the ethnic Swedes. Still, the identity of this part of the Arabic-speaking diaspora has a significant national and historical

component: not considering themselves Arabs or feeling historically connected to the Arabic language and culture, many of them actively promote the ‘common ground’ idea. This naturally isolates them from the rest of the Arabs, Arab business networks and work relations.

Swedish communities sharing an Assyrian or Syro-Jacobite cultural and linguistic identity are relatively young. They became visible in the early 1970s: the first Assyrian immigrants arrived from Iraq in 1967 [24, p. 12].

In work or business, they rarely get involved with their Muslim compatriots. At the same time, they actively promote their culture (for example, through the Suryoyo Aramaic language TV channel).

### **Syrian immigrants as the passionaries of the Middle Eastern diaspora in Sweden**

Just like the Iraqi Christians, about 50 thousand Jacobite Christians arrived in Sweden from ‘historical Syria’ (from the Turkish Tur-Abdin) at the end of the 1960s. The Polish researcher Martha Wozniak writes that these immigrants were handled by the Swedish Labour Market Commission (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, AMS), which distributed them to the cities of Eskilstuna, Märsta, Nyköping and Södertälje, having provided them with work permits [25, p. 123–124].

Everyone arriving from Syria to Sweden realises that they have come to a country of many Arabic speakers, where numerous Arabs have made their way in life, becoming famous actors, musicians and athletes. The Syrian diaspora, just like the Iraqi and Lebanese ones, performs well economically, and the business ties of the Syrian-Swedish businesspeople usually span several states. Thus, immigrants or refugees have a fair chance of finding employment. Intense competition in the Swedish labour market and rivalry with other Arab diasporas encourage many to start a business.

A member of the Syrian diaspora in Sweden called integration ‘a personal matter’: ‘everything depends on your personality — whether you’re open to European society or uncommunicative and withdrawn’. She added that Swedes were sympathetic towards her and many others like her, and there was a good opportunity to integrate into the local society<sup>7</sup>.

The influx of Syrians into Sweden was far from uniform: migration waves fluctuated depending on the political and economic situation at home and in the destination country.

<sup>7</sup> The results of the author’s survey of immigrants from the Middle East living in various European cities, August 2020 (in Arabic).

Table 5

**Immigration from Syria to Sweden, 2012–2020, people**

Sex	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Male	3,246	7,996	14,130	14,619	26,516	7,465	4,022	2,280	1,121
Female	2,382	5,951	8,721	9,944	17,496	7,601	5,088	1,845	928

*Compiled from: Population size... 2021–2120...*

According to the Statista agency, more Syrians (3,293 people) immigrated to Sweden in 2020 than shown in the table above.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, 2000–2014 data demonstrate that Syrian labour migrants found it hard to receive permits to work and stay in the country.

Table 6

**Temporary work permits issued to immigrants from Syria in Sweden, people**

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
72	61	39	39	38	32	35	36	58	199
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
435	645	534	727	780	—	—	—	138	

*Prepared based on: Population size... 2021–2120...*

The dramatic increase in Syrian applications for permits to work in Sweden might be a result of how Syria responded to the 2008 global economic crisis, whilst the following 1.5-fold rise occurred as a devastating war broke out in the Middle Eastern country. As mentioned above, the Swedish authorities simplified the procedure under the 2009 Labour Market Introduction Act. The inflow of migrants and refugees grew. Many Syrians, who usually have relatives in Lebanon, emigrated to Europe officially via the port of Beirut. Probably, most work permits were issued at the time to the ‘official’ immigrants and not asylum seekers. Many Syrians successfully integrated into the business environment of the host country; those who had had business experience and some initial assets achieved even more.

The German media outlet Deutsche Welle tells stunning Syrian success stories. Now residing in Sweden’s Malmö, two Syrian families (Abu Rukba and al-Sabbagh) managed to build on their prior experience and business ties across the world. (The trademark business pattern of Syrian entrepreneurs is to start a business at home and expand it to several countries simultaneously.) The enterprises of the two families once flourished in Damascus: the Sabbaghs owned

<sup>8</sup> Number of immigrants to Sweden 2020...

five nut roasting factories, and Abu Rukba's father ran a company that imported medical equipment to Syria. Likewise, the family owning the Jasmin al-Sham restaurant in Malmö's main pedestrian street ran four paper tissue factories in the Syrian city of Homs [26].

Deutsche Welle writes these Syrian immigrants are encouraging relatives and neighbours in Damascus to join their business. They also hope for a large sales market with their immigrant compatriots at the core, namely '112,000 Syrians who have fled to Sweden since the civil war began five years ago'. Delicious Ros-teri, a shop selling Arabian nuts opened in Möllevaangen Square, the centre of the city's immigrant population. This reportedly caused some resentment (or envy) from Iraqi immigrants who do not always welcome new Arab competition [26].

Abu Rukba plans to export freshly roasted nuts to Austria, promote the business in the capital of Germany and possibly go as far as roasting 'Arab' coffee. According to the businessman, Syrians like him do not want to spend years receiving benefits while studying Svenska för Invandrare (SFI, Swedish for Immigrants), the official first step towards integration into Swedish society. They are already there, ready to contribute to the economy [26].

The Euractiv pan-European media network located in 'ten European capitals' tells more stories: a 24-year-old Palestinian (arrived from Damascus in 2014) who started as a cashier and now studies computer science at Halmstad University; a dentist from Damascus who has a practice in the Swedish town of Mariestad; a 38-year-old mother (her family arrived in Skogas, a suburb of Stockholm, in 2013) who got a stable income and obtained Swedish citizenship. These people epitomise different paths to professional success and the economic integration of immigrants and refugees.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there are obstacles to the full integration of Syrians into the host society, and this is not always the locals' cautious attitude towards people of a different culture. Settling in like-ethnic communities (for example, in the vicinity of Malmö or Sørdetelier) rather than in the northern regions, where the Swedish authorities are ready to provide them with accommodation, Syrian immigrants often find themselves isolated from the general society. This circumstance was emphasised by the head of the Syrian Association of Sweden, Theodora Abdo: Syrian integration 'failed' due to the lack of housing and limited social contacts with the Swedes.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Syrians still finding their way in Sweden, five years on, 2020, *Euractiv*, 31 Aug, 2020, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/syrians-still-finding-their-way-in-sweden-five-years-on> (accessed 4.08.2021).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

There is also the tolerance problem. The immigration expert from the University of Gothenburg, Joakim Ruist, argues that ‘[i]t is an analytical mistake to think that the attitude of Swedes towards immigration was friendly before 2015 and that it changed after the wave of immigration: this tolerance was always fragile — everyone knew that most of the population did not want refugees in the country’ (In 2015, Sweden received the highest number of asylum seekers amongst the European Union — 163 thousand people, about a third of which identified themselves as Syrians).<sup>11</sup> In 2016, the authorities had to pass a temporary law expiring at the end of 2021. The law complicated family reunification and the issuance of permanent residence documents, offering a three-year residence permit instead. As a result, the number of Syrian arrivals in the country fell sharply, to 5.5 thousand people in 2016 and even fewer in subsequent years<sup>12</sup>.

The number of Syrian asylum seekers in Sweden also declined: 2,656 females and 2,803 males falling into this category entered the country in 2016; 1,296 females and 1,353 males, in 2019; 565 females and 644 males, in 2020<sup>13</sup>.

Syrians, however, are becoming increasingly visible in the Swedish business community. The protracted multilateral conflict in Syria has forced ordinary citizens and educated professionals to leave the country. Unable to find employment at home, highly-qualified Syrians are looking for a decent job elsewhere. The industrial infrastructure of the country lies in ruins: the economic ties have been severed; fuel and energy, the staples of production, are unprocurable. There are serious problems with administration and law enforcement. Amid the turmoil, experienced entrepreneurs and active and educated youth are trying to make the most of their talents abroad; Sweden, a relatively tolerant country with a historical Syrian diaspora, is the clear choice for many. Syrians starting a business in the country often have a support net in different countries. This gives them undeniable advantages, for instance, over the Iraqis, who have much fewer opportunities in this regard.

Another prominent category of immigrants is the self-employed. The Syrians and the Lebanese are usually more active than other Middle Eastern immigrants in Sweden; 12.5 per cent and 11.1 per cent amongst them, respectively, are self-employed. In some areas, up to 60 per cent of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants work for themselves [27, p. 6].

In the past few years, the inflow of Syrian labour migrants to Sweden has begun to decline, at least compared to that from Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon. The pro-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Population size... 2021—2120...

portion of Syrians amongst labour migrants has decreased and almost equalled the percentage of Iraqis in 2015. Judging by the number of work permits issued, the contribution of Syria was falling rapidly; in 2020, it was already 7.5 times smaller than that of Iraq.

Table 7

**Comparison: work permits issued in Sweden by country of origin**

Year	Iraq	Syria	Egypt	Lebanon
2010	363	369	141	91
2011	556	570	306	102
2012	424	483	183	61
2013	257	657	87	42
2014	223	688	116	54
2015	352	358	166	39
2016	243	113	106	39
2017	342	128	220	57
2018	670	138	268	86
2019	639	102	274	77
2020	520	72	239	66

*Prepared based on: Beviljade uppehållstillstånd översikter. Statistik 2010–2020...*

These figures, of course, do not mean that the Syrian diaspora has become less economically active. They only point to changes in the immigration flow and the readiness of the Swedish authorities to issue work and residence permits to Syrians. Moreover, a substantial shadow sector of the economy and massive self-employment give Syrians opportunities to harness their entrepreneurial spirit and prove their business acumen.

## **Conclusion**

Migrants from the Arab East are represented in Sweden by different national diasporas, of which the Iraqi and Syrian ones are the largest. Both have developed unevenly, with surges and recessions in the immigrant influx caused by several factors. Firstly, these are changes at home, which have caused periodic bursts of emigration. Secondly, migration intensity depends on the situation in Sweden, namely: (1) the degree to which the Swedes are willing to accept people of a foreign culture and language; (2) Swedish labour and immigration laws. Researchers from Malmö note that the reform of the legislation and 2009 changes to the

migration employment policy caused the relative number of labour immigrants from the Middle East to increase significantly: from 0.5 to 5.5 per cent from Iraq; from 1 to 4.5 per cent, Syria [16, p. 14, 16].

Waves of immigration from Iraq reflect the periods of socio-political unrest in the region: the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm, severe economic sanctions, the military occupation of Iraq, etc. The Iraqi diaspora in Sweden is relatively well-integrated economically. The Iraqis outnumbered Syrian immigrants until the end of the 2000s. But in the wake of the Arab Spring, immigration from Syria far outstripped that from Iraq. Overall, the influx of refugees from war-torn Syria has provided Swedish society with significant labour and human resources. The inflow of labour migrants with professional qualifications continues to this day. And, most importantly, the safety net of business ties and material support from relatives living and doing business in other countries has not disappeared.

Despite the current decline in Syrian immigration to Sweden, the diaspora remains extremely active economically. Their business passionarity suggests that this Arab diaspora will soon become the most numerous in the country. A strong community of Syrian and Iraqi Christians in Sweden, albeit often still isolated from the general society, creates a bridge between all Arab immigrants in Sweden (including Muslims [28]) and the host society as regards economic (labour, trade, etc.) relations [29; 30].

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