

# EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2020

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## Sweden



**EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2020 – Sweden**

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## SAMMANFATTNING

Denna rapport syftar till att beskriva den viktigaste utvecklingen inom migration och asyl under 2020 i Sverige och redogöra för relevanta nationella offentliga debatter i ljuset av policyutvecklingen på Europeisk nivå och dess betydelse för den nationella nivån.

### *Övergripande trender*

År 2020 påverkades migrationen till och från Sverige starkt av Covid-19-pandemin. Antalet ansökningar om uppehållstillstånd och antalet utfärdade uppehållstillstånd minskade kraftigt i alla kategorier av laglig migration (t.ex. familj, arbete och studier). Detsamma gäller antalet asylsökande. Statistiska centralbyrån (SCB) rapporterade den lägsta nivån på nettoinvandring (invandring minus utvandring) sedan 2005. Nettoinvandringen 2020 (+33 581 personer) mer än halverades jämfört med 2019 års nivå (+68 087).<sup>1</sup>

Totalt registrerade Sverige 12 991 asylansökningar (förstagångsansökningar) 2020, ungefär 41 procent färre än 2019, då 21 958 asylansökningar lämnades in. Siffran för 2020 representerar också det lägsta årliga antalet asylsökande sedan millennieskiftet.

Migrationsverket tog 20 980 beslut i asylansökningar (förstagångsärenden). Det faktum att antalet beslut var större än antalet inkommande sökande visar att handläggningen och beslutsfattandet kunde fortsätta trots pandemin och att myndigheten till och med kunde minska eftersläpningen i avarbetningen av öppna asylärenden från tidigare år. Antalet öppna förstagångsansökningar minskade från 14 890 i slutet av 2019 till 7 155 i slutet av 2020.<sup>2</sup> Den genomsnittliga handläggningstiden för asylansökningar vid Migrationsverket (302 dagar) var dock ungefär lika lång som år 2019 (288 dagar) eftersom andelen äldre ärenden inom det totala antalet ärenden blev större.

Andelen positiva beslut bland alla asylbeslut som fattades i första instans (Migrationsverket) var 23 procent 2020, vilket utgör en lägre beviljandegrad än 2019, då 27 procent av alla beslut som fattades i första instans var positiva.

Det totala antalet uppehållstillstånd för förstagångsansökningar som utfärdades under år 2020 för alla vistelser (asyl, familjeskäl, anställning, studier och andra ändamål) var 89 009. Detta representerar en betydande minskning jämfört med 2019 (117 913 utfärdade tillstånd) och också ett betydligt lägre antal än under åren innan.

Tabell 1 (absoluta tal) och figur 1 (procent) visar huvudkategorierna för förstagångstillstånd som beviljades 2020. Personer som kom till Sverige som arbetstagare (arbetskraftsinvandrare) utgjorde den största kategorin bland alla

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Sweden, [Befolkningsstatistik i sammandrag 1960–2020](#), Latest update: 18 March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Migrationsverket (2021) : Årsredovisning 2020, s. 39.

förstagångstillstånd som beviljades, vilket också var fallet 2019 men fortfarande representerar en betydande förändring eftersom asyl- eller familjerelaterade tillstånd under tidigare perioder var större kategorier än arbetsrelaterade tillstånd.

Tillstånd för familjeåterförening, familjebildning och andra familjerelaterade syften utgjorde den näst största kategorin 2020, med knappt 30 000 utfärdade första tillstånd. Internationella studenter från tredjeländer utgjorde den tredje största kategorin 2020, med 10 869 förstagångstillstånd.

Skyddsbehövande, dvs. personer som fick uppehållstillstånd på grund av skyddsskäl inom ramen för ett asylförfarande eller efter vidarebosättning till Sverige, var den fjärde största kategorin, med 10 471 utfärdade tillstånd. Historiskt sett är detta ett lågt antal, särskilt jämfört med andra grupper.

Ytterligare 5 776 personer beviljades uppehållstillstånd enligt EU-regler om fri rörlighet för personer, till exempel tredjelandsmedborgare som hade status som varaktigt bosatta i någon annan medlemsstat eller tredjelandsmedborgare som var familjemedlemmar till en EU-medborgare som flyttade till Sverige.

**Tabell 1: Övergripande invandringstrender: Antal beviljade uppehållstillstånd (förstagångstillstånd) 2018-2020**

Grund för uppehållstillstånd	2018	2019	2020
Familjeskäl	44 886	31 812	29 511
Arbete*	41 050	43 250	32 382
Skydd och humanitära grunder**	25 377	17 502	10 471
Studier***	14 105	15 669	10 869
EU/EES-regler	7 607	9 680	5 776
<b>Summa</b>	<b>133 025</b>	<b>117 913</b>	<b>89 009</b>

**Förklaringar:**

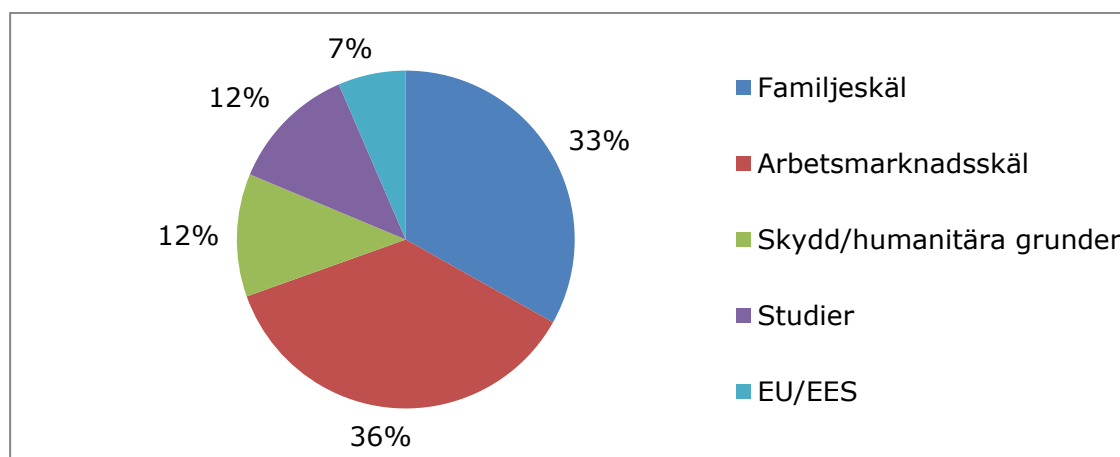
\* Inkluderar familjemedlemmar till arbetstagare.

\*\* Inkluderar flyktingar enligt flyktingkonventionen, alternativt (subsidiärt) skydd, vidarebosättning och uppehållstillstånd beviljade på grund av synnerligen ömmande omständigheter eller verkställighetshinder. Siffrorna inkluderar även tillstånd inom ramen för den så kallade gymnasielagen.

\*\*\* Inkluderar familjemedlemmar till internationella studenter.

**Källa:** Migrationsverket.

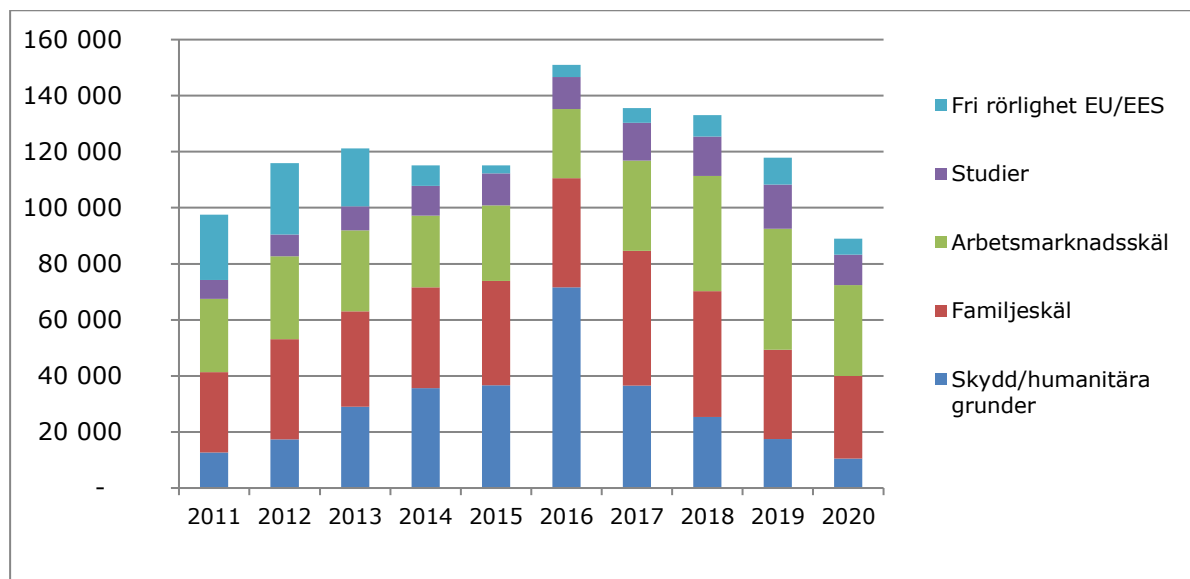
**Figur 1: Antal förstagångstillstånd beviljade 2020**



**Källa:** Migrationsverket.

Figur 2 nedan visar antalet beviljade uppehålls- och arbetstillstånd i ett längre tidsperspektiv. Antalet uppehållstillstånd som beviljats av skyddsskäl och humanitära skäl ökade kraftigt från 2015 till 2016 och minskade sedan igen under 2017-2020. Familjerelaterad invandring ökade fram till 2017 och minskade sedan. För arbetsrelaterad invandring visar trenden en stark tillväxt 2017, 2018 och 2019. När det gäller internationella studenter är en långsamt ökande trend är synlig fram till 2019; detta stoppades 2020 av Covid-19-pandemin.

**Figur 2: Tidslinje – alla beviljade förstagångstillstånd 2011-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

### *Internationellt skydd*

12 991 personer sökte asyl i Sverige 2020. Liksom tidigare år kom de flesta asylsökande 2020 från Syrien (1 208 sökande 2020). Andra viktiga ursprungsländer var Uzbekistan, Irak, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraina, Eritrea, Mongoliet, Somalia och Turkiet. Migrationsverket noterade att många som ansökte om asyl 2020 redan hade befunnit sig i landet sedan tidigare, med eller utan uppehållstillstånd.

I ett europeiskt perspektiv fortsatte Sverige att vara ett viktigt mottagandeland för asylsökande, men inte i samma grad som under den "europeiska flyktingkrisen" 2015. 2020 var Sverige det sjunde största mottagarlandet inom EU i absoluta tal (efter Tyskland, Spanien, Frankrike, Grekland, Italien och Nederländerna) och det åttonde största mottagarlandet i förhållande till dess befolkningsstorlek. Sverige tog emot cirka 3,2% av alla nya asylansökningar som lämnades in i EU 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Migrationsverket fattade 20 980 beslut i asylärenden (förstagångsärenden) år 2020. Det innebär ungefär 15 procent färre beslut än 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Källa: Eurostat.

4 922 individer beviljades skydd av Migrationsverket 2020. Den totala beviljandeandelen vid prövning i första instans var därmed 23 procent. Beviljandeandelen har sjunkit de senaste åren, från 60 procent 2016 till 32 procent 2018 och nu 23 procent 2020. Den lägre skyddsnivån är till stor del ett resultat av en förändrad sammansättning av de asylsökande som kommer till Sverige, som beskrivs närmare i kapitel 4. Om Dublinärenden och andra asylärenden som Sverige inte prövade i sak, t.ex. fall som skrevs av,<sup>4</sup> exkluderas från denna beräkning var beviljandeandelen 29 procent 2020 (och 35 procent 2019).

Det lägre antalet asylsökande 2020 är uppenbarligen i stor utsträckning en effekt av Covid-19-pandemin. Pandemirelaterade reserestriktioner och gränstängningar gjorde det mycket svårare för potentiella asylsökande att nå Sverige med flyg eller genom att korsa europeiska landgränser på väg till Sverige. Samtidigt ska antalet 2020 också ses i ett bredare och mer långsiktigt sammanhang. Sedan flyktingsituationen 2015-2016 har EU och dess medlemsstater gjort det mycket svårare för människor som migrerar irreguljärt att ta sig till EU:s territorium och att resa vidare inom EU. Till viss del kan lagändringar i Sverige såväl som inre gränskontroller också ha bidragit till denna utveckling.<sup>5</sup>

### *Vidarebosättning*

Den svenska kvoten för vidarebosättning av flyktingar från tredjeländer var oförändrad 2020 och omfattade 5 000 personer. På grund av Covid-19-pandemin kunde kvoten dock endast fyllas till cirka 70%, vilket innebar att cirka 3 600 kvotflyktingar överfördes till Sverige under året. Runt 1 400 personer som togs ut som kvotflyktingar men inte kunde överföras till Sverige under 2020 ska tas emot under 2021.

### *Ensamkommande barn*

Sedan 2015 har antalet ensamkommande barn som ansökt om asyl i Sverige minskat kraftigt. År 2020 ansökte 500 ensamkommande barn om asyl, jämfört med 902 år 2019 och 944 år 2018. De flesta ensamkommande barn 2020 kom från Syrien (108), Afghanistan (85), Somalia (69), Marocko (62) och Eritrea (25).

### *Anhöriginvandring*

Mestadels till följd av det stora antalet asylsökande som kom till Sverige 2015, ökade den familjerelaterade invandringen 2016 och 2017 men minskade sedan

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<sup>4</sup> En ansökan avkrivs bland annat när den sökande avviker eller återtar sin ansökan. År 2020 avskrevs 2 091 asylansökningar. 1 697 ansökningar hanterades inom ramen för Dublinförordningen och skulle därmed övertas av annan stat.

<sup>5</sup> 2016 antog Riksdagen en tillfällig lag som införde tillfälliga uppehållstillstånd för personer som fått internationellt skydd (istället för permanenta) och begränsade rätten till familjeåterförening samt möjligheter för asylsökande att få uppehållstillstånd av humanitära skäl. År 2019 ändrades denna lag men förlängdes samtidigt till 2021. Sedan slutet av 2015 har Sverige också genomfört kontroller vid vissa inre gränser.

något 2018 och framåt. 2018 beviljades 44 886 familjerelaterade tillstånd, 31 812 beviljades 2019 och 29 511 beviljades 2020.

En tillfällig lag som begränsade möjligheten att få uppehållstillstånd i Sverige trädde i kraft den 20 juli 2016. Enligt denna lag hade alternativt skyddsbehövande som lämnat in sina asylansökningar efter den 24 november 2015 i normalfallet ingen rätt till familjeåterförening. År 2019 ändrades den tillfälliga lagen och alternativt skyddsbehövande fick åter rätt till familjeåterförening på samma sätt som flyktingar. Den tillfälliga lagen utvidgade också försörjningskraven vid anhörginvandring, vilket även påverkade svenska medborgare och andra personer bosatta i Sverige. Det är rimligt att anta att anhörginvandringen till Sverige hade varit högre utan dessa begränsningar.

Inom gruppen personer som fick uppehållstillstånd av familjeskäl 2020 var 19 procent familjemedlemmar till flyktingar och andra skyddsbehövande. Övriga var personer som återförenades med eller bildade familj med andra människor bosatta i Sverige, som adopterades av någon i Sverige eller som föddes i Sverige som barn till föräldrar med utländsk nationalitet.

### *Arbetskraftsinvandring*

Antalet tredjelandsmedborgare som kom till Sverige för att arbeta såg en starkt ökande trend fram till 2019. 43 250 personer fick uppehållstillstånd för arbete i Sverige det året. 2020, under påverkan av pandemin, sjönk detta antal kraftigt till 32 382.<sup>6</sup>

Bärplockare och plantörer (3 490), IT-arkitekter, systemutvecklare och testledare m.fl. (2 511) samt snabbmatspersonal samt köks- och restaurangbiträden m.fl. (994) var de tre största yrkesgrupperna bland dem som fick arbetstillstånd 2020. Skogsarbetare, ingenjörer och tekniker samt städare och hemservicepersonal var också relevanta grupper. Detta visar att arbetskraftsinvandringen till Sverige bestod av både högt kvalificerade personer och arbetare i yrken med lägre eller inga formella behörighetskrav. Inom arbetskraftsinvandring totalt sett finns det en stor andel kortare tillstånd för till exempel säsongarbete.

I februari 2020 tillsatte den svenska regeringen en utredning som fick i uppdrag att granska väsentliga delar av det svenska arbetskraftsmigrationssystemet. Utredningen förväntas föreslå en ny typ av uppehållstillstånd för högkvalificerade tredjelandsmedborgare som vill komma till Sverige för att söka arbete eller starta företag. Utredningen förväntas också presentera lagstiftning för att lösa frågan om arbetskraftsmigranter som utvisas på grund av mindre avvikelser från kraven på arbetstillstånd, så kallade kompetensutvisningar, samt föreslå åtgärder för att förhindra fusk och missbruk samt exploatering av arbetstagare. Utredningen

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<sup>6</sup> Dessa siffror inkluderar medföljande anhöriga till arbetstagare.



presenterade ett delbetänkande i februari 2021.<sup>7</sup> Slutbetänkandet ska lämnas i november 2021.

### *Internationella studenter*

Antalet personer som kom till Sverige för att studera minskade också, från 15 669 beviljade uppehållstillstånd år 2019 till 10 869 år 2020. Bland de personer som fick uppehållstillstånd för studier 2020 antogs en majoritet (5 799) som studenter vid universitet och högskolor och 829 som doktorander. Ytterligare 2 820 fick uppehållstillstånd som familjemedlemmar till internationella studenter och 366 fick tillstånd för andra utbildningsändamål (övriga studier).

911 personer fick uppehållstillstånd för att söka arbete efter studier i Sverige. Möjligheten att ansöka om denna typ av tillstånd infördes 2014 och antalet tillstånd som beviljats för detta ändamål har ökat sedan dess, en trend som fortsatte även 2020.

I januari 2020 trädde ny lagstiftning i kraft om uppehållstillstånd för forskning och studier inom högre utbildning samt om uppehållstillstånd för att söka arbete eller starta näringsverksamhet i Sverige efter slutförd forskning eller slutförda studier. Nya regler infördes också för uppehållstillstånd för praktik med anknytning till högre utbildning, volontärarbete inom ramen för europeisk volontärtjänst och au pair-arbete. Med denna lagstiftning genomfördes Europaparlamentets och rådets direktiv (EU) 2016/801 av den 11 maj 2016 om villkoren för tredjelandsmedborgares inresa och vistelse för forskning, studier, praktik, volontärarbete, deltagande i elevutbytesprogram eller utbildningsprojekt och för au pair-arbete i svensk rätt. Ändringarna medförde att utländska studenter nu kan stanna i landet i upp till 12 månader för att söka jobb eller affärsmöjligheter, istället för sex månader, efter att ha avslutat sina studier i Sverige.

De viktigaste ursprungsländerna för tredjelandsmedborgare som beviljades ett första uppehållstillstånd för studier 2020 var Kina (1 729), Indien (1 648) och Pakistan (1 286).

### *Övergripande policyutveckling*

En viktig policyutveckling inom migrationsområdet 2020 var att en parlamentarisk kommitté om Sveriges framtida migrationspolitik, som tillsattes av regeringen 2019, lade fram sina förslag i september 2020. Förslagen, om de antas av Riksdagen, kommer sannolikt att påverka både den lagliga migrationen och asylsystemet i Sverige. Förslagen berör bland annat varaktigheten (giltighetstiden) för uppehållstillstånd som beviljas av skyddsskäl (t.ex. flyktingstatus och alternativt skydd) och andra skäl; villkor och krav för permanent uppehållstillstånd (t.ex. krav på språkkunskaper och försörjningskrav); villkoren för beviljande av

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<sup>7</sup> Ett förbättrat system för arbetskraftsinvandring, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:5](#), Stockholm.

uppehållstillstånd av humanitära skäl; villkor för familjeåterförening och familjebildning, inklusive krav på egen försörjning för familjerelaterad invandring; och rättssäkerheten i asylprocessen, bland andra frågor. Mycket av den offentliga debatten och politiken kring migrationsfrågor år 2020 handlade om kommitténs arbete.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> SOU 2020:54, p. 25-34.

## SUMMARY

This report aims to outline the most significant developments in the area of migration and asylum in Sweden in 2020 as well as relevant public debates, also in the context of European policy development and its impact on the national level.

### *Overall trend*

In 2020, migration to and from Sweden was strongly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of applications for residence permits and the number of residence permits issued decreased across all legal migration categories (e.g. family, work and studies), as did the number of asylum seekers. Statistics Sweden reported the lowest level of net immigration to Sweden since 2005. Net immigration (+33 581 persons) more than halved in 2020 compared to 2019 (+68 087).<sup>9</sup>

Unlike some other countries in the European Union, Sweden did not change its immigration or asylum laws or regulations to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. Asylum procedures and other migration-related procedures continued to work during the pandemic, also because of digitalised application procedures for several categories of residence permits.

In total, Sweden registered 12 991 asylum requests in 2020, roughly 41 percent fewer than in 2019, when 21 958 applications for asylum were lodged. The figure for 2020 also represents the lowest annual number of asylum seekers recorded since the turn of the millennium.

The Swedish Migration Agency took 20 980 first-instance decisions on asylum applications. The fact that the number of decisions was greater than the number of incoming applicants means that the processing of applications and decision-making continued despite the pandemic, and that the Agency was in fact able to reduce the backlog of pending asylum cases. The number of pending first-time asylum applications decreased from 14 890 at the end of 2019 to 7 155 at the end of 2020.<sup>10</sup> However, the average processing times for asylum applications at the Agency (302 days) roughly remained at the same length as in 2019 (288 days) because the share of older cases within the overall caseload increased.

The share of positive decisions among all asylum decisions taken at first instance was 23 percent in 2020, which constitutes a lower protection rate than in 2019, when 27 percent of all first-instance decisions taken were positive.

The total number of first-time residence permits that were issued during the year 2020 for all purposes of stay (asylum, family reasons, employment, studies, and other purposes) was 89 009. This represents a significant decline compared to 2019 (117 913 permits issued), and also a significantly lower number than in the

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Sweden, [Befolkningsstatistik i sammandrag 1960–2020](#), Latest update: 18 March 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Migrationsverket (2021): Årsredovisning 2020, s. 39.

years before. In 2016, for example, over 150 000 first-time residence permits were issued in Sweden.

Table 1 (absolute numbers) and Figure 1 (percentages) show the main categories of first-time residence permits that were granted in 2020. Persons who came to Sweden for work purposes (labour migrants) constituted the biggest category among all first residence permits granted, which was also the case in 2019 but still represented a significant shift because during earlier periods, asylum- or family related permits were larger categories than work-based permits.

Permits granted for of family reunification, family formation and other family-related purposes represented the second largest broad category of immigrants in 2020, with just under 30 000 first permits issued. International students from third countries constituted the third largest category in 2020, with 10 869 permits issued. Beneficiaries of international protection, i.e. individuals who received a residence permit for protection or humanitarian purposes after an asylum procedure or after resettlement to Sweden, were the fourth largest category, with 10 471 permits issued. Historically, this is a low number, particularly compared to other groups, such as students, which used to be smaller.

Another 5 776 people were granted residence permits under EU rules regarding the free movement of persons, such as third-country nationals who had a long-term resident status issued by another Member State or third-country nationals who were family members of an EU citizen moving to Sweden.

**Table 1: Overall immigration trend: First-time residence permits granted in 2018-2020**

Reasons	2018	2019	2020
Family reasons	44 886	31 812	29 511
Work reasons*	41 050	43 250	32 382
Protection/humanitarian reasons**	25 377	17 502	10 471
Study reasons***	14 105	15 669	10 869
EU/EES-related permits	7 607	9 680	5 776
<b>Total</b>	<b>133 025</b>	<b>117 913</b>	<b>89 009</b>

**Notes:**

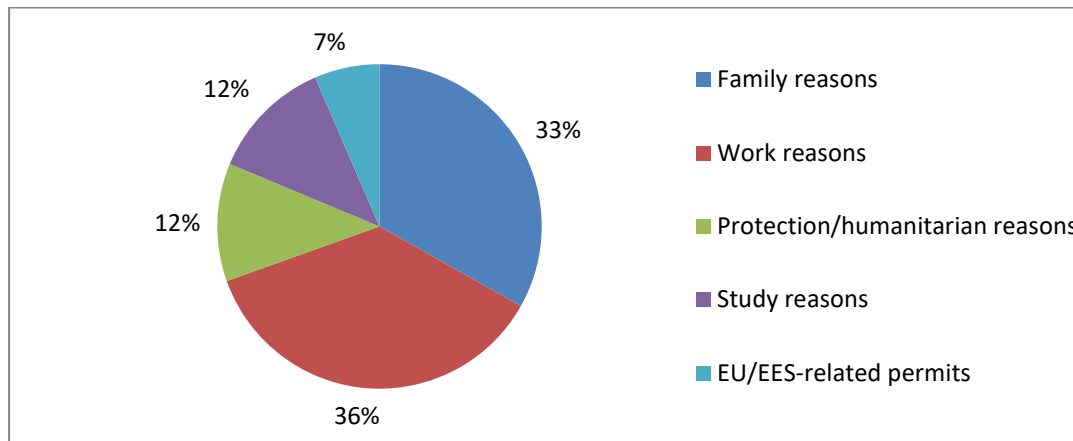
\* Includes family members of labour immigrants.

\*\* This includes protection for refugees, subsidiary protection, resettlement and residence permits granted due to exceptionally distressing circumstances or because a person could not be returned. Also includes residence permits granted under the "Upper secondary school Act" for young asylum seekers.

\*\*\* Includes family members of international students.

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

**Figure 1: Overall immigration: First-time residence permits granted 2020**

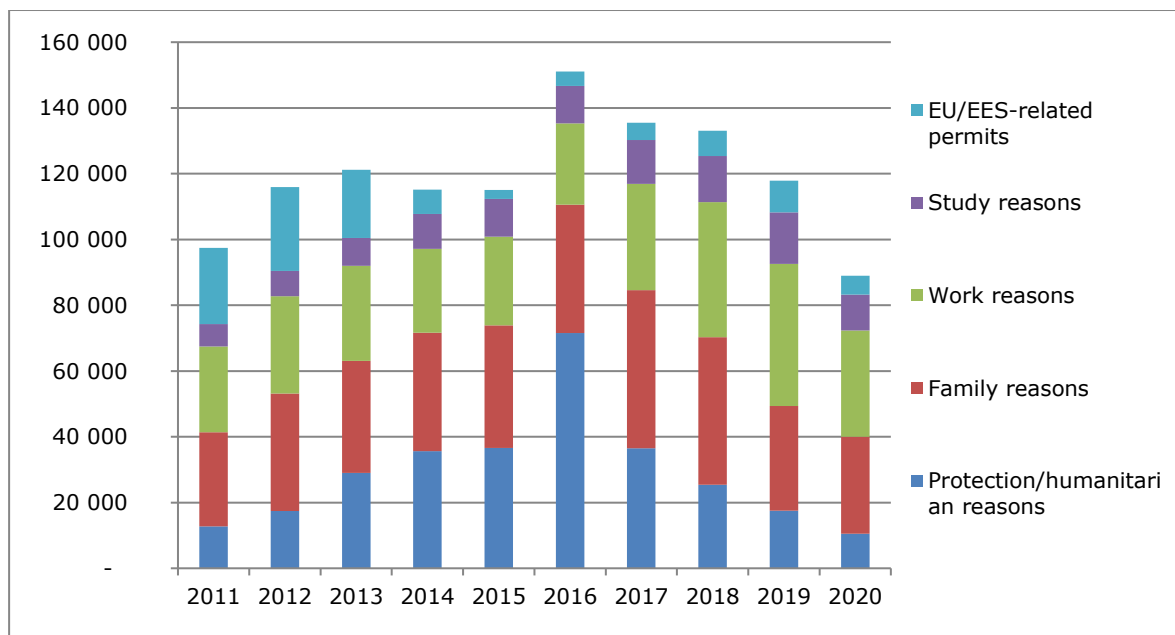


**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

Figure 2 below shows the granting of residence and work permits in a longer-term perspective. Residence permits granted for international protection and humanitarian reasons increased strongly from 2015 to 2016, and then decreased each year during 2017-2020. Family-related immigration increased until 2017 and then decreased until 2020. For work-related immigration, the trend shows a strong growth in 2017, 2018 and 2019. As far as international students (immigration for education purposes) are concerned, a slowly increasing trend is visible until 2019; this was stopped in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, the overall quantitative significance of EU/EES-related immigration by third-country nationals is relatively limited in comparison to the other categories.

**Figure 2: Timeline - all first-time residence permits granted, 2015-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

*International protection*

12 991 people applied for asylum in Sweden in 2020. As in earlier years, most asylum seekers were from Syria (1 208 applicants in 2020). Other important nationality groups were Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Eritrea, Mongolia, Somalia and Turkey. It should be observed, however, that the Swedish Migration Agency noted that many people who applied for asylum in 2020 had already been present in the country for some time, with or without a residence permit.

In a European perspective, Sweden continued to be an important destination and receiving country for asylum seekers, but not to the same degree as in during the “European refugee crisis” in 2015. In 2020, Sweden was the seventh largest recipient country within the EU in absolute numbers (after Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands), and the eighth largest recipient country in relation to its population size, receiving approximately 3.2% of all first-time applications lodged in the EU that year.<sup>11</sup>

When it comes to outcomes of asylum procedures, the Swedish Migration Agency made 20 980 first-instance decisions on asylum cases in 2020. This means roughly 15 percent fewer decisions than in 2019, when 24 569 decisions were taken.

4 922 individuals were granted protection at first instance in 2020. The overall protection rate at first instance level was therefore 23 percent. The protection rate has continuously fallen over recent years, from 60 percent in 2016 to 32 percent in 2018 and now 23 percent in 2020. The lower protection rate is to a large degree a result of a changed composition of the asylum seekers population coming to Sweden, as elaborated further below in Chapter 4. If Dublin cases and other asylum cases that Sweden did not examine materially, e.g. cases that were written off,<sup>12</sup> are excluded from this calculation, the protection rate was 29 percent in 2020, and 35 percent in 2019.

The lower number of asylum applicants in 2020 is obviously to a large extent an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. Pandemic-related travel restrictions and border closures made it much more difficult for potential asylum seekers to reach Sweden by air or by crossing European land borders en route to Sweden. At the same time, the numbers of 2020 should also be seen in a broader and more long-term context. Since the refugee situation in 2015-2016, the EU and its Member States have made it much harder for people migrating irregularly to reach EU territory and to move onwards within the EU. To a certain extent, legislative changes in Sweden

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Eurostat database.

<sup>12</sup> An application is written off, among other reasons, if the applicant absconds or withdraws his or her application. In 2020, 2 091 applications were written off. 1 697 cases were handled as Dublin cases.

as well as Swedish border controls may also have contributed to this development.<sup>13</sup>

### *Resettlement and relocation*

The Swedish quota for the resettlement of refugees from third countries remained unchanged in 2020, comprising 5 000 people. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, the quota could only be filled to about 70%, which means that approximately 3 600 individuals were resettled to Sweden during the year. The remaining 1 400 persons shall be transferred to Sweden in 2021.

Sweden did not participate in any voluntary intra-EU relocation initiatives for asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection.

### *Unaccompanied minors*

Since 2015, the number of unaccompanied minors (UAM) who applied for asylum in Sweden has declined strongly. In 2020, 500 UAM applied for asylum, compared to 902 in 2019 and 944 in 2018. In 2020, most UAM came from Syria (108), Afghanistan (85), Somalia (69), Morocco (62) and Eritrea (25).

### *Immigration for family reasons*

Mostly as a consequence of the high number of asylum seekers coming to Sweden in 2015, family-related immigration increased in 2016 and 2017 but then decreased somewhat in 2018 and onwards. In 2018, 44 886 family-related permits were granted, 31 812 in 2019, and 29 511 in 2020.

A temporary law restricting the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden, and the right to family reunification, had entered into force on 20 July 2016. Under this law, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who had submitted their asylum applications after 24 November 2015 had no right to family reunification. In 2019, this law was changed and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection were given family reunification rights again in the same way as refugees. The temporary act also expanded and extended maintenance requirements as a condition for family reunification, which also had an impact on family-reunification with Swedish nationals and other legal residents in Sweden. It is reasonable to assume that without these restrictions, family-related immigration would have been higher during recent years.

Within the overall group of persons who were granted residence permits for family reasons in 2020, 19 percent were family members of refugees and other

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<sup>13</sup> The Swedish Parliament had passed a temporary law in 2016, introducing temporary residence permits for beneficiaries of international protection (instead of permanent ones) and restricting the right to family reunification as well as possibilities for asylum seekers to be granted residence permits on humanitarian grounds. In 2019, this law was amended but extended until 2021. Since the end of 2015, Sweden has also carried out controls at certain intra-Schengen borders.

beneficiaries of protection. The others were persons that joined other people living in Sweden as well as permits issued in the context of adoptions abroad and to children that were born in Sweden to parents with foreign nationality.

### *Labour-related immigration*

The number of immigrants coming to Sweden for employment purposes saw a strongly increasing trend until 2019. 43 250 individuals were granted a residence permit for work in Sweden that year. In 2020, under the impression of the pandemic, this number dropped sharply to 32 382.<sup>14</sup>

Berry pickers and planters (3 490), IT architects, systems analysts, and test managers (2 511) as well as fast-food workers and food preparation assistants (994) were the three largest occupational groups among those who received a work permit in 2020. Forestry workers, physical and engineering science technicians and cleaners and home service personnel were relevant groups as well. This shows that labour immigration to Sweden consisted of both highly-qualified people and workers in professions with no or lower formal qualification requirements. Within labour immigration overall, there is a large share of seasonal workers.

As far as policy developments are concerned, the Swedish Government appointed an inquiry in February 2020, which was tasked to review important parts of the Swedish labour migration system. The inquiry is expected to propose a new type of residence permit for highly skilled third country nationals who want to come to Sweden to look for employment or start a business. It is also expected to present legislation aimed at solving the issue of labour migrants being expelled due to minor deviations from the requirements for work permits as well as propose measures to prevent abuse of the system and exploitation of workers. The inquiry published its first report in February 2021.<sup>15</sup> Their final report is expected for November 2021.

### *International students*

The number of people moving to Sweden for study purposes also decreased, from 15 669 in 2019 to 10 869 in 2020. Among those individuals that were granted a first permit in 2020, a majority (5 799) were admitted as students at universities and university colleges, and 829 as doctoral students. Another 2 820 were admitted as family members of international students, and 366 for other educational purposes.

A further 911 persons received a residence permit to look for work after their studies in Sweden. The possibility of applying for this type of “job-seeker permit”

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<sup>14</sup> These figures includes accompanying family members of labour immigrants.

<sup>15</sup> Ett förbättrat system för arbetskraftsinvandring, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:5](#), Stockholm.



was introduced in 2014, and the number of permits granted for this purpose has increased ever since, including in 2020.

In January 2020, new legislation regarding residence permits for study purposes, research, training, voluntary service and au pairing entered into force in Sweden. This legislation transposed EU Directive 2016/801 into Swedish law while at the same time addressing national policy priorities in this area. Among other changes, foreign students can now, after having completed their studies in Sweden, stay in the country for up to 12 months to look for job or business opportunities, instead of the previous six months.

The main countries that third-country nationals who were granted a first residence permit for study purposes in 2020 came from were China (1 729), India (1 648) and Pakistan (1 286).

### *Overarching policy developments*

An important policy development in the area of migration in 2020 was that a cross-party, parliamentary committee on Sweden's future migration policy, which had been appointed by the Government in 2019, presented its proposals in September 2020. The proposals, if adopted by Parliament, are likely to affect both legal migration and the asylum system in Sweden, such as the duration (period of validity) of residence permits granted for protection reasons (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and other reasons (e.g., family reunification, family formation, humanitarian reasons, etc.); conditions and requirements for permanent residence permits (e.g., language and financial support requirements); the conditions and requirements for granting residence permits for humanitarian reasons; conditions for family reunification and family formation including financial support requirements for family-related immigration; legal certainty in the asylum process, among other topics. Much of the public debate and policy-making in Sweden in 2020 centred on the work of this committee.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A summary in English of the commission's proposals is included in its final report, see SOU 2020:54, p. 25-34.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 9(1) of Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing the EMN, each National Contact Point of the network is required to provide every year a report describing the migration and asylum situation in the respective Member State. The report is structured so as to present relevant information on each aspect or dimension of migration and asylum.

As during the past five years, the EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum for 2020 consists of two parts and a statistical annex. Part I was designed as a questionnaire and is primarily intended to inform policy-makers within the European Commission about national developments that are relevant to them when analysing and evaluating the impact of EU legislation and policies. The Swedish contribution to Part I was completed in February 2021 and sent to the Commission. Due to its rather technical nature and limited use for the general public, it remains unpublished but is available from the Swedish EMN NCP upon request.<sup>17</sup> The same is true for the statistical annex, which was sent to the Commission in April 2020.

This report represents Part II of the Swedish EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum for 2020. It is primarily intended for audiences that are interested in an overview of the asylum and immigration situation in Sweden and specific national audiences, such as policy-makers, researchers, the media and the general public. It is published on the national website of EMN Sweden.<sup>18</sup>

Section 1 introduces the report. Section 2 provides an overview of asylum and migration policy developments, to set a general context for the developments to be described in more detail further below. It includes an overview of the general political developments, as well as main policy and legislative debates, broader developments in asylum and migration, plus institutional developments. Sections 3-9 describe specific developments in the main areas of asylum and migration. Some sections are sub-divided into more specific, thematic sub-sections.

The Report covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2020. However, at some instance, it may also include references to developments that started in earlier years and continued in 2020 or early 2021. It is the 17<sup>th</sup> report in a series of such EMN annual reports. Until 2015, however, the EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum had a different title, "EMN Annual Policy Report".

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<sup>17</sup> Please contact [emn@migrationsverket.se](mailto:emn@migrationsverket.se) to obtain the report.

<sup>18</sup> [www.emnsweden.se](http://www.emnsweden.se).

## 2 OVERVIEW OF ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### 2.1 Organisational structure of asylum and migration policy

In Sweden, the Government sets out the general guidelines for migration policy by proposing bills. It is the responsibility of the *Riksdag* (Swedish Parliament) to pass or reject proposed bills and amendments. The Government can supplement laws with ordinances. The Ministry of Justice is the Government body responsible for migration policy. It is also responsible for certain aspects of integration policies, which are shared between several other ministries but mainly lie within the responsibilities of the Ministry of Employment.

The Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Police Authority report to the Ministry of Justice and there is considerable cooperation at various levels between the ministry and these authorities. However, the authorities are formally subordinated to the Government as a whole and not a single Ministry.<sup>19</sup>

Within the area of migration and asylum, the Swedish Migration Agency is the responsible administrative agency concerning residence permits, work permits, visas, the reception of asylum seekers, return, acquisition of citizenship and repatriation. Also active in the area of migration are the Migration Courts, the Migration Court of Appeal, the Police Authority, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the Swedish missions abroad and the Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*). In addition, the County Administrative Boards negotiate with the municipalities on the reception of individuals who have been granted protection.

Legal provisions pertaining to the tasks of the Swedish Migration Agency are found primarily in the Aliens Act, the Aliens Ordinance and the Ordinance with Instructions for the Swedish Migration Agency. The Government also manages the Agency by means of annual budget appropriation directives that specify the operational budget and objectives.

The Migration Agency has the main responsibility for the reception of asylum seekers, from the date on which an application for asylum has been submitted until the person has been received by a municipality after being granted a residence permit, or has left the country, if notified that the application has been rejected. The integration of recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection is a responsibility of the 290 Swedish municipalities and the Public Employment Service *Arbetsförmedlingen*.

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<sup>19</sup> The Swedish system is based on independent administrative authorities. No public authority or minister may determine how an administrative authority is to decide in a particular case involving the exercise of public authority vis-à-vis a private subject or a local authority, or the application of law.

While the Swedish Migration Agency has the responsibility for voluntary returns, the Police Authority is the main responsible authority for border control and forced return. The Customs and the Coast Guard are required to assist the Police in the control of third country nationals' entry and exit and the Coast Guard shall control the vessel traffic at sea borders.

The legal system pertaining to migration in Sweden is governed by the Aliens Act (*Utlänningslagen*, Statute 2005:716), and emanating from that law, the Aliens' Ordinance (*Utlänningsförrordningen*, Statute 2006:97). The current Aliens Act took effect on 31 March 2006 and has subsequently been amended many times. The Administrative Judicial Procedure Act (Statute 1971:291) governs with regard to appeals. The Administrative Procedure Act (Statute 2017:900) contains certain general statutes that govern all administrative agencies. Since July 2016, a temporary act restricting the possibility of being granted a residence permit in Sweden, and the right to family reunification, has been in force. It was scheduled to expire in 2019, but in June 2019, the Parliament voted to extend it until July 2021, with some changes related to family reunification, which have made it possible again for people who are granted a residence permit as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to reunite with certain family members, in a similar way as for people with refugee status.

The Swedish migration system and asylum procedures are also regulated by the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Act (Statute 1994:137) and the Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Ordinance (Statute 1994:361).

Border control is governed by the Regulation (EC) No 562/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 establishing a Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code).

## **2.2 General political and institutional developments**

Since a new national government took office in January 2019, Sweden has been governed by the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party. The government has also been operating under an agreement between these two parties, the Centre Party and the Liberal Party regarding the state budget and the direction of policy. The Swedish Prime Minister in 2020 was Mr. Stefan Löfven. The Minister for Justice and Migration was Mr. Morgan Johansson. Both politicians are from the Social Democratic Party.

According to the Statement of Government Policy<sup>20</sup> that the Prime Minister made in Parliament in January 2019, several reforms were planned as regards migration

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<sup>20</sup> Government of Sweden (2019): Statement of Government Policy, 21 January 2019, <https://www.government.se/48f689/globalassets/government/dokument/regeringskansliet/statement-of-government-policy-20192.pdf>.

and asylum policy. In 2019 and 2020, the government launched several inquiries to develop proposals for legislative measures. Most importantly perhaps, a cross-party, parliamentary committee on Sweden's future migration policy was appointed in 2019. It presented its proposals in September 2020.<sup>21</sup> The proposals, if adopted by Parliament, are likely to affect many aspects of the legal migration system and the asylum system in Sweden, such as the duration (period of validity) of residence permits granted for protection reasons (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and other reasons (e.g., family reunification, family formation, humanitarian reasons, etc.); conditions and requirements for permanent residence permits (e.g., language and financial support requirements); the conditions and requirements for granting residence permits for humanitarian reasons; conditions for family reunification and family formation including financial support requirements for family-related immigration; legal and safe pathways to Sweden; legal certainty in the asylum process; among other topics.

In February 2020, the Government appointed an inquiry that will review important parts of the Swedish labour migration system. The inquiry is expected to propose a new type of residence permit for highly skilled third country nationals who want to come to Sweden to look for employment or start a business. It is also expected to present legislation aimed at solving the issue of labour migrants being expelled due to minor deviations from the requirements for work permits as well as propose measures to prevent abuse of the system and exploitation of workers. The inquiry presented its first report in January 2021.<sup>22</sup>

Another government-appointed inquiry looked into the possible introduction of Swedish language tests as well as basic knowledge of Swedish society as a requirement for the acquisition of citizenship. The first report of this inquiry was presented in January 2021.<sup>23</sup>

In January 2020, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) entered into force as a Swedish law. As Sweden had already ratified this Convention, no immediate or direct impact of this development is expected as concerns migration and asylum. However, as a national law, the CRC might have indirect impacts on policy-making and jurisprudence in the future.

There were no major institutional changes in 2020 apart from the fact that, as of January 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency has taken over certain migration-related tasks performed at the Swedish missions abroad, e.g. regarding the examination of applications for different types of residence permits and visas.

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<sup>21</sup> En långsiktigt hållbar migrationspolitik, Betänkande av Kommittén om den framtida svenska migrationspolitiken (Migrationskommittén), Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2020:54](#), Stockholm. A summary is also available at this link: <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/09/sustainable-migration-policy-for-the-long-term/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ett förbättrat system för arbetskraftsinvandring, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:5](#), Stockholm.

<sup>23</sup> Krav på kunskaper i svenska och samhällskunskapskrav för svenskt medborgarskap, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om språk- och samhällskunskapskrav för svenskt medborgarskap och andra frågor om medborgarskap, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:2](#), Stockholm.

Migration staff at the missions abroad, who are posted from Sweden, are now under the responsibility of the Migration Agency. Local staff working on migration cases is still employed by the missions but financed by the Migration Agency.

## 2.3 Main policy and legislative debates

### *The parliamentary committee on Sweden's future migration policy*

Much of the public debate on migration and asylum in Sweden in 2020 centred on the work of the above-mentioned committee on Sweden's future migration policy. Apart from the issues that the committee was instructed to look into, politicians also presented other ideas and proposals, some of which triggered intense debates. For example, it was proposed that Sweden should introduce an annual quantitative target for the number of asylum seekers, and that policies should be adapted to reaching this target.<sup>24</sup> However, the committee did not go forward with this idea. The committee also discussed measures to increase the number of voluntary and forced returns.<sup>25</sup> In October 2020, the government sent the committee's proposals to a large number of stakeholders for comments, and in December, it presented a few additional proposals (concerning, for example, family reunification rules and residence permits granted for humanitarian reasons),<sup>26</sup> which were also sent out for stakeholder consultation. For 2021, it is expected that a bill will be submitted to Parliament and that an amended Aliens Act will enter into force in July 2021, when a temporary act – which was adopted in 2016 to restrict the possibility of being granted a residence permit for protection purposes in Sweden, and the right to family reunification – will expire.

### *Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on migration and integration*

The outbreak and development of the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden and measures to limit the spread of the virus led to a strong decline in immigration to Sweden and the number of asylum applicants. This also triggered debates about the possibilities of Swedish employers to recruit foreign workers, especially concerning seasonal work sectors such as agriculture, horticulture and forestry, under the circumstances caused by the pandemic. The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise published a report, arguing that restrictions to employers' possibilities to recruit foreign workforce can have far-reaching consequences for Swedish companies and the Swedish economy.<sup>27</sup>

The pandemic was also expected to affect employment among immigrants and the chances of newly-arrived beneficiaries of international protection and their family members to establish themselves on the Swedish labour market and find jobs.

<sup>24</sup> [Partier kritiska mot volymmål i asylpolitiken](#), Svenska Dagbladet, 29 January 2020.

<sup>25</sup> [Nu börjar striden om migrationspolitiken](#), Aftonbladet, 10 May 2020.

<sup>26</sup> [Kompletterande promemoria](#) till betänkandet En långsiktigt hållbar migrationspolitik (SOU 2020:54).

<sup>27</sup> Svenskt Näringsliv: [När pandemin satte stopp för arbetskraftsinvandringen](#), Stockholm, November 2020.

According to data from Statistics Sweden, overall unemployment in Sweden increased by 2.2 percentage points (from 6.1 percent to 8.3 percent) in the third quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The increase in unemployment was stronger among foreign-born residents (increase by 4.7 percentage points) than among residents born in Sweden (1.2 percentage points).<sup>28</sup> This suggests a difficult situation for immigrants on the Swedish labour market, which could be particularly hard for newly arrived migrants.

There was also a debate about potential measures for certain young migrants who had come to Sweden during the refugee situation of 2015 or before, whose applications for asylum had been rejected but who were still in the country. In July 2018, the Parliament had decided that a limited group of unaccompanied young migrants, who had received, or would otherwise have received, an expulsion order, could be granted residence permits for studies at upper secondary schools, under certain circumstances. For those who graduate from upper secondary schools and find long-term employment within six months, the decision provided a possibility to receive a permanent residence permit. As the pandemic and the related economic challenges made it more difficult for this group to find employment, the government discussed the need to ease the requirements for residence permits for this group. Some political parties proposed to extend the timeframe for finding a job, however. Others argued that a comprehensive regularisation or amnesty should be carried out. Other parties opposed these ideas arguing that rejected asylum applicants should always be returned to their countries of origin.<sup>29</sup> As a majority of individuals within this group are from Afghanistan, there were also debates about the security situation there and whether it was possible and/or reasonable to remove young unaccompanied asylum applicants to Afghanistan. There were also media reports about young Afghan asylum seekers leaving Sweden after being rejected and applying for asylum again in other EU Member States, such as France or Germany.<sup>30</sup>

### *Immigration of workers*

The Swedish labour immigration system also led to further debates in 2020, especially regarding risks of exploitation, wage-dumping, poor working conditions and Sweden's attractiveness as a destination for highly-skilled migrants. There were a number of media reports on so-called "talent expulsions", i.e. situation in which third-country labour migrants risk to lose their residence or work permits because their employers – by mistake or intentionally – do not fully comply with the conditions for employing workers from third countries.<sup>31</sup> This matter was also

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<sup>28</sup> Statistics Sweden, [Kraftig försämring på arbetsmarknaden för unga och utrikes födda](#), Statistiknyhet, 27 October 2020.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example: [Regeringen backar om gymnasielagen](#), Expressen, 9 December 2020.

<sup>30</sup> [Nya regler kan sätta stopp för asyldrömmarna](#), Dagens Nyheter, 23 September 2020.

<sup>31</sup> For example: [Regeringen måste pausa kompetensutvisningar](#), Svenska Dagbladet, 5 September 2020.

raised in the Swedish Parliament.<sup>32</sup> The situation of foreign workers in Sweden is now dealt with by a government-appointed inquiry, which – as mentioned above – is also expected to propose legislation to introduce a new type of residence permit for highly skilled third country nationals who want to come to Sweden to look for employment or start a business. The inquiry published its first report in February 2021.<sup>33</sup> The final report is expected for November 2021.

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<sup>32</sup> See for example: Sveriges Riksdag: Moratorium för kompetensutvisningar, [Interpellation 2020/21:3](#) av Borian Åberg (M), Inlämnad: 10 September 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Ett förbättrat system för arbetskraftsinvandring, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:5](#), Stockholm.



### 3 LEGAL MIGRATION AND MOBILITY

#### 3.1 Economic migration

##### *Labour immigration (employees)*

The number of third-country nationals coming to Sweden as labour migrants decreased significantly in 2020 compared to 2019 and 2018. This is most likely a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, related travel and mobility restrictions as well as the economic effects of the pandemic. Especially in March, April, May and June 2020, the number of permits granted to incoming third-country workers was much lower than in the same calendar months in 2019. In July 2020, numbers went up again and were in fact higher than in 2019. During the following months, however, figures were lower again than normal. Overall, Sweden granted 32 382 first-time residence permits for work-related reasons. This number had been 43 250 in 2019 and 41 050 in 2018.

These broad figures include not only persons coming to Sweden because they found employment there (16 315 in 2020), but also their family members (12 510) as well as some self-employed people (114), visiting researchers (905) and people who work in Sweden under special rules, e.g. as au pairs, trainees, artists or sportsmen (2 538).

Table 2 shows the overall development regarding labour immigration to Sweden for the five-year period 2016-2020. The number of incoming employees increased until 2019 and then decreased significantly in 2020. Immigration for self-employment purposes has been very modest in size over many years, and the year 2020 was no exception.

**Table 2: Labour immigration to Sweden, 2016-2020**

<b>Broad category</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Employees	12 985	16 179	21 490	22 944	16 315
Family members of labour immigrants	8 629	12 235	15 373	15 131	12 510
Self-employed	174	221	135	104	114
Visiting researchers	907	1 222	1 155	1 216	905
Work in Sweden under special rules	2 015	2 440	2 897	3 855	2 538
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 710</b>	<b>32 297</b>	<b>41 050</b>	<b>43 250</b>	<b>32 382</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

Table 3 shows the ten main occupational categories among incoming workers from third countries in 2020. These figures are based on the number of work permits granted. There are certain differences between the number of immigrants who received a residence permit for work reasons as employees (16 315 in 2020, as mentioned above) and the number of work permits issued during the same year (15 231). The main reason for this is that in some cases, an immigrant will need a work permit to work in Sweden, but not a residence permit, while in other cases, a residence permit is needed, but the person is exempted from the requirement to have a work permit.

The main occupational groups among those who received a work permit in 2020 were berry pickers and planters, IT-professionals, fast-food workers, forestry workers, and physical and engineering technicians. This shows that labour immigration to Sweden consists of both low-skilled and highly-skilled workers, including a significant number of seasonal workers. Compared to 2019, all main occupational groups decreased in 2020 with the exception of forestry workers.

**Table 3: Work permits granted in 2020, 10 main occupational groups**

	2020
Berry pickers and planters	3 490
IT architects, systems analysts, and test managers	2 511
Fast-food workers, food preparation assistants	994
Forestry workers	777
Physical and engineering science technicians	667
Cleaners and home service personnel	628
Engineering professionals	609
Cooks and cold-buffet managers	547
Carpenters, bricklayers, and building frame workers	481
Market gardeners and crop growers	343
<i>Others</i>	<i>4 184</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 231</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

The most common nationality groups engaging in labour market-related migration to Sweden in 2020 were India (6 064), Thailand (3 484), Ukraine (2 369), Iraq (1 663) and China (1 273). Indian nationals often work in the IT sector, Thai nationals in the seasonal berry-picking business, and Ukrainian nationals in forestry.

**Table 4: Residence permits granted for work purposes (including family members), 2016-2020, top-10 nationalities**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
India	6 818	8 480	9 601	9 780	6 064
Thailand	3 616	3 512	5 257	6 603	3 484
China	1 689	2 232	2 327	2 128	1 273
Ukraine	846	1 255	2 016	1 994	2 369
Iraq	982	1 251	2 120	2 274	1 663
USA	924	1 408	1 387	1 322	1 047
Turkey	690	1 162	1 427	1 539	1 095
Iran	513	802	985	1 048	1 015
Pakistan	485	850	988	918	906
Brazil	619	675	937	939	689
<i>Other</i>	7 528	10 670	14 005	14 705	12 777
<b>Total</b>	<b>24 710</b>	<b>32 297</b>	<b>41 050</b>	<b>43 250</b>	<b>32 382</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

### *Legal and practical developments*

In recent years, the current Swedish system for labour immigration was often criticised for not sufficiently preventing untrustworthy employers from exploiting foreign workers. Over the years, stricter requirements for certain businesses were introduced to prevent such problems. In turn, the Migration Agency also developed a certification system for trusted employers that frequently recruit workers from abroad. A certification is an agreement between an employer and the Swedish Migration Agency that allows faster processing.

In 2017, the Government had tasked a number of Swedish public authorities to improve the methods for detecting workplace-related crime and irregularities, including undeclared work and exploitation of foreign workers. According to the Government, this initiative has produced good results, and in 2020, it was decided to follow-up and intensify this work, e.g. by increasing the number of workplace inspections.

In February 2020, the Government appointed an inquiry to review important parts of the Swedish labour migration system. The inquiry is expected to, among other issues, propose a new type of residence permit for highly skilled third country nationals who want to come to Sweden to look for employment or start a business. They shall also present legislation aimed at solving the issue of labour migrants being expelled due to minor deviations from the requirements for work permits as well as measures to prevent abuse of the system and the exploitation of workers. The inquiry published its first report in February 2021.<sup>34</sup> The final report is expected for November 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Ett förbättrat system för arbetskraftsinvandring, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om arbetskraftsinvandring, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:5](#), Stockholm.

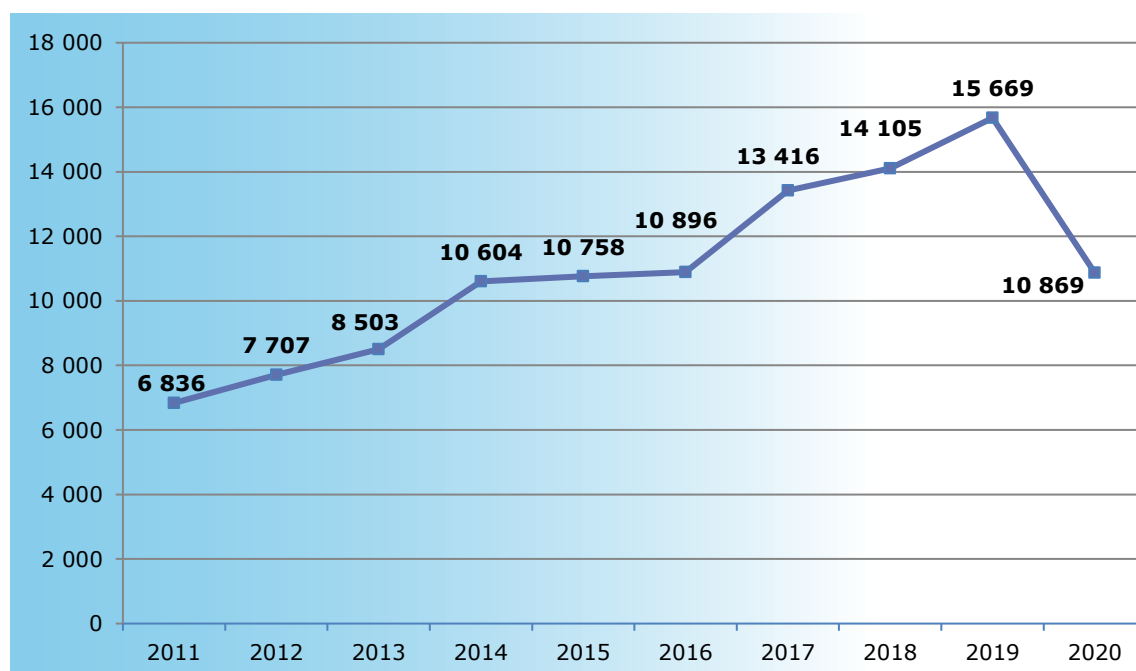
In light of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as challenges related to the enforcement of entry bans and other travel restrictions around the world, Sweden decided to suspend its Working Holiday Agreements with Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. Working Holiday Agreements mean that young people aged 18 to 30 years old are able to stay in Sweden for up to one year for a working holiday. In 2020, such agreements were in place with Australia, Chile, Hong Kong, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Uruguay.

### 3.2 International students and visiting researchers

#### *Third-country national students*

Immigration to Sweden for study purposes has increased over the past ten years, until 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic caused a decrease by almost one third (31%). In total, 10 869 first residence permits were granted for study purposes that year. This figure includes 5 799 students at universities and university colleges, 829 doctoral students and 2 820 family members of these two groups. The figure also includes 366 permits issued to individuals coming to Sweden for non-academic studies and 144 family members as well as 911 permits for students who were already in Sweden but applied for a permit to look for work opportunities after their studies.

**Figure 3: First-time residence permits granted for study reasons (including accompanying family members), 2011-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

As Table 5 shows, the most important nationality group among international students in Sweden over the past five years has been China. The second and third

largest nationalities in 2020 were India and Pakistan, followed by Iran and Bangladesh.

**Table 5: First-time residence permits granted for study reasons, top-10 nationality groups, 2016-2020**

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
China	2 327	2 470	2 202	2 433	1 729
India	1 218	1 578	1 859	1 922	1 648
Pakistan	849	953	1 040	1 340	1 286
Iran	572	883	937	1 189	842
Bangladesh	350	653	1 029	1 258	585
USA	752	876	772	826	380
Canada	408	385	362	350	82
Turkey	308	395	347	290	222
South Korea	329	331	342	392	122
Japan	252	336	308	352	65
<i>Other</i>	4 058	4 559	4 907	5 317	3 908
<b>Total</b>	<b>11 423</b>	<b>13 419</b>	<b>14 105</b>	<b>15 669</b>	<b>10 869</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

#### *Possibilities for international students to remain in Sweden to look for work*

There was an important policy change regarding international students in 2014, which started having some impact in 2015 and subsequent years. Students who have carried out studies at a Swedish higher education institution for at least two terms could now receive a residence permit for the purpose of looking for employment or investigating opportunities to start a business. According to a provision in the Aliens Ordinance, this permit could be valid for a maximum of six months. In 2020, Sweden implemented the EU Students and Researchers Directive.<sup>35</sup> This change meant, among other impacts, that third-country students who have completed their studies in Sweden can now receive a residence permit for 12 months to look for work opportunities. Since this “job-seekers” permit was first introduced, 3 872 individuals have been granted such a permit, and the trend has been increasing, including in 2020.

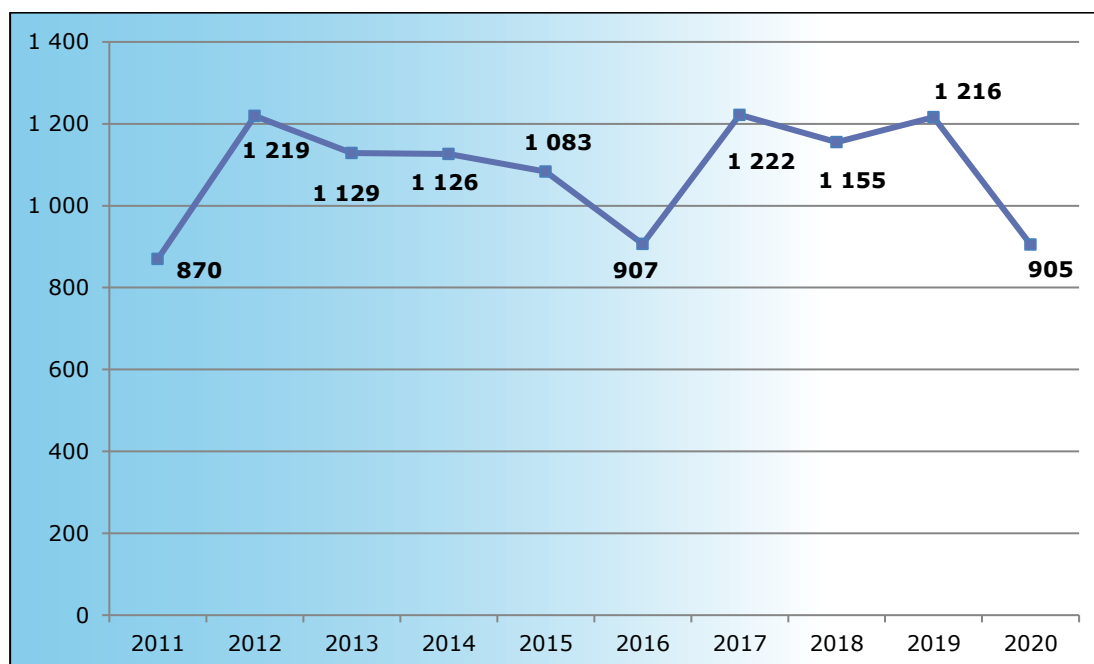
The implementation of the new Students and Researchers Directive also eased and redefined the financial support requirement for researchers and students. Both funds the applicant has access to at the time of application, and proof of future access to funds, may now be considered in the individual case.

<sup>35</sup> Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing.

### Researchers

In addition to university students and doctoral students, Sweden also admits researchers.<sup>36</sup> Their number reached a relatively high level (over 1 200 individuals) in 2012 and 2017-2019 but declined in 2020 (to 905). Statistically, visiting researchers are not included in the above-mentioned data on students; they are instead included in the data on labour immigrants.

**Figure 4: First-time residence permits granted to researchers, 2011-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

### 3.3 Family-related immigration

Immigration on the basis of family ties has for many years accounted for a large share of overall immigration flows to Sweden. In total, if we look at the reunification of family members in Sweden, family formation, adoptions, and also include family members of labour immigrants or incoming foreign students, family-related migration stood for almost 55% of all first-time residence permits granted in 2020. In absolute numbers, Sweden issued 48 802 residence permits for family reasons in 2020 (all sub-categories included), compared to roughly 57 262 the year before. In 2018, this number was even higher, 68 086. This decreasing trend can be attributed to a preceding decline in the number of persons who were granted protection in Sweden. Family reunification was particularly high during the years following the refugee situation in 2015. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic of course had an impact as well.

<sup>36</sup> Council Directive [2005/71/EC](#) of 12 October 2005 on a specific procedure for admitting third-country nationals for the purposes of scientific research.

*Policy and legal developments regarding family-related immigration*

Over recent years, Sweden tightened the rules for some categories for family-related migration. In 2010, a financial support requirement was introduced in the Aliens Act as a condition for family reunification, and in 2016, the Parliament adopted a temporary law restricting the possibility of being granted a residence permit for protection purposes in Sweden, and the right to family reunification. It was planned to be valid until 19 July 2019, but was extended until July 2021. Regarding financial support requirements, the temporary law demands that the sponsor in Sweden (who wants to be reunited or joined by family members) must not only be able to support him-/herself but also his or her family members.<sup>37</sup> This was a significant change as before, sponsors only needed to prove that they could support themselves.

The same law also stated that refugees and persons eligible for subsidiary protection in Sweden shall be granted temporary residence permits instead of permanent permits (which is the main rule under the Aliens Act). Refugees who are granted temporary residence permits under the temporary law and who are deemed to have well-grounded prospects of obtaining a permanent residence permit shall continue to have a right to family reunification with their spouse, cohabitant and/or minor children, and children who are refugees shall have a right to reunification with their parents. By contrast, a beneficiary of subsidiary protection who submitted his/her asylum application after 24 November 2015 had no right to family reunification until 20 July 2019, when this restriction was lifted again. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection now have a right to family reunification again in the same way as refugees.

In 2020, the cross-party committee on Sweden's future migration policies proposed, in principle, that Sweden should keep the system that had been applicable under the temporary act after the amendment of this act in 2019. This basically means the same family reunification rights for both refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. It also proposed to make it somewhat easier for Swedish and EU/EEA-nationals to be joined by a spouse or partner from abroad.

Following a judgement by the Court of Justice of the EU of 16 July 2020 in the joined cases C-133/19, C-136/19 and C-137/19, the Swedish Migration Agency changed its legal practice regarding family reunification cases involving applicants who are children. Before the ruling, the Migration Agency based its decisions on the age of the applicant at the point in time of the decision. The ruling made clear, however, that decisions (in many cases) have to be based on the age of the applicant at the time of application. As applications for family reunification often take a long time to decide upon, this change of practice means that more young

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<sup>37</sup> The maintenance requirement will not apply, however, if the sponsor is a child. In addition, family members of beneficiaries of international protection are also exempt from the maintenance requirement if the family member applies for family reunification within three months of the date when the beneficiary of protection obtained his/her residence permit.

persons might be considered minors and on that basis be granted family reunification in Sweden.

#### *Numerical trends in 2020*

In 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency and Migration Courts granted 29 511 first-time residence permits for family reunification and family formation purposes, which means a decrease by roughly 7% compared to 2019, when 31 812 such permits were issued. These numbers include family reunification and family formation in general, family members of refugees and other persons with international protection status, adopted children, and children of third-country nationals with permanent residence status in Sweden. Accompanying family members of labour immigrants or foreign students and third-country nationals who were granted a residence permit as family members of EU citizens or persons with long-term residence rights in other EU Member States are not included here. All categories are, however, shown separately in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: First-time residence permits granted for family reasons, main categories, 2016-2020**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Adoptions	129	83	72	62	31
Family members of refugees and other beneficiaries of protection	15 149	19 129	16 637	7 362	5 513
Family reunification and family formation in general	16 472	19 027	18 835	15 591	16 135
Children (of foreign parents) born in Sweden	7 257	9 853	9 342	8 797	7 832
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 007</b>	<b>48 092</b>	<b>44 886</b>	<b>31 812</b>	<b>29 511</b>
<i>Family members of labour immigrants</i>	<i>8 629</i>	<i>12 235</i>	<i>15 373</i>	<i>15 131</i>	<i>12 510</i>
<i>Family members of international students</i>	<i>1 425</i>	<i>1 844</i>	<i>2 418</i>	<i>3 094</i>	<i>2 820</i>
<i>Family members of third-country nationals with long-term resident status in other EU Member States</i>	<i>1 186</i>	<i>1 616</i>	<i>3 177</i>	<i>3 945</i>	<i>1 956</i>
<i>Third-country nationals who are family members of EU/EEA citizens or Swiss citizens</i>	<i>1 672</i>	<i>1 841</i>	<i>1 977</i>	<i>2 971</i>	<i>1 852</i>
<b>Grand Total*</b>	<b>51 992</b>	<b>65 749</b>	<b>68 086</b>	<b>57 262</b>	<b>48 802</b>

\* The Grand Total also includes a small number of other family-related permits, which do not fall into any of the main categories.

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.



The most frequent nationality groups among the persons immigrating for family reasons<sup>38</sup> in 2020 were Syria, Eritrea, individuals with unknown nationality or nationality still under investigation, India and Afghanistan, see Table 7 below.

**Table 7: First-time residence permits granted for family reasons, top-10 nationality groups, 2016-2020**

Nationality	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total 2016-2020
Syria	10 214	12 828	11 017	4 367	5 341	43 767
Eritrea	2 405	3 916	4 572	3 766	2 628	17 287
Somalia	2 594	2 855	2 535	1 215	984	10 183
Afghanistan	1 371	1 727	2 467	2 698	1 580	9 843
Stateless	2 497	3 233	1 853	973	739	9 295
Unknown*	1 453	1 864	1 781	1 891	2 037	9 026
Iraq	1 460	1 924	1 727	1 317	1 000	7 428
Thailand	1 404	1 487	1 353	1 117	1 095	6 456
India	568	802	1 166	1 200	1 651	5 387
Ethiopia	681	1 073	1 052	682	589	4 077
<i>Other</i>	<i>14 360</i>	<i>16 383</i>	<i>15 363</i>	<i>12 586</i>	<i>11 867</i>	<i>70 559</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>39 007</b>	<b>48 092</b>	<b>44 886</b>	<b>31 812</b>	<b>29 511</b>	<b>193 308</b>

\* Unknown or still under investigation

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

### 3.4 Citizenship and naturalisation

In October 2019, a Government inquiry was established and tasked to propose legislation to introduce Swedish language tests as well as basic knowledge of Swedish society as requirements for the acquisition of Swedish citizenship. The inquiry was ongoing in 2020 and presented its proposals in January 2021. According to the inquiry, tests of Swedish language and civics should become mandatory, with some exceptions, in 2025.<sup>39</sup>

In December 2020, a minor amendment to the Law on Swedish Citizenship entered into force to ensure that citizens of the United Kingdom, who enjoy certain rights under the Withdrawal Agreement between the EU and the UK, will be able to fulfil the conditions for acquisition of Swedish citizenship after the end of the transition period.

<sup>38</sup> Excluding family members of labour immigrants, of international students, of third-country nationals with long-term resident status in other EU Member States and of EU/EEA citizens or Swiss citizens

<sup>39</sup> Krav på kunskaper i svenska och samhällskunskap för svenskt medborgarskap, Delbetänkande av Utredningen om språk- och samhällskunskapskrav för svenskt medborgarskap och andra frågor om medborgarskap (USSMA), Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2021:2](#), Stockholm.

As regards statelessness, the Government engaged in dialogue with the responsible national agencies to discuss challenges regarding the registration of statelessness, nationality and “unknown” nationality, to limit inconsistencies.

### *Statistical trends*

The number of applications for Swedish citizenship has been increasing over recent years. This development is linked to the large number of people who were granted international protection in Sweden after having applied for asylum in 2014 or 2015 as well as subsequent family-related immigration. In 2019, a peak was reached as the Swedish Migration Agency received almost 90 000 applications for Swedish citizenship. In 2020, the trend reversed and the number of applications decreased to approximately 82 600 applications. As the number of incoming applications has considerably exceeded the Agency’s capacity to decide on incoming cases, there is a backlog of pending cases, however. At the end of 2020, the number of pending cases exceeded 100 000.

According to Statistics Sweden, 80 175 individuals from around 160 countries became Swedish citizens in 2020. Syrians were the by far largest group among those who became Swedish, 24 472 persons. Other relevant nationality groups were Iraq (3 610), stateless people (3 227), Afghanistan (2 820) and Poland (2 722).<sup>40</sup>

## **3.5 Visa Policy and Schengen co-operation**

Short-term travel from countries outside the EU/EEA as well as the issuing of short-term visas for third-country nationals who want to visit Sweden for a limited time for tourism purposes, visiting family members or business activities, was in 2020 strongly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

On 17 March 2020, the government decided to restrict non-essential travels to Sweden across an external border, meaning from other countries than the EU/EEA, except Switzerland and other select countries. As a general rule, foreigners who were not EU/EEA citizens and who were travelling to Sweden from a non-EU/EEA country were denied entry. This mainly affected travel to Swedish airports and seaports, since Sweden does not have any land borders to a country that is not part of the EU/EEA. There were exemptions for a selected number of countries outside the EU/EEA, whose nationals were thus allowed to enter. These exceptions varied during the year 2020. Exceptions also applied to foreigners residing in the EU/EEA, individuals with particularly urgent personal needs, and individuals who were to perform essential functions in Sweden, such as healthcare professionals, certain other professions in related areas, and individuals working with the transportation of goods, among others.

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<sup>40</sup> Statistiska Centralbyrån, [Utländska medborgare i Sverige](#), last updated: 25 March 2021.

On 22 December 2020, an entry ban was imposed for travels to Sweden from Denmark and the UK, with the purpose to reduce and prevent the spread of a new strand of the Covid-19 virus.

At times, the issuing of Schengen visas almost came to a standstill in 2020. The number of visa applications lodged at the Swedish missions abroad decreased by almost 86% in 2020, compared to 2019. The missions abroad registered 39 557 visa applications, compared to 280 076 in 2019, and the Migration Agency counted 3 204 applications (3 552 in 2019). The Agency only handles a minor share of all visa applications for Sweden.

In total, 32 815 visas were issued during the year. 28 499 were Schengen visas (mostly type-C visas) and 4 316 were national visas (type D-visas).<sup>41</sup> Most visas in 2020 were issued to Chinese, Indian and Russian citizens.

In 2020, the Migration Agency provided training on the revised Visa Code to all visa case officers at Swedish embassies and consulates prior to the Visa Code's entering into force in February 2020.<sup>42</sup>

### *Schengen borders*

In 2015, Sweden had reintroduced temporary border controls at its internal borders in response to the refugee situation at the time. In November 2020, the Government decided on internal border controls until 11 May 2021. According to the Government, border controls contribute to national security and help detect threats from potential perpetrators and prevent terrorist attacks. The Government also assessed that other measures were insufficient against the background of, among other things, shortcomings at the Schengen area's external borders. Furthermore, according to the Government, many people who enter the Schengen area do not remain in the country of arrival; they move relatively freely to other Member States. The Government stated that the border controls have had the positive effect of enabling a response to the serious threat to Sweden that the Government, since 2015, has considered to exist. The controls have enabled authorities to see which people want to enter the country, establish and verify their identity, and prevent people with malicious intentions from entering Sweden. The location, scope and duration of internal border controls was flexible and limited to what was needed to respond to the above-mentioned threat.

In December 2020, amendments to the Swedish Aliens Act and the national law on the Schengen Information System entered into force. These changes mean that an alien at an entry or exit check at the border or an internal check within the

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<sup>41</sup> Schengen type-C visas allow the holder a stay of up to 90 days within a period of 6 months for purposes such as tourism, family visits or business. National type-D visas as well as temporary residence permits are used, for example, when the reason for travelling to Sweden does not match any of the travel purposes outlined in the EU Visa Code, or when a foreign national wishes to stay in Sweden for more than 90 days.

<sup>42</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code).

country will be obliged to accept to be photographed and to leave fingerprints so that he or she can be identified with a search in the Schengen Information System. This applies if the person's identity cannot be determined in another way. These legal amendments were necessary to reflect Council Decision 2007/533/JHA of 12 June 2007 on the establishment, operation and use of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) and Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the establishment, operation and use of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) in Swedish law.

## 4 INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

After the extraordinary asylum situation in 2015, when almost 163 000 people applied for asylum in Sweden, the number of new asylum applicants decreased rapidly during subsequent years. In 2020, the numbers fell even more, mainly as a consequence of Covid-19 related travel restrictions.

In 2020, 12 991 individuals lodged an asylum application in Sweden. This represents a decrease by almost 9 000 individuals compared to 2019, or 41%. The number of asylum applicants in 2020 also represents the lowest annual number since 1999.

The number of first-instance asylum decisions on new asylum cases decreased from 24 569 in 2019 to 20 980 in 2020. However, the fact that this number was higher than the number of new asylum applications made during the year indicates that the Migration Agency not only decided on new cases, but also on asylum requests that had been lodged in previous years. These numbers do not include decisions on applications for extensions of protection-related residence permits.

### *Legislative developments*

A temporary act that was adopted in 2016 and aimed at reducing the number of new asylum applicants in Sweden remained in place throughout the year 2020. In 2019, this act had been extended and amended and was then scheduled to expire in July 2021.<sup>43</sup> Also in 2019, the Swedish government appointed a cross-party, parliamentary committee on Sweden's future migration policy, which was tasked to develop proposals for establishing a system that is sustainable in the long term, i.e. for the time after the scheduled expiration of the temporary act. The Committee presented its proposals in September 2020.<sup>44</sup> If adopted by Parliament, they are likely to affect many aspects of the legal migration system and the asylum system in Sweden. Among others, the Committee made the following proposals:

- People in need of protection and other migrants should, as a general rule, be granted temporary residence permits at the time of the initial decision.
- Permanent residence permits should only be granted after three years at the earliest and if certain requirements are met, e.g. that the applicant can support themselves and has Swedish-language skills.
- There should be an option – as previously – to grant humanitarian residence permits in cases of exceptionally distressing circumstances.

<sup>43</sup> For an overview, please see Swedish EMN Annual Reports on Migration and Asylum for 2015 and 2016, available at [www.emnsweden.se](http://www.emnsweden.se), and Migrationsverket (2018): The changing influx of asylum seekers in 2014-2016: Member States' responses - Country Report Sweden.

<sup>44</sup> En långsiktigt hållbar migrationspolitik, Betänkande av Kommittén om den framtida svenska migrationspolitiken (Migrationskommittén), Statens Offentliga Utredningar, [SOU 2020:54](https://www.government.se/articles/2020/09/sustainable-migration-policy-for-the-long-term/), Stockholm. A summary is also available at this link: <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/09/sustainable-migration-policy-for-the-long-term/>.

- A financial support requirement should, as a general rule but with a number of exceptions, apply in cases of family member immigration.
- Safe and legal channels to apply for asylum are needed, and the resettlement system is significant in this respect.

### *Safe countries of origin*

In December 2020, the Government submitted a legislative proposal to Parliament regarding the safe country of origin concept. According to the proposal, the Swedish Migration Agency will be authorized to decide on a list of safe countries of origin. The new legislation is proposed to enter into force on 1 May 2021. The proposal was prompted by the European Court of Justice Judgement of 25 July 2018 in case C-404/17, which limited the Swedish Migration Agency's possibilities to assess an asylum application as manifestly unfounded and decide on rejection with immediate enforcement. The Court had ruled that to be able to apply such a system, Sweden needed to introduce the revised Asylum Procedures Directive's rules on safe countries of origin into Swedish law.

### *Covid-19-related developments*

To maintain the functioning of the Swedish asylum system under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Swedish Migration Agency introduced more flexible approaches for asylum interviews and other meetings with applicants. It also enhanced and widened the use of digital/electronic tools. For example, applicants and Agency staff could be in different rooms during an interview, and participation in digital multi-party conference calls was made possible. Applicants were also given a possibility to provide the Agency with their cell phone numbers, for easier access to information on meetings and other arrangements. The Agency also worked to take into account whether or not an applicant or public counsel belonged to a Covid-19 risk group and whether or not it was considered suitable for individuals to use public transport to reach the Agency's offices. In the event of uncertainty, necessary personal meetings were rescheduled. New measures in 2020 also included improved digital transfers of case files between the Migration Agency and the migration courts. Further to this, remote interpretation services were used to a greater extent than before. As regards the collection of country-of-origin information, fact-finding missions were suspended as a consequence of Covid-19.

### *Legal counsels in asylum and migration procedures*

The Migration Agency clarified and raised the quality requirements for persons acting as public (legal) counsels for asylum seekers and other applicants for residence permits. It made clearer, for example, that counsels must have relevant education and/or experience and that persons who are not suitable for their task can be removed from the Agency's list of public counsels.

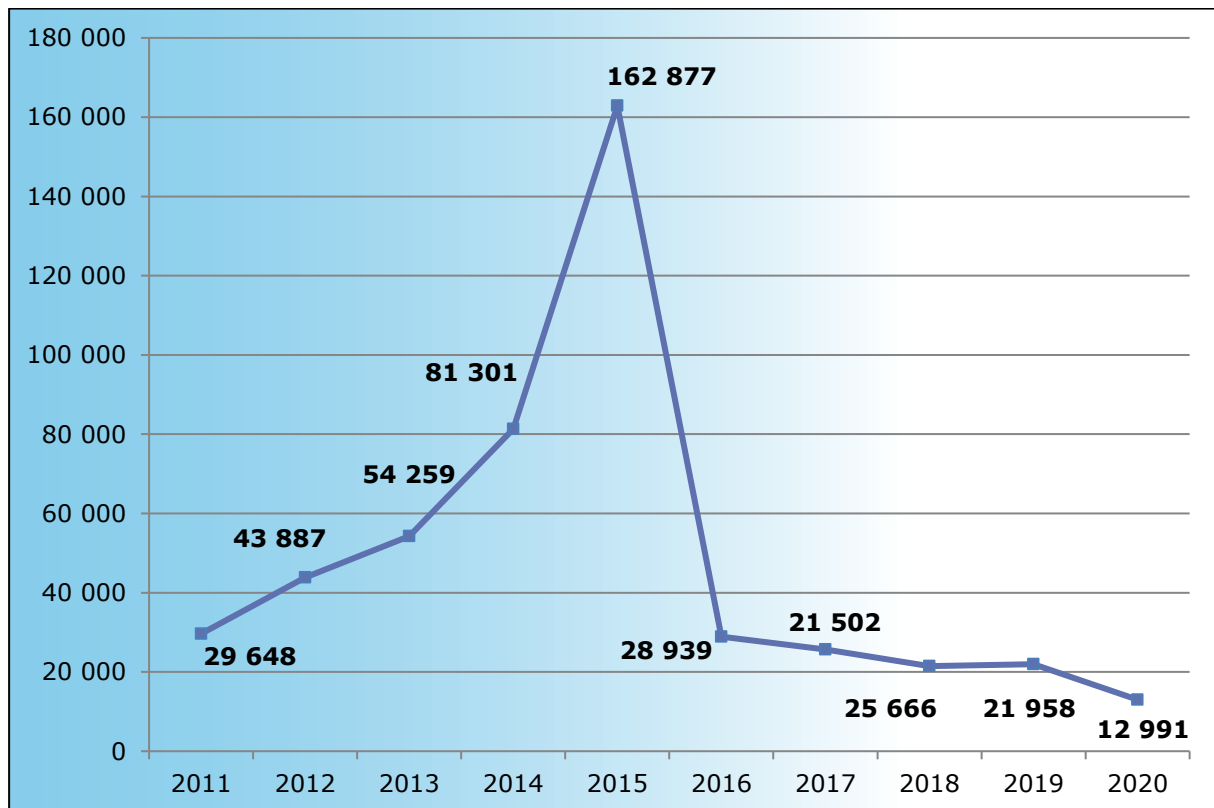
### Digitalised procedures

In 2020, a new digital application service was launched for people who have been granted protection and apply for an extension of their temporary residence permits. In these procedures, applicants can now identify themselves with an electronic identification tool.

## 4.1 Asylum applications

Throughout recent years, Sweden has been one of the main destination countries for asylum seekers within the EU. In 2015, almost 163 000 applications were registered in Sweden. After that, the number of new asylum seekers decreased. In total, 12 991 first-time asylum applications were registered in 2020.

**Figure 5: Asylum seekers, 2011-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

There is no single explanation for the notable decrease in the number of asylum seekers after 2015. Border closures in Southern, South-Eastern and Central Europe, the agreement between the EU and Turkey to stop irregular migration flows from Turkey to Greece, restrictive policy changes in various EU Member States, and attempts to stop irregular migration on the Central Mediterranean route (from Libya to Italy) have certainly contributed to this development, alongside the Swedish policy changes which, at times, included ID-checks on

travellers, temporary intra-Schengen border controls, and measures to make Sweden less attractive as a destination country.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on travel to Sweden, which also affected asylum seekers. The strong reduction in the number of asylum applicants that year was almost exclusively considered an effect of the pandemic. The Swedish Migration Agency also noted that many of those who applied for asylum in 2020 had already been in the country with or without a residence permit, which means that they were not recent arrivals.<sup>45</sup>

Syria was again the most important country of origin of asylum seekers during the year 2020 (1 209 applicants), although the number of Syrians decreased by 54% compared to 2019. Other main nationality groups were people from Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. With the exception of Mongolia, all 15 main nationality groups decreased substantially in 2020. Table 8 and Figure 6 below display the main countries of origin of asylum seekers in 2020, compared to 2019.

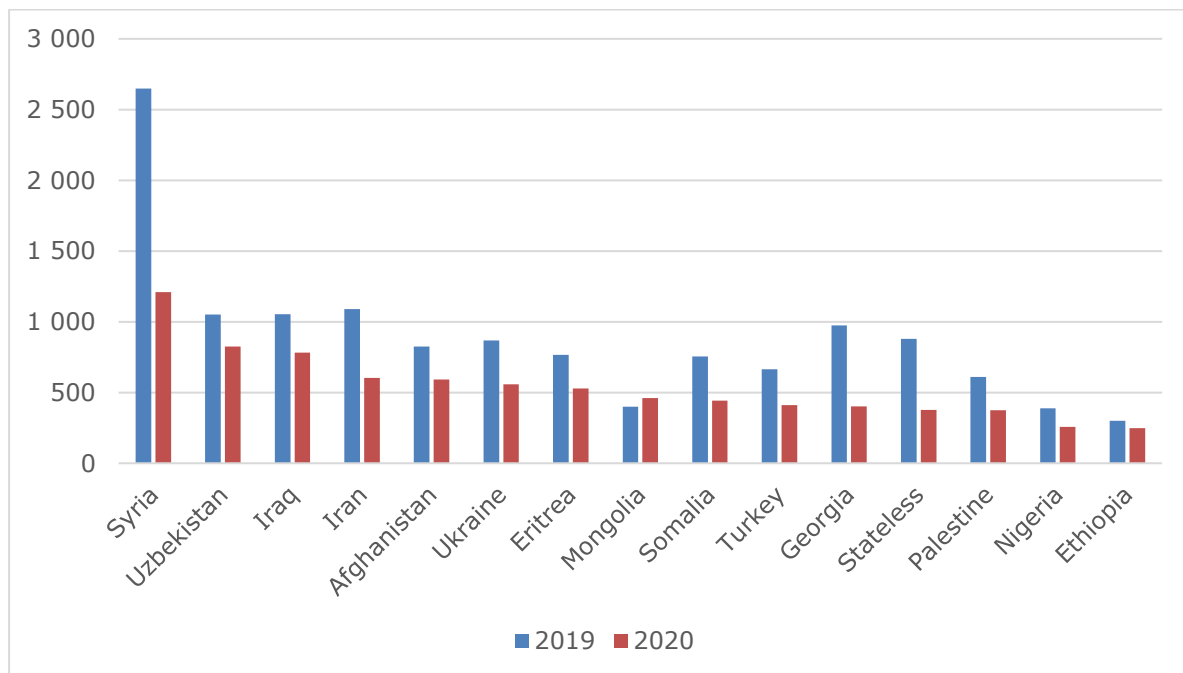
**Table 8: Asylum seekers, main nationality groups, 2019-2020**

Citizenship	2019	2020	Change %
Syria	2 649	1 209	-54,4%
Uzbekistan	1 052	826	-21,5%
Iraq	1 054	783	-25,7%
Iran	1 090	604	-44,6%
Afghanistan	825	593	-28,1%
Ukraine	868	559	-35,6%
Eritrea	766	529	-30,9%
Mongolia	399	461	15,5%
Somalia	755	443	-41,3%
Turkey	665	412	-38,0%
Georgia	975	401	-58,9%
Stateless	880	376	-57,3%
Palestine	611	374	-38,8%
Nigeria	389	257	-33,9%
Ethiopia	301	247	-17,9%
<i>Other</i>	8 679	4 917	-43,3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21 958</b>	<b>12 991</b>	<b>-40,8%</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

<sup>45</sup> Migrationsverket, [Verksamhets- och utgiftsprognos 2021-02-05](#), p. 34.



**Figure 6: Asylum seekers, main nationality groups, 2019-2020**

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

## 4.2 Reception of asylum applicants

The Swedish reception system for asylum seekers is managed by the Migration Agency. While an asylum application is under consideration, the applicant is enrolled at a reception unit, which will help him/her with accommodation and expenses during the waiting period.

There are two different main types of accommodation:

- In many cases, accommodation is provided by the Migration Agency in an apartment in a normal housing area, rented by the Migration Agency anywhere in the country, or at a reception centre. This type of housing is called reception facilities (*anläggningsboende*, ABO).
- As an alternative to stay in ABO accommodation provided by the Migration Agency, an asylum seeker has the possibility to arrange his/her own accommodation, which is called *eget boende* (EBO). Since applicants usually do not have the financial means to pay rent, they often stay with friends or relatives in such cases.

By the end of 2020, a total of 30 634 persons were enrolled in the Swedish reception system for asylum seekers, which is a decrease by 24% compared to 2019, when 40 312 people were enrolled at the end of the year. In line with this trend, and following a strong decrease in the number of asylum applications since 2015, the Migration Agency reduced its housing capacity and discontinued accommodation facilities. The Agency also downsized various other operations and

reduced the number of branch offices across Sweden as well as the number of employees.

In 2020, roughly 58% of all enrolled asylum seekers had arranged their own accommodation, and about 39% relied on accommodation provided by the Migration Agency. The remaining 3% were accommodated in other, specialised facilities.<sup>46</sup>

In April 2020, the Government tasked the Swedish Migration Agency to analyse and prepare the introduction of mandatory civic orientation sessions for asylum seekers. Following this task, the Government prepared legislation to introduce such civic orientation for asylum seekers.

#### *Changes to the Swedish reception system*

Whether or not asylum seekers should be allowed to arrange their own accommodation and stay with family members or friends has often been debated in Sweden. On 1 January 2020, new regulations regarding the reception system entered into force. The new rules aim to prevent asylum seekers from moving to areas with socio-economic challenges. As some areas in Sweden have experienced severe socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment and crime, the government intended to limit the inflow of migrants and asylum seekers to such areas. With the new rules, asylum seekers who move to such areas can lose their right to daily allowances.

In connection to this change of rules, the Government tasked the Migration Agency to check the addresses of asylum seekers in the Swedish reception and accommodation system and verify that those who choose to arrange their own accommodation register a valid private address. In July 2020, the Government clarified how socio-economically challenged areas are to be designated as such by the municipalities and the Swedish regional administrations so that the Migration Agency could implement the new system.

### **4.3 Asylum decisions**

In 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency made 20 980 first-instance decisions on asylum cases. This represents 15% fewer decisions than in 2019, when over 24 569 decisions were taken.

4 922 individuals were granted protection at first instance in 2020, compared to 6 540 in 2019. The overall protection rate was also lower in 2020 (23%) than in 2019 (27%). If Dublin cases and other asylum cases that Sweden did not examine

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<sup>46</sup> Asylum seekers placed in specialised facilities include unaccompanied minors that are placed in childcare facilities or family homes, and asylum seekers that are placed in health care facilities or police arrests.

in their substance, e.g. cases that were written off, are excluded from this calculation, the protection rate was 29% in 2020, compared to 35% in 2019.<sup>47</sup>

Table 9 below shows the distribution of positive and negative decisions for the ten quantitatively most important citizenship groups among all applicants who received a decision in 2020. Among these ten nationalities, Eritreans and Syrians had the highest chances of receiving protection at first instance, 64% and 63%, respectively. If one excludes cases in which the Migration Agency did not consider the application materially, for example due to the responsibility of another European country for the examination of the application (“Dublin cases”), then 76% of all Syrian applicants and 78% of all Eritrean applicants were granted protection. Another important nationality group with a relative high share of positive decisions was asylum seekers from Turkey, with a recognition rate of 51%.

**Table 9: First-instance decisions in asylum cases, main nationality groups, 2020**

Citizenship	Total number of decisions	Positive	Negative (after material consideration)	Negative (Dublin)*	Negative (other)**	Positive decisions as % of all decisions
Syria	2 255	1 422	455	170	208	63%
Iraq	1 385	231	883	138	133	17%
Uzbekistan	1 377	29	1 149	80	119	2%
Iran	1 184	328	686	63	107	28%
Afghanistan	932	366	424	69	73	39%
Turkey	778	393	323	8	54	51%
Somalia	755	222	321	127	85	29%
Stateless	714	236	346	56	76	33%
Eritrea	712	454	125	89	44	64%
Palestine	657	106	447	63	41	16%
<i>Other</i>	<i>10 231</i>	<i>1 135</i>	<i>7 111</i>	<i>834</i>	<i>1 151</i>	<i>11%</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 980</b>	<b>4 922</b>	<b>12 270</b>	<b>1 697</b>	<b>2 091</b>	<b>23%</b>

\* “Negative (Dublin)” means that the asylum examination is to be taken over by another State within the framework of the Dublin Regulation.

\*\* “Negative (other)” means that the Swedish Migration Agency has not considered the case materially because the application was written off. An application will be written off, among other reasons, when the applicant absconds or withdraws his/her application.

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

<sup>47</sup> Changing protection rates can be related to changing caseloads, changing travel routes, or otherwise changing circumstances.

*Protection statuses granted*

2 824 individuals who received a positive decision in 2020 were granted refugee status in accordance with the Geneva Convention. This equals to 57% of all those granted protection (4 922). Another 1 367 persons received subsidiary protection (28%). In addition to these two main statuses, roughly 14% (688 individuals) received a permit on the basis of impediments to the enforcement of return obligations or on other, exceptional grounds. In few cases, less than 1%, a humanitarian status was granted due to “particularly distressing circumstances”.

*Dublin procedures*

The lower number of asylum applications in 2020 also led to fewer cases handled in accordance with the Dublin Regulation.<sup>48</sup> During the year, the Migration Agency sent approximately 2 100 “take back” or “take charge” requests to other Dublin states, compared to 3 600 in 2019. 1 200 of these were accepted (2 100 in 2019).

At the same time, Sweden received roughly 5 500 Dublin requests from other states and accepted 3 900 of these. The number of Dublin requests coming in to Sweden from other Member States decreased in 2020, but an increase was noted in autumn. This was mainly related to families from Afghanistan that left Sweden to apply for asylum again in France or Germany.<sup>49</sup> In 2019, the number of incoming requests was 6 500.

The average processing time for outgoing Dublin cases in 2018 was 55 days, which is shorter than in 2019 (68 days).

**4.4 Resettlement**

Apart from being a destination for persons seeking asylum, Sweden also engages in global resettlement efforts. Following a cross-party agreement of 2015, Sweden has gradually increased the number of places in its resettlement programme. While approximately 1 900 spots were available in 2016 and earlier, the annual quota was raised to 3 400 for 2017, and to 5 000 persons in 2018. In 2019 and 2020, the quota was 5 000 as well. Contrary to beneficiaries of protection that come to Sweden as asylum seekers, resettled refugees are still granted permanent residence permits.

Resettlement is regulated by the Aliens Act in which specific criteria are mentioned. The Act serves as the legal basis for resettlement selection and procedures. An annual spending authorization from the Swedish Parliament and an annual Government decision for the responsible authority, the Swedish Migration Agency,

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<sup>48</sup> Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person.

<sup>49</sup> Migrationsverket, Årsredovisning 2020, p. 38-39.

regulate the operation of the programme. The Migration Agency decides on the allocation of the places within the resettlement quota in consultation with UNHCR and after consultation with the Ministry of Justice.

The resettlement programme consists essentially of two streams: dossier processing and selection missions. Residence permits are granted to persons classified as refugees under the Aliens Act or as persons in need of subsidiary protection. Sweden resettles upon request from the UNHCR, and – in exceptional cases – from a Swedish embassy.

### *Resettlement in 2020*

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Swedish resettlement quota for 2020 was not exhausted. Due to local restrictions, the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had difficulties to operate, and the Swedish Migration Agency decided to pause the transfer of individuals to Sweden for about five months (March–August 2020). At the end of the year 2020, just under 3 600 refugees had been resettled. The quota for the year was 5 000. Individuals that were selected but could not be transferred in 2020 are now expected to be resettled to Sweden in 2021, in addition to the quota for 2021, which is again 5 000, as in 2019 and 2018.

The distribution of quota places focused on the largest and most intense refugee situations as identified by the UNHCR, as well as vulnerable groups, and to mirror global resettlement needs. The Swedish program reserved 1 800 spots for Syrian refugees residing in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. 1 400 places were reserved for refugees stranded in countries along the so-called Central Mediterranean route, and 1 300 places were reserved for resettlement from host countries that are the focus of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The remaining 500 spots were earmarked for persons in need of urgent resettlement within the Prioritized Global Quota (PGQ), which normally encompasses a great variety of nationalities.

In 2020, a total of 3 221 residence permits were issued to resettled refugees. The number of residence permits issued is often different from the number of refugees transferred because the actual travel to Sweden can occur later than the granting of protection. The main nationalities resettled in 2020 were Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Syria and South Sudan (see Table 10).

**Table 10: Residence permits issued to resettled refugees, top-10 nationalities 2019-2020**

Citizenship	2019	2020
Eritrea	454	840
DR Congo	471	770
Sudan	363	457
Syria	2 161	355
South Sudan	223	274
Ethiopia	374	114
Burundi	70	97
Somalia	768	78
Turkey	10	49
Afghanistan	131	31
<i>Other</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>156</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 259</b>	<b>3 221</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

#### *New pre-departure measures for resettled refugees*

The Government has instructed the Migration Agency to offer refugees who await resettlement to Sweden a new type of preparatory pre-departure measures that shall facilitate their establishment and integration in Swedish society. In 2020, the Agency developed the basics for such preparatory measures and contracted IOM to put together relevant material and test it in the framework of pilot programmes. In December 2020, a pilot was carried out in Kampala (Uganda), and another pilot is planned to take place in spring 2021. The pilot project will be evaluated and shall then be used as the basis for a new, three-day pre-departure orientation programme for resettled refugees, to be implemented later in 2021.

#### *The EU-FRANK project*

In December 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency completed the project *Facilitating Resettlement and Refugee Admission through New Knowledge* (EU-FRANK), which had been carried out over for several years with support from the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The project aimed at facilitating increased resettlement to the EU, both in terms of quantity and quality, by supporting Member States on an operational level. The EU-FRANK project facilitated cooperation, coordination and peer-learning among States, to increase their knowledge about how to successfully manage the different steps of the resettlement process. Upon completion, the results of the project were handed over to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). EU-FRANK had given more than 300 individuals, who actively work on resettlement, opportunities to exchange experiences and build professional networks. It also delivered a training module and contributed to several research reports.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.eu-frank.eu/resources/publications.html>.

## 5 INTEGRATION OF PERSONS WHO ARE GRANTED PROTECTION

In 2020, 14 106 persons who were granted a residence permit left the reception system for asylum seekers and were settled in a Swedish municipality. This figure is considerably lower than the corresponding figures for 2019 (25 915), 2018 (44 216) and 2017 (68 751). The decrease is mainly the result of a significantly lower inflow of asylum seekers to Sweden after the peak in 2015. The figure includes asylum seekers that were granted protection or residence permits for other (e.g., humanitarian) reasons, persons that were taken to Sweden under the Swedish resettlement programme, and family members of beneficiaries of international protection.

In 2020, the Swedish Government continued its policies to reform and facilitate the integration of these newly arrived persons, in particular with regard to labour market participation, language acquisition and newly arrived students' and pupils' education.

### *New website for integration*

In 2020, the website "Information Sverige" (*Information Sweden*)<sup>51</sup> was launched. It is available in ten languages. Among other relevant information to people who are new in the country, it contains material for the civic orientation course for newly arrived immigrants. The website is funded by the Government and run by the County Administrative Boards.

### *Swedish language training for non-working parents with small children*

The Government launched a new Swedish language training initiative for non-working parents with small children, including persons on parental leave. The aim of the initiative is to improve knowledge of the Swedish language. Longer periods of parental leave can increase the time it takes for especially women to integrate into the labour market, and an interruption of language studies may lead to a regression in the language development.

### *Investments in Swedish from day one extended*

Since 2015, the Swedish study associations and folk high schools have been granted government funding for outreach measures targeted at primarily asylum seekers with the aim to strengthen their knowledge of Swedish language and society. The initiative shall give participants a meaningful activity during the asylum processing period and open doors to the local civil society. An increase in the knowledge of the Swedish language is considered to contribute to faster establishment on the labour market. This initiative has been prolonged until 2022.

### *Measures to increase employment among foreign-born women*

The integration period for newly arrived beneficiaries of international protection tends to be particularly protracted for women, and especially women with short

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.informationsverige.se/en/>

education. In addition, women participate in labour market policy measures to a lower extent than men while they take part in the Introduction Programme. In 2019, the need of a clear gender perspective in all measures within the integration programme was included as an assignment in the appropriation warrant of the Public Employment Service. In 2020, the assignment was extended to also apply in 2021.

*Increased grants to municipalities with high refugee intake*

In 2020, the government introduced a one-year targeted grant for municipalities with relatively high refugee intake. It also decided to extend and raise this grant. The aim of the grant is to make it easier for municipalities to organise an effective reception of newly arrived immigrants, which in turn shall create better conditions for settling in and integrating into working and community life.

*Intensive introduction year for newly arrived immigrants*

According to the political agreement from January 2019 between the Government, the Centre Party and the Liberals, an integration year should be introduced. In the budget bill for 2020, the government announced that this would be introduced as an "intensive introduction year" for newly arrived immigrants within the introduction program. The intensive introduction year should consist of a chain of intensive language measures and vocational measures that are provided in parallel or one after another other within a relatively short period of time. The aim is that, after finishing the intensive introduction year, participants can be matched to the labour market and get a job within one year after the start of the intensive year. From 15 April 2021, newly arrived women and men will be given the opportunity to participate in the intensive introduction year.

*"Entry Agreements"*

In 2020, preparations for "Entry Agreements" were made and the Government intends to introduce this measure in 2021. "Entry Agreements" is a new model for getting long-term unemployed and newly arrived immigrants into the labour market and to facilitate future skills supplies for employers.

*Local cooperation for employment*

The Delegation for the Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua) was tasked to promote cooperation between municipalities and the *Arbetsförmedlingen* (the Swedish Public Employment Service, PES) and to develop new forms of collaboration. The aim is to help reduce youth unemployment and enable newly arrived immigrants to become more effectively established in work. Within its overarching mandate, Dua's tasks include encouraging municipalities and the PES to enter into collaborative agreements at local level. One example of local agreements is the "Local Job Tracks" initiative. In a Local Job Track, newly arrived immigrants receive the education and training needed to get a specific job and at the same time gather work experience with a future employer.



*Extended labour market support due to the Covid-19 pandemic*

To counteract negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment in Sweden, also with regard to labour market integration of newly arrived beneficiaries of protection and their family members, the Government decided to extend the maximum period for state-subsidised labour market programmes such as employment support, extra jobs, introductory jobs and new start jobs by 12 months, i.e. from 2 to 3 years. This means that people who have received decisions that will expire may take part in extra jobs, introductory jobs and new start jobs for an additional 12 months. The possibility of extension was temporary and available until the end of December 2020.

In addition, the Government also decided to extend the maximum period for support for starting a business to a maximum of 12 months. The possibility of extended time was available until the end of December 2020.

## 6 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

### *Reception and accommodation of unaccompanied minors*

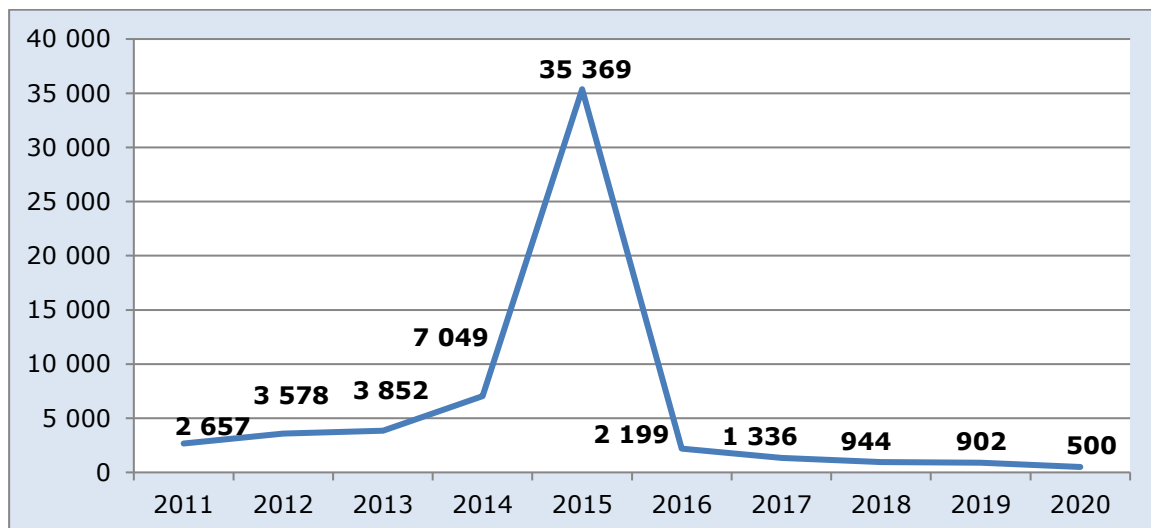
There were no major policy developments in 2020 regarding unaccompanied minors in Sweden. However, the Swedish Migration Agency developed a new app for asylum seeking children. The purpose of this app is to explain the asylum process through simple pictures and spoken speech in several languages. The app can also be used by adults who meet asylum-seeking children or by schools, for educational purposes.

In June 2020, the Government decided to launch an inquiry regarding the method for medical age assessments currently used by the National Board of Forensic Medicine in the framework of asylum procedures. The aim of the inquiry is to clarify how likely it is that a person of unknown age can be assessed as being older or younger than 18 on the basis of the medical method currently used. The age assessment method used had often been discussed and questioned by experts and in public debates. The method includes examining the applicants' wisdom teeth (with panoramic x-ray) and knee joints (with an MRI examination).

### *Numerical trends*

After 2015, when more than 35 000 unaccompanied minors (UAM) applied for asylum in Sweden, the number of UAM decreased strongly. In 2020, the number of asylum seeking UAM was 500. This number represents just under 4% of all asylum seekers that came to Sweden that year. This percentage was 8% in 2016 and as high as 22% in 2015.

**Figure 7: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in Sweden, 2011-2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

### *Countries of origin and protection rate*

In contrast to the years 2014-2016, Afghanistan was no longer the dominating country of origin of unaccompanied minors arriving in Sweden in 2017-2020. In

2020, UAM from Syria constituted instead the largest nationality group, with 108 asylum applicants, while Afghanistan and Somalia were the second and third largest groups, with 85 and 60 UAM applying for asylum, respectively.

**Table 11: Unaccompanied minors, main nationalities 2016-2020**

Citizenship	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total 2016-2020
Afghanistan	665	222	99	121	85	1 192
Somalia	421	159	106	124	69	879
Syria	180	159	136	151	108	734
Morocco	144	235	126	125	62	692
Eritrea	74	52	100	38	25	289
Albania	104	78	37	20	14	253
Ethiopia	133	53	34	14	5	239
Iraq	93	52	31	37	10	223
Stateless	45	39	29	37	16	166
Algeria	47	39	24	18	17	145
<i>Other</i>	293	248	222	217	89	1 069
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 199</b>	<b>1 336</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>5 881</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

As in previous years, UAM were more frequently granted protection than adult asylum seekers. Whereas the protection rate (at first instance) for all asylum seekers in 2020 was 23%, the protection rate for UAM was 46%. This is a significantly higher protection rate than in 2019, where it was 38%. With cases in which the Swedish Migration Agency did not consider the application materially, for example in "Dublin cases", excluded, the protection rate for UAM was 60% (compared to 56% in 2019).

The majority of UAM coming to Sweden in 2020 were boys (69%), and most of them were registered as being between 13 and 17 years old.

**Table 12: Unaccompanied minors applying for asylum, age and gender, 2020**

Age ranges	Girls	Boys	Total
<i>0-6 years</i>	20	20	40
<i>7-12 years</i>	39	45	84
<i>13-15 years</i>	53	110	163
<i>16-17 years</i>	45	168	213
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>500</b>

**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

## 7 TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

### *Trends regarding trafficking in human beings*

Seen over several years, trafficking in human beings seems to be a growing phenomenon in Sweden, although rising numbers of suspected cases can also be a result of increased awareness and resources made available to and by competent authorities.

In 2020, the Migration Agency identified 363 persons as potential victims of trafficking. Among these, 220 were women and 143 were men. 47 were under the age of 18. The potential victims were mainly from Nigeria, Thailand and Morocco. In 2019, 481 individuals had been identified as potential victims.

Labour exploitation was the most frequent form of exploitation found among the cases identified in 2020, with 169 cases. The second most common type of exploitation was sexual exploitation, with 126 cases. Victims of trafficking were identified within all types of migration to Sweden, not only among asylum seekers.

The Migration Agency also processes cases in which the person in charge of a preliminary criminal investigation applies for temporary residence permits for suspected victims or witnesses of crimes. This includes trafficking victims that cooperate with law enforcement authorities. In 2020, the Agency issued 46 such permits in relation to potential victims of trafficking. In addition to these, 15 so-called “reflection periods”, a type of short-term permits, were granted.

Over the year 2020, 18 individuals were arrested or otherwise involved in criminal proceedings related to trafficking offences, and 9 persons were indeed convicted for such crimes.

There were no major policy developments in Sweden regarding trafficking in human beings in 2020.

## 8 IRREGULAR MIGRATION

One element in detecting and tackling irregular immigration is to ensure an efficient and reliable system of checks on persons in order to prevent foreign nationals from travelling into or staying in Sweden in contravention of the relevant regulations. Checks on persons are carried out both at the EU external borders and within the Swedish territory. Sweden's geographical position, however, means that there are no external land borders. Most irregular migrants who arrive in Sweden have travelled via another EU Member State or by air.<sup>52</sup>

Since 2015, Sweden has also carried out checks at its intra-Schengen borders, such as at the Öresund Bridge between Sweden and Denmark and in ferry terminals. In November 2020, the Government decided on internal border controls until 11 May 2021.<sup>53</sup>

In December 2020, amendments to the Swedish Aliens Act and the national law on the Schengen Information System entered into force. These changes mean that an alien at an entry or exit check at the border or an internal check within the country will be obliged to accept to be photographed and to leave fingerprints so that he or she can be identified with a search in the Schengen Information System. This applies if the person's identity cannot be determined in another way.<sup>54</sup>

### *Workplace inspections*

Sweden has also worked to increase and improve inspections at workplaces to detect and counteract irregular work. New legislation, in force since July 2018, has given the Police Authority extended rights to conduct such inspections, based on risk assessments, in sectors where there is an elevated risk of individuals working without the necessary work or residence permits. The aim is to prevent unsound employers from exploiting irregular migrants. Already in 2017, the Government had tasked a number of Swedish public authorities to jointly improve the methods for detecting workplace-related crime and irregularities, which also includes work carried out by foreign nationals without the necessary permits. In 2020, it was decided to follow-up and intensify this project, e.g. by increasing the number of workplace inspections.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Swedish Migration Agency/EMN (2012): [Practical responses to irregular migration into Sweden](#), a study produced by the European Migration Network (EMN).

<sup>53</sup> Beslut om återinförande av gränskontroll vid inre gräns, [Pressmeddelande](#) från Justitiedepartementet, 5 November 2020.

<sup>54</sup> These legal amendments were necessary to reflect Council Decision 2007/533/JHA of 12 June 2007 on the establishment, operation and use of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) and Regulation (EC) No 1987/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the establishment, operation and use of the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) in Swedish law.

## 9 RETURN

In order to ensure the sustainability of the Swedish asylum system, those who, following an examination, are found not to be in need of protection must return to their countries of origin. A rejection of an application for a residence permit is usually accompanied by a refusal-of-entry or expulsion order. In the first place, the persons concerned should return on a voluntary basis, if needed with the support of the Swedish Migration Agency. In cases where the obligation to return to one's country of origin is not respected, the Police is responsible for implementing the refusal-of-entry or expulsion order.

### *Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic*

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on both voluntary and forced return. Different measures were taken to mitigate the effects. For example, to effectively assist returnees, the Swedish Migration Agency decided in September 2020 to reimburse certain costs incurred due to the pandemic, such as costs for Covid-19 tests and possible quarantine costs in the country of destination. The aim of this was to enable returns to take place even where a third-country national did not have the means to pay for costs incurred due to the pandemic. Pre-departure Covid-19 tests were made possible to enable returns to countries that require a newly taken test.

Further to this, the gathering of updated information proved particularly important during the pandemic. The Migration Agency developed a comprehensive overview of about 160 third countries of return and their respective testing and quarantine requirements, to support the Agency's reception officers in their work and to enable effective return procedures. The overview also aimed at decreasing the number of flight cancellations and avoiding unnecessary re-bookings.

### *The European Return and Reintegration Network*

In 2018, the Migration Agency became a partner in the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN). The Program aims to strengthen, facilitate and streamline the return process in the EU through common initiatives, and to promote a durable and efficient reintegration in countries outside the EU.

In 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency, in cooperation with ERRIN, developed a pilot-project called "Sustainable Reintegration in Afghanistan" (ERRIN-SRA). The project aims to improve the long-term opportunities for reintegration of Afghan citizens returning from Europe. It created and implemented a new concept to assist returnees to start businesses in Afghanistan. As part of the activities, the project conducted an information campaign in selected districts of Afghanistan to sensitise the families of returnees about the challenges their sons and daughters face – and tackle the issue of post-return stigma. Moreover, the project has contributed to dissemination of information directly from project staff in Afghanistan to counsellors at European Migration Authorities.

### *Measures to make returns more effective*

In December 2020, the Government tasked the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Migration Agency to analyse factors that prevent the enforcement of refusal of entry decisions and return decisions. The two authorities are now expected to present proposals for how such factors, i.e. obstacles to efficient returns, could be overcome. The task also includes an analysis regarding the exchange of data and information (e.g., on returnees) between the two authorities and proposals for how this exchange might be improved.<sup>55</sup>

Further to this, the Government tasked the Swedish Agency for Public Management to analyse how the Migration Agency, the Police Authority and the Prison and Probation Service can make their work on returns more effective.<sup>56</sup>

In 2020, the Swedish Migration Agency also initiated cooperation with Frontex in the field of voluntary return.

### *Detention and alternatives to detention*

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Migration Agency reduced the number of detention places from 520 to just under 300 to adapt detention facilities to Covid-19-related rules as set up by the Swedish Public Health Agency. Connected to this, it was also decided that third-country nationals should not be detained if their return decision was considered not to be enforceable in the near future. The Agency also limited the number of visitors at detention centres. Rooms for meetings between detainees and visitors were designed to prevent the spread of Covid-19, e.g. through the use of Plexiglas barriers to separate a detainee from a visitor.

The Migration Agency decided to establish a new detention centre near Gothenburg, which shall replace an older one in the same area. In parallel, the Agency also worked to establish a new detention facility in the North of Sweden.

The Swedish Police Authority decided to use alternatives to detention to a greater extent during the pandemic. This has implied a more extensive use of supervision to prevent the risk of absconding, as an alternative to detention.

### *Reintegration support*

In order to facilitate return and to strengthen the incentives for voluntary return, economic reintegration support can be granted to persons who have received a final decision or withdrawn their application and choose to return voluntarily to a country with very limited opportunities for re-establishment. In 2020, 291 persons

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<sup>55</sup> Regeringen (Justitiedepartementet), *Uppdrag till Migrationsverket och Polismyndigheten att analysera och föreslå åtgärder för att effektivisera informationsöverförandet*, Regeringsbeslut Ju2020/04473, 3 December 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Regeringen (Justitiedepartementet), *Uppdrag till Statskontoret att analysera och föreslå åtgärder för att effektivisera Migrationsverkets, Polismyndighetens och Kriminalvårdens arbete med återvändande*, Regeringsbeslut Ju2020/01867/SIM, Ju2019/01414/SIM (delvis), 7 September 2020.

were granted reestablishment support provided by the Swedish Migration Agency. Most of the beneficiaries were from Iraq (159) or Afghanistan (66). In another 275 cases, reintegration support was granted under ERRIN. Again, Iraq and Afghanistan were the main nationalities among those receiving this type of support. However, the number of grants was lower than in 2019 and 2018.

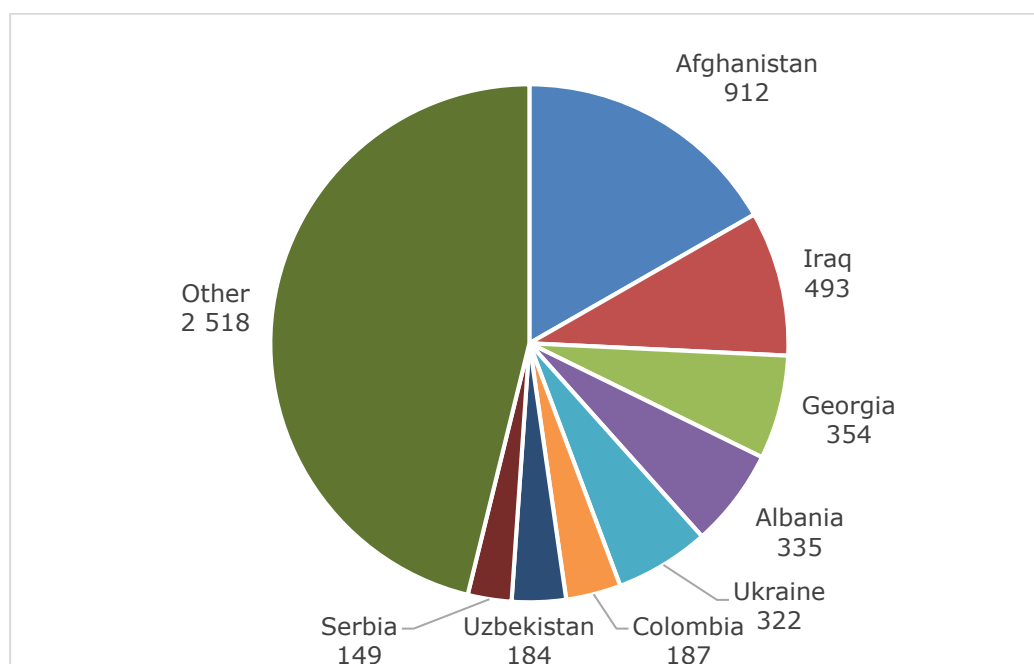
#### *Voluntary and forced returns*

In 2020, a total of 5 454 former asylum seekers were de-registered from the Swedish asylum reception system and returned to their home countries (3 069), to member states of the EU or EEA (2 167), other countries (170), or to unknown destinations (55). 4 387 of these returns were voluntary, assisted by the Migration Agency. The remaining 1 070 cases were forced returns, carried out by the Police.

The most frequent nationality groups among those who returned in 2020 were Afghanistan (912), Iraq (493), Georgia (354), Albania (335) and Ukraine (322); see figure 8 below.

These figures do not include persons who were not enrolled in the asylum reception system when they left Sweden. The overall number of returns in 2020 was therefore higher; there were around 6 200 voluntary and 3 100 forced returns. Overall, the number of returns decreased in comparison to earlier years.

**Figure 8: Voluntary and forced returns, main citizenship groups in 2020**



**Source:** Swedish Migration Agency.

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