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Report from
EMN Sweden
2018:2

Impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination



**EMN study 2018:
Impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination
- Country Report Sweden**

Report from EMN Sweden 2018:2

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Table of contents

Executive Summary	4
Sammanfattning på svenska	6
1 Introduction	8
2 Overview of the national situation	11
2.1 Legal framework and national authorities involved in implementing the visa liberalisation process	11
2.2 Public and policy debates related to the visa liberalisation process	11
2.3 Main links between the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries and Sweden	12
2.4 Main trends in cross-border mobility and long-term migration, including asylum, from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries	14
3 Positive impact of visa liberalisation in Sweden	18
3.1 Description of national situation	18
3.2 Economic benefits, including foreign trade and direct investments	18
3.3 Growth of tourism following visa liberalisation	20
3.4 Impact of visa liberalisation on the national labour market	22
3.5 Impact of visa liberalisation on the number of foreign students	23
4 Challenges of visa liberalisation in Sweden	25
4.1 Description of national situation	25
4.2 Voluntary and forced returns to the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries	26
4.3 Smuggled and/or trafficked persons from the visa-free countries	27
4.4 Number of nationals from the visa-free countries found to be illegally present	29
4.5 Signs of possible misuse of visa liberalisation	29
4.6 Offences committed by nationals of the visa-free countries	30
5 Measures put in place to deal with possible misuse of visa-free regimes	32
5.1 Description of national situation	32
5.2 Measures to fight illegal employment and/or smuggling and trafficking	33
5.3 Measures to reduce the incidence of nationals found to be illegally present	33
5.4 Measures to deal with administrative burdens since the introduction of the visa-free regime	33
5.5 Measures to deal with the possible misuse of visa liberalisation	34
5.6 National response to the influx of asylum seekers from the visa-free countries	35
Conclusions	36

Executive Summary

The EMN focussed study *Impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination* was part of the 2018 EMN work programme and was carried out in the Member States and Norway. The Swedish national report was compiled by experts at the Swedish national contact point of the EMN with contributions from experts at the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Police, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, Statistics Sweden, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, Business Sweden and Visit Sweden.

The countries targeted in the study are the Western Balkan countries of Serbia, Montenegro, FYROM (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania and the Eastern Partnership countries of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, for all of which visa liberalisation was introduced in the 2009 to 2017 period. The study period is set from 2007 to 2017. More specifically, the study discusses if, and how, visa liberalisation has had an impact on Sweden in several different areas including asylum and legal migration categories such as work-related immigration and immigration for education reasons. Furthermore, it looks into any effects on foreign trade and the economy at large, notably tourism. Finally, it aims to scrutinise downsides such as trafficking in human beings and smuggling and their possible connection to visa liberalisation as well as if and to what extent the incidence of other crimes can be connected to nationals of the countries targeted in the study.

The Western Balkan countries in particular have previous strong links to Sweden, dating back to labour immigration from the former Yugoslavia in the 1960s and the high number of refugees coming to Sweden following the civil war, particularly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the 1990s. There is a considerable diaspora in Sweden from the former Yugoslavia, much less so from the Eastern Partnership countries.

The study finds that the major immediate consequence of visa liberalisation has been a high increase in the number of asylum seekers. This was particularly noticeable in the cases of Serbia, FYROM, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia. The number of asylum seekers from Albania and Ukraine also increased. However, the latter countries did not increase in connection with the introduction of visa liberalisation, which suggests other factors are at play as well, in the case of Ukraine, particularly the start of the civil war. The vast majority of asylum applications were rejected and many were considered unfounded. Small numbers of applicants from the countries concerned were considered to be in need for international protection. Interestingly, Albania stands out as the country with the highest number of asylum applicants considered to be in need for international protection after visa liberalisation. Overall, asylum applications tend to decrease again after an initial rise following the introduction of visa-free travel. Criminality among Georgian asylum seekers in Sweden made headlines in 2017 to 2018, but visa liberalisation as such has been little discussed in public and policy debate in Sweden. The number of asylum seekers from the countries studied has at times been a challenge for the Swedish Migration Agency, contributing to over-burdening and a need to prioritise accelerated procedures for these applicants. Nationals from the countries targeted in the study make up a large share of the total number of return decisions as well as an increasing share of instances of detected identity document fraud and of persons refused entry at the external borders.

Overall effects on legal migration such as migration for remunerated activities and for education reasons appear to be limited, at least for the time being, and the number of permits issued to self-employed persons is negligible throughout the study period. Importantly, however, the number of residence permits issued for remunerated activities for nationals of the Western Balkan countries increases gradually throughout the period and peaks in 2017.

Looking at the number of external border-crossings and in particular guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation it is clear that more and more people from the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries travel to and from Sweden. Furthermore, visa liberalisation has in all likelihood contributed to the establishment of a number of direct flights to the Western Balkans, which in turn has fuelled additional incoming (and outbound) travellers. Tourists from the countries concerned are not prioritised by the Swedish tourism business. With the large Western Balkans community in Sweden in mind, there is reason to believe a large share of nationals from the Western Balkans in particular travel to Sweden with the main purpose to visit family and friends. However, the increasing number of registered guest nights for nationals of the countries studied reasonably yields more profit to businesses and indicates tourist spending could be increasing as well.

Turning to the issue of foreign trade and any other recorded economic benefits for Sweden, the study finds that trade with the absolute majority of the targeted countries has increased over the past decade, even if levels remain comparatively low. It is difficult to see a causal link to the visa-free regime, however. Visa liberalisation has facilitated business contacts and business development, in particular for companies in the countries concerned that wish to enter European markets. However, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) are probably more important for trade development.

There is little evidence in available data that human trafficking from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries has increased after visa liberalisation. However, the Police reports that trafficking did increase after the introduction of visa-free travel and EU accession of some countries in Eastern Europe. Due to limited data availability, it is challenging to explore any connections to smuggling and crime levels in Sweden. There is sufficient reporting from the Police and the Migration Agency, however, to indicate that visa liberalisation has fuelled criminality among Georgian asylum seekers in Sweden.

In conclusion, the major immediate impact of visa liberalisation was a noticeable increase in the numbers of asylum seekers. Legal migration appear to be less affected, at least for the time being. The latter also largely appears to be the case when it comes to criminal activities such as trafficking in human beings. Travel between Sweden and the targeted countries and the number of guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation has increased progressively over the period.

Sammanfattning på svenska

EMN-studien *Impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination* ingick i EMN:s arbetsprogram för 2018 och genomfördes i EU:s medlemsländer och i Norge. Den svenska nationella rapporten har tagits fram av experter inom den svenska kon-taktpunkten för EMN och med bidrag från experter inom Migrationsverket, Polisen, Åklagarmyndigheten, Statistiska Centralbyrån, Tillväxtverket, Business Sweden och Visit Sweden.

Studien är inriktad på länderna Serbien, Montenegro, Före detta jugoslaviska re-publiken Makedonien (FYROM), Bosnien och Hercegovina och Albanien på Västra Balkan samt Moldavien, Georgien och Ukraina inom det Östliga Partnerskapet, som alla blev viseringsfria under perioden 2009-2017. Studien omfattar åren 2007-2017. Mer specifikt diskuterar studien om, och i så fall hur, viseringsfriheten har påverkat Sverige inom flera olika områden så som asyl och kategorier av reglerad invandring som arbetstagare och studenter. Vidare tittar den på eventuella effekter på handel och ekonomin som helhet, inklusive turism. Slutligen syftar den till att undersöka negativa sidor som människohandel och smuggling och deras möjliga samband med viseringsfrihet liksom om och i så fall i vilken utsträckning förekomsten av andra brott kan sättas i samband med medborgare i de länder som ingår i studien.

Speciellt länderna på Västra Balkan har tidigare starka band till Sverige som går tillbaka till arbetskraftsinvandringen från före detta Jugoslavien under 1960-talet och det stora antalet flyktingar som kom till Sverige efter inbördeskriget, särskilt från Bosnien och Hercegovina, under 1990-talet. Det finns en betydande diaspora i Sverige från före detta Jugoslavien, vilket inte är fallet med länderna i det Östliga Partnerskapet.

I studien framkommer att den största omedelbara konsekvensen av viseringsfrihet har varit en stor ökning av antalet asylsökande. Detta var särskilt märkbart i fallen med Serbien, FYROM, Bosnien och Hercegovina och Georgien. Antalen asylsökande från Albanien och Ukraina ökade också. Dessa ökade dock inte i samband med att viseringsfrihet infördes, vilket antyder att andra faktorer också har spelat roll, i fallet Ukraina särskilt början på inbördeskriget. Den stora majoriteten av asylansökningarna har avslagits och många har bedömts som ogrundade. Låga antal sökande från de studerade länderna har bedömts att vara i behov av internationellt skydd. Albanien sticker intressant nog ut som det land varifrån flest asylsökande bedömts vara i behov av internationellt skydd även efter viseringsfriheten. I allmänhet minskar antalet asylansökningar från alla länderna över tid efter det att viseringsfrihet införts. Brottslighet bland georgiska asylsökande i Sverige skapade rubriker under 2017-2018, men viseringsfrihet som sådan har inte diskuterats i stor utsträckning i offentlig och poli-tisk debatt i Sverige. Antalen asylsökande från länderna i fråga har periodvis varit en utmaning för Migrationsverket och bidragit till en ökad arbetsbörda och ett behov av att hantera ansökningarna snabbt. Medborgare från länderna i studien utgör en stor andel av de med beslut om återvändande liksom en ökande andel av de som ertapas med förfalskade id-handlingar och de som vägras inresa vid yttre gräns.

Den övergripande påverkan på reglerad invandring så som för arbetsmarknadsskäl eller för studier ser ut att vara begränsad, åtminstone för tillfället, och antalet till-stånd utfärdade till egenföretagare är försumbart under studieperioden. Viktigt att notera är dock att antalet utfärdade uppehållstillstånd för arbetsmarknadsskäl till

medborgare i länderna på Västra Balkan gradvis ökar under perioden och är som högst 2017.

Tittar man på antalet passager av yttre gräns och speciellt på antalet gästnätter på hotell och andra typer av boenden är det tydligt att fler och fler människor från län-derna på Västra Balkan och inom det Östliga Partnerskapet reser till och från Sverige. Vidare har viseringsfriheten med stor sannolikhet bidragit till att ett antal flyglinjer startats till destinationer på Västra Balkan, vilket i sin tur ökat antalet resande i båda riktningarna. Turister från länderna i studien är inte en prioriterad grupp av den svenska turistnäringen. Med tanke på den stora gruppen från Västra Balkan i Sverige är det troligt att en stor andel medborgare från dessa länder reser till Sverige med huvudsakligt syfte att besöka vänner och familj. De ökande antalen registrerade gästnätter avseende medborgare i de aktuella länderna har rimligen lett till ökade intäkter inom besöksnäringen och antyder att inkomsterna från turism kan bli större.

När det gäller frågan om handel och eventuella ekonomiska fördelar för Sverige kan konstateras att handeln med majoriteten av länderna ifråga har ökat under det senaste decenniet även om nivåerna fortfarande är förhållandevis låga. Det är dock svårt att se orsakssamband med viseringsfriheten. Viseringsfrihet har underlättat ut-veckling av affärsverksamhet, men de djupgående och omfattande frihandelsavtalen (DCFTA) är förmodligen viktigare för handelsutvecklingen. Det finns inga direkta bevis för att människohandel från länderna på Västra Balkan och det Östliga partner-skapet har ökat efter viseringsfriheten. Polisen har visserligen rapporterat att män-niskohandeln tidigare ökat i samband med viseringsfrihet och EU-utvidgningen med länder i Östeuropa. På grund av begränsad tillgång till statistik är det svårt att un-dersöka eventuella samband med smuggling och andra brott begångna i Sverige. Det finns tillräcklig rapportering från Polisen och Migrationsverket dock som indikerar att viseringsfriheten har underblåst brottslighet bland georgiska asylsökande i Sverige.

Sammanfattningsvis har den största initiala effekten av viseringsfrihet varit en påta-glig ökning av antalet asylsökande. Reglerad invandring verkar ha påverkats i mindre grad, åtminstone fram tills nu. Detta gäller även i stort sett brottslighet så som männi-skohandel. Resande mellan Sverige och de viseringsfria länderna och antalet gästnät-ter på hotell och andra former av boenden har stadigt ökat under perioden.

1 Introduction

The EU has established a common visa policy for transit through or intended stays in the territory of the Schengen States.¹ The Visa Code² provides the overall framework of EU visa cooperation. It establishes the procedures and conditions for issuing visas for short stays (i.e. no more than 90 days of stay in a 180-days period) in and transit through the territories of EU countries.

A Regulation³ establishes the visa requirements and visa exemptions for non-EU nationals entering the EU in view of a short stay. The Regulation provides a common list of countries whose nationals must hold a visa when crossing the external borders of a (Member) State and a common list of those who are exempted from the visa requirement. The decisions to change the lists of non-EU countries are taken based on a case-by-case assessment of a variety of criteria also known as visa liberalisation benchmarks. Notably, these decisions are sometimes taken as a result of successful visa liberalisation dialogues with the third countries concerned. Furthermore, the Regulation establishes a suspension mechanism to respond to emergency situations such as abuse resulting from visa exemption.

Visa liberalisation is one of the EU's most powerful tools in facilitating people-to-people contacts and strengthening ties between the citizens of third countries and the EU. At the same time, visa regimes are instrumental to restrict unlimited and unwanted migration and trans-border organised crime. Visa liberalisation is therefore granted to countries that are deemed safe and well-governed, meeting a number of criteria in various policy areas. Visa liberalisation benchmarks include, for example, migration management, public policy and security, economic benefit (tourism and foreign trade) and external relations including considerations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

While migration policies have received considerable attention from comparative researchers, much less is known about global shifts in border policies dealing with short-term mobility. Studies conducted in the past have revealed that visa restrictions were costly, they carried an administrative burden and required additional personnel. The imposition of travel requirements did not reduce only inflows but also outflows, and thus, overall movement of persons.⁴ The importance of the visa liberalisation agreements has been demonstrated by research that was pursued prior to the visa waiver agreements in light of the political commitments between the EU and its east-

- 1 To date the Schengen Area encompasses most EU States, except for Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom.
- 2 Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code)
- 3 Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 of 15 March 2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement - Official Journal L 081, 21.03.2001.
- 4 *The Effect of Visa Policies on International Migration Dynamics (2014)*, Working Papers, Paper 89, April 2014, University of Oxford, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/23ae/89f7acdecb909aaa601210519ef48848917e.pdf>

ern neighbours, given the growing need for less division on the European continent.⁵ Furthermore, analysis showed that the prospects of visa liberalisation agreements constitute a powerful incentive for far-reaching reforms in the policy areas of freedom, security and justice.⁶

What has not been addressed thoroughly however, was whether measures affecting the granting of short-term visas could have an impact not only on short-term travel but also on longer-term immigration and residence of foreign nationals.⁷ EU Member States have been facing different challenges caused by visa liberalisation, such as persisting irregular migration, and issues related to prevention and fight against organised crime.⁸

Whereas the limited research done in this field proved that there were clear benefits for the EU to conclude such agreements with third countries, the overall impact of visa liberalisation agreements with the Western Balkan and the Eastern Partnership countries remains vastly under-researched.⁹

Consequently, the aim of this EMN study is to provide an overview of national experiences with the functioning of the visa-free regime. It will identify challenges, best practices and positive experiences, and provide up-to-date information on the latest tendencies in this area of migration policy.

The study will cover Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries that have successfully concluded visa liberalisation dialogues according to the relevant action plans and roadmaps. Such dialogues were successfully conducted between the EU and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Montenegro and Serbia (2009), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010) as well as Moldova (2014), Ukraine and Georgia (2017). They resulted in granting visa-free travel to citizens of these countries.

More specifically, the study will focus on the impact of visa liberalisation on countries of destination. The visa-free regime is the most tangible benefit for the citizens of the Western Balkan countries in the process of their integration into the EU and one of the core objectives for the Eastern Partnership countries. Thus, the subjects of the study are third-country nationals of these visa-free countries.

5 *Consequences of Schengen Visa Liberalisation for the Citizens of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova*, Migration Policy Center, 2012, <http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/23497/MPC-RR-2012-01.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

6 *The Impact of Visa Liberalisation in Eastern Partnership Countries, Russia and Turkey on Trans-Border Mobility*, CEPS Paper in Liberty and Security, 2014, <https://www.ceps.eu/publications/impact-visa-liberalisation-eastern-partnership-countries-russia-and-turkey-trans-border>

7 *Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe, impact of visa abolition*, Centre for Eastern Studies 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/migration_report_0.pdf

8 *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council First Report under the Visa Suspension Mechanism - Brussels, 20.12.2017 COM (2017) 815 final*, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/20171220_first_report_under_suspension_mechanism_en.pdf

9 However, see for example *Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe, impact of visa abolition*, Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/migration_report_0.pdf

This study will consider the national policies and practices following changes in migration flows raised by visa exemptions in the mentioned third countries. The scope of the study includes the period 2007-2017 and focuses on the immediate years prior to and after the visa waiver agreements entered into force. The study is based on the presumption that visa liberalisation yields effects on cross-border mobility.

The main questions the study addresses are the following:

- Which were the previous links between Sweden and the countries studied, particularly with regard to potential pull factors for cross-border mobility and migration?
- What was the impact on cross-border mobility as a whole, for example on external border-crossings, and including persons refused entry at the external borders and persons found to be illegally present from these countries?
- What was the impact of visa liberalisation on the flow of asylum applications (and including returns) from the countries concerned and what measures were taken to address this situation?
- How did visa liberalisation affect legal migration trends such as immigration for remunerated activities and education reasons from nationals of the countries targeted?
- Has visa liberalisation so far had any effects on the economy at large, including foreign trade and tourism?
- Were there any effects on transnational crime such as trafficking in human beings and smuggling connected to nationals of the countries concerned and the incidence of crime committed by nationals of these countries?

This report is the Swedish contribution to this comparative study. As with all EMN studies, it is primarily based on secondary sources. The necessary information has been gathered mainly through desk research. Unless otherwise noted, statistics for the study was provided by the Swedish Migration Agency and Eurostat.

2 Overview of the national situation

2.1 Legal framework and national authorities involved in implementing the visa liberalisation process

The Aliens Act and the Aliens Ordinance are the most important legal instruments in the field covered by this study. Changes that have had an impact on the target group, i.e. third country nationals with or without a visa requirement, were made in the Aliens Act 1 July 2016. The changes concerned the provisions for issuing an order to leave on formal grounds. Changes were made to bring national legislation in conformity with EU-law.¹⁰

The Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Police are the two principal national authorities dealing with migration, border management and border protection in Sweden. The Migration Agency has not had a role in the "implementation" of visa liberalisation per se, but since increasing numbers of asylum seekers has been an immediate consequence, the Migration Agency has come to play a central role. The Migration Agency is the competent authority for the processing of all applications for residence permits, including those on protection grounds, as well as for voluntary returns. Swedish missions abroad receive and process visa applications. Appeals are handled by the Migration Courts and the Migration Court of Appeal. The Police is responsible for, inter alia, forced returns, border controls, internal checks on foreigners, the fighting and prevention of crime and related fields covered by the study.

2.2 Public and policy debates related to the visa liberalisation process

There seems to have been little debate that specifically centres on visa liberalisation. Meanwhile, the impact of visa liberalisation and particularly the consequence of an increase of asylum seekers from some countries have made headlines in the media.

The Swedish national report of the 2011 EMN study Visa Policy as a Migration Channel concluded that the media rarely discusses visa policies since visas to Sweden only are issued for the purpose of a visit and not for immigration. According to the report, only the Sweden Democrats, which gained representation in Parliament in 2010, have argued against visa liberalisation in parliamentary debates and in parliamentary committees.¹¹ A general overview of parliamentary records of the 2007 to 2017 period confirms that visa liberalisation as such does not appear to have been a contested

¹⁰ See The Migration Court of Appeal rulings of November 2014 (UM 1546-13) and June 2015 (UM 2024-15). The provisions for issuing an order to leave on formal grounds were subsequently changed (chapter 8 section 2, paragraph 3 of the Aliens Act).

¹¹ Europeiska Migrationsnätverket (EMN): Viseringspolitik som en migrationskanal till Sverige (2011).

issue. In 2011 to 2012, the Sweden Democrats appear to have been the sole political party in Parliament that argued against visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries.¹²

The increasing number of Georgian asylum seekers and the problem of Georgian criminality in Sweden appears to have been debated already prior to visa liberalisation in 2017. However, media reporting and debate in Parliament on Georgian asylum seeker related crime seems to have become more frequent after the introduction of visa-free travel.¹³ The increase of Serbian asylum seekers after visa liberalisation also made headlines in the media in 2011.¹⁴

It would be difficult to determine the direct impact from these debates on national policy. It is clear, however, that recent debates have coincided with policy proposals from the Government and other political parties in Parliament. The Moderate Party, for example, has proposed it should become easier to expel convicted criminals.¹⁵ Likewise, the Government has announced tougher policies on international crime rings.¹⁶

2.3 Main links between the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries and Sweden

Ties between Sweden and Yugoslavia and its succeeding states are long standing. There has been two principal waves of immigration to Sweden from these countries. Firstly, labour immigration was considerable in the 1960s. Following the outbreak of civil war in the former Yugoslavia and in particular in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a very high number of asylum seekers from the area came to Sweden in 1992 to 1993. Ultimately, more than 70 000 persons from the former Yugoslavia were given refuge in Sweden in the 1991 to 1995 period. The absolute majority of these, around 49 000, originated from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Presently, 59 000 persons born in Bosnia and Herzegovina are residents in Sweden, compared to 7 700 from FYROM, 1 100 from Montenegro and 12 000 from Serbia. In addition, 67 000 persons were registered as born in Yugoslavia and 6 100 in Serbia and Montenegro.¹⁷

According to one report, families were the most common entity of applicants from the former Yugoslavia, which has resulted in comparatively low subsequent immigration for family reasons. Immigrants from the former Yugoslavia were less inclined to apply for naturalisation, but this changed in the wake of the conflicts in the 1990s, and those who were received as refugees also applied for naturalisation. Hence, return migration to the former Yugoslav republics is low and there is a large diaspora in

¹² See www.riksdagen.se, for example Interpellation 2012/13:78.

¹³ See www.riksdagen.se and for example "Georgiska inresor oroar i EU", Svenska Dagbladet, 8 March 2018 and "Sveriges krav på Georgien: Ta hem era medborgare", Sveriges Radio, 13 March 2018.

¹⁴ "Var fjärde asylsökande från Serbien eller Kosovo", Dagens Nyheter, 5 May 2011.

¹⁵ "M vill göra det enklare att utvisa", Dagens Nyheter, 5 February 2018.

¹⁶ More information available at the website of the Social Democratic Party, last accessed 16 August 2018, <https://www.socialdemokraterna.se/aktuellt/2018/atgarder-for-att-stoppa-stoldligorna/>

¹⁷ Statistics Sweden: Utrikes födda samt födda i Sverige med en eller två utrikes födda föräldrar efter födelseland/ursprungsland, 31 december 2017, totalt (rounded).

Sweden.¹⁸ Personal remittances from Sweden, in particular to Bosnia and Herzegovina, are believed to play an important role.¹⁹ Travel between Sweden and the former Yugoslav republics has become very easy and affordable in the past few years with the establishment of low-cost airlines. At the time of writing this report, there were direct flights to Sweden from a number of destinations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM and Serbia.

Several major Swedish companies have operations in Serbia. Business Sweden was established in Belgrade in 2001.²⁰ Trade with Bosnia and Herzegovina is limited, but growing. A Swedish Chamber of Commerce was established in 2005 through a private initiative and some Swedish companies have operations in the country. Sweden opened an embassy in Sarajevo already in 1995 towards the end of the civil war. The Swedish Agency for International Development Co-operation (SIDA) is present in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sweden's trade with FYROM is limited. Sweden's embassy to FYROM was opened in 2005.

In contrast to the former Yugoslav republics, Sweden's links to Albania have been less developed, at least historically. Currently 4 300 persons born in Albania are residents in Sweden. The growth of the Albanian community in Sweden is a recent phenomenon. Before 2007, less than 1 000 persons born in Albania were to be found in the population registry.²¹ The number of Albanian asylum seekers in Sweden has been high in the 2010s. Trade between Sweden and Albania is limited. SIDA is present in the country and has funded, inter alia, projects aiming at addressing domestic violence and sustainable forestry and agriculture. Sweden's embassy to Albania opened in 2010.

The links between Sweden and the Eastern partnership countries, with the exception of Ukraine, have traditionally been more limited than with the Western Balkan countries. Historically, immigration has been limited, particularly in the Soviet era.

The Moldovan community in Sweden has increased in recent years, but is still very small. Around 1 100 persons born in Moldova are registered in the population registry.²² Trade with Moldova is limited, but growing slowly. Textiles are Moldova's primary exports to Sweden. Moldova opened an embassy in Stockholm in 2006 and Sweden's embassy to Moldova opened in 2010. SIDA is present in the country and project funding has been focused on the areas of democracy and human rights, including LGTB rights.

¹⁸ Statistics Sweden: Efterkrigstidens invandring och utvandring – demografiska rapporter 2004:5 (2004).

¹⁹ APU Network: Den bosniska diasporan har möjlighet att främja handeln med BiH, last accessed 3 August 2018, <http://apunetwork.net/den-bosnisksvenska-diasporan-har-mojlighet-att-framja-handeln-med-bih/>. According to World Bank data on bilateral remittances in 2017, Bosnia and Herzegovina was the major recipient country that year among the countries concerned, www.worldbank.org

²⁰ Business Sweden's purpose is to help Swedish companies to grow their global sales and international companies to invest and expand in Sweden. Business Sweden is owned by the Government and the industry.

²¹ Statistics Sweden: Utrikes födda samt födda i Sverige med en eller två utrikes födda föräldrar efter födelseland/ursprungsland, 31 december 2017, totalt (rounded).

²² Ibid.

Presently, around 1 700 persons born in Georgia reside in Sweden.²³ Nearly all of these individuals were entered in the population registry after 2000. Swedish businesses are making investments in Georgia. However, the Swedish telecom company Telia withdrew from the Georgian market in 2018. SIDA is present in Georgia and has funded, inter alia, projects on democracy, gender equality and the environment. Sweden opened its embassy to Georgia in 2010. Following visa liberalisation, the number of Georgian asylum seekers to Sweden increased and continues to be on a high level. There has been frequent recent reporting in the media on crime committed by Georgians. Meetings at government level between the two countries were held in the spring of 2018 in order to facilitate the return of Georgians convicted in Sweden.²⁴

The Ukrainian group in Sweden is by far the largest from the three countries. Currently, around 8 800 persons born in Ukraine are residents in Sweden.²⁵ A number of Ukrainians sought refuge in Sweden during and immediately after the second world war. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of civil war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the number of Ukrainian asylum seekers to Sweden increased dramatically. Seasonal workers from Ukraine, particularly in the agriculture and forestry sectors, are common in Sweden. SIDA is present in Ukraine since 1995 and has funded, inter alia, projects on good governance (anti-corruption) and the promotion of market reforms. Many Swedish businesses are active in Ukraine and Sweden is one of the top investors in the country.

2.4 Main trends in cross-border mobility and long-term migration, including asylum, from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries

Starting by looking at the number of external border-crossings from nationals of the Western Balkan countries, it is clear there is an overall strong trend of increase following the introduction of visa-free travel. Secondly, we can discern two different patterns. Whereas the increase of nationals from Serbia starts soon after the commencement of visa-free travel, the increase for some of the other countries (FYROM, Montenegro and Bosnia Herzegovina) occurs later. Possible explanations could be that Serbia has a considerably higher population, is more developed than some of the other countries and traditionally has been better served with direct flights to Sweden. Hence, it is possible Serbs are more prone to fly to/from Sweden, whereas nationals from some of the other countries initially travelled overland or by air via another Schengen Member State to Sweden. Similarly, it is possible the steep increase in border-crossings from nationals of FYROM and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the past few years can be explained by the introduction of direct flights to destinations in these countries. However, the number of border-crossings of Albanians has also increased sharply in the past few years and there are currently no direct flights from Albania to Sweden.

Among the Eastern Partnership countries, border-crossings of nationals from Moldova have remained very low and only increased marginally after the commencement of visa-free travel. Border-crossings of Georgians and Ukrainians have increased modestly since the introduction of visa-free travel in 2017. Interestingly, the most sharp increase in the number of border-crossings of Ukrainian nationals occurred between

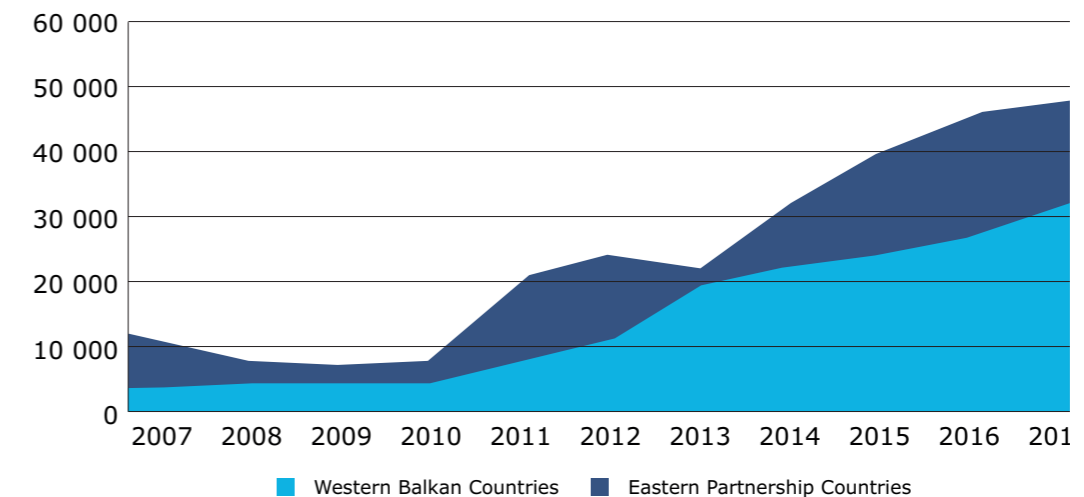
²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Sveriges krav på Georgien: Ta hem era medborgare", Sveriges Radio 13 March 2018.

²⁵ Statistics Sweden: Utrikes födda samt födda i Sverige med en eller två utrikes födda föräldrar efter födelseland/ursprungsland, 31 december 2017, totalt (rounded).

2010 (4 248) and 2011 (12 319) and in 2013 numbers were down at 2 877. Border crossings of Ukrainian nationals by far exceed those of Georgian and Moldovan nationals. A contributing factor could be there are direct flights from Ukraine to Sweden, which is not the case with Moldova and Georgia.

Figure 1. Total number of external border-crossings of nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries 2007-2017



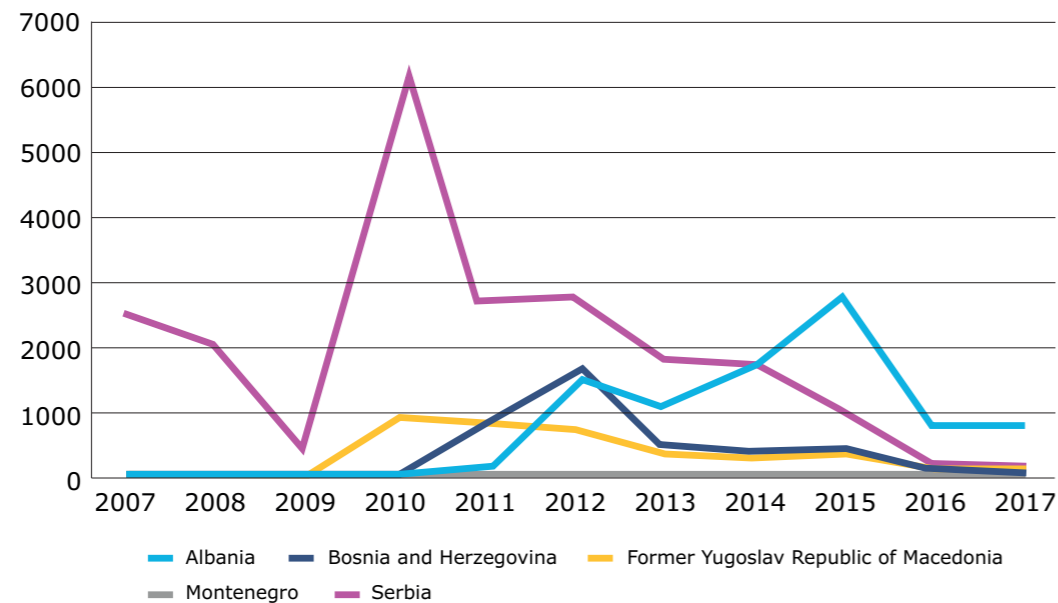
While available data on external border-crossings does seem to give a good indication of trends, there are some challenges associated with it. It covers only persons registered in the national registry of aliens (CUD). In addition, it is based on nationality and not residence, i.e. persons who reside in Sweden have made an unknown number of these border-crossings. Finally, it should be underlined that data on border-crossings only covers airports and that a sizeable number of passengers that have southern Sweden as their destination often fly to Copenhagen (Denmark) which is the closest international airport and thus are not captured in Swedish statistics. There is reason to believe too that a great number travel overland, not least to visit friends and family, and these are not included in data on external border-crossings. The total number of border-crossings registered to/from non-Schengen destinations increased from 85 922 in 2007 to 483 037 in 2017.

It reasonable to believe that the visa-free regime has played an important role in the increase of cross-border mobility in this case, even if it may be difficult to establish causal links.

Turning to data on asylum applications it is very noticeable how these increase after visa liberalisation for several of the Western Balkan countries. The increase for some countries is rather dramatic and we are looking at a tenfold increase in the numbers. FYROM, for example, increases from 90 asylum seekers in 2009 to 900 in 2010 and Serbia from 585 in 2009 to 6 255 in 2010. Applicants from Serbia were numerous in some of the years preceding the visa-free regime and account for the bulk of asylum seekers from the Western Balkan countries after that point as well. The numbers from Montenegro, however, are consistently low throughout the decade. Albania also increases steeply, but this increase does not come immediately after the start of the visa-free regime, which indicates other factors are at play too. The peak year is 2015 when 2 610 Albanians applied for asylum. Overall, the number of asylum seekers gradually decreases towards the end of the period. The vast majority of asylum appli-

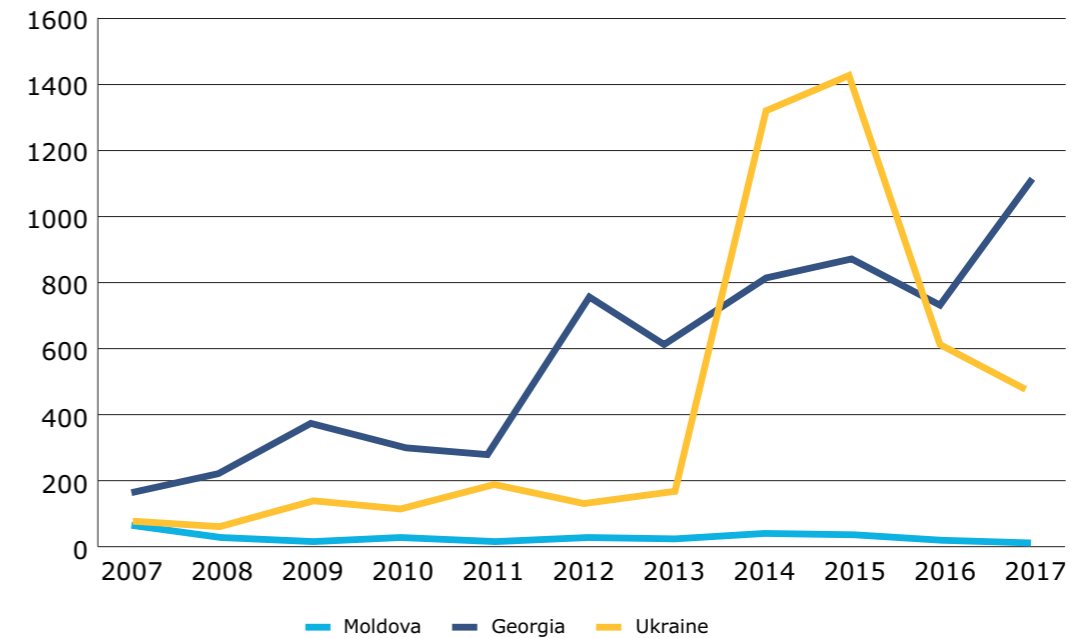
cations were rejected and were often found to be unfounded. Before the commencement of visa-free travel, Serbia stood out as the one country where the highest number of applicants were granted international protection. In the past few years, only applicants from Albania have been granted international protection. Furthermore, Albania stands out as the country among those in the study where the highest number of applicants have been granted international protection after visa liberalisation. Data on the total numbers of residence permit applications for the countries concerned are very much influenced by the number of asylum applications received.

Figure 2. Total number of asylum applications lodged by nationals from the Western Balkan countries 2007-2017



The amount of asylum applications from the Eastern Partnership countries is lower than that from the Western Balkan countries for the whole of the period, even if there was an increase in the past few years. The numbers from Moldova are consistently low and for Ukraine, the number of asylum seekers decreases after the introduction of the visa-free regime in 2017. The peak years for Ukraine are in 2014 (1 320 asylum seekers) and 2015 (1 415 asylum seekers), which must be connected with the situation in Ukraine in those particular years, i.e. the civil war and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The one exception is asylum seekers from Georgia that reached its all-time high in 2017 at 1 100. However, the trend of increasing asylum applications lodged by Georgian nationals dates back to 2012 which saw an increase from 280 up to 750 applicants compared to 2011. Small numbers of applicants from Georgia and Ukraine have been considered in need for international protection in the past few years. Consequently, the numbers of negative decisions were high for both countries. Data on the total numbers of residence permit applications for Georgia and Ukraine are very much influenced by the number of asylum applications received. The number of asylum applications from Moldova decrease over the period.

Figure 3. Total number of asylum applications lodged by nationals from the Eastern Partnership countries 2007-2017



Even if the study only marginally touches upon other circumstances influencing persons from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries to seek asylum in Sweden, it seems clear that the visa-free regime has been an important factor behind the increase in the number of asylum seekers from several of these countries. The total number of asylum applications from third-country nationals range from 36 207 in 2007 to 26 325 in 2017 with a peak of 162 450 in 2015. Applications from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries accounted for 25 per cent of the total number of asylum applications in 2010, which is the peak year. In the past two years, their share of the total number of asylum applications is considerably lower, slightly above 10 per cent. The total number of residence permit applications (all permits) from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries range from 11 957 applications in 2007 to 14 275 in 2017. The peak years are 2015 (18 045 applications), 2014 (17 482 applications), 2012 (17 174 applications) and 2010 (16 913 applications)

3 Positive impact of visa liberalisation in Sweden

3.1 Description of national situation

No overall evaluation of the (positive) impact of visa liberalisation has been carried out in Sweden. Legal migration trends appear to have been less affected by visa liberalisation, at least for the time being. It seems probable, however, that visa-free travel can facilitate in particular work-related migration and migration for education reasons. The number of work-related residence permits issued for nationals of the Western Balkan countries increase gradually in the 2007 to 2017 period. Furthermore, as was discussed in the previous section, there has been a progressive increase in the number of external border-crossings of nationals from the targeted countries over the 2007 to 2017 period. The latter development indicates that overall cross-border mobility has increased.

From the point of view of nationals of the targeted countries, the visa-free regime has obviously been positive in the sense that travelling to Sweden (and the rest of the Schengen area) has become easier. Not least, this has also benefited the Western Balkan communities in Sweden where many people have family links in the visa-free countries. Additionally, the visa-free regime clearly must have contributed to the establishment of low-cost airlines serving several destinations in the Western Balkan countries making travel more accessible and affordable for more people, both in Sweden and in the countries concerned.

The total number of guest nights in hotels and other forms of accommodation of nationals of the targeted countries has increased noticeably over the decade. This development reasonably must have been positive for this business sector, even if numbers are small, and it shows that tourist spending could be increasing. There is so far little evidence of positive effects on foreign trade. Some reports say, however, that the visa-free regime facilitates business contacts and business development. It is possible that some of the positive effects of visa liberalisation are more long term and are difficult to capture or analyse within the scope of this study.

Following increases in the number of asylum seekers from some of the visa-free countries, the dialogue with the relevant third-countries intensified and led, for example, to closer cooperation through liaison officers. In general, cooperation on return and readmission (including forced return) work well with the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. There are significant differences in the number of return cases to the countries concerned that are handled by the Swedish Police. For the past two years, the bulk of forced returns have been to Albania, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine.

3.2 Economic benefits, including foreign trade and direct investments

This question is difficult to respond to within the scope of the study since it is rather substantial. At any rate, no comprehensive studies that have analysed any overall economic benefits seem to have been conducted. Importantly, any such studies would need to have a long-term approach and cover the periods both before and after visa-free travel to be of relevance. There seems to be little evidence of specific economic benefits having been identified though, at least so far. However, as mentioned above, the increasing number of guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation of nationals from the countries concerned reasonably must be considered a positive development.

It is reasonable to believe the visa-free regime initially incurred costs, particularly for the operations of the Swedish Migration Agency that had to process the high numbers of asylum applications as well as to provide accommodation and carry out assisted voluntary returns. Conversely, the fact that a number of Swedish missions abroad no longer had to handle visa applications from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries reasonably must have reduced costs.

Statistics Sweden and The National Board of Trade publish statistics on trade and related matters. Business Sweden's offices in Vienna, Warsaw and Moscow are responsible for markets in the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. For the purpose of the study, trade statistics for the countries concerned were reviewed and representatives of the competent offices of Business Sweden were asked to give their opinion on the development in the countries concerned after visa liberalisation.

Looking at the whole of the 2007 to 2017 period, overall trade has increased with the majority of the countries, but decreased for some. Sweden's imports from all of the countries concerned, except Moldova, was higher in 2017 compared to 2007. Imports from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine increased most noticeably over the past few years. Meanwhile, Sweden's exports to the majority of the countries concerned was higher in 2017 compared to 2007. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova are the exceptions.²⁶ Data shows that Swedish direct investments are highest in Ukraine, followed by Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and FYROM. The amounts for the other countries are very small. It is difficult to see trends in the data. Direct investments in Sweden from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries are very small.²⁷

Overall, trade with these countries has been relatively small and it is difficult to see causal links to visa liberalisation, not least since single transactions in an individual year have very large impact on the total value of trade for a particular year. Business Sweden reports that the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) are the main factor behind recent trade development, particularly in the case of Ukraine. On the one hand, some report that visa-free travel has a positive effect on both trade and business exchanges between for example Ukraine and Sweden. It is described as a "solid tool" for Ukrainian businesses and European counterparts to capitalise on the DCFTA. The visa-free regime has made Europe more accessible to Ukrainian companies and they travel more to Europe.²⁸ On the other hand, it is reported that the former visa requirements rarely constituted a problem in business relations since local staff employed at Swedish companies normally were issued mul-

²⁶ Statistics Sweden: E-mail communication 7 September 2018 (Excel spreadsheet).

²⁷ Statistics Sweden: Direktinvesteringar. Nettotransaktion efter land, tabellinnehåll och år, www.scb.se, last accessed 17 September 2017. Data on direct investments is available from 2013 and onwards.

²⁸ E-mail communication from Business Sweden 7 August 2018.

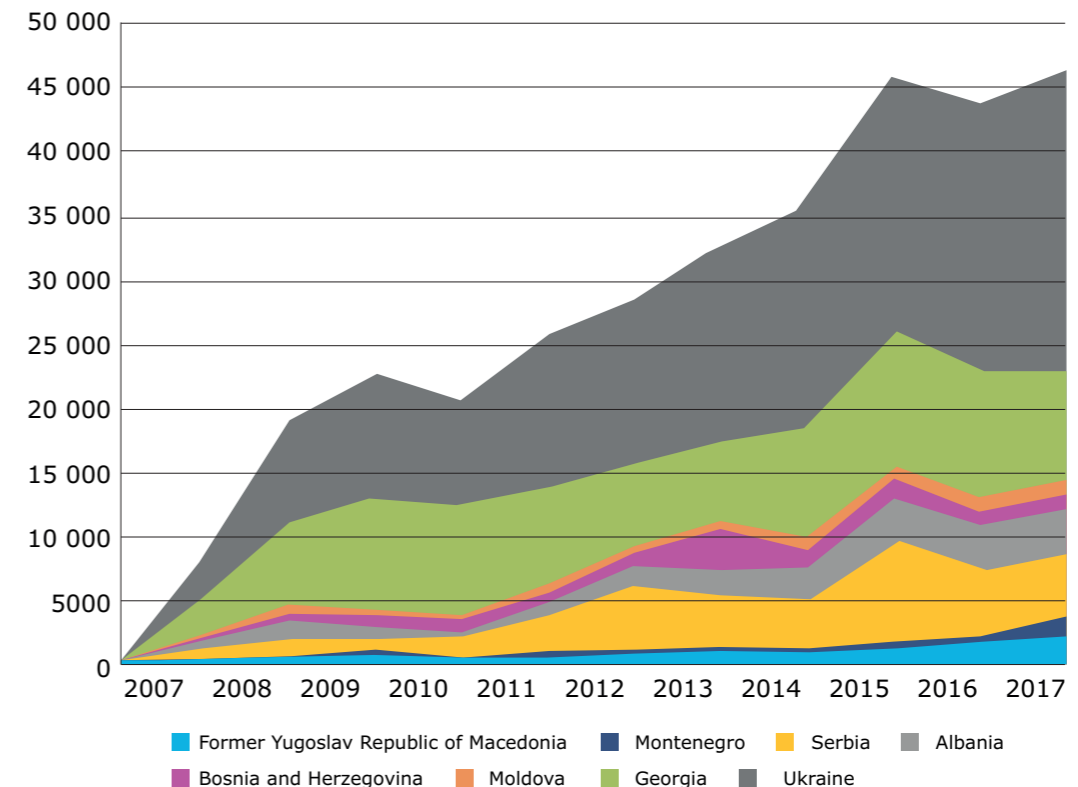
multiple entry Schengen visas with a one-year validity or more. Likewise, local investors and business leaders normally were in the possession of Schengen visas independently of their business relations to Swedish companies.²⁹

3.3 Growth of tourism following visa liberalisation

Data on guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation over the 2007 to 2017 period clearly shows that the total number of guest nights for foreign nationals has doubled, from 8,79 million up to 16,2 million. The total number of guest nights for the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries has increased to an even greater degree, going from merely 8 550 in 2007 up to 46 615 in 2017. Clearly, however, guest nights from these countries make up a very small share of the total. Looking at the specific countries, we can discern two different and interesting patterns. Whereas the increase for the Western Balkan countries is more or less consistent after visa liberalisation, trends for Georgia in particular are different. For example, the number of guest nights for Georgians reach well over 8 000 already in 2009 to 2010 which was several years prior to visa liberalisation in 2017 when the number was at a similar level. Ukraine, which is by far the most populous of the eight countries, account for largest share of guest nights. Guest nights for Ukrainian nationals have increased over consecutive years and continued to increase after visa liberalisation.

²⁹ Statistics Sweden: E-mail communication 7 September 2018 (Excel spreadsheet).

Figure 4. Total number of guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation for nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries 2007-2017³⁰



Visit Sweden, which is the country's national tourism organisation, does not prioritise the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. Additionally, Visit Sweden cannot provide any details on tourism in Sweden from the countries concerned.³¹ There is no breakdown on nationality available when it comes to Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) data on tourist spending in Sweden. Given the large diaspora in Sweden from the former Yugoslavia, the main purpose for travelling to Sweden for a great many visitors is in all likelihood to visit family and friends. Additionally, a large number of

³⁰ Source: Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. Data refers to guest nights (hotels, hostels, camping grounds etc.) and not to the number of individuals. Data for 2007 does not include guest nights at camping grounds. Unfortunately, data on guest nights does not distinguish the purpose of stay, i.e. business or tourism. All data on guest nights in the report originates from these two government agencies. The number of guest nights for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014 was originally reported at 15 293, which by all accounts appears to be improbably high since annual numbers in the period range from 261 to 3 279. No potential explanation for such a massive increase in 2014 was found. After consultation with the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, the number for 2014 was set at 1 529.

³¹ E-mail communication from Visit Sweden 5 July 2018.

the guest nights from Ukraine in particular, can probably be explained by the presence of seasonal workers.³²

While complete data on tourism from the countries concerned is lacking, there is little evidence to suggest that nationals of the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries are particularly important groups for the tourism industry. While commercial tourism is limited, the overall steady increase in the number of guest nights nonetheless indicates that spending from nationals of the countries concerned is increasing over time and that visa liberalisation probably has played an important role in this development.

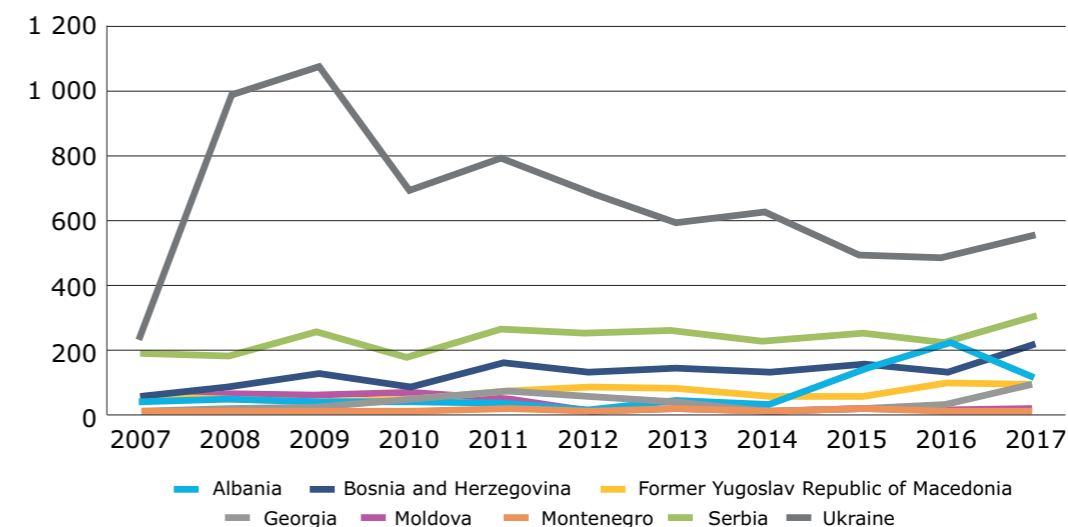
3.4 Impact of visa liberalisation on the national labour market

New legislation on labour immigration to Sweden entered into force in December 2008. Since then, employers have the right to recruit third-country nationals to fill vacancies if they cannot find suitable Swedish or European Union workers. There are no quotas in place and the system is open to labour migrants of all skills levels and nationalities. The fact that this reform was launched immediately before the commencement of visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries makes it more difficult to assess the impact of the visa-free regime in this context.

The number of work-related residence permits issued for the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries follows the general trend of increase in 2009 compared to 2008. However, total numbers for the countries remain rather static throughout the period, and mostly in the 1 100 to 1 300 bracket and peak in 2009. A major reason for this development is that numbers for Ukraine, which account for a large share of the permits issued, decrease after 2009. Meanwhile, there is a noticeable gradual increase in the number of issued permits to nationals from the Western Balkan countries in the period, going from 286 permits issued in 2007 to 738 permits issued in 2017. Georgia increases as well towards the end of the period. However, the share of permits issued to Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership nationals, out of the total number of work-permits issued to third-country nationals, remains under 10 per cent throughout the period. The latter range from 9 349 to 18 978 in the period and peak in 2009.

³² Around 1 700 Ukrainian nationals were issued work permits for jobs in forestry and agriculture, including as berry pickers in the 2009 to 2017 period.

Figure 5. Total number of residence permits issued for remunerated activities for nationals of the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries 2007-2017



There is no separate provision for “entrepreneurs” in the Aliens Act. Rather, entrepreneurs and self-employed persons are both considered as business owners and are covered by the same provision in the Aliens Act.³³ The total number of residence permits issued for the countries concerned increases throughout the period and 2017 is the peak year, but numbers are very low at 15 permits issued in total and it is difficult to see any causal link to visa liberalisation. Total numbers for all nationalities in this category are low and range from 29 in 2007 to 215 in 2017. The peak year is 2012 when 346 permits were issued.

Interestingly, the caseloads for Georgia and Ukraine, both of which became visa-free in 2017, prove to be rather different in the past two years. While the share of asylum applications among Ukrainians decreased and the share of migration for remunerated activities thus increased, ratios in the Georgian caseload show the opposite pattern.

Altogether, it seems difficult to establish causal links between visa-free travel and developments on the regular labour market so far, at least by looking at the overall numbers of permits issued for remunerated activities.

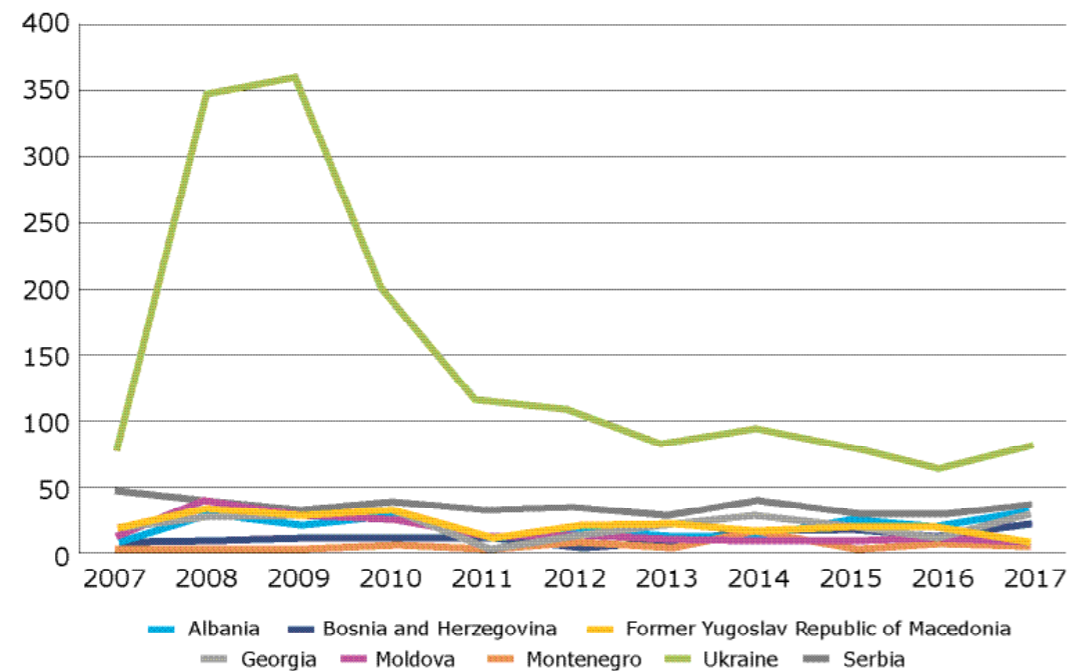
3.5 Impact of visa liberalisation on the number of foreign students

The number of residence permits issued for education reasons to nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries vary over the years. However, they only make up a very small share of the total numbers issued and there are no real signs of a growth in the numbers due to visa liberalisation. Sweden introduced application fees and tuition fees for students from third countries in 2011, which lead to a fallout of international students in the following years. Among the countries studied, this decrease is very noticeable in the case of Ukraine. The peak years in the period,

³³ Chapter 5, Section 5, second paragraph of the Aliens Act (2005:716).

for the countries concerned, are between 2008 and 2010. Numbers for the Western Balkan countries have increased somewhat in recent years and in 2017 they were back at pre-2011 levels. Clearly, the introduction of fees comes across as the major factor influencing the number of international students coming in the period, and in a negative way. The total number of issued permits issued peak in 2010 at 13 968. In 2017 total numbers had recovered and were up at 10 101 which was the highest annual figure after 2010.

Figure 6. Total number of residence permits issued for education reasons to nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries 2007-2017



4 Challenges of visa liberalisation in Sweden

4.1 Description of national situation

The high initial increase in the number of asylum seekers from several of these countries after the commencement of visa-free travel contributed in administrative burdens for some of the competent government agencies over a period.

Firstly, the influx reasonably incurred additional costs for the Swedish Migration Agency and other government agencies. Furthermore, the absolute majority of asylum applications were rejected and many were subject to accelerated procedures. Arguably, the development made it necessary for the Migration Agency to prioritise applications from a group that by and large did not belong in the asylum system. The increase also affected the Migration Courts, the Migration Court of Appeal and the Swedish Police. Equally, the increase in the number of persons found to be illegally present contributed to an administrative burden since the circumstances of these individuals needed examination by the Police or the Migration Agency.

The number of return decisions issued to nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries mirrors the number of asylum seekers. Their share of the total number of return decisions vary accordingly. The peak year is 2012, when 7 035 return decisions were issued to the countries concerned. Arguably, return operations to the Western Balkans have been resource-intensive as well as costly because of the high numbers and the fact that all returns in Sweden in practice are performed as assisted voluntary return. Generally, however, return to the Western Balkan countries has been comparatively successful and it accounts for a large portion of total (voluntary) return. This situation not least owes to the fact that identity and travel documents are easy to obtain and that many failed asylum seekers return voluntarily. The Swedish Police has had to handle higher numbers of forced returns, but return operations to the countries in question generally function well.

Data on irregular border-crossings is unavailable, but the fact that Sweden does not have any external land borders means there are few instances where irregular border-crossings can potentially take place. For the past several years, the only passenger ferry on a regular route from a non-EU destination arriving at a Swedish port is the Saint Petersburg-Stockholm ferry that calls at Helsinki or Tallinn prior to reaching Stockholm. The absolute majority of external border-crossings take place at international airports in Sweden where the Police performs external border controls. These circumstances suggest there is little reason to believe irregular border-crossings of nationals of the countries concerned would have increased much after visa liberalisation.³⁴

³⁴ There is no consistent reporting on stowaways found in passenger (cargo) aircraft or passenger (cargo) vessels. However, in the past few years, a large number of Albanian nationals attempting to reach the UK has been detected in the port of Göteborg. These individuals have normally been reported on the grounds of trespassing into a restricted area and not in reporting on irregular border-crossings. Source: Email communication from the Swedish Police, 18 April 2018.

Turning to identity fraud instances, available data indicates that these have increased in the past few years for nationals from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. Albania, Georgia and Ukraine account for the absolute majority of such cases. The total number for the countries concerned has increased each year since 2013 (13 instances detected) and peaked at 78 detected instances in 2017. The total number of identity document fraud instances in 2017 was 215.³⁵

4.2 Voluntary and forced returns to the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries

As discussed in section 2, the increase in the number of asylum seekers was particularly steep from some of the Western Balkan countries following visa liberalisation. The number of return decisions more or less mirrors this development and indicates that a vast share of the applications were rejected (with the exception of Albania). Moreover, the fact that the numbers of asylum seekers and return decisions were high in the same individual years suggest many applications were processed quickly. This situation seems to apply to Albania as well, from which the number of asylum seekers peaked in 2014 to 2015 and for which a record 2 700 return decisions were issued in 2015. Albania stands out as the one country for which the highest number of both voluntary and forced returns were performed in the past few years. According to the Aliens Act, a decision of immediate enforcement due to manifestly unfounded claims must be issued no later than three months after the application was lodged.³⁶

Georgian asylum seekers is the group that arguably has led to the biggest recent challenges following visa liberalisation. While asylum seekers from Serbia were far more numerous in the 2010 to 2014 period in particular, challenges linked to asylum seekers from Georgia appear to have been more serious. Not least are there many reports of crime (theft in particular) among Georgian asylum seekers. Talks at ministerial level were held to address the situation, including the return of failed Georgian asylum seekers convicted of crime in Sweden. A long-term investigation on international crime rings in Sweden by the Swedish Police showed that Georgians are one of the major nationalities involved in this type of crime.³⁷ The influx of Georgian asylum seekers also prompted the Migration Agency to set up special operations to process these applications.³⁸ The number of asylum seekers from Ukraine peaked in 2014 to 2015, i.e. before visa liberalisation and appears to owe more to the situation in Ukraine at that time. While nearly 500 Ukrainians applied for asylum in Sweden in 2017 it was still a 65 per cent decrease compared to 2014.

Looking at the number of issued return decisions, numbers for Moldova are low and reflect the small number of asylum seekers from that country. The numbers of return

³⁵ Since March 2012 Sweden reports all fraudulent documents detected at Stockholm Arlanda Airport, Göteborg Landvetter Airport, Stockholm Skavsta Airport and Malmö Airport and from 2017 also Småland Airport Växjö to Frontex. The term "fraudulent document" includes forged, counterfeit, abused, stolen, blank and/or fraudulently obtained documents. Source: E-mail communication from the Swedish Police, 21 May and 4 September 2018.

³⁶ Chapter 8, paragraph 19 of the Aliens Act (2005:716).

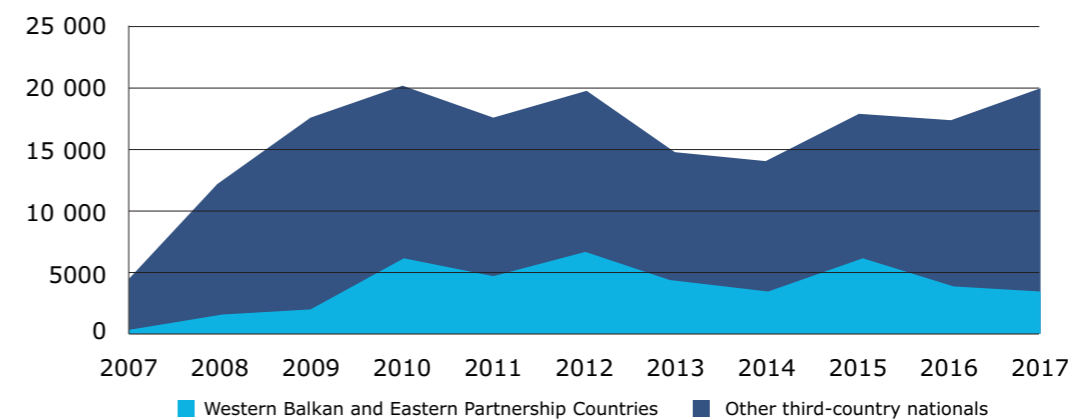
³⁷ Swedish Police: Mobil organiserad brottslighet – erfarenhetsberättelse 2011-2015, öppen version, juni 2016.

³⁸ Swedish Migration Agency: Chefen för region Stockholms administrativa beslut om införandet av interprofessionella team i region Stockholm, A-57/2018, 12 February 2018.

decisions issued to Ukrainian and Georgian nationals peaked in the 2015 to 2017 period, reflecting the high number of asylum seekers coming during those years. In the past few years, it was more common for Georgian nationals to be subject to forced return compared to returnees to Moldova and Ukraine.

The total number of return decisions ranged from 4 730 in 2007 to 20 525 in 2017, which was the peak year. Return decisions to the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries account for nearly 30 per cent of total return decisions in some years in the period.

Figure 7. Total number of return decisions issued to third-country nationals 2007-2017



4.3 Smuggled and/or trafficked persons from the visa-free countries

The relative lack of quantitative data, particularly with regard to smuggling, makes it challenging to reply to this question. However, there are reports on trafficking that include quantitative data. The Swedish Police publishes regular reports on trafficking for sexual and other purposes since 1999. In addition, the National Police and National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking has published concise annual summaries in English since 2000.³⁹ Finally, the Swedish Migration Agency keeps data on suspected instances of human trafficking reported to the Police since 2013.

There are very few convictions of human trafficking in Sweden all told in the period. However, according to experts, there are many examples of persons charged with human trafficking that are ultimately convicted of other (related) crimes such as procur-

³⁹ The former reports are entitled *Lägesrapport - Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål* while the summaries in English are entitled *Statistical information on Trafficking in Human Beings*, provided by the Swedish National Rapporteur. These publications include all reports and convictions pertaining to trafficking in human beings for sexual and other purposes. The Swedish Police (the National Police and the National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking), The Swedish Prosecution Agency and The Swedish Migration Agency (the Anti-trafficking Coordinator) have provided supplementary information.

ing of sexual services, kidnapping, assault and unlawful threats. This means that final court rulings probably only provide a fraction of the picture. Importantly, however, most victims of human trafficking in Sweden are EU nationals, primarily from Bulgaria and Romania, and not third-country nationals.

There is little evidence in available data to suggest Sweden has encountered a rise in the number of trafficked persons from the countries concerned following visa liberalisation. Three nationals from the targeted countries (Albania, Ukraine and Serbia) were registered as victims of human trafficking in final court rulings in 2007 to 2017. At the same time, recent reports say human trafficking as a whole is increasing. For example, the Police received 39 reports on human trafficking involving forced labour in 2017, a 44 per cent increase compared to the previous year.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Migration Agency reported 444 instances of suspected human trafficking to the Police in 2017, a 30 per cent increase compared to 2016 when 341 reports were filed and considerably higher than in 2015 when 195 reports were filed.⁴¹ All of the suspected instances of human trafficking reported by the Migration Agency concerned third-country nationals. Importantly, the Police reported in 2011 that the number of detected victims of human trafficking increased in Sweden and the EU when the visa requirement was lifted for the Baltic states and when countries in Eastern Europe became members of the EU.⁴² The Police has since pointed at EU enlargement and visa liberalisation as two of several possible factors behind the increase of human trafficking in Sweden and the EU. The Police argues these circumstances have made it easier for traffickers to recruit and transport particularly vulnerable girls and young women with the purpose of sexual exploitation in EU Member States. Additionally, the Police points at the visa regime as an important tool that can contribute to curb human trafficking.⁴³

The Swedish Prosecution Authority reports it is rare that victims of trafficking are smuggled to Sweden. Victims normally have identity documents and they have entered the country legally.⁴⁴

Quantitative data on smuggling is unavailable. Smuggled persons are not prone to contact the Police after their arrival in the country and very few facilitators are found. It is not possible to observe a connection to visa liberalisation. Sweden is a destination country that has a large inflow of migrants and, in all likelihood, many asylum seekers have entered the country assisted by facilitators. There is no detailed information available on if, or how, activities of irregular migration facilitators are connected to the countries targeted in the study or to visa-free travel as a whole.⁴⁵ Looking solely at the phenomenon of smuggling it seems more likely the number of nationals from the countries concerned subject to smuggling would decrease after the introduction of visa-free travel since migrants can easily enter legally. For instance, asylum seekers such as those from Serbia, FYROM, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia coming immediately after visa liberalisation, must reasonably as a rule have entered Sweden and/or the Schengen area by way of their passports.

⁴⁰ The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention Official Statistics.

⁴¹ Swedish Migration Agency: Annual report 2017.

⁴² Swedish Police: Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål, Lägesrapport 12 (2011).

⁴³ Swedish Police: Människohandel för sexuella och andra ändamål, Lägesrapport 13 (2012), Lägesrapport 14 (2013), Lägesrapport 15 (2014), for example.

⁴⁴ E-mail communication from the Swedish Prosecution Authority, 13 June 2018.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

4.4 Number of nationals from the visa-free countries found to be illegally present

For some of the targeted countries data clearly show such a development immediately following visa liberalisation. The number of nationals found to be illegally present from FYROM increases from 80 to 620 in the 2009 to 2010 period while Serbian nationals increase from 1 635 to 5 185 in the same period. Bosnia and Herzegovina increases from 95 in 2010 to 495 in 2011. The development mirrors the number of asylum seekers received. Hence, the number of persons found to be illegally present from Albania is the highest in 2014. Ukraine shows the same development. Meanwhile, numbers from Montenegro are consistently low. Moldova increases from 10 to 40 persons in 2013 to 2014, but numbers are low throughout the period.⁴⁶

There is no reliable data available on the numbers of overstayers.⁴⁷ However, there is a strong correlation between the number of asylum seekers and the number of persons found to be illegally present from a particular country. Furthermore, data on asylum applications shows that the absolute majority of these are lodged after entry into Sweden. While there is no quantitative data available on at what point in time after entry persons have applied for asylum, this situation suggests the number of overstayers following visa liberalisation potentially increased. The fact that Sweden does not have any external land borders, meaning that many applicants must have entered the Schengen area prior to their entry in Sweden, adds to this conclusion.

4.5 Signs of possible misuse of visa liberalisation

One example of possible misuse relevant to look into would be the incidence of illegal employment. However, there is no breakdown on nationalities available and total data is only available since 2013. The lack of quantitative data makes it difficult to draw any conclusions with regard to nationals of the countries concerned. The total number of third country nationals found in illegal employment in the period was by far the highest in 2017 at 352. However, the number of controls at workplaces by the Police (sometimes in cooperation with other government agencies) were higher in the past few years. In 2013, 500 controls were carried out, compared to 1 000 in 2016 and 1 400 in 2017.⁴⁸

Another example of possible misuse, which is supported by data, would be asylum applications made without reasonable grounds. Hence, the strong initial increase of

⁴⁶ The Swedish Police has changed the set-up of categories of migrants reported to Eurostat as illegally present, which makes it difficult to follow accurately this phenomenon for the whole of the period. Through 2014, asylum seekers that applied after entry into the country were registered as illegally present. In 2016, this was changed and persons lodging an application for asylum after entry were no longer registered as illegally present. Source: E-mail communication from the Swedish Police, 14 June 2018.

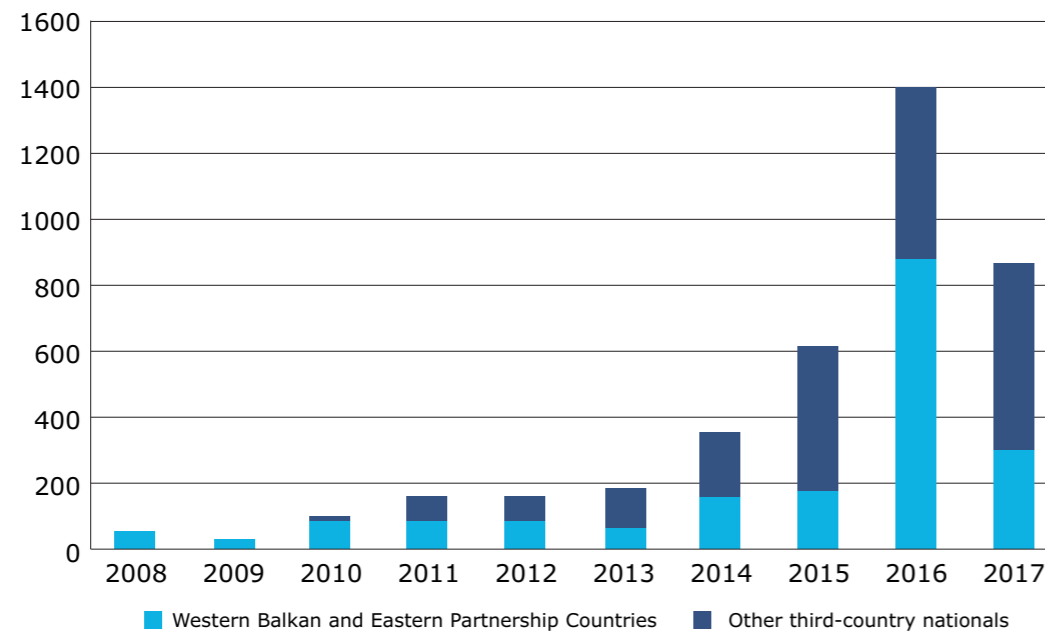
⁴⁷ In the global context, a person who remains in a country beyond the period for which entry was granted. In the EU context, a person who has legally entered but then stayed in an EU Member State beyond the allowed duration of their permitted stay without the appropriate visa (typically 90 days), or of their visa and/or residence permit.

⁴⁸ "Polisen genomför allt fler arbetsplatsinspektioner", 14 June 2018, last accessed 20 August 2018, available at: <https://polisen.se/aktuellt/nyheter/2018/juni/polisen-ge-nomfor-allt-fler-arbetsplatsinspektioner/>

asylum applicants after visa liberalisation can be seen as sign of misuse to a large degree. This is particularly the case since an absolute majority of applications from the countries concerned were rejected and a large share of these were considered as manifestly unfounded. By all accounts, large numbers of persons from these countries entered Sweden (legally) on the premise to remain no longer than the visa-free period but instead applied for asylum at some point following their entry into the country.

Interestingly, the number of nationals from these countries refused entry at Sweden's external borders has increased gradually each year since 2011 and they make up a large share of the total number of those refused entry. The increase since 2014 is steep, going from 190 that year up to 580 in 2017. Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine account for the majority of these refusals of entry. This development seems, at least partially, to be the result from the id checks and internal border controls introduced since 2015. At the time of writing this report, internal border controls were still in place.

Figure 8. Total number of third-country nationals refused entry at the external borders 2007-2017



4.6 Offences committed by nationals of the visa-free countries

There is no available breakdown on nationality in official crime statistics in Sweden, which makes it difficult to respond to this question. Furthermore, there seems to be little research, if any, that specifically follows crime committed by third-country nationals before and/or after the commencement of visa-free travel or research on the nationality of perpetrators as a whole.

One of the few recent major studies conducted on crime perpetrated by non-Swedish born persons is an often mentioned report published in 2005 by the Swedish National

Council for Crime Prevention.⁴⁹ However, the report uses the dichotomy of persons born in Sweden or outside Sweden and has no specifics on the nationality of offenders.

Specifically with regard to Georgian nationals there are indications of an escalated level of crime committed by these in the 2010s and that the magnitude of criminal activities perpetrated by Georgians increased after the commencement of visa-free travel. For example, the Swedish Police published a study in 2016 where Georgian crime rings are listed as one of the major international crime rings that operate in Sweden.⁵⁰ Inter alia, the study reports that Georgian crime rings favour countries where asylum-processing times are long and that a large number of Georgians apprehended in Sweden have been in the possession of an "LMA card", which is a card issued to registered asylum seekers.

⁴⁹ The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention: *Brottslighet bland personer födda i Sverige och i utlandet – rapport 2005:17 (2005)*.

⁵⁰ Swedish Police: *Mobil organiserad brottslighet – erfarenhetsberättelse 2011-2015, öppen version, juni 2016*.

5 Measures put in place to deal with possible misuse of visa-free regimes

5.1 Description of national situation

As mentioned in section 4.5, ungrounded asylum claims have arguably constituted the most noticeable example of misuse of the visa-free regime. Over the years, the Swedish Migration Agency has been repeatedly tasked by the Government to accelerate the processing of asylum claims presumed to be (manifestly) unfounded.⁵¹ The vast majority of this caseload has consisted of applications from nationals of the Western Balkan countries. The Migration Agency has responded by setting up, for example, special task forces and projects with a view to reduce end-to-end processing times (from application to return). Multidisciplinary teams have been frequently used, for example staffed by case officers, decision-making officers and return officers in close cooperation. The Migration Agency has also utilised specialised accommodation for these groups of applicants. Often they have been placed in accommodation near asylum examination units and international airports in order to facilitate processing and return.⁵²

A similar approach was taken by the Migration Agency to deal with the recent influx of asylum seekers from Georgia in the 2017 to 2018 period. In this case, the Stockholm office adopted a regional action plan in 2018 that established a fast track procedure to handle the many Georgians applying for asylum there. The fast track procedure, which for example involves specialised case officers, assigned Georgian language interpreters and exchange of information with the Police, was still in operation at the time of writing this report.⁵³

Finally, there were media reports in 2010 to 2012 of many asylum seekers from the Western Balkan countries having been “tricked” into leaving their country and travel to Sweden to apply for asylum. According to these reports, local travel agents had likely spread false information and promises that applicants would be offered jobs and accommodation upon arrival. As a means to counter these phenomena, Swedish missions in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina disseminated information on the rules and conditions for receiving a residence permit in Sweden, for example through local media outlets.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See for example the Government’s appropriation letters to the Migration Agency in 2012 to 2014.

⁵² See Annual reports of the Migration Agency for the corresponding years.

⁵³ Swedish Migration Agency: *Chefen för region Stockholms administrativa beslut om införandet av interprofessionella team i region Stockholm, A-57/2018, 12 February 2018 and supplementary information from the Migration Agency’s Stockholm Office, 17 August 2018.*

⁵⁴ See for example “Serber luras till Sverige”, *Sveriges Radio* 11 March 2010 and “Bosnier luras söka asyl i Sverige”, *Dagens Nyheter* 29 June 2012

5.2 Measures to fight illegal employment and/or smuggling and trafficking

The Government has progressively stepped up its efforts in fighting illegal employment in the past few years, particularly aiming at combating exploitation of (third-country) workers by employers. For example, the Police has been authorised increased possibilities to carry out workplace inspections. Recent policy developments are discussed in the Swedish national report of the 2016 EMN focussed study *Illegal employment of third-country nationals in the EU*. Inter alia, the report confirms that a main route to illegal employment can likely stem from a legal entry (on a visa or by the benefit of a visa-free regime).⁵⁵ There is no information available, however, suggesting the Government’s measures are specifically geared towards nationals of visa-free countries in general or the countries targeted in this study. According to the Police there are no specific measures taken to fight smuggling and/or trafficking from these visa-free countries.

5.3 Measures to reduce the incidence of nationals found to be illegally present

The Police is obliged to perform internal checks on foreigners if there is reason to believe that a person is illegally present in the country. Sweden introduced temporary border controls in November 2015 that were still in place at the time of writing this report. Identity checks on public transport from Denmark (ferries, trains, buses) and Germany (ferries) were introduced in January 2016, but these were phased out in May 2017. The Police estimates that the temporary border controls reduce the incidence of nationals found to be illegally present.

5.4 Measures to deal with administrative burdens since the introduction of the visa-free regime

For the Western Balkan countries, the challenge of a strong increase in the number of asylum seekers is primarily limited to the first two years after visa liberalisation. After that, numbers gradually decrease. The one exception is Albania, where the numbers of applicants do not peak until a few years after the introduction of the visa-free regime. Hence, for the Western Balkan countries, administrative burdens related to the number of asylum seekers have been largely a passing challenge. Hence, there seems to have been less of a long-term need to implement measures to deal with that administrative burden. In addition, since many of these applications were considered (manifestly) unfounded, return procedures were simplified and normally less time consuming.

Since Georgia and Ukraine became part of the visa-free regime only in 2017 it would be too early to draw any conclusions on the long term effects for those two countries. As already mentioned, the Migration Agency set up a special fast track procedure in 2018 to deal with Georgian asylum seekers in particular. This fast track procedure has proved successful in reducing end-to-end application processing times, currently by one third.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Swedish Migration Agency/EMN Sweden: *Illegal employment of third-country nationals in the EU, country report Sweden (2016).*

⁵⁶ E-mail communication from the Migration Agency’s Regional Stockholm Office, 17 August 2018.

As indicated in Figure 1, the number of external border-crossings of nationals from the countries concerned has grown steadily over the decade, which means that border controls have screened a progressively higher number of visa-free air passengers from these non-Schengen countries each year.

5.5 Measures to deal with the possible misuse of visa liberalisation

The term misuse can potentially include a vast array of different deviations (violations) from the original purpose of entry into Sweden. Many are difficult to monitor until the person in question is actually detected by the authorities or report to the authorities by her/himself. In principle, many of these possible outcomes have been discussed in previous sections. Many persons have applied for asylum, which largely can be considered as misuse in the light of the fact of very high refusal rates for visa-free countries. Possibly, the Migration Agency's response to employ accelerated procedures for these applications served as a signal to dissuade other potential applicants.

As mentioned previously, the Government has given increased powers to the Police to carry out work place inspections, which is a measure that potentially will increase detected misuse of visa liberalisation. Since Sweden does not have any external land borders, it is often in connection with internal checks on foreigners and at external air borders where overstayers can be detected.

In 2018, the Swedish Migration Agency was commissioned by the Government to carry out an analysis of the potential misuse of visas.⁵⁷

Procedures with regard to overstayers depend on whether the person applies for a residence permit or not upon detection and where he/she is detected, for example by the Police in connection with internal checks on foreigners or in external border controls upon exiting the country or at the Swedish Migration Agency.

Some overstayers, including those who have remained in Sweden after the expiry of their visa, apply for asylum. For the Western Balkan countries, this phenomenon was probably more prevalent in the years immediately following visa liberalisation when the numbers of asylum seekers from these countries were very high.

The Police performs internal checks on foreigners. A third-country national detected in such a check presumed to be illegally present, and that does not apply for asylum, will be subject to investigation in order for the Police to issue an order to leave and to examine whether an entry ban should be issued. The same procedures are applied for overstayers that are detected upon exiting at border controls. Overstayers who approach the Migration Agency are informed they are illegally present and are to leave the country or legalise their stay. They often have questions on how to proceed to apply to legalise their stay. Migration Agency staff can provide brief information on which possibilities are at hand and which application forms to use. Overstayers that have protection claims are referred to the closest application unit of the Migration Agency to lodge a formal asylum application.

⁵⁷ Swedish Migration Agency: *Kvalitetschefens uppdrag om analys av viseringsavhopp (VP2018)*, U-27/2018.

Return procedures are the same for overstayers as for other returnees. Return procedures for overstayers that do not apply for a residence permit are handled by the Swedish Police.

5.6 National response to the influx of asylum seekers from the visa-free countries

Generally, the majority of applications from visa-free countries tend to meet the legal requirements to be considered (manifestly) unfounded. Refusal rates for these countries are very high.

Over time, the Swedish Migration Agency has developed its approach and processing of applications from visa-free countries. An increase/redistribution of resources, such as more specialised case officers assigned to work on these applications is a common measure. Furthermore, tailor-made support tools related to case examination, such as country of origin information, operational guidance notes, sets of Questions & Answers, have also been utilised. This practice has been employed repeatedly at times of high inflow of applications. The aim has been to establish an efficient and fast application processing in order to, if possible, process cases within the time frame of the accelerated procedures set out in the (Revised) Asylum Procedure Directive, which was implemented in Sweden in 2017.

Since 2015, the Migration Agency has gradually implemented and developed a new standard for processing asylum applications. The standard is based on a sorting of cases into a track-system related to the perceived need of examination of the individual case. The aim was to create a more flexible and effective case processing with specialised units processing cases in different tracks.

To facilitate a more effective assessment of the level of examination needed, the Migration Agency keeps up-to-date information on refusal rates and maintains a list of countries with a high refusal rate (>80 per cent). The list also makes a categorisation of the applicants' identity documentation and contains corresponding information on which level of documentation is needed to enforce the return decision swiftly. This list is to be used as a support tool and is not binding for case officers. An application is always examined on its own merits.

These measures have increased the accuracy of the identification and processing of manifestly unfounded applications but also applications that are not substantive, but do not meet the legal prerequisites of accelerated procedures. The measures taken at the Migration Agency have contributed to a higher level of competence in the processing of manifestly unfounded applications and non-substantive applications. It is difficult to estimate the immediate or specific impact these measures have had on the influx. Probably, short application processing times and high refusal rates serve as a signal for potential applicants in the country of origin, possibly reducing the number of applicants. Additionally, a fast process is likely to facilitate return.

Conclusions

This EMN focussed study is the first of its kind to look into the impact of visa liberalisation in Sweden. Not only does it focus on potential effects in terms of cross-border mobility and migration to Sweden, such as asylum seekers, work-related migration and migration for education reasons, but it also covers areas such as economic benefits, including tourism and foreign trade, and any incidence of crime connected to visa liberalisation. The study includes 8 countries for which visa-free travel was introduced in the past several years. These are the Western Balkan countries of Serbia, Montenegro, FYROM (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Eastern Partnership countries of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. The study follows the period from 2007 to 2017.

While a starting point for the study is that visa liberalisation is a potential pull factor for cross-border mobility and migration, it should be noted that the study only marginally touches upon circumstances in the countries of origin influencing these phenomena. Hence, causal links between visa liberalisation and for example trends in migration and asylum often proved more difficult to establish. Even so, it seems clear that visa liberalisation indeed has played an important role for several of the developments covered in the study. It should be underlined too that Georgia and Ukraine became visa-free only in 2017, which means that the period of study for these two countries since the commencement of visa liberalisation is limited.

Turning to the results of the study, a natural starting point would be to focus on which consequence of visa liberalisation made the biggest impact in Sweden. In the short run, this would without doubt be the high initial increase in the number of asylum seekers. Thousands of applicants came from Serbia, FYROM, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia after the point when visa-free travel was introduced. The factual numbers and their impact on the operations of the Swedish Migration Agency and other government agencies have been thoroughly discussed in the study. Largely, this information was well known previously. Interestingly however, the study does not seem to be able to show fully to what extent the authorities expected this development and to which extent preparations were made to handle this outcome. This observation seems particularly relevant for the Western Balkan countries. Reasonably, authorities in Sweden were better prepared to handle the increase in the number of applicants from Georgia in 2017 to 2018. Interestingly, Albania and Ukraine deviate from the pattern mentioned since asylum seekers from the two countries did not increase immediately after visa liberalisation. In the case of Ukraine, the increase occurred in 2014 to 2015 and was in all likelihood connected to the civil war and Russia's annexation of Crimea. Similarly, domestic events in Albania may have influenced the increasing number of applicants from that country in 2014 to 2015.

Looking at the Western Balkan countries and their ties to Sweden, we can see some factors that potentially can contribute to explain the strong increase. There were already strong links between Sweden and several of these countries such as large diasporas and previous considerable immigration. Furthermore, geographical proximity allowed for easy transport to Sweden. In the case of Georgia, however, none of these factors is at hand and there was still a strong increase. Unsurprisingly, these results indicate that the interplay between push and pull factors is rather complex and that we would need more in-depth analysis to fully understand these phenomena. The vast majority of asylum applications were rejected and many were considered un-

founded. Small numbers of applicants were considered to be in need of international protection, and in recent years only applicants from Albania, Ukraine and Georgia. Albania stands out as the one country where a noticeable share of applicants has been recognised as beneficiaries of international protection following visa liberalisation. It is also the country with the highest number of recorded instances of document fraud among the countries concerned. The Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries account for large share of the total number of return decisions. Returns, particularly to the Western Balkan countries, generally work well. A long-term trend seems to be that the numbers of asylum seekers decrease over time following visa liberalisation.

Furthermore, the study aims to look into at what impact, if any, visa liberalisation has had on some categories of legal migration to Sweden. These include immigration for remunerated activities, self-employment and education reasons. Overall, it proves to be difficult to make the connection between visa liberalisation and trends for these categories of legal migration. The number of permits issued for work-related migration are higher in 2017 than in 2007, but it is reasonable to believe the increase owes at least as much to the fact that Sweden eased its labour immigration legislation in 2008. The peak year for the total number of work-permits issued from these countries was in 2009. Importantly, however, work-related migration from the Western Balkan countries has increased throughout the period and peaked in 2017. The economic performance in Sweden and the situation on the labour market, which is characterised by an increasing demand for labour in certain industries, may also have had an impact. The numbers of incoming students from these countries are lower in 2017 than in 2007, which can probably be explained by the introduction of tuition fees in 2011. In addition, it is difficult to see that the visa requirement would be a major obstacle or that its absence would play a major role for these categories of regular migrants. Applicants have a dedicated purpose with their move to the country, i.e. a particular work place or university, and they need to apply for a work and/or residence permit all the same. It is reasonable to believe, however, that visa-free travel facilitates these categories of regular migration since it makes it easier for potential candidates to visit for example universities or companies in Sweden before making a formal application. Interestingly, developments for Georgia and Ukraine in the past two years differ noticeably. The ratio of work-related residence permits issued to Ukrainians increase and that of asylum applications decrease, whereas the trend for Georgia is the opposite. Finally, the number of self-employed migrants (entrepreneurs) coming to Sweden from the countries targeted in the study has remained negligible after visa liberalisation. The total numbers in this category, however, are low in Sweden.

The impact on foreign trade and tourism are two additional areas that this study has scrutinised. While overall trade increased with the majority of these countries in the 2007 to 2017 period, volumes remain comparatively low and it is difficult to make any causal link to visa liberalisation. Overall, positive effects on trade or other economic benefits for Sweden are difficult to determine, but are probably limited for the time being. Reports say, however, that visa-free travel facilitates business contacts and business development. Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) probably play a greater role for trade development than visa liberalisation, but are only marginally researched in the study. The effect on tourism is somewhat challenging to determine. Looking at the number of external border-crossings and the number of guest nights at hotels and other forms of accommodation, we can clearly see a steady increase of these two indicators over time. All countries except Georgia register their peak years following visa liberalisation. The increasing number of guest nights is surely a positive development for the industry, even if the countries concerned are a small group. "Traditional" tourism from these countries has received little attention by the tourism business in Sweden. The large diaspora from the Western

Balkan countries in particular probably means that a large share of travellers come to Sweden with the purpose to visit friends and family. Overall, the fact that travel has become easier and more affordable with the introduction of low-cost airlines offering direct flights is probably the greatest positive effect in this field. Importantly, as the number of asylum seekers from the countries targeted generally decrease over time while the number of external border-crossings and guest nights increase, the share of bona fide travellers likely increases.

Turning to downsides such as crime perpetrated by nationals of the visa-free countries, trafficking in human beings and smuggling it is somewhat difficult to draw conclusions due to the relative lack of data on the nationality of offenders. There are indications, however, that visa liberalisation has fuelled criminality among Georgian asylum seekers. Data on final court rulings do not suggest any impact on the numbers of victims of trafficking from the visa-free countries. As discussed in the study, however, many convictions are for related crimes and the Police reports that trafficking has increased following previous EU-enlargements and visa liberalisation. Considering these factors, trafficking in human beings from the targeted countries would require more in-depth scrutiny to allow for conclusions that are more definitive. Misuse of visa-free travel is sometimes difficult to detect but ungrounded asylum claims is one example and this is/was probably the most noticeable example of misuse of visa liberalisation in Sweden. The number of instances of identity document fraud has increased from the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries. In addition, the number of persons refused entry at the external borders from these countries has increased since 2011 and they account for a large share of those refused entry. As discussed in the study, the increase in the number of asylum seekers led to an additional administrative burden at the Swedish Migration Agency that, inter alia, decided to set up special operations to process swiftly the high numbers of applications. The Migration Courts, the Migration Court of Appeal and the Swedish Police were also affected in this regard.

To conclude, it is difficult not to highlight the increasing numbers of asylum seekers from these countries as an immediate short-term impact of visa liberalisation. At the same time, there is a long-term trend of increasing numbers of external border-crossings and increasing numbers of hotel nights registered by nationals of the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries, which potentially are positive trends. Migration for work-related purposes has also increased for the Western Balkan countries in particular, whereas the number of asylum seekers have decreased in the past two years. All told, this suggests that the share of bona-fide travellers is increasing and that a shift towards an increasing share of legal migration is possible. This process is rather slow, however, and will probably develop very differently for the countries concerned given they are a heterogeneous group with vastly different economic and social situations. Specifically with regard to trade and economic benefits, it is possible that positive effects need to be analysed more long-term and in-depth to be fully assessed. Finally, the lessons learnt and discussed in the study can potentially be of value in assessing and managing the impact of visa-free regimes that will be introduced in the future.

About the EMN

The European Migration Network (EMN) is an EU funded network, set up with the aim of providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum for institutions of the European Union, plus authorities and institutions of the Member States of the EU, in order to inform policymaking. The EMN also serves to provide the wider public with such information. The EMN was established by Council Decision 2008/381/EC adopted on 14 May 2008. The Swedish Migration Board is the Swedish National Contact Point (NCP) for the EMN.

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