



SWEDISH NATIONAL
AUDIT OFFICE

Summary

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Act on the Reception of Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants for Settlement (Settlement Act)

– has the reform met the intentions?

Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has audited whether the reform of the allocation system for settlement of certain newly arrived immigrants has met the intentions of faster and more evenly distributed reception between municipalities and better establishment of new arrivals in the labour market. The introduction of the Act on the Reception of Certain Newly Arrived Immigrants for Settlement (the Settlement Act) in 2016 meant that, unlike before, municipalities were obliged, following allocation by the Swedish Migration Agency, to accept new arrivals for settlement in the municipality. The Swedish NAO considers that the intentions of the reform have been achieved and that the work of the Migration Agency and the County Administrative Boards is mainly effective and promotes the intentions. However, some parts of the Swedish Migration Agency's allocation work can be improved.

Audit findings

Shorter waiting times for new arrivals after introduction of the Settlement Act

Reception of new arrivals in municipalities following allocation has become faster after the introduction of the Settlement Act, compared to before. The average waiting time from a newly arrived immigrant in an accommodation centre being granted a residence permit until their reception by a municipality has decreased by 32 days, corresponding to 21 per cent. The reduced waiting times coincide with the introduction of the Settlement Act, despite the fact that allocated reception was considerably higher in the years after the Act was introduced compared to the years before. The Swedish NAO therefore considers that the introduction of the Settlement Act has contributed to reducing waiting times.

Higher income and employment for new arrivals when allocated to municipalities with lower unemployment

Prior to the introduction of the Settlement Act, the reception of new arrivals was unevenly distributed in relation to the population size of the municipalities. Municipalities that received high numbers often also had higher unemployment rates and a high volume of asylum seekers. Reception is more evenly distributed in terms of the municipality's unemployment, population size and asylum reception, following the introduction of the Settlement Act. The Act has also improved the establishment of new arrivals in the labour market. New arrivals allocated to municipalities with relatively low unemployment have, after three years, higher average incomes and employment compared to those allocated to municipalities with higher unemployment. According to the Swedish NAO's calculations, the introduction of the Settlement Act has meant that the income of allocated new arrivals increased by an average of about SEK 3,000 per year, corresponding to 1.8 per cent. However, the results should be interpreted with caution as it is difficult to assess with certainty the importance for establishment of being allocated to a municipality with relatively low unemployment.

The agencies' work promotes the intentions

The Swedish NAO considers that the Migration Agency's work to produce proposals for the number of new arrivals to be allocated and the distribution between counties (county numbers) is efficient and promotes a more even reception between municipalities. The Government has so far always made decisions on county numbers in accordance with the Migration Agency's proposal. The majority of county administrative boards use the Migration Agency's calculation basis at municipal level when deciding on the distribution of allocations between municipalities within each county (municipality numbers).

The county administrative boards also base their decisions on criteria that promote the intentions. The Swedish NAO also considers that the Migration Agency gives municipalities the opportunity to prepare their reception. Partly by establishing a plan of how many allocations each municipality will receive per month, and partly by providing information about the newly arrived immigrants that the municipality is to receive.

Newly arrived immigrants' work skills can be better utilised

When deciding which municipality is to be allocated to receive the new arrival, the Swedish Migration Agency can, within the framework of the municipality numbers, take into account different individual criteria in order to find a suitable municipality. They can, for example, take into account criteria such as the need for specialist medical care, proximity to relatives and the newly arrived immigrant's occupational and educational background. However, the audit shows that although occupational and educational background is one of the agency's criteria for assessing and making decisions about the municipality allocation, the Swedish Migration Agency does not systematically collect this data. At the same time, interviews with the Migration Agency's settlement unit show that the data are regarded as useful. The Swedish NAO considers that, by collecting data on occupational and educational background, the agency can encourage allocation of newly arrived immigrants to municipalities where their work skills are in demand. This would probably increase the chance of faster and better establishment, in accordance with the intention of the law.

The Migration Agency cannot always take into account the best interests of the child

Sweden has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which means that the best interests of the child must guide all exercise of public authority. The Swedish NAO notes that there are situations in which the Migration Agency cannot allocate newly arrived immigrants covered by the Settlement Act to the municipality where they have ties, even though it is deemed to be in the best interests of the child. This could, for example, refer to allocating unaccompanied minors who are quota refugees to municipalities where they have a sponsor. It may also refer to parents who wish to be reunited with their child who had previously arrived in Sweden as an unaccompanied quota refugee or unaccompanied asylum seeker. The reason is that municipalities have already reached their municipality numbers and that it has not been possible to agree to transfer allocations between municipalities.

Recommendations

Recommendation to the Government:

- Enable the Swedish Migration Agency, based on an assessment of the best interests of the child, to instruct municipalities to accept newly arrived immigrants covered by the Settlement Act in addition to the municipality numbers.

Recommendation to the Swedish Migration Agency:

- Systematically collect data on the occupational and educational background of newly arrived immigrants so that, within the framework of the municipality numbers, the data can be used in the assessment and municipality allocation decision.