

Summary

Newly arrived immigrants in Sweden –
effective initiatives for a quick reception
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Newly arrived immigrants in Sweden – effective initiatives for a quick reception?

The Swedish National Audit Office has reviewed the state initiatives for reception and settlement of newly arrived immigrants in the municipalities. The review was conducted within the framework of the strategy of the National Audit Office for reviews within the area establishment and integration.

Background of the review

As the number of asylum seekers who arrive in Sweden is increasing significantly, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for municipalities to receive more refugees and their relatives. Currently there are approximately 12,000 people (of which approximately 9,500 in accommodation centres) who have been granted a residence permit but are waiting for a municipality to receive them. An average waiting time of approximately five months for this group entails both a delayed establishment for the individual and significant expenses for the State.

The aim has been to review whether the initiatives which the Government and agencies in charge have conducted to eliminate obstacles for quick and appropriate reception and settlement of newly arrived immigrants in the municipalities are effective. The review has covered the Government, the Migration Board, Arbetsförmedlingen (Swedish Public Employment Service) and county administrative boards. The starting point has been the comprehensive audit question: Are the state initiatives for settlement and reception of newly arrived immigrants in the municipalities appropriate and effective within the framework of available resources?

The review has been conducted with the aid of case studies in four counties, a county administrative board survey, a municipality survey, questions to county councils and regions, document studies as well as interviews with reviewed agencies.

Results of the review

The overall assessment of the National Audit Office is that there is significant scope to streamline the current system, given the historically high influx of people who come to Sweden to seek asylum or reunite with their relatives. The reception and settlement system is not organised in a manner which allows relevant players to handle the currently high reception of asylum seekers



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without impacting the flow in the system negatively. The review shows that there are potential streamlining benefits for the State if more newly arrived immigrants with a resident permit can leave the Migration Board's reception system quicker and be allocated a place for settlement in a municipality. If one agency gets overall settlement responsibility for all newly arrived immigrants who are deemed to require assistance with settlement, the assigned resources can also be used more efficiently.

State initiatives only impact the actual reception to a certain extent

The review of the National Audit Office shows that when approximately 85 per cent of the newly arrived immigrants currently choose to arrange their own accommodation or move to a relative, in practice the state initiatives have a small impact if the aim is also to attain more even reception between the country's municipalities. This also means that moving out from the Migration Board's accommodation centres largely takes place without the planning which Arbetsförmedlingen should be responsible for when it comes to finding a place for settlement where there are also jobs and receiving municipalities. Thus, the review shows that the state initiatives are only important for the actual reception to a certain extent.

County and municipality figures have weak control effects

The review also shows that while the prerequisites of newly arrived immigrants for gainful employment are a starting point for Arbetsförmedlingen determining the county distribution of the reception (county figures), this is not reflected to the same extent when county administrative boards reach agreement with the municipalities on reception (municipality figures). If the purpose is to help newly arrived immigrants in need of settlement to stay in a municipality where they have the best prerequisites for establishment in the labour market, according to the assessment of the National Audit Office, the county figures should have a stronger control effect and the municipality figures should conform to these to a larger extent.

The divided settlement responsibility of the agencies does not promote the flow in the system

The review of the National Audit Office shows that it is mainly access to vacant apartments and the willingness of newly arrived immigrants to accept assignment which in practice governs the municipality which newly arrived immigrants who need help with their settlement are assigned. According to the National Audit Office, that responsibility for settlement of all newly arrived immigrants (within and outside the establishment assignment, resettled (quota refugees) and unaccompanied minors) is currently divided between two agencies entails that the existing resources of agencies are not used in an efficient manner. Competition for vacant accommodation and inadequate overview of the overall demand for settlement are two examples of the fact that the current allocation of responsibility is not functioning. Reasons for Arbetsförmedlingen retaining its current settlement assignment are missing when a majority of the newly arrived immigrants have an education and professional background which is not adequately specific for matching with the labour market to arise and when, as a result of among other things lack of accommodation in



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municipalities with good labour market conditions in practice, it is difficult to be successful with the principle on a labour market perspective in the settlement. If the responsibility for settlement of all newly arrived immigrants was allocated to one agency, the National Audit Office assesses that the settlement process could be streamlined.

Need for greater proximity and continuity principle in the settlement

A challenge in the settlement work is that an increasing number of newly arrived immigrants decline an assignment or terminate their settlement process. According to the National Audit Office, a greater proximity and continuity principle in the settlement could contribute to an increasing number of newly arrived immigrants being assigned a place in a municipality quicker after being granted a residence permit, and that an increasing number settle in small districts, while continuity in the state establishment initiatives is improved. Application of such a principle means that newly arrived immigrants should, in the first instance, be matched to municipalities in the county where there are accommodation centres, and where in many cases they have already started their establishment and integration. The National Audit Office also assesses that the principle of matching to the national labour market in the first instance should be applied to individuals who have an educational and professional background which is adequately specific for such a matching to arise.

Many agreed assigned places are not used

The review of the National Audit Office shows that only roughly 65 per cent of the approximate 7,600 places which according to the county administrative boards' agreements with the municipalities should have been available, were used by Arbetsförmedlingen or the Migration Board for assignment of newly arrived immigrants in 2013. Consequently, this means that every third agreed assigned place (approximately 2,500) was not used by any of the two agencies.

The fact that so many places were not used, while approximately 11,300 people are waiting for a settlement assignment from Arbetsförmedlingen (of which 6,300 in accommodation centres) , entails an efficiency problem according to the National Audit Office. Assuming that it had been possible for Arbetsförmedlingen and the Migration Board to use 2,500 more agreed assignable places for assignment of people who currently reside in accommodation centres, this equates to a cost saving in the Migration Board's reception system by a magnitude of SEK 25 million per month.

An extensive reception of both asylum seekers and relatives imposes significant requirements on preparedness and flexibility from all relevant players. For agencies to meet the requirements for flexibility which an extensive reception imposes, agencies need to be given conditions for maintaining a flow in the system so that targets can be attained.



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State subsidies are not deemed to provide adequate benefits to the municipalities

The review of the National Audit Office shows that the majority of municipalities are of the opinion that state benefits do not cover the expenses of reception of municipalities in some cases. For example, it is common for municipalities to pay supplementary maintenance support in “the gap” between the state benefit systems. The review also shows that neither the Government nor the Migration Board follow up whether the state grants which the agency annually decides on and pays to municipalities and county councils for reception of newly arrived adults (SEK 5.9 billion in 2013) are used for the intended purpose and the effects on the cost allocation between the State and municipality.

Arbetsförmedlingen has not used the assigned resources fully

An important prerequisite for good reception in the municipalities is that there are locally individually adapted initiatives for facilitating the establishment of newly arrived immigrants. The review shows that in 2013 Arbetsförmedlingen did not use SEK 853 million of the assigned funds for the intended purpose. A reason for this is that Arbetsförmedlingen's lower administration grant for employment officers within the establishment assignment, combined with a high influx of participants has resulted in employment officers finding it difficult to prepare individual establishment plans containing programme initiatives.

Arbetsförmedlingen sees limitations in the rules and regulations for procurement

Many municipalities offer labour market and establishment initiatives for newly arrived immigrants. According to Arbetsförmedlingen, the current rules and regulations entail limitations in terms of the opportunities which the agency has for awarding contracts through procurement to municipalities and municipal companies or concluding agreements on provision of establishment initiatives with them. This is despite the fact that the agency assesses that in certain cases municipalities can offer more qualitative initiatives for newly arrived immigrants.

The National Audit Office's recommendations

Recommendations to the Government

The National Audit Office recommends the following with the aim of streamlining the settlement process:

- The Government should consider providing one agency overall settlement responsibility for all newly arrived immigrants in need of assistance with settlement.



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- The Government should consider enabling the agency which is responsible for assignment of newly arrived immigrants to apply a proximity and continuity principle in the settlement to a greater extent.
- The Government should consider giving the agency which is responsible for settlement of newly arrived adults greater assignment opportunities during periods of high national reception.
- The Government should, to a greater extent, allow use of properties owned by the State as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and people who have been granted a residence permit while awaiting municipal placement and allow the Migration Board to run these under personal management.

For the rest, the National Audit Office recommends the following:

- The Government should assign the Migration Board to follow up the state subsidies which are annually paid to municipalities and county councils for reception of newly arrived adults.
- The Government should investigate the opportunity for county councils and regions to access information on which newly arrived immigrants have been registered in the county.
- The Government should ensure that the problem of the “gap” between the state benefit systems gets a solution.
- The Government should conduct a review of the current rules and regulations with the aim of enabling municipalities to choose the accommodation form for unaccompanied minors which is deemed to be most suitable based on their conditions and needs.

Recommendations to the Migration Board

- The Migration Board should improve the dialogue with municipalities on which new accommodation centres have been established and inform all municipalities when newly arrived immigrants who have settled on their own in each municipality are granted a residence permit.
- The Migration Board should conduct a detailed review of the handling of state subsidies to municipalities and county councils.

Recommendations to Arbetsförmedlingen

- Arbetsförmedlingen should ensure that there is a well-functioning local agreement on the establishment of newly arrived immigrants in all municipalities and more actively



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promote collaboration with relevant players on the establishment of newly arrived immigrants.

- Arbetsförmedlingen should continuously work towards reducing the scope and effect of limitations in the opportunities the agency has of, through procurement, awarding contracts to or concluding agreements with municipalities and municipal companies and work towards ensuring that they can be involved as suppliers of the labour market and establishment initiatives for newly arrived immigrants to a greater extent.

Recommendations to the county administrative boards

- The county administrative boards should work towards ensuring that agreements with municipalities on assignable places to a greater extent are equated to a real reception capacity in the municipalities.
- The county administrative boards should work towards ensuring that municipalities to a greater extent should take initiative for collaboration with property owners.

