

An intersectional perspective on ethnic relations, integration and discrimination in Sweden

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Population of immigrant

- Today, almost one fifth of Sweden's population is of foreign origin. About **16 percent** were born abroad, while about **5 percent** were born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents.

Compared to many other European countries, Sweden has a high proportion of foreign-born persons in relation to the total population. Statistical data show that Switzerland (27 percent), **Germany, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, France, and Britain have among the highest proportions of foreign-born residents in Europe and Italy** (4 present) **and** eastern Europe have among the lowest percentages of foreign-born residents in Europe. Poland have only 0.5 percent.

- Today, the greater part of foreign-born persons in Sweden comes from **non-European countries**. Statistics show that the number of people who moved to Sweden for **humanitarian reasons was proportionally higher** than in many other European countries such as England, Italy, Germany, and France.

Employment among immigrant

- The **native-born employment rate** has been **ca. 80** percent or higher throughout the 2000s, while the corresponding figures **for foreign-born immigrants born outside of Europe** was even lower, and in 2009 it was about **59 percent**.

- **In 1975**, foreign-born and native-born persons had **similar rates of employment**, but the employment gap increased markedly during the economic crisis of the 1990s, and was **still large in 2009**

Employment rate for immigrant in an international perspective

- An international comparison of a number of Western countries including Spain, Britain, Sweden, Italy, France, Canada, and Germany found that **in 2008 Sweden had the largest employment gap between foreign- and native-born persons**
- Statistical data also show that of 19 OECD countries, Sweden have the **highest have in employment rates** between native- and foreign-born persons **12.1% in 2009.**

Lower employment rates for immigrant women in Sweden

Employment rates are lower for women than for men in Sweden and the **gap between men and women is greater among the foreign born than the native born**. In 2009, the employment rates for native-born men and women were about 76 and 73 percent respectively, while the corresponding figures **for foreign-born men and women were about 67 and 58 percent**.

Unemployment

- In Sweden, unemployment is higher among immigrants than native-born persons. When it comes to gender aspects of unemployment, foreign-born men have the highest proportion of unemployment while native-born men have the lowest percentage. When it comes to age, unemployment has been greatest in the age category of 15–24 years. **Combining age, gender, and ethnicity, statistical data for 2009 show that youth unemployment was highest among foreign-born young men (37.6 percent) and lowest among young women born in Sweden (22.8 percent)**
- At the international level, unemployment is high among foreign-born immigrants in Sweden. While Spain has the highest rate of unemployment among foreign-born persons, **Sweden ranks nr 15 out of the 21 OECD countries**

Income

- **Foreign-born** persons who have lived in Sweden for more than **20 years** still have lower incomes than persons born in Sweden. **Foreign-born women have lower incomes** than foreign-born men. Income levels are **lower among those born outside Europe** than those born in Europe.
- Study has also found that **unreasonable income** exist between foreign- and native-born persons. This shows that **changing one's foreign-sounding surname to a Swedish-sounding one** results in **higher income** after the name change. The average increase in annual **income associated with a name change ranges from 10,000–15,000 kr**. This applies to people born in **Africa, Asia, or the Slavic countries**.

Education

- Statistical data show that **38 percent** of native born 25–64 years of age had **post-secondary education**, while the corresponding figures for foreign-born were **about 36 percent**.
- Among the native-born 21 percent had lower secondary education, compared to 13 percent of the foreign born. A larger part of women than men are highly educated both among native and foreign born persons. **By international standards, Sweden has a high proportion** of college graduates among its **foreign citizens, 31 percent**.

Health

- In 2008–2009, the proportion of people with ‘**good health**’ among native-born men and women aged 16 and older was about **84 percent**. The corresponding figures for foreign-born persons were about **73 percent**. **Only 69 percent of foreign-born women** report being of good health, while the corresponding figure for **native-born men was 85 percent**.

- During 2000–2005, the proportion of native-born persons reporting poor or **very poor health was around 4 percent**. The corresponding figure for those born **outside Europe was about 17 percent**. When controlling for socio-economic factors (socio-economic group, type of housing, and possession of a cash buffer), the proportion who reported poor or very poor health among persons born **outside Europe was found to be 10 percent**, which is two-and-a-half times higher than among native-born persons.

Residential Segregation

Residential segregation is a growing problem that has attracted increasing attention lately. The National Board of Health and Welfare reports that during the period 1990-2012 there has been a marked increase in ethnic segregation in Sweden. **During the period, the poverty rate has increased significantly in very resource-weak areas** where people often have their origins in **Southern Europe, Asia, Africa, or Latin America.** This means that the populations in these areas have come to be poor 'visible' immigrant groups.

How segregation and immigrant low position can be explained?

1. A culturally conditioned perspective that stresses **cultural differences** and a **lack of cultural competence**.
2. A **class-based perspective** in which generally the **ethnic minority background** have poorer health, a lower position in the labour market, and worse housing conditions.
3. **The intersectional theory of ethnic discrimination** that emphasizes the role of exclusion mechanisms in explaining the marginalized status of foreign-born persons in Sweden.

Defining ethnicity and ethnic relations

Ethnic relations are not only about the **relationship between ethnic ‘Swedes’** and those who have **immigrated**, but also includes the relationships between the majority society and native groups, such as the Sami, and minorities, such as the Roma.

Ethnicity: Characteristic or construction:

- The concept of ethnicity is far from problem-free. It is in fact difficult to determine the extent to which ethnic differences are based on **objective criteria** for group membership or are a result of social constructions.
- According to ‘*primordialism*’ **ethnicity is a characteristic** and distinguishing feature that is independent of situation.
- In contrast to this perspective, **constructionists** employing a ‘circumstantial’ (**situation related**) view consider ethnicity to be just one of **many dimensions** used by individuals or collectives to identify themselves or be identified by others.

An intersectional perspective on ethnic relations as power relations

- An intersectional perspective would be a better starting point for analyzing **power relations surrounding ethnic relations** and possibilities for integration than the approaches that emphasize cultural characteristics.
- An intersectional perspective can study the **complexity of discrimination**.
- Key concepts in analyzing ethnic relations from the perspective of power will be **discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion**.
- From a **power perspective**, ethnic relations – like class, age and gender relations – are generally **part of a social stratification based not only on a dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’, but also on a hierarchical power relationship** in which ethnic minorities usually are inferior and ethnic majorities superior.

An intersectional perspective on ethnic relations as power relations

Example:

Categorization of people as ‘immigrants’ can contribute to having a **negative image** of themselves or the new country and thereby reinforce this **feeling of marginalization**. Therefore, **ethnic groups’ power and status, participation and representation** are some of the important elements that should be addressed to shed light on ethnic relations and on **the idea of the ‘multicultural society’**.

Integration policy in Sweden: From assimilation to multiculturalism

- From the end of World War II until the **early 1970s**, labour immigration to Sweden and many other countries increased, as a result of **economic growth**.
- A policy of assimilation was officially pursued in Sweden until the **mid-1970s**. It failed because many foreign-born persons **lacked the 'will'** to assimilate in their new country
- An assimilation policy implies that immigrant groups and ethnic minorities are expected to abandon their own ethnic identities in order to assimilate to the majority population's culture and norms.
- Friedman and Friedman also believe that a **weakening of the nation state and its ideology together with a lack of integration** paves the way for **multi-ethnic ideas** that, according to the authors, increase the risk of ethnic identification and disintegration.

A modest multicultural integration policy

In Sweden, the failure of assimilation policies led to the setting up of an immigration commission. The final report of the commission became the basis for the government bill Concerning Guidelines for Immigrants and Minorities Policy (1975:26). The Immigration Commission formulates the following goals for Swedish policy on immigrants and minorities: **equality, free choice, and collaboration.**

New policy

While during the 1980s and 1990s, the gap between foreign- and native-born persons was big in many aspects, at least in terms of rate of employment. Immigration policies were increasingly questioned in **the late 1990s, and a new policy was** drafted to replace it.

Multiculturalism, transnational cultures, and an anti-discrimination perspective

- For a long time there was an established belief that the integration issue mainly concerned how **'immigrants' should be integrated into Swedish society**. It was believed that society was composed of two groups with different characteristics, namely **'Swedes' and 'immigrants'**.

- In this way, the **integration question was reduced to a special policy for 'the others'**.

The question is whether one also must begin to speak of integrating Swedes into a multiethnic society, instead of just integrating immigrants into Swedish society.

Multiculturalism, transnational cultures, and an anti-discrimination perspective

- The term '**trans nationalism**' was used to describe how people develop and maintain relationships and activities in several national environments
- The transnational cultures are challenging both the Swedish national cultural heritage and contemporary cultural segregation.
- '**Segregated integration**' may in fact be a result of multicultural and transnational society, as it does not place enough importance on participation as the key measure of integration.

Multiculturalism, transnational cultures, and an anti-discrimination perspective

- **Ethnic discrimination and structural barriers are significant for segregation and isolation**, one could ask how some people of foreign origin have managed to defy the structural barriers and improve their position in society.

- The point of emphasizing exclusion mechanisms and discrimination is to **shift the focus** from **individual actions to structural conditions** that put certain people at a disadvantage because of their particular characteristics **active anti-discrimination** policy may therefore be of great importance in encouraging foreign-born people to improve their motivation, skills, and desire to integrate, and thus reduce ethnic inequalities.

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