

SWEDEN

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1. Introduction

Family reunification and humanitarian migration were the main immigration channels in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s. Labour immigration remained insignificant following a ban on recruitment since 1968, and no major policy changes to the overall fairly restrictive labour immigration regime took place until 2006. The government then proposed a new labour immigration policy, which is in force since 15 December 2008.

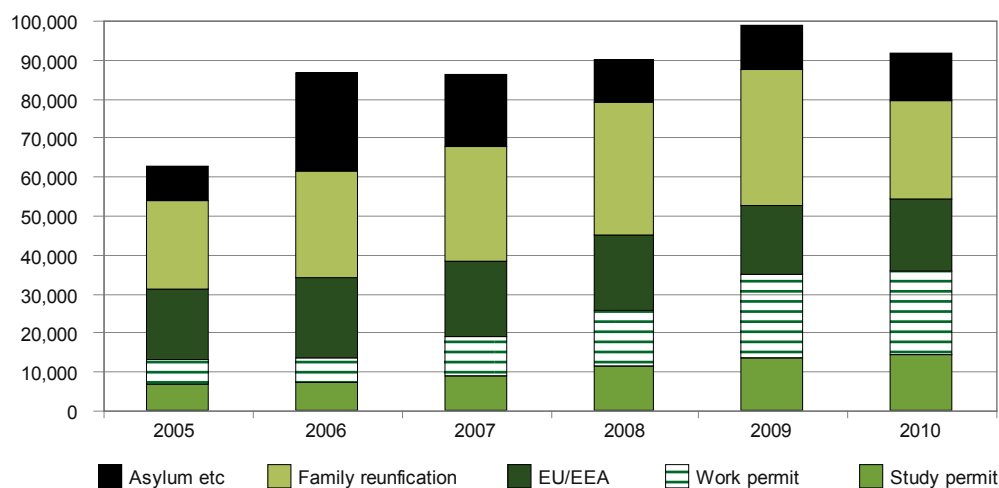
The 2008 legislation spearheaded an employer-driven labour immigration policy. Under the previous system, too many governmental agencies were involved in determining labour shortages and granting work permits, so that actual shortages did not always correspond to those on the shortage list and respectively to the employer needs. The new 2008 system has allowed employers to recruit third-country nationals to fill their vacancies, if they could not find suitable Swedish or European Union (EU) workers. Employers gained the right to decide on their labour market needs and fill their vacancies accordingly. There are no caps or quotas in place to determine how many labour migrants can enter the labour market.

Under the previous government a commission was established to examine labour and skills shortages and the potential need for labour immigration. The main reason for the 2008 reform was “first, the recognition that labour shortages in Sweden could not be filled by people living in Sweden or in other EU countries. Second, the population was rapidly getting older, and fewer people of working age would have to support an increasing percentage of the population in the near future” (Billström, 2009).

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As a result, labour immigration increased since 2008, especially for third-country nationals. Nevertheless, family reunification and asylum-seekers still make up the largest proportion of immigration to Sweden. EU/EEA migration has remained fairly constant during 2005 to 2010 (around 18,000/19,000 per year). Overall, immigration reached almost 100,000 new entrants in 2009, up from 40,000 only ten years earlier in 1999 (Migrationsverket, 2009).

Figure 1: First residence permits granted, 2005-2010



Source: Migrationsverket 2011a.

The Swedish government recognizes that labour immigration can only be complementary to other measures in Sweden which are aimed at increasing employment and broadening participation (EMN, 2010).

2. Identification of labour and skill shortages in Sweden

Various methodologies are used in Sweden to establish labour shortages and labour market needs forecasts. They range from employers' surveys to statistical analyses based on graduation and retirement rates. Both macro-level data (for labour shortages) and micro-level labour market information (for skill shortages) are used for policy development and implementation. Shortages are assessed nationally, but also on the level of individual sectors and regions (county, municipality).

A range of actors are engaged in the forecasting of labour market developments in Sweden but key agencies are Statistics Sweden (SCB), the Public Employment Service (PES) and the Migration Board. Their publications are used in long-term studies and also for planning by authorities, schools and individuals (Lindskog, 2003).

As of March 2011, 63 occupations were on the shortage list. Shortages occur at both high and lower skills levels. Some occupations (such as doctors, dentists, psychologists, teachers and nurses) are regulated and thus require authorisation or certifications.

Comparing the current shortage list to previous ones from 2009 and 2010, the number of shortage occupations has increased substantially (from 35 occupations in 2009 and 49 in 2010) not least due to the economic recovery.

PES produces occupational forecasts twice a year analyzing the labour market situation and future prospects for almost 200 occupations. For the forecasts, the PES assesses interviews with 12,400 private employers, municipal authorities and county councils. A 'shortage index' is then used to quantify recruitment needs, using a weighted average value from 1 to 5. It identifies the occupations (occupational groups) where there is a shortage of applicants. Before the new legislation on labour immigration was introduced (December 2008), this shortage list comprised a criterion for who could get a work permit in Sweden (EMN, 2010).

The SCB publishes regularly reports on job openings and unmet labour demand. It also produces labour forecasts, including of long-term perspective until 2030 in its 'Trends and Forecasts' publication (SCB, 2009b). Among the relevant assessments by the SCB and other agencies are the following:

- Short-term forecasts "Labour Market Tendency Survey" provide information on the current labour market situation and its future prospects for the coming years for 71 educational programme. Every fall some 10,000 questionnaires are sent to selected 7,000 employers inquiring on a range of issues, including their assessment of the supply of potential employees and the training plans in the perspective of one and three years (SCB, 2010). In the 2010 Survey employers thought that there was a good supply or a balance of job-seekers without occupational experience for eight out of ten educational groups. Employers reported that there was still a shortage of candidates with occupational experience for most of the educational groups, such as engineers, experienced doctors and childcare workers (SCB, 2010).
- PES produces occupational forecasts twice a year that analyze the situation in the labour market and future prospects for almost 200 occupations. The forecasts are based on interviews with 12,400 private employers, municipal authorities and county councils (EMN, 2010). The PES' research department engages also in a macroeconomic assessment and industry forecasts that contribute to the overall analysis (PES, 2010).
- The Svensk Näringsliv (SN) – Confederation of the Swedish Enterprises – publishes *ad hoc* reports with the aim to improve the understanding of requirements and demands on future labour market from the perspective of private employers. Most studies are based on interviews with the member company needs (Lindskog, 2003). In 2002 two SN members published a report stating that employers were dissatisfied with the Swedish labour immigration system due to facing considerable difficulty hiring non-EU workers. In fact, the policy was assessed to be so restrictive that it kept migrants deliberately away from the Swedish borders (Ekenger and Wallen, 2002, cited in Bucken-Knapp, 2007). The 2011 the first SN economic survey indicated that while the national unemployed rate was at same level in 2005 and 2010, there were about 40 percent more unfilled vacancies in 2010 (SN, 2011).

- The National Agency for Education (NAE) is responsible for conducting forecasts in the fields of childcare and education.
- The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents the governmental, professional and employer-related interests of Sweden's 290 municipalities and 20 county councils. The Federation produced forecasts on the municipal level on various issues, such as healthcare, based on the current personnel data and assumptions on the future recruitment possibilities (Lindskog, 2003).

PES advertises notified vacancies, but employers are since July 2007 no longer obliged to report vacancies to PES. Therefore, only about 30 percent of all vacancies are publicized via PES (EMN 2010, 24). In the fourth quarter of 2010, the average recruitment time for all private sector workers varied by both occupation and geographical location. The longest recruitment times were observed for the IT specialists (about 1.7 months) and professionals such as lawyers, economists, veterinarians and technicians (about 1.4 months). The shortest recruitment time was reported in the hotel and restaurant sector (0.1 month). In terms of regions, Stockholm has the average recruitment time of 0.8 months, while the lowest period is recorded for North Central Sweden and Central Norrland (about 0.4 months) (SCB, 2011a). SCB data indicates that in the fourth quarter of 2010, almost 50 percent of vacancies (about 8,900) were registered in the region of Stockholm (SCB, 2011a).

Small companies with one to nine employees have the most vacancies, followed by those employing between 10 and 49 workers. It appears to be difficult for small companies to fill their vacancies as they might not have access to the same resources and know-how for recruitment, and be could be less attractive to potential employees than larger companies.

Information on the vacancies and issuing work permits for migrants is available at the regional, county and municipality levels. Regional and local authorities identify labour and skill shortages, and the data are then passed on to the SCB Statistics Sweden, Swedish Migration Board and other relevant authorities.

3. Migration and Labour Market Analysis in Relation to Public Policy

Labour market analyses by various bodies seem to have influenced the Swedish policymakers, in particular the Department for Migration and Asylum Policy of the Ministry of Justice in designing the 2008 legislation.

No changes were implemented with the economic crisis as the system is considered to be self-regulatory. Sweden was one of the three EU countries that did not impose any transitional restrictions on labour immigration from new EU Member States in 2004. Nevertheless, Sweden did not receive many highly skilled EU immigrants for various reasons, including the limitations of the Swedish language. By 2007 over 10,000 migrant workers from the new EU Member States had come to Sweden (Gerdes and Wadensjö, 2008), compared to over a million workers headed for the United Kingdom. The evidence of the small number of EU migrant workers helped to secure the Swedish

Parliament's approval to the proposal for opening Sweden's borders to more labour immigrants.

For many years, the ruling governments were opposed changes in the labour migration policy. In late 2001, employers tried to negotiate the relaxation of labour migration restrictions, but were criticised by the labour market boards, the Social Democratic government and the unions. Even though the main union confederation, LO had been mostly concerned with the low-skilled immigration, any changes to the labour immigration policy were resisted.

In 2002 the pressure from a range of political parties started to mount. The next year, the opposition parties formed a powerful alliance and established a parliamentary committee on labour migration to review the immigration legislation. Several reports by SN, PES and Statistics Sweden indicated that Sweden suffered from labour shortages in some sectors already (SCB, 2005). While the trade unions finally acknowledged in 2003 the need for labour immigration to help fill labour shortages, they pushed for the continued tripartite shared control of labour migration policy and issuing the migrant work permits by unions, employers and the government. LO was supported by the two other union confederations, TCO and SACO that favoured a centralized system and very limited labour immigration in shortage occupations (Cerna, 2009).

The 2006 Commission Report (*Arbetskraftsinvandring till Sverige. Slutbetänkande av Kommittén för arbetskraftsinvandring*) concluded that no widespread labour shortages were observed in Sweden, but there could be shortages in specific occupations, sectors (such as healthcare and education), and regions (Ministry of Justice 2006). The report proposed: 1) extending the work permit to 24 months with the possibility of renewal after 48 months, then conversion to permanent residence (after four years); 2) linking labour immigration to the labour market shortages (established by the Swedish Migration Board and PES, based on graduation and retirement level statistics, as well as employers' surveys); 3) letting the Labour Market Administration establish a shortage list and take decisions in consultation with social partners; and 4) tying the work permit to a specific occupation and a specific employer during the initial permit period. If the person was still in the same employment when the work permit was revisited, the extended permit would be subsequently tied only to the occupation (EMN, 2006). The link between the work permit and the occupation and employer was intended to ensure meeting labour requirements by the employer.

The Committee also found that it was important for Sweden's competitiveness to continue offering a generous policy for labour migrants to bring their families into the country; but also to utilize existing talent more effectively by activating disadvantaged groups on the labour market (Ministry of Justice, 2006).

To sum up, the 2006 Committee Report called for greater liberalisation of labour immigration, which was supported by the new centre-right coalition government. The Committee report and the subsequent legislative proposal were often labelled as targeting highly skilled immigration, but the fact that they concerned workers of all skill levels. The legislative proposal was largely based on the recommendations of the Committee, but spearheaded the approach that would allow employers to decide on their labour needs, and request work permits for migrants without the approval of the unions. It supported the protection of the Swedish workers by reaffirming

the need to guarantee the equality of wages and working conditions for immigrant and native workers. Consultation on the proposal ran until November 2007 and the Parliament adopted it in November 2008. The law came into force on 15 December 2008.

According to the new legislation, the trade unions retained the right to state their opinion on the new recruitment within five days. For employers it is sufficient to prove that they advertised without success through the Swedish Labour Market Board and the European Union's EURES system, and that the remuneration and working conditions were in line with sectoral collective agreements. Immigrants initially receive a work permit for two years and can apply for an extension of another two years if still employed at the renewal date. Labour immigrants can obtain permanent residency after four years of legal stay in Sweden. The permit is restricted to a specific occupation and employer for the first two years. If the residence and work permit is extended after two years, it is restricted only to a specific occupation. If the employee changes occupations, he/she must apply for a new work permit. In case the migrant loses the job, he/she can look for other employment for three months before having to leave the country. The labour migrant is allowed to bring family members to Sweden from the start and they can also receive work permits. Importantly, migrants can also leave Sweden for up to 12 months without compromising their status and the pathway towards permanent residency (Migrationsverket, 2009).

Prior to the 2008 reform, the PES had the central role in assessing labor shortages, and reflecting this data in granting decisions on issuing work permits. Currently, the PES is no longer able to argue that the particular labour is already available in Sweden, other EU/EEA countries or Switzerland. The new labour immigration regime is based on the assumption that the employers know best what they need. As employers have difficulties in finding suitable candidates with the right match of skills in a wide range of occupations, the system employs a non-sectoral approach to labour immigration (Carlander, 2009). The role of the government is to regulate the labour market, and offer the same salaries, insurance and employment protection to all workers to avoid labour exploitation and salary dumping. The unions check whether the collective agreements are upheld where they exist. In other cases, the salary cannot fall under the minimum wage in the occupation.

Even though the new immigration system is demand-driven, shortage lists are still being used for various purposes. The shortage list has a positive effect for foreigners already staying in Sweden on a visa with a referral to visit an employer for an interview. Normally an employee should apply for a work permit in his or her home country and wait there until a permit is granted. For occupations that are on the list it is instead possible for the employee to submit the application in Sweden (and wait for the decision from the Migration Board without leaving the country). Applications for work permits by candidate employees with a job on the shortage list are also handled with priority (personal communication, Migrationsverket).

The government also simplified the rules for foreign students who wish to stay and work in Sweden upon the completion of their studies. Asylum-seekers who have found employment of the duration of at least six months can now apply for residence and work permits (Ministry of Justice, 2010). The government thus considers other types

of immigration (family, humanitarian and student) in assessing the potential of migration to fill identified labour shortages.

As the new immigration policy has only been in force since 15 December 2008, it is hard to assess its impact, although an initial assessment requested by the government is currently underway. The Swedish think-tank FORES published a report on the first 100 days of the new system in March 2011 (Rosenqvist, 2011), which highlights several challenges, including in the area of the inter-agency cooperation in provision of integration services, and the delivery of the integration programmes (IOM, 2011). Evidence also suggests that employers outside the main cities (Stockholm, Malmö and Göteborg) and the metropolitan areas, and small employers continue experiencing difficulties in attracting suitable workers despite the liberalization of immigration rules.

Sweden is experiencing shortages for a number of causes, which are also tackled in by the public policy. For instance, there is insufficient interest of young people in engineering training (PES 2010). In addition, trade union Landsorganisationen i Sverige (LO) claims that Sweden has neglected vocational training and apprenticeships that resulted in a labour shortage in less skilled occupations (Andersson, 2008). Regional labour mobility is also insufficient. Other proposed measures to address shortages include increasing the geographical mobility of workers within Sweden, and active labour market policies incentivising Swedish employers to hire national workers/immigrants already in the country through tax breaks. In addition, the government seeks to introduce measures in order to encourage unemployed people and those on long-term sick leave back to work (Andersson, 2008). Another area of effort includes validation of jobseeker education, training and skills (EMN, 2010).

4. Labour market position of migrant workers

The policy change in 2008 also brought about more elaborate migration data collection that allows for examination of the migration phenomenon by age, occupation and nationality.

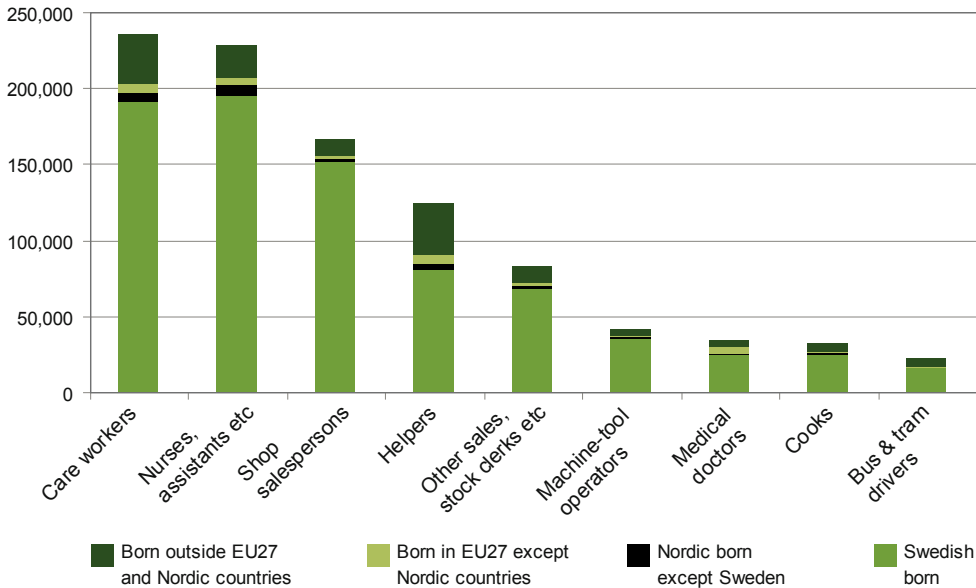
Third country nationals – those born outside the EU and the Nordic countries – are concentrated in several less skilled occupations: care workers (32,400 in 2009), helpers (33,500 workers in 2009), nurses (21,900) and other sales assistants and stock clerks (11,300) (Figure 2). The number of third-country nationals in highly skilled occupations (for instance, 4,200 medical doctors in 2009) is smaller.

Among bakers, pastry chefs and confectionary makers 36.6 per cent of workers were born outside the EU27 and the Nordic countries. There are many third country workers among helpers and cleaners in offices and hotels (32.5%) and bleaching, dying and cleaning machine operators (26.5). Among highly skilled occupations, third-country pharmacists constitute 19.9 percent of all workers in this occupation.

Based on the 2003-2004 survey of population aged 16-64, OECD reported the over-qualification rate of 6.5 per cent for the native-born, in contrast to 16.1 per cent for the foreign-born working age population. Another study indicated that among the foreign-born, 30.6 percent were overqualified in 2003. Women and immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe and Africa, Asia, and Latin America, were overrepresented among all

overqualified workers. The same study found that for the Sweden-born women and Western European immigrants the probability of overqualification appears to decrease with time. This was not true for non-EU immigrants, which could be indicative of discrimination (Thorkelson, 2010).

Figure 2: Occupation of third-country workers in Sweden, 2009



Source: Swedish Occupation Register with statistics 2009

Note: SSYK4 according to the Swedish Standard Classification of Occupations (SSYK96)

Overqualification is a significant problem for third-country nationals since their qualifications are not always recognised. Sweden has invested resources to support language acquisition for immigrants, as well as to improve their qualifications. With the introduction of the Anti-Discrimination Act the country is also clamping down on discrimination (OECD, 2010).

Swedish-born workers generally fare better in the labour market (Table 1). The unemployment rate (8.3% of national rate) is higher for the foreign-born workers (15.1%) than for Swedish-born ones (7.1%).

Data also indicates some changes in 1995-2008. For instance, the employment rate for foreign-born men increased from 51.7 per cent in 1995 to 69.9 per cent in 2008, and respectively from 50.0 to 58.7 per cent for foreign-born women. Furthermore, the unemployment rate decreased for foreign-born men from 28.1 per cent in 1995 to 11.5 per cent in 2008, and respectively for the foreign-born women from 19.9 to 12.9 (Table 2). These data seem to suggest that either the government implemented successful integration measures and/or Sweden admitted immigrants better geared towards success in the labour market.

Table 1: Labour market outcomes of the Swedish and foreign born working age population (15-74 years of age) by labour force participation and sex, 2010, absolute figures in thousands

Population category	Employed	Unemployed	Active	Inactive	Total	Unemployment rate	Activity rate	Employment rate
Total	4,499	408	4,907	2,048	6,955	8.3	70.6	64.7
Swedish born	3,860	295	4,154	1,664	5,819	7.1	71.4	66.3
Foreign-born	639	114	753	384	1,136	15.1	66.2	56.2
Men	2,539	222	2,581	935	3,516	8.6	73.4	67.1
Swedish born	2,032	161	2,192	782	2,974	7.3	73.7	68.3
Foreign-born	327	62	389	153	542	15.9	71.7	60.3
Women	2,140	186	2,326	1,113	3,439	8.0	67.6	62.2
Swedish born	1,828	134	1,926	882	2,845	6.8	69.0	64.3
Foreign-born	312	52	364	231	594	14.3	61.2	52.5

Source: SCB Statistik årsbok, 2011b.

Table 2: Labour market outcomes of the Swedish and foreign born working age population (15-74 years of age) in 1995-2008, per cent

	1995	2000	2007	2008
Employment rate				
Native-born men	73.2	75.8	78.0	77.9
Foreign-born men	51.7	59.6	68.1	69.9
Native-born women	71.7	73.2	74.3	74.5
Foreign-born women	50.0	54.7	58.6	58.7
Unemployment rate				
Native-born men	8.8	5.1	5.1	5.1
Foreign-born men	28.1	13.5	11.7	11.5
Native-born women	7.0	4.3	5.5	5.5
Foreign-born women	19.9	11.2	12.6	12.9

Source: OECD, 2010

Foreign-born persons who have lived in Sweden for a long time have improved their situation in the labour market and reached a better occupational position (Rooth and Ekberg, 2006).

Hedberg (2008) provides an excellent summary of several empirical studies on labour market integration of foreign-born nationals. These studies show, for example, that the employment gap between natives and immigrants in the Swedish labour market can be explained by ethnic discrimination. Migrants also have lower exposure to social networks which has an impact on their access to the labour market. Foreign-born workers are overrepresented in low-skilled and low-wage occupations due to the ethnic sorting in the labour market (Hedberg, 2008). Clearly, this indicates the need for continuous integration policy efforts to ensure that the goals of the new immigration policy are achieved.

5. Conclusions

As many other high-income countries, Sweden experiences labour and skills shortages in a variety of sectors and occupations, ranging from engineers and IT specialists, doctors and nurses to bricklayers and shop assistants. The new employer-led immigration regime, in force since 15 December 2008, promotes labour immigration is one of the means to fill labour shortages. The new policy states that “labour demand in the labour market is the driving factor and that human resources are emphasised as an important component of global migration” (EMN, 2010).

The Swedish approach comprises a number of good practices, but also some potential problem areas.

To encourage applications from Swedish and EU nationals, employers have to advertise the job offer for ten days, and adhere to the established collective agreements. Trade unions have a more limited role in comparison to the previous system, but still have an opportunity to comment on the application and the contract. Some unions are worried that the amount of time they receive to comment is insufficient, which might leave too much of the decision-making power in employers’ hands and potentially harm the labour market options of the Swedish workers. In addition, not every occupation has union representation. Nevertheless, the government provides special incentives through active labour market policies to encourage employers to first recruit among the unemployed.

Many countries do not have such comprehensive social partnership between employers’ associations, unions and the government, especially for both high- and low-skilled occupations. The challenge with such a flexible labour immigration policy, where the decisions are delegated to employers is to prevent social and wage dumping as a result of hiring migrants.

Another concern is that employers do not invest more in training and education of Swedish students and workers because they have an easy access to labour migrants. Therefore, it is important for the government to stress that labour immigration is one of the means to respond to labour and skills shortages, and should not be considered a substitute for other labour market and social policies.

Some of the practices and labour immigration rules could be transferred to other national policies. The flexible, demand-driven approach to labour immigration is a noteworthy approach to fill shortages and respond to some of the mismatches and problem areas. Employers ‘know best what they need’ and permits are granted by the Migration Board, instead of the previous procedure of being approved by several agencies. It is system that adjusts itself to the economic cycle, as the scope immigration is directly linked to the availability of vacancies and adapts in turns to economic growth and recession.

Importantly, Sweden offers migrant workers a possibility to settle permanently with their families. For small and open economies, this might be a step forward in attracting labour migrants, including highly skilled workers that value favourable admission mechanisms and set of rights that extends to their family members. If the foreign nationals stay longer than 12 months, they have to register with the population register and have access to the same welfare rights as the Swedish nationals.

Another strong point of Swedish labour immigration system that it acknowledges labour shortages in all skills levels in contrast to many countries that focus only on attracting highly skilled immigration. Such approach discourages irregular migration and realistically reflects the nature of labour shortages in Sweden.

Overall, many of the Swedish practices are applicable to other countries. The parallel focus on domestic measures such as training/education of workers, and labour immigration policy is an appropriate for addressing labour shortages in a comprehensive manner, including their root causes. In order to limit social dumping, it is necessary for governments to guarantee the equality of salary and working conditions for foreign and native workers. Good communication between migration management agencies and statistical bodies determining labour market needs is also a crucial element of the system, as are continuous efforts to improve provision of integration services.

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