

Closing the door to Sweden: Migration legislative changes and government inquiries in 2024

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Abstract: The Swedish government has committed to reducing immigration and is increasingly moving toward stricter migration policies and reduced rights for migrants. This article provides an overview of migration policy developments in Sweden during 2024, drawing on a unique database that maps and categorizes migration policy changes from 1954 to the present. The year 2024 saw a mix of restrictive and liberalizing reforms, including tighter asylum reception rules, more demanding citizenship criteria, and expanded access for highly skilled labor migrants under the EU Blue Card scheme. Additionally, temporary protection holders from Ukraine gained improved access to services. Ongoing and upcoming government inquiries signal a continued shift toward more restrictive policies, reflecting a broader realignment in Sweden's migration governance.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines Sweden's migration policy shifts in 2024, focusing on legislative changes, policy proposals, and government inquiries. Key developments during 2024 include stricter asylum reception rules, tougher conditions for acquiring citizenship, liberalized labor migration policies via the EU Blue Card, and better access to services for Ukrainians under temporary protection. Ongoing inquiries address deportation policies, family migration restrictions, citizenship and asylum policies, and integration measures, reflecting a broader shift toward increased migration control.

Contextual background

The Swedish government, led by Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, is a coalition of the Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and Liberals, supported by the Sweden Democrats through the Tidö Agreement. This agreement, signed after the 2022 election, outlines the terms of cooperation among these parties, allowing the Sweden Democrats significant

influence over policies without being part of the formal government. It covers migration, integration, criminal policy, asylum legislation, energy, climate, healthcare, and education. Migration measures include combating irregular migration, reducing overall immigration, strengthening border controls, using biometric data, restricting refugee resettlement, increasing deportations, and introducing transit centers. Support for these policies remains stable in parliament, so far with backing from the main opposition party, the Social Democrats.

The Swedish policy process

The Swedish policy process for developing legislation starts with government-issued directives (Dir) for commissions to investigate specific issues. These commissions, comprising experts and stakeholders, produce reports (SOU) with findings and recommendations. The reports undergo a consultation process (remissbehandling) for feedback from various stakeholders. Based on this feedback, the responsible ministry drafts a bill (proposition) and submits it to the Council on Legislation for review. After the review, the bill goes to a parliamentary committee for further examination and amendments. Finally, the bill is debated and voted on in parliament. This thorough process ensures comprehensive and inclusive policymaking, typically taking several months to a few years.

OVERVIEW

This article is part of a broader research project that maps and analyzes changes in Swedish migration policy from 1954 onward. A key focus is evaluating whether policy shifts over time have led to greater openness or increased restrictiveness. The graph below presents the preliminary overall results, summarizing yearly changes—where a higher value indicates a shift toward openness, and a lower value signifies increased restrictiveness. The data reveal a clear trend toward openness from the mid-1970s until 1988. From the early 1990s, migration policy again moved in a more open direction, reaching its peak in 2014. However, after 2020, we observe a sharp turn toward increased restrictiveness. The results from 2024 reveal a surprising liberalization of migration policies, primarily driven by reforms facilitating labor migration for highly skilled workers and extending rights for Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection. However, current policy proposals indicate a shift towards increased restrictions in the coming years.

Fig. 1: Overview of migration policy developments in Sweden 1954–2024. Source: Author

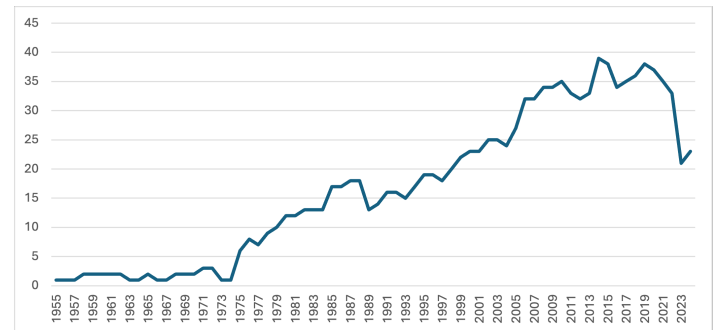


Table 1: New migration laws

Bill	Area	Changes	Policy direction	In effect
2023/24:107	Citizenship	More difficult to become citizen by notification due to crime	Restr.	Oct 24
		Suspicion of crime at the time of decision instead of application	Restr.	Oct 24
2023/24:15	Temporary protection (Ukrainians)	Increased access to services by being registered in the population registry	Lib.	Nov 24
		Right to parental leave	Lib.	Nov 24
2024/25:18	Labour migration (Blue card)	Lower income requirements	Lib.	Jan 25
		Shorter contract requirements	Lib.	Jan 25
		Easier change of employer	Lib.	Jan 25
		More persons eligible	Lib.	Jan 25
		Easier to apply from Sweden	Lib.	Jan 25
2024/25:49	Asylum reception	Mandatory to live in reception centers for daily allowance	Restr.	Mar 25
		Revocation of asylum claim if absent from centers	Restr.	Mar 25
		Mandatory civic orientation	Restr.	Mar 25

* Approved by the parliament in January 2025

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024

In 2024, the parliament approved four new migration laws (See Table 1). This section provides a description of these laws and contextualizes their consequences.

Asylum Reception: A requirement to stay in state reception centers

Policy changes:

Economic Assistance: Linked to housing; only for those in assigned accommodations.

Housing Control: Migration Agency can inspect accommodations.

Residence Permit Withdrawal: If not living in assigned housing and not notifying the agency.

Civic Orientation: Mandatory courses on Swedish laws, norms, and practical life.

On October 15, 2024, the Swedish government presented a Commission report outlining a new framework for asylum reception: Reception Act – A New Law for Organized Asylum Reception and Efficient Return (SOU 2024:68). The proposed legislation significantly restricts the ability of asylum seekers to arrange their own housing during the asylum process, marking a major shift in Sweden's approach to asylum reception. The aim is to ensure a more structured and uniform reception system, improve asylum seekers' understanding of Swedish laws and societal norms, and maintain security and order in accommodations.

Under the previous system, asylum seekers could either reside in Migration Agency accommodations or find their own housing, known as Eget Boende (EBO). Migration Agency accommodations were in designated centers across the country, where asylum seekers had no right to choose their place of residence and were subject to relocation based on space availability. Alternatively, asylum seekers could opt for EBO, typically choosing to stay with relatives or friends while awaiting the outcome of their applications. In 2024, 66% of the 25,919 individuals registered in the Migration Agency's reception system lived in self-arranged housing (Migration Agency, 2025).

The Reception Act introduces sweeping changes to asylum seekers' living arrangements. Asylum seekers will be required to stay in Migration Agency accommodations for the entire duration of their asylum process. The proposal mandates participation in civic orientation courses, covering Swedish laws, societal norms, and practical aspects of life in Sweden. Additionally, new measures will address misconduct, including warnings, forced relocation, and expulsion.

Following a parliamentary debate on January 29, 2025, the proposed bill (Prop. 2024/25:49) was approved by a large majority. The new legislation will take effect on March 1, 2025, bringing key changes: economic assistance linked to housing, control of housing, withdrawal of residence permit application, and mandatory civic orientation.

The adoption of this reform marks the end of Sweden's 30-year-old EBO system. Since 1994, asylum seekers were encouraged to arrange their own housing, with a housing allowance provided to partially cover rental costs. Concerns over housing segregation and uneven integration outcomes led to successive restrictions over the years. In 2005, the government abolished the financial housing allowance for asylum seekers choosing EBO. In 2020, further restrictions were introduced, preventing asylum seekers from settling in socio-economically challenged areas in 32 municipalities. With the implementation of the Reception Act, Sweden is making a decisive shift away from decentralized asylum housing policies toward a fully state-controlled system.

Better conditions for Ukrainian refugees

Policy changes:

Foreigners with temporary protection can now be registered in the population registry earlier than before, making it easier to access public services.

Individuals under temporary protection who are employed in Sweden are now eligible for work-based parental benefits and temporary parental leave benefits.

On May 28, 2024, the Swedish government proposed the "Improved Living Conditions for

Foreigners with Temporary Protection” bill, focusing on Ukrainian refugees. The bill, effective November 1, 2024, aims to enhance their legal and social status by allowing earlier registration in the population registry, improving access to essential services. Previously, Ukrainians under temporary protection were treated similarly to asylum seekers, with limited access to services compared to those with permanent residence. They received basic services and financial assistance, which was set at a low level: €6.39 per day for single adults, €5.49 per day for adults sharing household expenses, and €3.33–€4.50 per day for children, depending on age. They were not included in the population registry, which restricted access to many public services and social benefits.

The new legislation allows earlier registration in the population registry, enabling individuals to obtain a personal identity number for better access to services. It also grants employed individuals under temporary protection eligibility for work-based parental benefits and temporary parental leave benefits. However, they remain ineligible for residence-based benefits like child allowances and housing benefits. Despite these changes, individuals under temporary protection are still largely treated like asylum seekers, except for the registry inclusion and work-based parental leave benefits. This reform aligns Sweden's policies more closely with neighbouring countries, though economic security for those without stable employment remains uncertain.

Implementation of the EU Blue Card for high skilled labour migration

Policy changes:

Lower income requirements, from 1.5 times to 1.25 times the average gross annual salary.
Shorter contract requirements, reducing the required contract duration from 12 months to 6 months.
Easier change of employer, by notification rather than needing to apply for a new permit.
More persons eligible, allowing relevant professional experience to substitute for formal education qualifications.
Easier to apply from Sweden, migrants with other residence permits can now transition to an EU Blue Card without leaving the country.

On September 24, the government presented a new law on labour migration, transposing the updated EU Blue Card Directive (Prop. 2024/25:18), effective January 2025. The new law aligns closely with the revised EU Blue Card Directive (Directive 2021/1883). To be granted an EU Blue Card in Sweden, a foreign national must have an employment contract for a highly qualified position lasting at least six months and a salary of at least 1.25 times the average gross annual salary in Sweden.

The updated directive introduces several liberalizations to increase the Blue Card's attractiveness and usability, including lowering the minimum salary requirement, reducing the required contract duration, and allowing professional experience to substitute for formal education qualifications. Foreign nationals already residing in Sweden on other residence permits can now transition to an EU Blue Card without leaving the country. Blue Card holders also have greater flexibility in changing employers or professions by notifying the Swedish Migration Agency.

Despite these improvements, the impact of the EU Blue Card on labour migration to Sweden should remain limited. Sweden's ordinary labour migration system already allows for lower income thresholds, shorter contract durations, and broader eligibility criteria, making it more attractive for employers and high-skilled migrants. National labour migration

schemes continue to dominate across the EU, limiting the uptake of the Blue Card.¹ Sweden's demand-driven labour migration system, introduced in 2008, offers more flexibility to both employers and workers, reducing the incentive to apply for an EU Blue Card.

More difficult to become a citizen by notification

Policy changes:

More difficult to become a citizen by notification. Individuals suspected or convicted of certain crimes, pose a threat to national security, or have connections to extremist groups or criminal organizations are no longer eligible for citizenship by notification. Suspicion of crime at the time of decision instead of application. Eligibility for citizenship will now be assessed at the time of the decision, rather than at the time of application. Enhanced protections for vulnerable individuals. Measures to ensure that individuals are not coerced into renouncing their previous citizenship.

On March 19, the Swedish government introduced the bill "Amendments to the Citizenship Act" (Prop. 2023/24:107), proposing stricter requirements for acquiring Swedish citizenship by notification. The amendments received broad political support, with all major parties except the Left Party and the Green Party backing the reforms. The reform, effective October 1, 2024, introduces security-based restrictions and enhances protections for vulnerable individuals.

Under the new law, individuals suspected or convicted of certain crimes, those posing a threat to national security, and those with connections to extremist groups or criminal organizations are no longer eligible for citizenship by notification. Eligibility for citizenship will now be assessed at the time of the decision, preventing applicants from being granted citizenship if their circumstances change after applying.

The bill also introduces measures to protect children and adults in vulnerable situations, particularly those affected by honor-based oppression. This involves stricter monitoring and verification processes to ensure that renouncing

citizenship is voluntary and not due to external pressure or threats.

Government decision on resettlement of refugees

Sweden has played a significant role in refugee resettlement since the 1950s, traditionally prioritizing those in greatest humanitarian need. While Sweden expanded its resettlement program in 2016 to accommodate 5,000 refugees per year, the Tidö Agreement reduced the quota to 900 refugees annually from 2023. A press release from the Ministry of Justice (2024) confirmed that Sweden will accept approximately 900 quota refugees in 2024, focusing on women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, including LGBTQI individuals. These groups will make up about two-thirds of the total resettlement quota, with most refugees being selected from Uganda and Tanzania, predominantly from the Democratic Republic of Congo. A notable shift in Sweden's resettlement criteria is the introduction of integration potential as a key factor in the selection process. The Swedish Migration Agency now assesses refugees' skills, education, work experience, and values to determine their ability to integrate into Swedish society. Conversely, individuals with a history of involvement in armed groups, anti-democratic activities, or extremist organizations are excluded from resettlement consideration. These developments mark a departure from Sweden's historical approach, which focused on humanitarian need rather than potential economic or social contributions.

REFORMS IN THE PIPELINE

Return operations and internal controls of foreign nationals.

In 2024, saw two key Commission reports tightened return operations and immigration control with two key reports: "Prescription of Removal Decisions and Certain Issues Regarding Re-entry Bans" (SOU 2024:10) and "Certain Measures for Strengthened Return Operations and Foreign National Control" (SOU 2024:80). These reports propose legal changes to limit irregular

migrants and rejected asylum seekers from staying in Sweden.

SOU 2024:10, presented in February 2024, extends the statute of limitations on removal decisions from four to five years and requires individuals to leave Sweden before the period begins. It also abolishes the track-change system, which allowed rejected asylum seekers to apply for work permits. The Swedish Parliament approved these measures on March 12, 2025, with broad political support. The measures came into effect on April 1, 2025.

SOU 2024:80, presented in November 2024, focuses on identifying and removing irregular migrants. Recommendations include improved coordination between agencies, expanded police powers for internal immigration controls, and increased use of technology for deportations. A proposal to require public servants to report undocumented migrants was discarded due to legal and ethical concerns. The parliamentary vote on SOU 2024:80 has not been scheduled yet.

COMMISSION REPORTS WITHOUT A SCHEDULED DATE FOR BILLS

Detention

The interim report "Improved Order and Security in Detention" (SOU 2024:5), published on January 10, 2024, presents recommendations from the 2023 Detention Inquiry to enhance security and efficiency in migrant detention facilities. It proposes extended search authority, allowing authorities greater powers to search detainees, their rooms, and personal belongings to prevent security breaches. It also recommends increased supervision during detainee transport, enabling the appointment of guards to accompany individuals and minimize escape risks. Additionally, stricter control of visits and shipments is suggested, granting authorities greater discretion to monitor and inspect interactions between detainees and the outside world, reducing the risk of unauthorized communications or contraband.

Labour migration

The government inquiry "New Rules for Labour Immigration" (SOU 2024:15), published on February 15, 2024, proposes significant changes to Sweden's labour migration policy. These reforms aim to prioritize high-skilled migration and reduce the influx of low-skilled workers. Key proposals include increasing the minimum salary requirement for work permits to 100% of the median salary, introducing a list of excluded low-skilled occupations, and imposing higher penalties for employers hiring foreign workers without valid permits. The minimum salary required for a work permit has increased to 28,480 SEK per month (80% of Sweden's median salary), with plans to raise the threshold to 100% of the median salary.

Support for voluntary return

The government inquiry "Support for Immigrants' Emigration" (SOU 2024:53), published on August 13, 2024, proposes encouraging voluntary return of migrants through increased financial incentives, expanded information campaigns, and measures to prevent returnees from re-entering Sweden. It suggests that migrants receiving financial support for voluntary return could lose their right to stay in Sweden if they return and may need to repay grants. However, the lead investigator expressed skepticism about the feasibility of these measures, raising concerns about the economic viability of financial incentives, ethical implications of pressuring migrants to leave, and practical challenges of monitoring returnees and enforcing repayment. The investigator also noted potential negative public perception, as these measures might be seen as coercive rather than supportive.

Changes for student migration

On December 5, 2024, the departmental inquiry "Better Migration Law Regulations for Researchers and Students" (Ds 2024:31) proposed liberalized rules for doctoral students and researchers, while tightening regulations for international students. The new framework would allow time spent on a doctoral study permit to count toward eligibility for

permanent residence, facilitate easier status transitions for researchers, and grant greater travel rights during residence permit application processing. In contrast, international students face new restrictions, particularly in terms of employment and academic performance. The new rules introduce caps on student employment and enforce stricter academic progress requirements, requiring students to demonstrate sufficient study credits and progress to extend their residence permits. Improved information-sharing between state agencies will enhance monitoring and enforcement.

New goals for integration policy and review of economic support for newly arrived persons with international protection

In 2024, one inquiry related to integration was conducted. The final report, "Steering Power for Successful Integration" (SOU 2024:41), was presented on June 14. It proposes a new goal for integration policy: "foreign-born women and men should have the same rights, obligations, and opportunities as the rest of the population to live a free, dignified, and independent life." To achieve this, a new governance model with measurable indicators to track progress in employment, education, health, and social participation is suggested. Additionally, the inquiry recommends revising economic support programs for newly arrived refugees participating in integration initiatives to create stronger incentives for them to seek employment or increase their working hours.

DIRECTIVES FOR NEW GOVERNMENT INQUIRIES

The Swedish government has issued several new directives for legislative inquiries aimed at tightening deportation rules, citizenship regulations, family migration policies, and the asylum system.

Stricter deportation measures for foreign offenders

The directive "Stricter Regulations on Deportation Due to Crime" (Dir. 2024:42) proposes expanding the deportation of foreign nationals convicted of crimes. The inquiry will focus on four areas:

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tightening current deportation regulations, requiring prosecutors to request deportation for deportable offenses, increasing penalties for remaining in Sweden despite a re-entry ban, and extending the length of re-entry bans, including indefinite bans in severe cases. The final report is expected by May 15, 2025.

Further restrictions on citizenship acquisition

On June 14, 2024, the government issued a Supplementary Directive to the Investigation on Stricter Requirements for Acquiring Swedish Citizenship (Dir. 2024:63), introducing additional restrictions on naturalization. The inquiry will evaluate eliminating the notification procedure for several migrant groups, imposing stricter requirements for stateless individuals born in Sweden, and limiting exemptions from naturalization conditions. The directive also mandates a review of regulations on the loss of citizenship to ensure compliance with EU law.

This directive is part of a broader citizenship inquiry that presented a final report in January 2025 (SOU 2025:1), suggesting stricter requirements for acquiring Swedish citizenship. In December 2024, the migration minister addressed Parliament, stating that citizenship applications should be delayed until the new restrictions take effect, arguing that granting citizenship under the current, less stringent regulations could pose a security risk to Sweden. In response, a new instruction for 2025 was issued to the Swedish Migration Agency, instructing them to intensify efforts to detect security threats in citizenship assessments.

Tighter conditions for family migration

On July 11, 2024, the government announced a migration inquiry: Tightened Conditions for Family Immigration (Dir. 2024:68). This directive proposes restricting access to residence permits based on family ties through five measures. First, it will assess limiting the eligibility of reference persons to those with permanent residence permits or Swedish citizenship. Second, it will narrow the scope of eligible family members to immediate family only.

Third, it will propose stricter maintenance requirements, requiring reference persons to demonstrate financial self-sufficiency. Fourth, it will explore introducing mandatory comprehensive health insurance for family migrants. Finally, it will evaluate increased use of DNA testing to verify biological kinship in family reunification cases. The final report is expected by August 25, 2025.

Planned restrictions on asylum policy

In November 2024, the government issued a Supplementary Directive to the Investigation on the Adaptation of Swedish Legislation for Granting Asylum and the Asylum Procedure to the Minimum Level According to EU Law (Dir. 2024:115). This directive aims to align Swedish asylum laws with the new EU Migration and Asylum Pact while exploring additional restrictions on asylum procedures. One key area is whether Swedish law should allow greater discretion to reject asylum applications without examination, especially if applicants have previously sought asylum in another EU country. The inquiry will also examine how to accelerate the phase-out of permanent residence permits for asylum seekers. The interim report is expected by March 31, 2025, with the final report due by October 2, 2025.

CONCLUSIONS

Sweden's migration policy developments in 2024 reflect a broader shift toward stricter migration controls, selective labour migration, and enhanced enforcement mechanisms. Legislative and policy changes under the Tidö Agreement prioritize reducing irregular migration, tightening eligibility for asylum and family reunification, and imposing stricter conditions for acquiring Swedish citizenship. Meanwhile, measures like the liberalization of labour migration under the EU Blue Card system aim to attract highly skilled workers while restricting lower-skilled migration.

The policy process to introduce stricter deportation policies, extended re-entry bans, and increased police authority for internal immigration controls highlights Sweden's focus on enforcement

and deterrence. The elimination of pathways such as the track-change system for work permits and stricter family migration criteria marks a shift away from earlier policies that facilitated long-term integration. While Sweden remains committed to aligning its policies with EU minimum standards, it is also moving toward a more restrictive national framework, becoming one of the toughest in Europe.

REFERENCES

- [1] According to data from Eurostat, in 2023, 89 000 Blue Cards were granted, dominated by 69 000 in Germany and only 106 in Sweden.

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