

The Policy and Strategies Used in the Integration of Immigrants in Sweden

Abstract

The intention of this briefing is to introduce policies, strategies and tactics used to integrate non-Nordic immigrants into Swedish society. It outlines how the 1997 government policy on integration has been applied by the State, municipalities, the private sector and NGOs in the search for an acceptable method to integrate racial minorities into Swedish society. An example of how the policy has functioned in a small Swedish city is also provided. Intentionally condensed, this briefing should inspire readers to conduct a their own study of Sweden's compliance with the principles on non-discrimination that are available in United Nations human rights treaties and EU directives.

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Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Raouf Ressaissi

SWEDEN, ITS POPULATION AND ITS POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The population of slightly more than nine million persons in Sweden is diverse and consists of Scandinavian Nordics and other ethnic groups. Since the end of World War II, Sweden is known for its generous and liberal history of receiving refugees, nearly all of whom are quickly absorbed into its labour force. Due to this refugee-cum-migrant-worker population, at least eleven percent of the current population consists of persons with an immigrant background. This includes first and second generation persons, both of whom are popularly identified as “immigrants”.

The total population also contains five official minority groups: the Sami (who are also Sweden’s largest indigenous population), the Swedish Finns, the Tornedalians, the Roma, and ethnic Jews. But even though there are statistics kept on the nationality and birthplace of all persons in Sweden, those from the Americas (all regions and ethnic groups), Africa, Asia, the Middle-East and the Pacific Islands are not recognised as members of a minority group, even though they may have obvious physical characteristics that indicate that they are non-Nordics. Besides, only those officially recognised minority groups’ languages are recognised as minority languages.

Sweden has been a party to nearly all United Nations human rights instruments since the early Seventies. It is also a party to The Council of Europe’s conventions and a number of International Labour Organization (ILO) treaties protecting vulnerable groups from discrimination in labour. In 1971 Sweden adopted a criminal law statute prohibiting discrimination, and its first gender equality act in labour law in 1979. But prior to 1999 Sweden never adopted an effective law prohibiting racial discrimination in labour. For many years, the reason given for this was that there were no racial problems in Sweden, a policy that was enhanced by the fact that statistics based on race and ethnicity were not maintained. That was the general opinion for decades in spite the fact that people of different races, ethnicities and religions live here, many in inner-city areas such as Rinkeby and Tensta in Stockholm, or Rosengård in Malmö.

THE NEW SWEDISH INTEGRATION POLICY

In 1997 the Swedish Parliament approved a new Integration Policy (1997/98:16) which called upon public and private sectors to take account of ethnic and cultural diversity when complying with its objectives. The policy called for the development of plans for integration, improved

equal rights and opportunities for all regardless of ethnic or cultural background. Municipalities were offered tempting amounts of funds per person if they provided newly arrived refugees with Swedish language and other introduction programmes. The new policy also addressed the important role that NGOs had in developing an effective dialogue to realise the policy's goals, and called for the creation and support of anti-discrimination bureaux throughout the country. The Swedish Integration Board (SIB from hereon) was established in 1998 and was assigned the task of bankrolling those who participated in the goals of the new policy.

But in spite of the SIB's funding powers, the new State policy was neither warmly received nor quickly acted upon. In fact, it was not until the EU adopted Directives 2000:43 and 2000:78 that a number of municipal governments were motivated to attempt complying with the new policy. Their sudden reaction was enhanced by the adoption of some new laws: i) Sweden's first law prohibiting discrimination in labour (1999:130), (ii) a law calling for the equal treatment of students (2001:1286), and (iii), a new comprehensive Statute prohibiting direct and indirect discrimination (SFS 2003:307) for several categories of persons when seeking employment or public services.

In February, 2006, a newly created government committee, the Committee on Discrimination, submitted a proposal to Parliament calling for an even more comprehensive law that will prohibit discrimination for seven categories of persons including one on age. The new law, if it is adopted, will also provide protection to legal personalities such as associations and businesses where needed, and might include special measures based on one's ethnicity. Some of the proposals were resisted by many sectors of Swedish society, especially labour unions and organisations representing employers. Nevertheless, if adopted, it will become effective in 2007. Until then, however, all sectors of Swedish society have been urged to participate in the new integration policy. Municipalities were especially urged to adopt their own policies and plans.

EVASIVE MUNICIPAL STRATEGIES

But recent government research has shown that Swedish municipalities have huge differences in their adoption of the new State policies and practices. The number of municipal policy statements examined by SIB researchers shows that the actual number of municipalities that attempted to comply was insignificantly small. Only four municipal policies called for anti-discrimination clauses in service contracts; only three suggested special measures for job

applicants with a non-Swedish background (proving they were equivalently qualified); and only one provided for any sanctions if a County employee was guilty of discrimination or harassment. Such evasive (and in some cases, outright defiant) tactics to avoid compliance with the new policy are especially obvious in southern Sweden (Scania), where right-wing and neo-Nazi associations seem to be able to operate with impunity. The differences may become clearer if we look at how one of the complying municipalities in Sweden managed the new policy.

Compliance by A Local Government

Lund is the name of a small town in southern Sweden that is also the home to Scandinavia's largest university. The population of the town is slightly more than 101 thousand persons and the city's statisticians (December 31, 2004) claim that 15% of the total population is of foreign origin. In the Spring of 2002, the city of Lund's Advisory Board for Integration (previously named the Advisory Board on Immigrants) adopted a Diversity Plan for integration in consensus with a number of local NGOs. On the Advisory Board's recommendation, the City Council then adopted an Integration Policy. Both documents declared that they would honour the new Swedish policy on integration, laws prohibiting discrimination and the principles of non-discrimination in United Nations treaties Sweden has ratified and all relative EU Directives. The Plan was very ambitious. Amongst its goals were to actively try to fill 10% of the County's jobs with persons with immigrant origins within five years; to increase the number of immigrants the City's management jobs; to assist immigrants in starting their own businesses; to respect immigrants cultural and language abilities; and to be a good example for other Swedish cities to follow. To fulfil these goals, the City Council approved of a "Diversity Development Officer" to co-ordinate the Policy and the Plan with various actors in the County.

As well-intentioned as the Policy and the Plan were, however, they stumbled over a number of serious oversights. One was the 10% quota in city employment that was promised: it was in direct conflict with the new Swedish law prohibiting ethnic and other forms of discrimination in employment (SFS

2003:307). Hence, any real attempts in this direction had to be aborted even though there are similar forms of affirmative action through the State's own labour office. Another oversight is that there is no provision for an anti-discrimination clause in service contracts with the City, nor one for the punishment of municipal employees who were in violation of existing laws prohibiting discrimination. A further oversight with both the Policy and the Plan was that neither contained provisions for an independent, competent monitoring system regarding discrimination within the city's civil services. The proposal to assign Division Supervisors as monitors overlooked the question of their competence. Hence, that role had to be taken up by a local NGO: The Anti-Discrimination Bureau of Lund (ADB Lund). One of its first public campaigns was the distribution of the UNESCO 10 Point Plan for Cities to all political parties, civil servants and NGOs in Lund. Unfortunately, ADB Lund closed down at the end of 2005 due to the SIB's higher interest in spreading its limited resources to other parts of Sweden, and the municipality's lower interest in financing a local anti-discrimination bureau at all. As one leading local politician put it: "Quite simply, a local Anti-discrimination Bureau was not included in either the municipality's Policy or Plan."

Evasive Compliance by a Swedish University

In May 2000, an investigating commission headed by the then vice-chancellor of Lund University submitted a study on integration at Swedish universities to the Ministry of Education entitled *Diversity in Swedish Education (Mångfald i högskolan, SOU 2000:47)*. The study commented on the need for Swedish universities to increase ethnic and social diversity, and recommended special labour-market measures to be taken to ensure ethnic diversity in the recruitment of staff at all of Sweden's institutions of higher education. In 2002, the Board of Directors of Lund University adopted their own Diversity Plan which specifically called for ethnic and social diversity within the University's student population, teaching and staff members. Responsibility for

implementing the plan was placed under the domain of the vice-chancellor and the boards of directors of various faculties and institutions.

In 2003 and 2004 a number of conferences outlining the potentials and possibilities for a more integrated university were held by NGOs such as The English International Association of Lund, and institutes such as the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights, with University faculty, union representatives and staff members.

But implementing the University's Diversity Plan along all such recommendations was stealthily evaded from top to bottom by those who could have brought about real change. Hence, employment within the university's administration, faculties and institutions remains extremely ethnically homogeneous. So far, persons employing staff members at all levels show no interest in increasing the ethnic diversity of staff members or teaching personnel through affirmative action or quotas. Instead, the strategy used to divert attention from that issue has been to focus on changing the social diversity of students rather than on the ethnic diversity of staff members and teachers. But even here, implementation falls short of the universities own recommended principles, as it strives to recruit only those students who's early academic achievements are on par with the traditional entry grading systems. Of 20 so-called socially disadvantaged students recruited during the Spring of 2003, only 2 reflected any real social diversity. Hence, the social diversity measures that are used continue to maintain the extremely homogenous character of the student population at Lund University.

In 2003, The Evaluation Committee at Lund University (*Utvärderingsenheten*) published a report recommending improvements in the quality of information given to vulnerable students. Other recommendations called for the education of staff and faculty members on the laws prohibiting discrimination, identifying the needs of vulnerable students, and for student clubs and dormitories to adopt equality policies to improve the equal treatment of vulnerable students. The report also criticised a 2002 Lund University Magazine (LUM) article that suggested applying affirmative action principles

to recruit students from ethnically vulnerable populations. However, the report did not address any probable need to implement affirmative action policies to recruit faculty members from available pools of academically qualified ethnic minority groups.

Compliance by the Private Sector

Companies and small business establishments in Lund have not adopted a common diversity or integration plan. The proposal to adopt non-discrimination clauses in service contracts remains a non-issue until it is adopted by the City Council. The city's Diversity Co-ordinator is in regular contact with the private sector with regards integration within employment and housing.

Compliance by the NGO Community in Lund

Since the consensual adoption of the 2002 Integration Plan, none of the fifty or so NGOs in Lund that are known as "immigrant associations" have published a diversity plan of their own as an alternative to the original plan. An umbrella organisation known as LIFS (Lund Immigrant Co-operative Association) holds quarterly meetings with the city's Advisory Board on Integration, but how much real influence they have on the city implementing the 2002 Plan or Policy remains open to question. As with many local NGOs, the dependence on City Counsel funding mires their activities into the treadmill of displaying immigrant cultural events. Fortunately, there are several other local NGOs who avoid such quagmires.

The above example of Lund's struggle with implementing the new Swedish integration policy is unfortunately not the general trend. While Lund's City Council has managed a good public housing policy that has avoided creating an immigrant ghetto, its other good intentions have been blocked by the very law prohibiting ethnic discrimination on the local labour market that it should avoid. This is why a 2003 Price Waterhouse audit of the Plan had a number of

recommendations for the City to adopt before it could fulfil its goal of being a role model for other Swedish cities.

National Public and Private Sector Strategies

Sweden's business community is slowly beginning to adopt diversity policies and plans. But proposals to introduce and adopt non-discrimination clauses in service contracts or affirmative action plans based on ethnicity remains an issue of debate -- especially since there is the problem of such policies violating existing laws prohibiting the major categories of discrimination. A considerable number of public and private sectors of Swedish society have refocused their sights on the rights of other vulnerable groups. Many now include gender equality issues and the problems of equality for the functionally disabled in Swedish society in their employment policies. Others are focused on the problems of sexual choices, with a focus on mainstreaming the problems of sexual orientation, especially the discrimination of homosexual and bisexual people. This latter development has received substantial State support through the SIB in spite of the absence of any statistics on the numbers of persons belonging to those vulnerable groups. The result of this new direction is that members of other vulnerable groups, especially those who are vulnerable because they are members of a racial or ethnic minority, feel they are being discriminated against twice: once for previously established reasons, and again by the State (SIB) through the diversion of funds to the defence of members of the new focus groups. Angry opinions are largely voiced behind closed doors.

Swedish NGO Strategies

The 1997 Integration Policy also called for the SIB and the offices of the Discrimination Ombudsmen to be in consultation with NGOs that could function as local reference points to promote integration and anti-discrimination measures. But since Swedish municipalities have shown little -- and in some case, no -- interest in maintaining such bureaux, State support became vital to the presence of the NGO community in the Integration Policy. Swedish NGOs had a poor presence at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism that took place in Durban, South Africa. Following a number of public debates on the matter, the government decided to follow the model set by NGOs engaged in anti-discrimination activities in The Netherlands. Funding the organisations would be the hands of the SIB.

A new Swedish mandate (SFS 2002:989) was adopted for the purpose of providing funds and guidelines for Anti-discrimination Bureaux (ADB) to follow. With the funding they received, which covered office maintenance, travel expenses and salaries, they were to provide assistance and directions to individuals for assistance in filing police reports, negotiating with unions, employers or locating the Discrimination Ombudsmen and other persons who could assist them in finding a remedy; produce information to the general public on current legislation and procedures for combating discrimination and finding remedies; provide education in the form of seminars and conferences; and build public opinion against unfair discrimination through their own media and by working with established media structures.

Like their models in The Netherlands, Swedish ADBs have neither the mandate nor the budget to take their cases directly to court. This important function remained in the hands of the various Ombudsmen for Discrimination, who are, in fact, government employees. These moderately financed local ADBs are each under the financial might of the SIB. As state-supported NGOs they are obliged to provide protection to the all groups of vulnerable persons referred to in comprehensive law SFS 2003:307. Exactly how much influence the SIB exerts on them to implement the prohibitions under the comprehensive law remains a subject of debate. A few have protested the alleged dictatorial powers of the SIB's financing practices. This and other issues around the power of the SIB over NGOs has contributed to a number of government investigators and former employees to call for the disbandment of the SIB. But this comes without providing for an alternative for the frail NGO community to turn to. Besides, the closure of the SIB is a political decision.

There are, however, larger and more independent NGOs complying with the 1997 Integration Policy. One of these, an umbrella association known as the Centre Against Racism, is also state financed but is based in Stockholm. Strong political party allegiances have resulted in the fact that the CMR receives the lion's share of the SIB's budget for NGOs engaged in integration and anti-discrimination activities. It is well staffed with professionals and provides many services to its member organisations and other sectors of Swedish society. This is not without controversy, however, hence its battle with an ice cream company in 2005 (GB Glace) over the name of one of its flavours. The flavour's name, "Nogger Black", was considered offensive to many Africans living in Sweden and CMR launched a campaign to force the company to withdraw that name from its campaign. But the company refused, and the entire event brought CMR considerable

attention. It was a bold step for CMR to take, and was highly appreciated by many Africans in Sweden.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON SWEDISH STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Although well intentioned, the 1997 Swedish Integration Policy has had only marginal success. A large number of disturbing issues have yet to be publicly debated or seriously decided upon by the sectors concerned. Some of the principle issues are:

- The blatant *de facto* discrimination of persons with non-Swedish names or birth in the allocation of public housing by county governments. There is no government mandate on how public housing is to be allocated to ensure non-discrimination and integration.
- Strong independent local government politics that are easily over-ride national policies. This enables many of Sweden's county governments to defy national policies on integration. Nearly all have established their own policies regarding the allocation of public housing for immigrants and there are no national regulations or guidelines regarding the rentals and sales of homes and apartments on the private market.
- The unwillingness of educational institutions at all levels to adopt special measures (affirmative action) or quotas to offset the high absence of immigrant academics from teaching professions at schools and universities.
- The absence of national plans and policies calling for affirmative action measures for first and second generation foreigners on the labour market in comparison with similar programmes aimed at the advancement of women in Sweden.
- The discrimination of undocumented migrants who are not in possession of the ten-digit ID number from even the most basic education and health-care services. This form of discrimination falls mainly onto the shoulders of migrant farm workers, sub-contracted temporary workers and persons whose application for asylum have been rejected.
- The absence of a National Human Rights Commission and Court that could ensure that the Policy had a competent monitoring and implementation mechanism.

Other issues of concern include the competing interests of the NGO community for funding from the SIB; the financial support by the State for national associations based on race and ethnicity; the tolerated conflict of interests of politicians who wear two hats, one for NGOs and the other for the positions they were elected to; the blatant discrimination based on one's religion that is so widely practised; the tolerance for neo-nazi and far right organisations under the guise of Freedom of Speech.

Some of these unresolved issues are best reflected by studying the reports and recommendations from international and regional human rights monitoring bodies or the few NGO shadow reports that are available. All of the UN monitoring bodies have offered recommendations to Sweden to take effective and proactive measures that could lead to improved integration and the elimination of the worst types of discrimination of vulnerable immigrant groups. The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has also made recommendations in its three reports on Sweden.

The continued struggle for the integration of ethnic minorities through the adoption of laws and policies calls for much more attention to be paid to these reports by Sweden's NGO community. But so far, their most visible strategies have been to focus their attentions on national and local politicians with "awards" and invitations to cultural events ad infinitum. This only ensures continued financial support for jobs within their integration and anti-discrimination bureau projects, but it comes at the cost of leaving the tasks of the real goals behind, and it ignores the other powerful institutions that could also provide such financing. But such a strategy would require changes in Swedish laws regarding the taxation of large donations from business and industry to NGOs and others, a task that is clearly in need of development. But until NGOs in Sweden are really free from government control in the form of State subsidies from institutions such as the SIB, combating structural discrimination in Sweden will remain marginally successful at best. The alternative is that it remain the failed venture it is accused of being by so many.

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www.thelundian.com

Center Against Rasism

www.cmr.nu

Swedish Integration Board

www.integrationsverket.se

Discrimination Ombudsman

www.do.se

Lund University

www.lu.se

Lund County

www.lund.se