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## **Economic Commission for Europe**

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### **Group of Experts on Migration Statistics**

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**Post pandemic migration flows**

## **The corona pandemic and migration to Sweden**

**Note by Statistics Sweden\***

### *Abstract*

When the corona pandemic hit Sweden at the beginning of 2020, restrictions were introduced limiting international travel. Immigration decreased sharply in 2020 compared to 2019, mainly during April, May and June. Although still below its level in 2019, immigration has recovered to some extent in 2021.

This working paper shows that the pattern of recuperation has varied considerably by different groups. India was the most common country of birth for labour migration from outside the EU in 2021. Among EU-immigrants, Germany has replaced Poland in 2021 as the most common country of birth. Some other groups did not see a recuperation. For instance, work-related immigration from China, which was relatively common before the pandemic, remain at comparatively lower levels. Moreover, statistics are presented by age, sex and the municipality in which immigrants settled in. Overall, the results of this study might help shed some light on possible emerging trends in post pandemic migration flows.

Preliminary monthly data for 2022 is also shown.

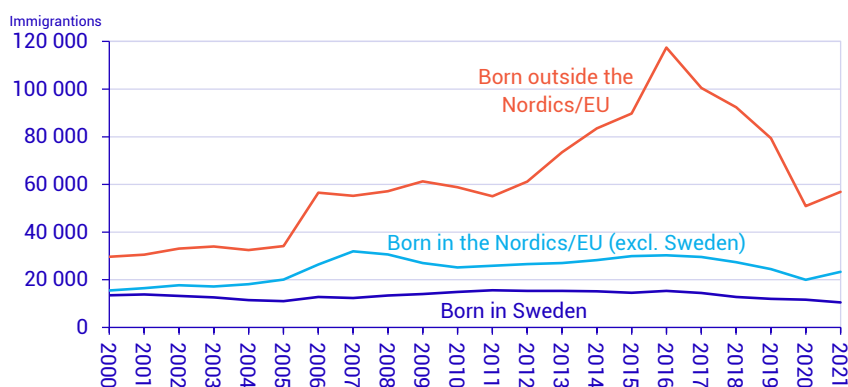
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## I. Introduction

1. Immigration to Sweden increased sharply between 2000 and 2016. There are several explanations behind this increase. Asylum immigration, work- and study-related immigration and family reunification contribute to the increase. But it is asylum immigration, above all of people born in Syria, that accounts for the historically high levels seen in the mid-10s.
2. After 2016, immigration has decreased, above all due to a lower immigration of people who sought asylum in Sweden and of their relatives. This decline is a consequence of several changes. One reason is the law that came into force in 2016 and which meant limited opportunities for asylum seekers and family members of former asylum seekers to obtain a residence permit in Sweden. Other important factors are limited opportunities for refugees to enter the European Union (EU) and to travel between EU countries and reach Sweden, due to stricter border controls.

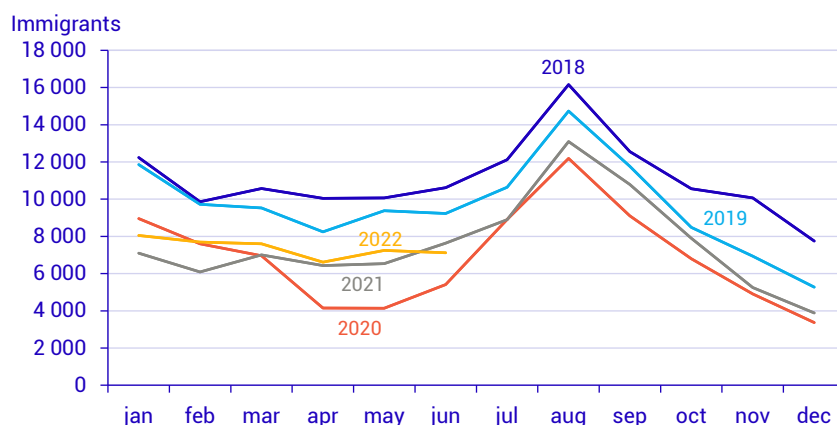
Graph 1 - Immigration to Sweden by region of birth, 2000-2021



3. When the corona pandemic hit Sweden and the rest of the world at the beginning of 2020, several restrictions were introduced limiting international travel. This brought limited opportunities for immigration to and emigration from Sweden in 2020. It is difficult to precisely estimate the impact of the corona pandemic on immigration to Sweden, as a downward trend is already seen since 2016.
4. Nonetheless, a breakdown of the statistics per month strongly suggests that the pandemic had a certain impact on immigration (see Graph 2). It was mainly during April, May and June 2020 that the number of immigrants was lower compared to the corresponding months in 2018 and 2019. The first wave of the pandemic began around March 2020 in Sweden and various measures, including international travel restrictions, were introduced to prevent the spread of the infection.
5. Immigration recovered somewhat in 2021 and 2022 compared to 2020. One explanation for that is that the travel restrictions were largely lifted in 2021. For example, in February 2021, it became possible to travel into Sweden if one could show a negative covid-19 test on arrival.
6. The main purpose of this working paper is to provide a picture of which groups contributed the most to the decline in immigration in 2020 and its subsequent increase in 2021, focusing on the most common countries of birth of the immigrants. Immigration of returning Swedes

has been comparatively more stable since the beginning of the pandemic. Therefore, the focus of this report is on the immigration of persons born abroad.

Graph 2 - Number of immigrants per month, 2018–2021 and preliminary data for 2022



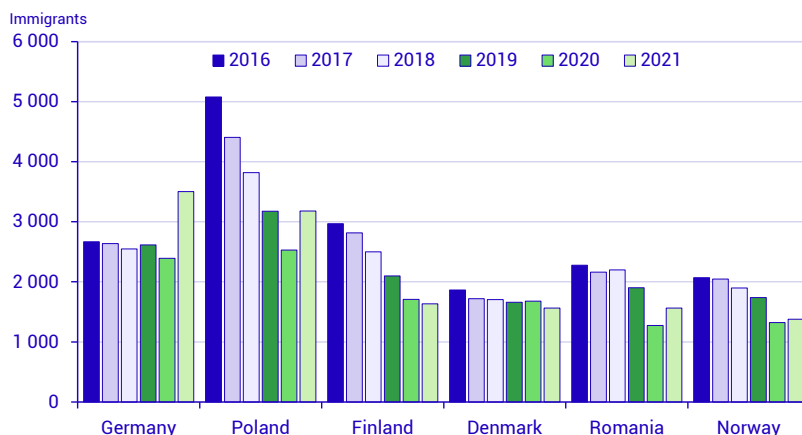
7. All statistics presented here are based on administrative register data covering the entire resident population of Sweden. Data documentation is available at the website of Statistics Sweden ([www.scb.se/be0101-en](http://www.scb.se/be0101-en)). The category “EU” includes the 27 countries that were members on 1 January 2022. The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2020 and therefore it is included in this report in the group outside the Nordics and the EU. The current division of the EU without the United Kingdom has been used for all years going back.

## II. Immigration from other Nordic countries and the EU

8. Between the Nordic countries, there has been free movement and a common labour market since the 1950s. Within the EU there is a mobility directive that gives citizens the right to move freely and reside within the territories of the member states. Sweden joined the EU in 1995.
9. Germany, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Romania, and Norway were, in that order, the most common countries of birth among people born in the Nordic countries or the EU who immigrated to Sweden in 2021. These six countries account for 55 percent of the total immigration of people born in the Nordics or the EU in 2021. Immigration during and after the pandemic has varied considerably between these countries of origin.
10. The immigration of people born in Poland and Romania decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021. A downward trend is seen before the pandemic year mainly among people born in Poland.
11. The immigration of people born in Finland and Norway also decreased in the pandemic year 2020, but there was no clear increase in 2021. The immigration of people born in Norway was slightly higher in 2021 compared to 2020, while the immigration of people born in Finland decreased slightly in 2021 compared to 2020.

12. The immigration of people born in Germany decreased to a lesser extent in the pandemic year 2020 compared to other countries such as Poland, Romania, Norway and Finland. But the immigration of people born in Germany increased sharply in 2021, 46 percent higher compared to the year before. In 2021, the immigration of people born in Germany was at the highest level since 2008.
13. The development of the immigration of people born in Denmark differs from that of those born in the other five most common countries. The immigration to Sweden of people born in Denmark was relatively stable during the period 2017–2020 with no signs of reduced immigration in the pandemic year 2020. In 2021, this immigration decreased somewhat.

Graph 3 – Immigration to Sweden of persons born in Germany, Poland, Finland, Denmark, Romania, and Norway, 2016–2021

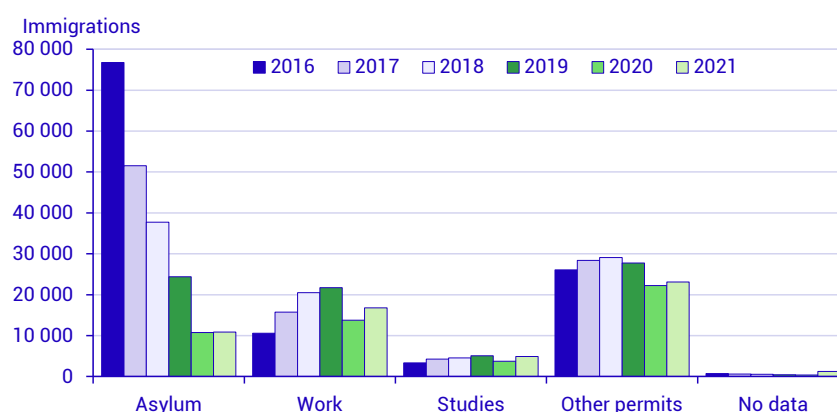


14. A comparison of gender, age and the municipality in which the immigrant settled shows some differences in the case of people born in Poland, Germany, Finland, Romania, Norway and Denmark who moved to Sweden in 2021. Among immigrants born in Poland, Romania and Denmark there were more men than women, while it was more common for immigrants born in Finland to be women. Immigration of those born in Germany and Norway was more evenly distributed between women and men.
15. The highest percentage of children and young people (ages 0–19) is seen among those immigrants born in Norway, 35 percent, and the lowest percentage is seen among those born in Poland, 12 percent. The average age of people in this age group varied between 5.9 years among those born in Denmark and 10.5 years among those born in Finland. The average age among adult immigrants varied between 34.8 years among those born in Denmark and 38.6 years among those born in Norway.
16. For immigrants born in Germany, Poland, Finland and Norway, Stockholm was the most common municipality to settle in upon immigration. It was most common for immigrants born in Denmark to settle in Malmö municipality, 37 percent of them did so. Among those born in Romania who moved to Sweden in 2021, Gothenburg was the most common municipality.

### III. Immigration from outside of the Nordics and EU

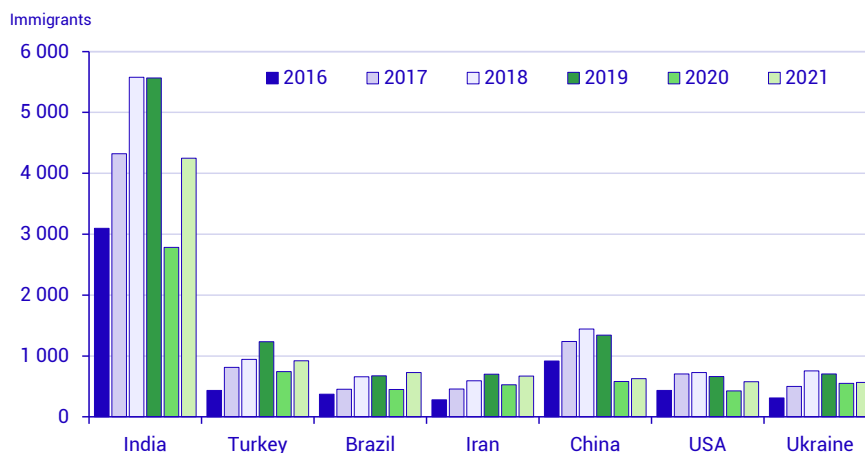
17. Citizens of countries outside the Nordic countries and the EU need to apply for a residence permit to settle in Sweden. Residence permits are grouped into four categories in this study: 1) refugees and their relatives, 2) work and relatives of workers, 3) studies, and 4) other permits, which include relatives (excl. of refugees and workers) and permanent residents in a EU country.
18. A clear trend between 2016 and 2019 was a reduced immigration of people who sought asylum in Sweden and their relatives, while there was an increased immigration related to work. The total immigration of persons born outside of the Nordic region and the EU decreased in 2020 and increased in 2021. The decrease in 2020 was largest among refugees and their families, but also evident in other groups, such as labour migrants, students, and family members to non-refugees. The fact that the total immigration of people born outside the Nordic countries and the EU increased in 2021 is largely due to increased labour immigration. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is on immigration due to work.

Graph 4 - Immigration of persons born outside of the Nordics and EU by type of residence permit, 2016–2021



19. India, Turkey, Brazil, Iran, China, the United States and Ukraine were, in that order, the most common countries of birth among people born outside the Nordic countries or the EU who immigrated to Sweden for work in 2021. These seven countries account for half of the total the labour immigration of people born outside the Nordic countries or the EU in 2021.
20. India was the most common country of birth for labour migrants in recent years. It was also immigrants born in India who had the greatest impact both on the decline in inflow during the pandemic year 2020 and on the recovery in the years after. Labour migrants born in Turkey, Brazil, Iran and the United States also contributed to the increase in arrivals in 2021 but to a lesser extent than those born in India. The immigration of people born in China and Ukraine shows a different pattern. Labour immigration of those born in these two countries did not increase significantly in 2021 after the decrease during the pandemic year 2020. The decline in 2020 was particularly sharp among those born in China.

21. Graph 5 – Work related immigration of persons born India, Turkey, Brazil, Iran, China, the United States and Ukraine, 2016–2021

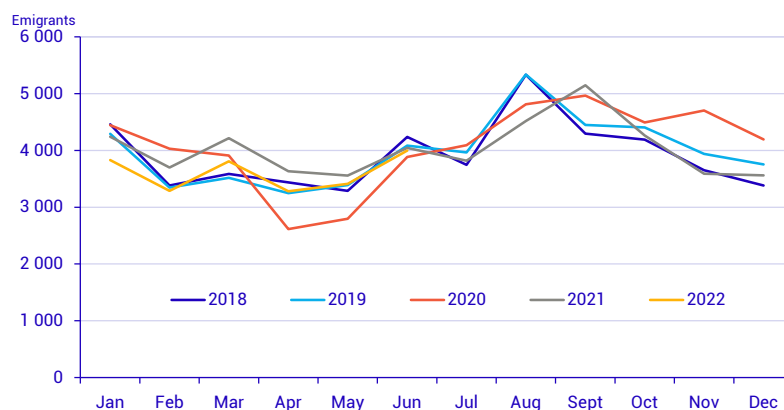


22. When comparing gender, age, and the municipality in which the labour immigrant settled, some differences are apparent in the case of people born in India, Turkey, Brazil, Iran, China, the United States and Ukraine who moved to Sweden in 2021. Among immigrants born in in these seven different countries, there are slightly more men than women, with some variation in the levels. The highest percentage of men is seen among those born in Turkey, 58 percent. The immigration of those born in India and Brazil was more evenly distributed between women and men, 52 percent were men and 48 percent were women.
23. The highest percentage of children and youth (ages 0–19) is seen among immigrants born in the United States, 25 percent, and the lowest percentage is seen among those born in China, 14 percent. The average age of people in this age group varied between 5.7 years among those born in India and 9.1 years among those born in Ukraine. The average age among adult immigrants varied between 32.4 years among those born in Turkey and 35.6 years among those born in Iran.
24. For immigrants born in India, Turkey, China, the United States and Ukraine, Stockholm was the most common municipality to settle in upon immigration. It was most common for immigrants born in Brazil and Iran to settle in Gothenburg, 26 and 20 percent respectively.

#### IV. Emigration

25. Compared with immigration, there were relatively small changes in emigration from Sweden during the pandemic years 2020 and 2021. During 2020, emigration was significantly lower in April and May, during the first wave of the pandemic in Sweden. At the end of 2020, more people emigrated than in previous years.

Graph 6 - Number of emigrants per month, 2018–2021 and preliminary data for 2022



26. Among the native-born, the number of emigrants decreased slightly in 2020 and then increased in 2021. Among the foreign-born, emigration increased in 2020, despite a relatively low level in April-May, and decreased in 2021. The decrease in emigration in 2021 can largely be explained by a lower immigration in 2020. The number of emigrants decreased among those born in Poland, India and China, among other countries. In some groups, emigration increased both in 2020 and 2021. This includes people born in Syria, Iraq and Somalia.

## V. Conclusion

27. The main purpose of this working paper is to provide a picture of which groups contributed the most to the decline in immigration in 2020 and its subsequent increase in 2021, focusing on the most common countries of birth of the immigrants. The results show that the decline in 2020 and the increase in 2021 are largely due to variations in immigration of people born outside the Nordics and the EU who have moved to Sweden for work.
28. The pattern has varied considerably between countries. For most countries of birth, immigration has decreased during the pandemic year 2020. Greater increases in 2021 are mainly seen among labour immigrants born in India and people born in Germany. India was the most common country of birth for non-EU labour migration in 2021. Among EU-immigrants, Germany has replaced Poland in 2021 as the most common country of birth.
29. Compared with immigration, there were relatively small changes in emigration from Sweden during the pandemic years 2020 and 2021.