

Chapter 28

Migrants' Access to Social Protection in Sweden



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28.1 Overview of the Welfare System and Main Migration Features in Sweden

28.1.1 *Main Characteristics of the National Social Security System*

The Swedish welfare state is, in line with popular typologies, interchangeably referred to as the Social Democratic, the institutional, or the encompassing model of social policy, which reflects the political driving forces and its institutional characteristics (Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber et al. 1993; Korpi and Palme 1998). The Swedish welfare state is often clustered together with the other Nordic countries by reference to the Nordic model underpinned by equality-promoting principles and a political strategy of including the middle class in the social protection system in order to generate political support for generous provisions also for vulnerable groups in society. Infused by principles of universalism, the Swedish social security model builds on a comprehensive public responsibility for the welfare of the entire resident population. The model combines residence-based universal benefits with earnings-related entitlements for the economically active population. Residents have access to flat-rate basic benefits and for those in work, social insurance benefits are earnings-related (Palme et al. 2009). Securing income and joint financing of large welfare programs is dependent on high labour force participation and employment rates, as well as high taxes and social security contributions.

The Swedish welfare state is essentially individualistic, meaning that transfers, taxes, and services are normally linked to the individual rather than the household.

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Social security is funded by a combination of employer's social security contributions and taxes, and in the case of pensions, it is complemented with insured person's social security contributions. Cash benefits are administered at the central state level. The exceptions are in the areas of social assistance (*försörjningsstöd*), which is administered by the municipalities, and the voluntary state subsidised unemployment insurance (*arbetslöshetsförsäkring*), which, in line with the Ghent system, provides earnings-related benefits that are administered by independent unemployment funds. Those who do not voluntarily join an unemployment insurance fund can qualify for a basic flat rate benefit (*grundförsäkring*) (Esser et al. 2013). Benefits in kind tend to be provided on the local level by municipalities and counties with local taxes being most the important source of revenue.

Although still dominated by universal and public-funded services, since 1990, however, there has been an intensified market orientation of the Swedish welfare system, which is mainly characterised by the introduction of private service providers within the publicly funded welfare system (Palme 2015). Since 2006, taxation levels have decreased and some social security programs have been reformed or retrenched (Ferrarini et al. 2012). Recent restrictive changes imply stricter eligibility criteria for social insurance and shorter duration of sickness and unemployment benefits. Furthermore, in 2007, the insured person's contributions to the earnings-related part of the unemployment insurance were increased, leading to a significant decline in coverage of the unemployment insurance (Kjellberg 2011). Social security benefits have thus gradually become less generous, which is a continuation of a longer-term trend of falling formal replacement rates in most social insurance programs from around 90% in 1990 to around 80% today (Palme 2015).

28.1.2 Migration History and Key Policy Developments

Due to population growth and famine (among other factors), approximately 1.2 million Swedes emigrated between 1850 and 1930, in particular to North America (Hammar 1985). Since then, Sweden has gradually turned into a country of immigration.¹ Following the economic growth after the Second World War, there was a substantive influx of labour immigrants from Nordic and other European countries during 1950–1970 (Lundh and Ohlsson 1999). In the late 1970s and 1980s, Sweden became a major receiving country of asylum seekers and resettled refugees. Immigration to Sweden has since then continuously been characterized by large-scale asylum immigration and family immigration (Byström and Frohnert 2013).

Swedish migration and integration policies have often been regarded as liberal and ambitious (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012). Building on ideas of universal welfare state egalitarianism, a right-based integration model was adopted in the

¹ However, emigration from Sweden has increased since the 1960s and approximately one out of 20 Swedish citizens are residing abroad (Westling 2012).

1970s, thus promoting equal opportunities for citizens and foreigners alike (Borevi 2014; Sainsbury 2012). Since the early 1990s, Sweden has also had comparatively generous admission and settlement policies for protection seekers and family immigration. This is reflected in comparative policy data in which Sweden frequently has been ranked among the most liberal and enabling countries regarding immigration and immigrant integration policy (Helbling et al. 2017).² In addition, since the enactment of a new legislation in 2008 regarding non-European union (EU) workers, Sweden has become one of the world's most open countries for labour immigration (Calleman 2015). Following the 2008 law, labour immigration has gradually increased (see Fig. 28.1).

Political instability, conflicts and interventions around the world have affected the inflow of asylum seekers in Sweden during the 1990s and the 2000s. Large groups of refugees from former Yugoslavia arrived in Sweden in the 1990s, with a peak of 84,018 in 1992 (Lundh and Ohlsson 1999). The number of asylum seekers has increased during the 2010s, exceeding 40,000 per year from 2012 to 2017. In recent years, most refugees originated from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.³ Increasing immigration to Sweden in the twenty-first century has also resulted in an increase of both the number and share of the foreign-born population. By the end of 2018, the number of foreign-born residents was almost 2 million, accounting for around 19% of the population.⁴

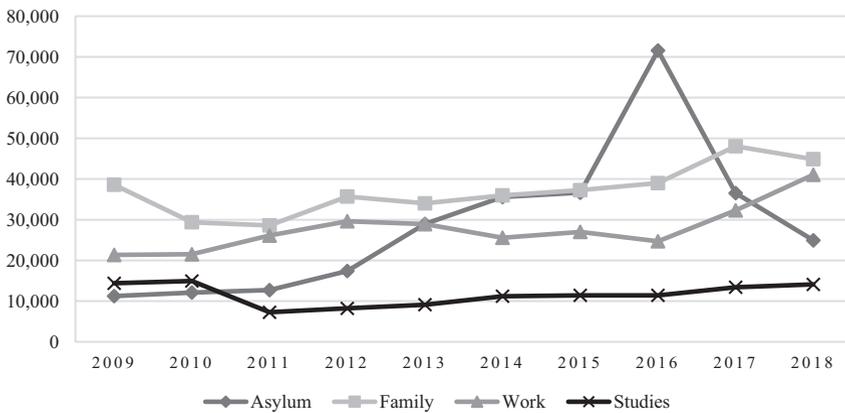


Fig. 28.1 Immigration to Sweden by first permit reason, 2009–2018. (Source: Swedish Migration Agency 2019)

² See also: Migration Integration Policy Index (2015). Barcelona/Brussels: CIDOB and MPG. <http://www.mipex.eu/>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

³ Swedish Migration Agency (2019). Statistics. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Statistics.html>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

⁴ Statistics Sweden (2019). Population statistics. <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

With 163,000 asylum applicants in 2015, Sweden received – despite its relatively small population of roughly 10 million – the third highest number of asylum seekers registered in the EU (Parusel and Bengtsson 2017). The large number of new arrivals constituted a major challenge for key institutions such as the Migration Agency and the Employment Service, municipalities, and the Swedish society more broadly. To cope with these challenges, the Swedish Government introduced restrictive temporary changes in the migration legislation. Except for the introduction of border controls in 2015, the government adopted a temporary legislation in mid-2016 limiting the possibility of asylum seekers and family members to acquire permanent residence permits.⁵ The new legislation marks a major turnaround in Swedish immigration policy (Parusel 2016). These temporary changes, in combination with international policies such as the EU-Turkey refugee agreement of 2016, have resulted in a decreasing number of asylum seekers in Sweden. While both family immigration and labour immigration have increased in recent years, the overall number of granted residence permits has dropped gradually since the peak in 2016 when 151,031 permits were issued.⁶ Figure 28.1 shows the number of granted residence permits in Sweden between 2009 and 2018 by category of entry.

28.2 Migration and Social Protection in Sweden

As equal rights to social security is a fundamental feature of the Swedish welfare state, nationality or immigration status of a person do not affect the entitlements to social security benefits. Rights are based on either residence or work in Sweden. The residence-based access to social protection entails that any individual who resides and can be expected to reside in the country for at least 1 year is considered a resident, regardless of his/her nationality and type of residence permit. The one-year criterion of the applicant's intention to stay in Sweden is assessed by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (*Försäkringskassan*) and takes into consideration factors such as the individual's interest of staying in Sweden and the real domicile. As far as work-related social security is concerned, no differences are normally made on the basis of nationality or type of residence permit.

More recently, especially against the backdrop of the so-called migration crisis in 2015–2016, the political debate in Sweden has to some degree drifted, with some parties increasingly addressing the urgency to restrict newcomers' and immigrants' access to various social benefits. The rapid increase of asylum seekers in 2015 also prompt the Swedish Government to introduce restrictive temporary changes in the

⁵Swedish Migration Agency (2018). Limited possibilities of being granted a residence permit in Sweden. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Legislative-changes-2016/Limited-possibilities-of-being-granted-a-residence-permit-in-Sweden.html>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

⁶Swedish Migration Agency (2019). Statistics. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Statistics.html>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

migration legislation, including border controls, more restrictive rules for residence, and a maintenance requirement for the acquisition of permanent residence and for family reunification.⁷ There have however been no changes when it comes to access to benefits.

Since various social rights generally are based either on residence or on work in Sweden, only a share of the benefits accounted for in this chapter are accessible for Swedish nationals residing abroad. Certain benefits, mainly earnings-related, are exportable to both EU and non-EU countries, such as earnings-related sickness and activity compensations and earnings-related old-age pensions, whereas others are only exportable to countries within the EU/European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, such as the guaranteed old-age benefit and the guaranteed flat-rate benefit for invalidity.

28.2.1 Unemployment

The Swedish unemployment insurance system consists of two schemes: a state-subsidised voluntary insurance to compensate for the loss of income (*inkomstbortfallsförsäkring*), providing earnings-related benefits financed by contributions from employers and insured individuals; and a basic insurance (*grundförsäkring*) financed by employers' contributions and providing a flat-rate benefit for those who are not voluntarily insured but fulfil the work (and other) criteria.

To be entitled to unemployment benefits (both the earnings-related insurance and the basic allowance) applicants are required to register as jobseekers at the public employment office; to be capable of working for at least 3 h each working day and an average of at least 17 h per week; to be below the age of 65; and to be otherwise available to the labour market.⁸ The earnings-related benefit is paid to unemployed individuals who have been a member of an unemployment insurance fund (*arbetslöshetskassa*) for at least 12 consecutive months. Entitlement to the basic allowance requires that the individual is not eligible for the earnings-related benefit, either by not satisfying the membership condition or by not being a member of an unemployment fund. The qualifying period for both benefits is to have been employed or self-employed for at least 6 months and at least 80 h of work per month during the last 12 months or, to have been employed or self-employed for at least 480 h during a consecutive period of 6 months with at least 50 h of work every month during the last 12 months. Calculations of the earnings-related benefit are determined by previous income and the duration of unemployment. The benefit is paid at 80% of the reference income during 200 days and thereafter at 70% during

⁷Swedish Migration Agency (2018). Limited possibilities of being granted a residence permit in Sweden. <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Legislative-changes-2016/Limited-possibilities-of-being-granted-a-residence-permit-in-Sweden.html>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

⁸SFS 1997:238.

100 days.⁹ The benefit ceiling is set at 910 Swedish Krona (SEK) (€94) per day for the first 100 days and maximum SEK 760 (€78) for the remaining days. The flat-rate basic allowance is set at SEK 365 (€38) per day. Both benefits can be granted for 300 days (extended to applicants who have a child).¹⁰

Apart from the requirement of having a fixed domicile in Sweden, there are no specific requirements for EU and non-EU foreign residents to be eligible for unemployment insurance. As unemployment benefits counts as a regular work-related income, receiving unemployment provision is not a formal obstacle for applying for family reunification according to the maintenance requirement. Recipients of unemployment benefits are allowed to leave the country temporarily without losing their benefit, but only to apply for employment in another EU/EEA country or Switzerland. The benefits cannot be granted if the recipient moves permanently to another country.

28.2.2 Health Care

Public healthcare in Sweden is universal and covers all residing inhabitants. Hence, EU and non-EU foreigners holding a valid residence permit have access to public healthcare under the same conditions as Swedish nationals. Swedish nationals residing abroad are not eligible for the benefits-in-kind system,¹¹ except for those temporarily residing in other EU countries who are covered by the European Health Insurance Card. The public healthcare system is tax-funded and administrated by the counties (*Landsting*). The benefits-in-kind system implies that the patient pays user charges to cover part of the cost for medical care and hospitalisation himself/herself (children under 18 are exempt).

The system of sickness cash benefits is earnings-related and covers employees and self-employed. For employees, the employers pay sick pay from the 2nd up to the 14th day of illness and the Social Insurance Agency pay sickness cash benefits (*sjukpenning*) as from the 15th day. Self-employed and unemployed registered with the Swedish Public Employment Service (*Arbetsförmedlingen*) as jobseekers can only receive sickness cash benefit, but not sick pay (*sjuklön*). There is no qualifying period of insurance or prior residence to become eligible to claim sickness benefits. Neither is there a general time limit of benefit duration. If the illness continues after 364 days, the insured individual can apply for extended sickness cash benefit (*sjukpenning på fortsättningsnivå*) with a reduction in the benefit received. If the insured

⁹SFS 1997:238.

¹⁰European Commission (2018). *Mutual information system on social protection, MISSOC*. MISSOC comparative tables database. <https://www.missoc.org/missoc-database/comparative-tables/> Accessed 1 March 2019.

¹¹SFS 2017:30.

individual has a serious illness, he/she can apply for continued sickness cash benefit.¹²

Incapacity benefits in Sweden are divided into two systems: an earnings-related sickness/activity compensation (*inkomstrelaterad sjukersättning/aktivitetsersättning*) financed by contributions paid by employees and self-employed; and a tax financed guaranteed compensation (*garantiersättning*) for all residents with low or no earnings-related sickness compensation or activity compensation. Incapacity benefits are paid to individuals with fully or partially reduced work capacity. If the person has a partial disability, a reduced benefit is paid at $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the full benefit according to the degree of disability. At least three years of residence in Sweden are required to become eligible to claim guaranteed compensation and at least 1 year with pensionable income is required to access the earnings-related compensation.¹³

The systems of cash sickness and incapacity benefits are equal to citizens and non-citizens alike. EU citizens with a right of residence (*uppehållsrätt*) in Sweden can access these benefits under the same conditions as national residents. A non-EU foreigner must have a residence permit valid for at least 1 year and must be considered, on a case-by-case basis, to intend to reside in Sweden for at least a year to be eligible for sickness and incapacity benefits. Cash benefits in case of sickness are not exportable to nationals who decide to reside permanently abroad. Swedish nationals receiving the earnings-related sickness/activity compensation are allowed to keep this benefit under the same conditions when deciding to permanently move abroad. Individuals' receiving the guaranteed compensation are only allowed to export the benefit when permanently moving to an EU/EEA country or Switzerland.

28.2.3 Pensions

The public old-age pension system (*ålderspension*) is a compulsory and universal scheme consisting of different components. The first tier includes the income-related pension (*inkomstpension*) based on two types of benefits; (1) a notional defined contribution system (NDC) and (2) a fully funded premium reserve pension (*premiépension*) following the defined contribution principle with individual accounts. The second tier is the tax financed guarantee pension (*garantipension*) granting a guaranteed level for all (permanent) residents and a supplement for those with very low income-related pensions (Esser et al. 2013).

Even if there is no minimum period for enrolment in the Swedish pensions system as a contributor/insured person, in reality, it takes a long time to qualify for a full guarantee pension or an adequate income pension. Three years of pensionable income are required for the income-related pension and 3 years of residence in

¹² SFS 2010:110, section C.

¹³ SFS 2010:110, section C.

Sweden are required for the guarantee pension. The retirement age is flexible from 61 for the income-related pensions and payable from 65 years for the guarantee pension. The size of the income-related pension is determined based upon life-time earnings (including social insurance benefits), age at retirement, cohort life expectancy, and the development of the economy. The guarantee pension depends on the duration of residence in Sweden (up to 40 years) and the amount of earnings-related pensions. Migrants who do not fulfil the requirements for the guaranteed pension are entitled to claim a maintenance support for the elderly (*äldreförsörjningsstöd*) above the age of 65. The maintenance support is means tested and establishes a reasonable standard of living after housing costs are paid.¹⁴

There are no additional requirements to become eligible for old-age related benefits for foreigners residing in Sweden. Individuals are allowed to keep the income-related pension indefinitely, regardless of which country they move to. Individuals are also allowed to keep the guarantee pension if they leave the country temporarily. However, a beneficiary of the guarantee pension may only keep the benefit if he/she resides in another country in the EU/EEA and Switzerland.

28.2.4 Family Benefits

Family-related social protection in Sweden is defined as child benefits and parental benefits. The child benefits system is a compulsory and universal scheme covering all resident parents and children. The system is tax financed and provides a flat-rate child allowance (*barnbidrag*) and a large family supplement (*flerbarnstillägg*). Child benefits are paid from the month after the birth of the child until the age of 16 (for those who reach 16 and are still in compulsory education, an extended child allowance (*förlängt barnbidrag*) is paid).¹⁵

The scheme of parental benefits includes a tax financed benefits in kind health service for all residents and a compulsory cash benefits system of parental insurance (*föräldraförsäkring*) with earnings-related and flat-rate benefits. The benefits in kind system include free maternity services and hospital care according to the public healthcare system. The main condition for access to health care is residence in Sweden. The cash benefits parental insurance includes the pregnancy cash benefit (*graviditetspenning*) and the parental benefit (*föräldrapenning*). The first one is payable during the period of leave between the 60th day before confinement and the 11th day before confinement; whereas the second one is payable for a total of 480 days per child. For children born after 2016, 90 of these days are reserved to each parent (so called mother's quota and father's quota), while the remaining days can be transferred between the parents. In addition, fathers are entitled to 10 benefit

¹⁴SFS 2010:110, section E.

¹⁵SFS 2010:110, section B.

days in connection with childbirth.¹⁶ The minimum guaranteed parental benefit (*grundbelopp*) is paid for 390 of the 480 days according to the sickness cash benefit rate, the minimum being SEK 250 (€26) per day. The remaining 90 days are paid at SEK 180 (€19) per day. To receive parental benefit above SEK 250 (€26) per day, the parent must have been insured for sickness cash benefit above SEK 250 (€26) for at least 240 consecutive days before confinement. This requirement applies for the first 180 days of receiving the benefit and the remaining days are paid at either at sickness benefit level or at a flat rate.¹⁷

EU citizens with a right of residence in Sweden can access family-related benefits under the same conditions as national residents. Non-EU nationals must have a residence permit that is valid for at least one year and must be considered, on a case-by-case basis, to intend to reside in Sweden for at least a year. A new regulation entered into force in July 2017 preventing parents migrating to Sweden from receiving parental benefits retroactively for children over 1 year. To receive child benefits, the child must be residing in Sweden. If the child leaves Sweden for less than 6 months, the child allowance is still paid. This limit does not apply if the country of destination is an EU/EEA country or Switzerland. Parental benefits can be retained only by non-residents who are insured in Sweden and the child lives in an EU/EEA country or Switzerland.¹⁸

28.2.5 *Guaranteed Minimum Resources*

Social assistance (*försörjningsstöd/ekonomiskt bistånd*) is the only benefit in Sweden that could qualify as a minimum income scheme. All legal residents are entitled to social assistance to guarantee a reasonable standard of living. The benefit is means-tested and administered by the municipalities. Social assistance is provided as a last resort (safety net). As a general rule, all real property, removable assets, and incomes, regardless of the nature and origin, are taken into account and deducted from the amount of social assistance. As long as the claimant is able to work, he/she must be available to the labour market at all times. Moreover, claimants might also be required to take part in work experience or other skill-enhancing activities organised by the municipality. As the basic rule is that recipients of social assistance should be residing in Sweden and available to the labour market, the possibility of exporting the benefit is normally not allowed. However, the decision on social assistance is always preceded by an individual evaluation and may vary between responsible committees and municipalities.¹⁹

¹⁶SFS 2010:110, section B.

¹⁷SFS 2010:110, section B.

¹⁸SFS 2010:110, section B.

¹⁹SFS 2001:453.

Foreigners are required to have a fixed domicile in Sweden to receive social assistance. The basic rule for EU citizens is to have sufficient means to support themselves and their family members in order to acquire the right of residence in Sweden. Accordingly, claiming social assistance can affect their right of residence, although the decision is made on a case-by-case basis involving individual assessment. Non-EU foreigners must have a residence permit valid for at least one year and must be considered, on a case-by-case basis, to intend to reside in Sweden for at least a year to be eligible for the benefit. Claiming or receiving social assistance do not affect EU and non-EU foreigners' access to citizenship.²⁰

Since 2010, newly arrived migrants that are beneficiaries of protection can apply for an introduction benefit administered by the Swedish Public Employment Service. This benefit requires migrants to participate in certain labour market programmes and is paid instead of social assistance if the migrant is eligible for the introduction benefit.²¹ According to a temporary law introduced in 2016, beneficiaries of temporary residence permits are required to have a work-related income (pay from work, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit) to be granted a permanent residence permit. This is however only required in order to obtain a permanent residence permit, not for the extension of a temporary residence permit. In addition, the law also includes a maintenance requirement for family reunification, which requires a regular work-related income (including pay from work, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, and earnings-related retirement pension).²² Hence, according to the maintenance requirement, non-EU foreigners receiving social assistance are in essence not eligible for family reunification.

28.2.6 Obstacles and International Agreements

The basic feature of equal rights to social security in Sweden is reflected by the few differences in entitlements and rights for potential beneficiaries. Thus, the guiding principle of the Swedish welfare system is that non-citizens should not be subjected to separate rules on the basis of their nationality or immigrant status (Sainsbury 2012). Instead, rights to social security are normally based on either residence or work in Sweden. Accordingly, there are no general differences between citizens and non-citizens when it comes to the right of retrieving social benefits that are exportable to other countries. As previously outlined, however, only a share of the benefits accounted for in this chapter are accessible for foreigners or citizens residing abroad, some of which do not include any limitations (i.e. the income-related sickness/activity compensation; the earnings-related old-age pension and the premium reserve

²⁰ SFS 2001:453.

²¹ SFS 2010:197.

²² SFS 2016:752.

pension), whereas others are only exportable to EU/EEA countries or Switzerland (i.e. the guaranteed compensation for invalidity and the guaranteed old-age benefit).

Apart from the residence and work-related criteria, there are no specific obstacles or sanctions for accessing social protection benefits for foreigners residing in Sweden. However, the temporary law adopted in 2016 limits asylum seekers' possibilities of being granted residence permits and the possibility of family reunification for beneficiaries of temporary residence permits.²³ Among other restrictions, this new law also stipulates that the standard residence permit granted beneficiaries of protection should be time-limited to 13 months. Although this policy does not formally obstruct individuals with temporary residence permits to access social benefits, it arguably constrains their possibilities to meet the one-year residence-based condition attached to various welfare benefits. The law also includes a maintenance requirement for family reunification requiring regular work-related income that should match a so-called 'standard amount'. Thus, in practice, the maintenance requirement restricts, in most cases, the possibility of family reunification for beneficiaries with temporary residence permits who receives income-support in the form of social assistance.

In terms of international agreements, among the three countries whose nationals represent the largest groups of non-EU foreigners residing in Sweden, bilateral social security agreements have been concluded with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey, but not Iran. The agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina covers health care, pensions, and family benefits²⁴ and it entails that citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina residing in Sweden are covered by the public health service and sickness insurance in accordance with Swedish law. They are also entitled, under equal conditions, to public contributory and non-contributory pensions. Childcare allowance, according to Swedish law, is given to citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina if they have resided in Sweden for at least 6 months. The bilateral agreement with Turkey covers unemployment benefits, health care, pensions, and family benefits.²⁵ Turkish nationals residing in Sweden are entitled, under equal conditions, to benefits in kind in case of sickness. Income-related pensions may not be reduced, modified, suspended or withdrawn on account of a Turkish recipient residing in Sweden. However, this does not apply to the guarantee pensions. The agreement moreover entails that parental insurance acquired in both countries shall be added together for the acquisition of rights to the benefit. Turkish citizens residing in Sweden shall receive medical benefits, and also maternity and childbirth benefits, in accordance with Swedish legislation.

Among the three non-EU countries that represent the largest destinations of Swedish citizens, bilateral agreements have been concluded with the United States and Canada, but not with Australia. The agreement between Sweden and the United

²³ SFS 2016:752.

²⁴ Förordning 1978:798.

²⁵ SFS 2005:234.

States covers health care and pensions.²⁶ It stipulates that a Swedish citizen shall, if eligible, be covered by sickness or activity compensation under US laws. Regarding pensions, it also entails that the US agency shall, under certain conditions, take into account periods of coverage that are credited under Swedish laws on income-related pension when establishing the entitlement to old-age benefits for Swedish citizens residing in the US. The bilateral agreement with Canada also covers health care and pensions²⁷ and for both insurance schemes, it entails that benefits acquired by Swedish citizens in Sweden shall not be subject to any reduction, modification, suspension, cancellation or confiscation if the person resides in Canada (this does not apply to the guarantee pension).

28.3 Conclusions

The Swedish welfare state is in principle universal and encompassing, providing all residents with an extensive system of benefits from the cradle to the grave. The social protection system combines residence-based universal benefits with earnings-related entitlements for the economically active population. Thus, residents have access to flat-rate basic social insurance benefits and for those in work, earnings-related benefits are tied to the level of wages (Palme et al. 2009). The evolution of the Swedish welfare state since 1990, however, has been characterised by intensified market orientation of welfare services, tax cuts, and various changes in the welfare state programs. Consequently, it has been argued that social security benefits, to some extent, have been drifting away from the core principles of an encompassing model where also the middle class is adequately covered by the model of social protection (Ferrarini et al. 2012; Palme 2015). Changes in the Swedish social security system have also included restricting the qualifying conditions for social insurance benefits (sickness, unemployment insurance) and further limiting their duration. However, a number of these changes have been reversed by the Red-Green government in power since 2014.

A cornerstone of the Swedish social protection model is that foreigners should not be subject to any specific rules only affecting them as a group on the basis of their nationality or immigrant status (Sainsbury 2012). Instead, rights are based either on residence or work in Sweden. The residence-based access to social protection entails that any individuals who reside and can be expected to reside in Sweden for at least 1 year are considered residents, regardless of nationality and type of resident permit. As far as work-related social security is concerned, no differences are normally made on the basis of nationality or type of residence permit. Since 2010, newly arrived migrants that have been granted residence for protection and subsidiary protection reason may apply for an introduction benefit, which is paid instead

²⁶ SFS 2004:1192.

²⁷ SFS 2002:221.

of social assistance if the migrant meets the necessary conditions. A new regulation from 2017 prevents parents migrating to Sweden from receiving parental benefits retroactively for children over 1 year.

Perhaps the most important policy change as regards to immigrants' access to social benefits concerns a new temporary law adopted by the Swedish Parliament in June 2016, which limits asylum seekers' possibilities of being granted permanent residence permits. The present government has made a deal in Parliament to prolong this temporary legislation 2 years beyond June 2019. Although it does not formally obstruct individuals with temporary residence permits to access social benefits, the law entails that a holder of such permit should have work-related income (pay from work, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit) to be granted a permanent residence permit. The law also includes a maintenance requirement for family reunification requiring a regular work-related income which, in practice, can affect the possibility of family reunification for beneficiaries of temporary residence permits who receives social assistance.

While the current Government still emphasizes the right to asylum and the potential gains of cross-border mobility,²⁸ the restrictive policy reforms of 2015 and 2016, including border checks and the temporary legislation, constitutes a major shift in Swedish immigration policy. The reforms explicitly aimed to reduce the influx of asylum seekers in order to cope with the challenges following the large reception of asylum applications in 2015–2016. Even though the number of asylum seekers in Sweden has decreased drastically since 2015, concerns over immigration have continued to be at the centre of political debates. In the 2018 national election, the radical right party the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) won 17.6% of the votes making it the third largest party. Reflecting this tension, the availability of Swedish social benefits has been discussed both as a means of attracting migrants and in respect of the capacity of the system to cope with the large influx of newcomers. Accordingly, some parties have put forward policy suggestions aiming to restrict or further condition newly arrived migrants' entitlement to social benefits. The two largest opposition parties in the Swedish parliament, the Moderate Party (*Moderata Samlingspartiet*) and the Sweden Democrats, have raised the most explicit propositions. The Moderate Party has proposed limited subsidies and welfare provisions for new immigrants, including qualifying conditions in terms of language and work-based requirements to benefit from parental insurance, social assistance, and guaranteed pension. The party has also suggested that social assistance should not be granted EU foreigners residing in Sweden who neither work nor study (Kinberg Batra et al. 2017). Except drastically reducing immigration to Sweden, the Sweden Democrats also proposed that social protection should be limited for foreigners and conditional on work and language-related achievements.²⁹ However, these

²⁸ Government Offices of Sweden (2017). Migration and asylum policy objectives. <https://www.government.se/government-policy/migration-and-asylum/objectives/>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

²⁹ Sverigedemokraterna (2018). Sverigedemokraternas höstbudget 2018. <https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/H%C3%B6stbudget-2018.pdf>. Accessed 1 March 2019.

propositions have not yet had any impacts when it comes to immigrants' access to social benefits in Sweden.

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