

The purpose of this report is to highlight how those who immigrated as refugees or family members of refugees made a living in their first fifteen years in Sweden. This study followed how individuals made a living in different ways over the years and entered and exited the labour market and various economic security systems.

Data was collected from Statistics Sweden's various registers and databases on different types of income during the immigrants' first fifteen years in Sweden. The income that makes up the largest share of an individual's total annual income each year is referred to as that individual's main source of income. The study is limited to those who were aged 18 to 49 years on immigration and were thereby of working age throughout all the relevant years. The sources of income are

- Social assistance;
- income from employment and business;
- unemployment benefit;
- income derived from a labour market policy measure;
- income derived from studies;
- income from care of children or a relative; and
- sickness benefit or sick leave compensation.

The individual may also

- completely lack income; or
- have left Sweden.

Six common paths

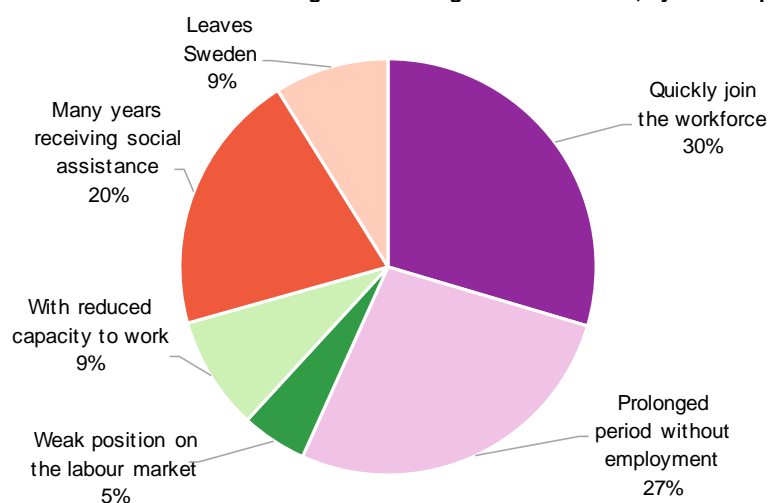
Using cluster analysis, the 30 600 persons who immigrated between 1997 and 2001 were divided into six groups based on their main sources of income over the years. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution between the different groups.

Quickly joined the workforce

This is the largest group, accounting for 30 percent of all those in the study. For most persons in this group, social assistance was the main source of income in the first year after immigration. In the second year after immigration, many of them still received social assistance, while the main source of income for other was gainful employment or studies. As the years went by, more and more persons had gainful employment as their main source of income, and over the 15 years, gainful employment became the main source of income for most of them. Fifteen years after immigration, 88 percent had gainful employment as their main source of income. Among those with gainful employment, 86 percent had an income that indicates an established position on the labour market, 4 percent had an income that corresponds to an insecure position, and 10 percent had a weak position on the labour market.

This group comprises mainly persons who were young when they immigrated and persons with a post-secondary education. Women and men are equally represented in this group.

Figure 1
Distribution of those who immigrated as refugees in 1997–2001, by income pattern



Prolonged period without employment

In this group, the main source of income during the first years after immigration was social assistance, which then transitioned mainly to gainful employment. After fifteen years in Sweden, 74 percent of this group had gainful employment as their main source of income, and among these, 80 percent were established on the labour market.

This is the second largest group, and as in the group Quickly joined the workforce, there are no differences between the sexes and the group consists mainly of young people. Persons from Africa and Asia are overrepresented, compared with other regions.

Weak position on labour market

During their first years in Sweden, most people in this group had social assistance as their main source of income, followed by a few years when many of them were gainfully employed. In the second half of the period under study, the main source of their income was unemployment benefit or labour market policy measures. Most of them did not have labour market policy measures as their main source of income every year. Many of them switched between unemployment benefit, labour market policy measures and gainful employment from year to year.

This is the smallest group, accounting for 5 percent of all persons in the study. There are more men than women in this group. Persons in this group were older, on the whole, when they immigrated and they have compulsory education as their educational attainment level.

Reduced capacity to work

One out of ten persons followed in this study belong to this group. Most people in this group subsist on social assistance during the first years, which transitions to gainful employment and eventually sickness benefit or sick leave compensation. The group consists mainly of persons who were older when they

immigrated, persons with compulsory education and quota refugees. Women and men are equally represented in this group.

Many years of social assistance

This group accounts for 20 percent of all persons in the study; persons in this group had social assistance for most of the 15 years in the study. Many of them have also had other types of income as their main source of income for one or more years. Social assistance was the main source of income for 21 percent of this group. This group is characterised by women, persons who were older when they immigrated, quota refugees and persons from Africa and Asia.

Leaves Sweden

This group makes up 10 percent of those included in the study, and they have in common that for at least one of the years in the study, they were not registered as living in Sweden. The group consists of more men than women, and more persons who immigrated from Africa than from other continents. About 20 percent of both women and men who immigrated from Africa left Sweden.

Most persons had both social assistance and gainful employment

Gainful employment was the main source of income for about 80 percent of the persons in this study during one of their first fifteen years in Sweden. On average, gainful employment was a main source of income for eight years. Social assistance was a main source of income for 86 percent for at least one year, and on average for five years.

The report concludes with a comparison between the refugees described here and those who immigrated in the most recent five years. The group that immigrated in recent years is larger, younger and the persons more often have post-secondary education, and the proportion of those who immigrated from both African and Asian countries is larger.