

Language Training for Immigrant Workers in Sweden

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Immigrants in Sweden

SWEDEN TODAY has become a multinational community. Immigrants now come from as many countries (approximately 120) as belong to the United Nations, and number about 600,000 in all—between 6 and 7 per cent of Sweden's total population. Some 200,000 of them have acquired Swedish citizenship. Table 1 shows gross immigration figures for aliens during the years 1967-71.

At the end of 1971 there were 416,600 foreign citizens domiciled in Sweden. Of these, nearly 65 per cent were nationals of another Nordic country, and in fact almost half were from Finland. As table 2 indicates, the ten largest groups of aliens made up nearly 90 per cent of the total.

IMMIGRANTS AND EMPLOYMENT

One of the chief factors drawing immigrants to Sweden, at least in recent years, has of course been the country's prosperous economy with its opportunities for well-paid employment. Beginning in the late 1940s labour shortages in Sweden induced a number of firms to start recruiting labour in other countries. By the 1960s immigration of this kind was accounting for a substantial proportion of total manpower resources.

The number of aliens registered as being gainfully employed reached a peak of 229,000 in January 1971: by April 1972 there had been a slight decline to 218,000. The majority of immigrants are engaged in manufacturing work, while another fairly large group are employed in service occupations. One result of the difference between the immigrant population's age distribution and that of the Swedish population (most immigrants are between 20 and 40 years of age, and only 1 per cent of

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TABLE 1. IMMIGRATION INTO SWEDEN, 1967-71

Year	From Nordic countries ¹	From non-Nordic countries	Total
1967	14 100	13 000	27 100
1968	21 700	11 000	32 700
1969	44 000	15 600	59 600
1970	48 000	25 600	73 600
1971	21 000	18 000	39 000

¹ Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

them, as against 12 per cent of Swedes, have reached retirement age) is that a higher proportion of immigrants—and a far higher proportion of immigrant women—are gainfully employed.

No official forecasts of future immigration into Sweden have been made, but there are grounds to believe the net figure will run at between 10,000 and 20,000 persons annually. Much will continue to depend of course on economic conditions as well as on political decisions both in Sweden and in the countries of emigration.

The regulations governing immigration into Sweden and the employment of aliens have undergone considerable changes over the years. Until 1915 a foreigner could go to Sweden, live and work there without a permit of any kind. Then, during the First World War, food and housing shortages and security considerations made the introduction of restrictions on free immigration necessary, and although the Aliens' Acts have been tightened or relaxed many times since then, free immigration has never been restored except for nationals of the other Nordic countries. The common labour market linking Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden allows nationals of these countries to be employed without a permit and to take up residence anywhere in the Nordic area. The controls on immigration from non-Nordic countries were introduced in their present form in 1967, following the large-scale influx of immigrants from central and southern Europe (but also from Finland) in the early and mid-1960s. These regulations, which require nationals of non-Nordic countries to be in possession of work permits and have jobs arranged before arriving in Sweden, were brought in partly to allow the arrival of new workers to be harmonised with Swedish employment policy and partly to avoid the consequences of unchecked immigration: there was a real fear that immigrants might come to form a new low-paid proletariat, isolated and socially handicapped within the Swedish community.

Invaluable as immigration has been to the economy—immigrants being concentrated, as we have seen, in the most productive age groups—

TABLE 2. NATIONAL ORIGIN OF MAIN ALIEN GROUPS IN SWEDEN, 1971

Country of origin	Men	Women	Total	% of all aliens
Finland	103 900	102 400	206 300	49.5
Yugoslavia	21 900	18 700	40 600	9.7
Denmark	17 500	12 900	30 400	7.3
Norway	13 500	13 900	27 400	6.6
Germany (Fed. Rep.)	11 100	9 000	20 100	4.8
Greece	9 100	7 200	16 300	3.9
Italy	4 800	2 700	7 500	1.8
United States	3 600	2 800	6 400	1.5
United Kingdom	3 300	2 600	5 900	1.5
Poland	2 200	2 700	4 900	1.3

the Swedish authorities are well aware that there is much more to the matter than mere economics. Coming from a wide range of different social and cultural backgrounds, usually ignorant of Swedish language, customs and institutions, immigrants need help in settling down and integrating in their new environment. This imposes a considerable burden on various social services but perhaps most of all on the educational system. It is not only the children of immigrants who have to be catered for: adult immigrants need to be taught Swedish, both for use in their work and in their everyday lives, and given guidance about community affairs, while at the same time maintaining contact with the language and culture of their own homeland. Much of this work falls on the various adult educational associations.

The present article is specifically concerned with the efforts that are now being made in Sweden to provide immigrants with tuition in Swedish and information about the community in which they have come to live.

Language tuition for immigrants prior to 1 July 1973

Language being the most important medium through which people communicate with one another, a knowledge of Swedish is a prerequisite if immigrants are to settle down and feel they are actually involved in community life. An immigrant who cannot speak the language will encounter difficulties at work, in contacts with the people he meets, and in many everyday situations. It was therefore decided that efforts should first and foremost be concentrated on language tuition.

Before the mid-1960s immigrants had only limited possibilities for tuition in Swedish, and usually had to pay for it. Heavy immigration in 1964 and 1965, however, impelled the Government to set aside funds

for language tuition for immigrants as from the 1965/66 fiscal year. This enabled the National Board of Education, in consultation with the Labour Market Board¹ and, after 1 July 1970, also with the National Immigration and Naturalisation Board to arrange free tuition in Swedish language and community affairs for foreigners intending to remain in Sweden for some time. On 1 July 1972, regulations went into effect requiring immigrants to have residence permits or, if as Nordic nationals they do not need such a permit, to be officially domiciled in Sweden, in order to be eligible for such tuition.

ROLE OF THE ADULT EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The courses themselves are given by the adult educational associations approved by the National Board of Education, and are financed by state grants.

Immigrants are in fact to be found in all the existing branches of adult education. There are no precise figures on the over-all proportions of immigrant and Swedish-born students attending adult education classes, but immigrants form a fairly high proportion of workers undergoing "labour market training"²—about 10 per cent of all those who began courses in 1970/71—while the proportion taking part in adult education arranged by local authorities is about 8 per cent.

As just mentioned, however, tuition in Swedish for immigrants is mainly dispensed by the ten state-approved but independent adult educational associations, the greater part of it by the Workers' Educational Association.

The amount of language teaching provided for immigrants has expanded rapidly over the past six or seven years, and is coming to form an increasingly greater proportion of the educational associations' activities. As may be seen in table 3, the number of study circles³ specialising in Swedish for immigrants organised by the associations increased from 4,187 during the 1965/66 academic year to 18,990 in 1971/72. One reason for this expansion is the fact that state grants to the associations for language training are far more generous than for other fields of study. During the academic year 1971/72, when approximately 165,000 immigrants attended study circles in Swedish and civics, expenditure from public funds for these activities amounted to about 50 million kronor.

The tuition is arranged on the general lines of the curriculum drawn up by the National Board of Education. This lays down that the classes should provide immigrants with a knowledge of the Swedish language

¹ The central administrative body for questions relating to the labour market, foreign labour, retraining, vocational guidance, unemployment assistance, etc. It supervises the Employment Service.

² Roughly equivalent to retraining for the unemployed and the disabled.

³ Courses combining individual study with group work.

TABLE 3. SWEDISH-LANGUAGE CLASSES FOR IMMIGRANTS
ARRANGED BY ADULT EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS, 1965/66-1972/73

Academic year	Study circles	Participants	Total hours of instruction
1965/66	4 187	45 138	110 202
1966/67	4 469	45 900	124 108
1967/68	5 005	51 460	143 866
1968/69	8 618	90 335	311 379
1969/70	14 109	148 462	641 574
1970/71	26 595	251 778	781 676
1971/72	18 990	165 282	665 556
1972/73	13 085	121 673	515 227

and also familiarise them with Swedish community affairs and the Swedish way of life. They should further endeavour to stimulate the interest of the participants in attending other forms of adult studies, for instance other classes offered by the educational associations, courses at folk high schools¹ or the courses for adults arranged by local authorities. Teaching may take either an "intensive" or a "less intensive" form. In the latter case each study circle comprises a minimum of 20 hours' study divided into sessions of one to three hours each. "Intensive" tuition consists of at least four hours of study per day for four to five days per week and comprises a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 240 hours of study.

EMPLOYER SCHEMES

The majority of immigrants have hitherto attended language courses in their leisure time. In recent years, however, a number of employers have arranged tuition in Swedish during working hours which their foreign employees have been able to take part in without loss of pay. Schemes of this sort have in most cases been the result of negotiations between the firm and the responsible trade union. The fact that such negotiations have been entered into by an increasing number of firms is due among other things to an agreement reached between the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Swedish Employers' Federation (SAF) in 1970 recommending their member organisations to devote more funds and energy to language tuition for immigrant employees. The LO and SAF considered that all immigrants with an inadequate knowledge of Swedish should be given approximately 200

¹ Many folk high schools are run by political or religious organisations. They provide a general civic education, often with emphasis on philosophy and the arts. Students are aged 18 and over.

hours' tuition, 60 of which were to take place during working hours and be paid as such. Many firms applied the terms of this agreement, others went even further and arranged courses lasting 240 hours with wage compensation for the time spent in classes.

Language and civic training for immigrants under the new Act

THE COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION

During 1969 and 1970 the economic boom reached its peak—and so did immigration. In the latter year close on 75,000 immigrants arrived in Sweden. The Government had realised as early as 1968 that it was necessary to come to grips in earnest with the problems raised by the settlement in Sweden of ever-larger numbers of immigrants. Accordingly a parliamentary Commission on Immigration was appointed in that year to produce a programme of action and supervise the application of whatever measures it deemed were called for.

The first task of the Commission was to examine what was already being done in the field of Swedish-language tuition and to submit recommendations as to how immigrants' needs in respect of language training and community information could be catered for more satisfactorily.

In its first report issued in June 1971 the Commission recommended that all immigrants taking up employment in Sweden after 1 January 1973 should have the right to 240 hours of basic tuition in Swedish and community information during working hours. Immigrants not in employment would receive a grant of 700 kronor on completion of their training. The Commission further recommended that local authorities should be responsible for the organisation of this training.

The recommendations put forward by the Commission on Immigration form the basis of the new legislation governing the right of foreign workers to time off from their jobs with wage compensation when attending Swedish-language courses, as approved by the Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) in December 1972 and May 1973.

SCOPE AND APPLICATION OF THE ACT

On some points, however, the new Act and its application differ from the recommendations of the Commission on Immigration. The Commission proposed, for instance, that all immigrants should receive remuneration during their period of study, but the Act applies only to immigrants in employment. Furthermore, the Commission recommended that local authorities should arrange the courses, while the Act has come to be applied in such a way that responsibility remains with the independent educational associations. The Commission proposed that only immigrants who were employed in Sweden for the first time after

1 January 1973 should be entitled to tuition, while the Act goes a step further and grants the same right to immigrants whose employment began before this date.

The new Act, which came into force on 1 July this year, covers immigrants who have work permits or—if these are not required—who are duly domiciled in Sweden. With some exceptions it applies to all employed immigrants whose mother-tongue is not Swedish, Danish or Norwegian, unless they are considered to possess sufficient knowledge of any of these languages already. Other exceptions are: foreign students who come to Sweden for vacation jobs; aliens who are engaged in work of a temporary nature; immigrants working in the employer's household; immigrants who have already received the tuition provided under the Act; and immigrants who have received tuition in the refugee camps set up under the auspices of the Labour Market Board or in the course of "labour market training".

TIME OFF AND WAGE COMPENSATION

Under the Act an immigrant who needs tuition has the right to 240 hours off from his work and to the wages he would have earned for the whole of this period during normal working hours. Time off and pay are reduced proportionately for workers in part-time employment. For instance a person who works half time only and earns 14 kronor an hour is entitled to 120 hours off and will be paid at the rate of 7 kronor an hour—but for the whole 240 hours of tuition.

Tuition takes place as far as possible during ordinary working hours. In some branches of commerce and industry where this may be impracticable, suitable arrangements must be made for classes to be held outside working hours. In this and in several other respects the Act assumes that there will be close consultation between employers and employees. They are expected to get together and agree whether the tuition should take place during normal working hours or whether this would cause serious disruption of production. They also have to decide how the wage or salary compensation is to be calculated and paid out and which adult educational association is to be responsible for organising the courses.

The Act distinguishes between the right to time off and the right to receive remuneration. The right to time off can be limited by collective agreements between the employer and the trade union. The right to wages or salary, on the other hand, is indefeasible, irrespective of whether tuition takes place in or outside working hours. Remuneration, then, is never less than it would have been if the employee had been working during a corresponding period. Time off is equated with working time, so that a 45-minute class—allowing the employee a few minutes to get to and from his workplace—is compensated as a full hour worked.

INTERIM REGULATIONS FOR IMMIGRANTS WHO ENTERED
THEIR EMPLOYMENT BEFORE 1 JANUARY 1973

The Act also differentiates between immigrants who began work prior to 1 January 1973 and those who began on or after this date. While the latter have the unconditional right to 240 hours off with pay, the entitlement of those who began work earlier may be fixed at either 240 or 160 hours depending on the amount of tuition they have already received and on their knowledge of Swedish. (As mentioned above, some firms have already arranged language classes—with wage compensation or grants—and immigrants who have benefited from such tuition may have their entitlement reduced to 160 hours.) This decision is arrived at by means of a proficiency test to which I shall revert below.

The Act provides that tuition for immigrants who started work before 1 January 1973 will be spread over a five-year period. This is because there are estimated to be some 75,000 such immigrants in need of tuition and the educational associations simply do not have the capacity to teach them all at once. At what time during this five-year period the courses take place will be decided jointly by the employer and the responsible trade union in consultation with the educational association or associations arranging the tuition. An employee who does not take advantage of the training at the time agreed will forfeit his right to time off. He remains entitled to the corresponding remuneration, however, provided that he begins attending classes before 30 June 1978.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

At the request of the Government, the National Board of Education has developed a method for testing the standard of language proficiency of foreign workers. One particularly difficult problem was to find a means of determining who should receive 160 and who should have 240 hours of tuition. In consultation with LO and SAF the Board of Education came to the conclusion that the only practicable way was by means of a test. During the spring of 1973 the Board of Education therefore drew up a test which was tried out at several firms and found to give satisfactory results. The test is in two parts, one written, lasting about 30 minutes, and one oral, which takes about five minutes.

The written test aims at determining the employee's ability to state correctly the singular and plural forms of several common nouns, the grammatical endings of some simple adjectives, his knowledge of a few prepositions and pronouns, and the conjugation of some common verbs. The oral test consists of an interview in which the immigrant replies in Swedish to a number of questions put by the examiner.

Each employee is judged on the combined results of the written and oral tests. In determining the number of hours off he should be entitled to, account is also taken of his apparent learning potential.

Between August and October 1973 the Board of Education trained about 200 examiners who will be in charge of the tests in the various firms. Uniform training is necessary in order to guarantee that identical standards are used in assessing the language proficiency of immigrants in different parts of the country.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS OF THE ACT

Within 60 days after the commencement of employment, the employer must inform a new employee of his rights under the Act and offer him the opportunity of taking time off for language and civic training. The employee must utilise his rights within two years, after which time they will lapse. Immigrants who began work before 1 January 1973 were to be informed of their rights by 30 September 1973 at the latest.

If the employer does not so inform his immigrant employees within the time specified or in any other way fails to comply with the Act or with agreements he has entered into, he can be held liable for damages. The labour courts are competent in questions where the terms of employment are governed by collective agreements: other cases may be dealt with by the ordinary courts.

An employee who leaves his job with one employer and takes up employment elsewhere can utilise whatever time off remains to him in his new job. Records kept by the Board of Education show whether an immigrant has previously received benefits due to him under the Act. These records are open for consultation by employers and trade unions.

The Act also includes a clause which gives protection against dismissal. No one can be dismissed from his job because he wishes to exercise his right to language and civic training. Even if the employee seeks to waive his right to time off with pay, he will not be authorised to do so: it will always remain open to him for a period of two years. In this way pressure cannot be brought to bear on him to refrain "voluntarily" from following a course of instruction.

As already mentioned, the tuition itself has been entrusted to the state-approved adult educational associations. Employers may not therefore themselves arrange tuition for their immigrant employees under the Act. In order to be eligible for government grants, the educational associations have to follow the curriculum prescribed for the teaching of Swedish which has been drawn up by the Board of Education. They must also use teaching methods approved by the Board.

TEACHING METHODS

The choice of methods is governed of course by the circumstances in which tuition is given and by what it is hoped to achieve. The typical language class is composed of immigrants who speak different mother-tongues, belong to different age groups and come from different cultural

and educational backgrounds. The objective as laid down by the Board of Education is primarily to give them proficiency in the spoken language. Proficiency in writing Swedish takes second place.

Tuition is normally given according to the "modified direct" method. This means that it takes place in Swedish with a Swedish teacher. Great care is taken to ensure that tuition follows a strict grammatical and phonetical progression. The method requires extensive and varied teaching aids using different kinds of illustrative materials, and makes very great demands on the teachers' training in pedagogics and on their experience of language teaching.

Because the groups are so heterogeneous it is important that the tuition be individualised. In this connection knowledge of the pupil's cultural and social background and early education can be most useful. Diagnostic tests are used in order to constitute classes that are as homogeneous as possible in respect of the pupils' knowledge of Swedish, since this facilitates the application of the particular teaching method used.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Tuition in community affairs is an extremely important part of the education arranged for immigrants. It must be as all-round as possible since its object is to equip the immigrant with the knowledge he needs to cope successfully with the whole range of problems he will encounter in his new country. Community information is integrated with language tuition from the very outset and it is usually the language teacher who is made responsible for it. On occasions, however, specialist teachers are invited to describe and explain some particular feature of community life.

Basic information is provided about community functions as they affect the kind of everyday situations in which immigrants might find themselves, for instance at the post office, the bank, the social security office, when registering their place of domicile, at the hospital, and so on. The most topical subjects also include family and marriage questions and information on schooling. In time tuition can begin to include facts about the political parties, the Government, the Riksdag, etc. Study-visits and a certain amount of information in their own language are other means of familiarising immigrants with their new community.

TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

Teachers of Swedish to immigrants have widely differing educational backgrounds and teaching experience. An important requirement in all teachers appointed is, however, that they have a thorough command of Swedish, and it is an advantage if they know one or more foreign languages as well. They should also have a knowledge of phonetics, linguistics, pedagogics, etc. Another very important point is that they

should be interested in the immigrant's social problems, especially the difficulties he encounters as a newcomer in a strange land, and should also show understanding for and have some knowledge of the culture and way of life of other countries.

Nevertheless, out of a total of 1,900 teachers engaged in training courses for immigrants in 1972/73, very few had undergone training directly adapted to the teaching of immigrants. Nor had any special university courses been arranged for teachers of immigrants until the autumn of 1973.

It is clear that developments in teaching, teacher training and the production of teaching aids will assume considerable importance over the next few years. Experience gained in the eight years during which the teaching of immigrants with government support has been in progress will no doubt be of great value in this field. But there is still a need in Sweden for fuller exchanges of information between educational associations and research institutions in order to stimulate research into the problems of minority groups as well as language research.

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In the foregoing article I have attempted a summary account of some of the practical steps that are being taken to ease the foreign worker's adaptation to his new environment. The process of adaptation is complex and subject to many influences—economic, social, psychological and others—and we in Sweden are under no illusion that the institution of language and civic training for immigrants is a complete answer to the problem. We believe it is a step in the right direction, but are very conscious of the distance that remains to be travelled.
