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Role of Civil Society Organisations in Sweden for the Immigrants

Surabhi Singh^[1]

Abstract

Various factors like globalisation and conflicts in many countries have led to a dramatic increase of immigrants in Sweden. Since the year 2000, fewer seekers have arrived in other Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, and Norway) compared to Sweden which has experienced a significantly higher number of asylum seekers. The number of asylum seekers in Sweden is highest after Germany in all of Europe. The influx of migrants has put significant pressure on the country's social services. Civil society is an important institution is plays a major role in the successful integration of migrants in the labour market and society with the help of municipalities in Sweden. Thus it becomes crucial to study the role of civil society organisations with regards to growing immigration to Sweden. This paper will try to analyse what different methods are being adopted for the integration of immigrants in Sweden. The paper will also focus on the involvement of civil society organisations broadly in two activities. First, immediate help is being given to seekers who arrived at train stations, ferry terminals and transit accommodations. Second, the engagement of the civil society organisation in the facilitation of integration in the labour market and society.

Keywords: *Immigrants, Civil Society Organisations, Municipalities, Integration, Labour market.*



Introduction

The period of globalization of the economy and movement of people, along with the chaotic situation in many countries led to the dramatic increase in the migration of people from one country to another. This means people are forced to leave their countries due to wars, conflict, and many other factors. This also implies they have to face many difficulties while moving between terrestrial spaces as the borders between the nations are controlled (Djampour, 2018).

According to Balibar (2002), while explaining the meaning of border he defines that border not only demarcates geographical spaces but also marks the difference between human beings. He also argues how border treats differently.

“Nothing is less like a material thing than a border; even though it is officially ‘the same’ (identical to it and therefore well defined) whichever way you cross it – whether you do so as a businessman or an academic traveller to a conference, or as a young unemployed person. In this latter case, a border becomes almost two distinct entities, which have nothing in common but a name. Today's borders (though in

reality, this has long been the case) are, to some extent, designed to perform precisely this task: not merely to give individuals from different social classes, different experiences of the law, the civil administration, the police and elementary rights such as the freedom of circulation and freedom of enterprise, but actively to differentiate between individuals in terms of social class" (Balibar, 2002).

In the above quotation, he points out that the border does not have the same meaning for everyone. For example, privileged people who have passports also have surplus rights. It's just the formality at certain places. However, for the ones who do not have a valid passport borders become troublesome. These borders are monitored and surveilled by military forces to prevent illegal migrants. Therefore in this context, the study of the role of civil society organizations becomes important as they play a vital role in helping undocumented migrants.

After World War II, the majority of European countries have experienced large-scale immigration. Among all Sweden in the Nordic region have experienced tremendous waves of immigration since the 1980s. However, the year 2015 has turned out to be unique. Sweden almost received 1, 63, 000 applications from asylum seekers, which is one of the highest in all EU countries (Swedish Migration Agency, 2015). Following 2016, the number of asylum seekers has decreased due to the shutting of borders and the introduction of ID controls on the Danish-Swedish Border (Lonnæus, 2016). Since then Sweden has minimalized its laws on asylum to the minimum level required by the European court of justice and international conventions (Fry and Islar, 2021).

The influx of migrants puts significant pressure on the country's social service. In this connection, civil society organizations play an important role in maintaining coordination with public authority for the reception and integration of asylum seekers (Arora-Johnsson, 2017).

The main objective of the paper is to explore the relationship between key variants that is the state, civil society organisations and how they coordinate in handling the responsibility of integration of the immigrants. After the 2015 refugee crisis, the role of civil society organisations has increased. The paper is based on the hypothesis that national, regional and local authorities are partnering with civil society organisations to tackle the responsibility of assimilation of asylum seekers in the labour market and society. This study is qualitative which is mainly based on different government reports and research articles. These reports and research articles are based on the exploratory study on integration activities and relations between the municipality, civil society organizations, and national authority.

The paper is structured as follows: First, civil society in Sweden has been evaluated, The policy for civil society in Sweden is discussed in the second section. Thirdly, the role of civil society in the integration of refugees is highlighted. The role of different civil society organizations including churches has been discussed in fourth section. The challenges faced by the civil society organizations are presented in the

fifth section and finally, the conclusion focuses on the responsibility which is divided between state and civil society organisation for the integration of immigrants.

Civil Society in Sweden

The existence of a strong civil society is debated by scholars, as the state provides everything. But research in Sweden in the last 20 years has refuted this assumption (Anheier and Salamon, 1999). There is the coexistence of a strong state with a strong civil society. Boli (1992) finds Swedish civil society is less independent of the state, it is closely tied to the government. But it doesn't mean it does not have a strong impact on society. However, the Swedish civil society is less developed in the fields of health and social services and more in the field of culture, leisure, and advocacy.

The Swedish civil society traces go back to the 16th century before the Reformation began. Earlier it was in the form of charity which was being done by the church as well as by the king. But later in the 19th century, a new organization emerged for young people, orphanages, and reformatories that provide to handicapped, deprived, and delinquent children. These initiatives were taken by individuals, associations, foundations which were influenced by popular movements (Bramstang, 1964). These movements were the temperance movement, labour movement, consumer cooperatives, the sports movement, and adult education institutes (Johansson, 1993; Lundkvist, 1977). Later environmental, the women's movement also came into the picture of the 1970s and 1980s.

Policy for Civil Society Organization in Sweden

In December 2009, the Swedish Government presented a bill for the policy of civil society to the Riksdag (Parliament). Its main agenda was to improve the condition of civil society for the development and welfare of society as a whole. It also focussed on making civil society the main tool for building democracy. The policy was guided by principles that were based on autonomy and independence, dialogue, quality, continuity, transparency, and diversity (Regeringkansliet, 2010).

In 2014, Sweden adopted a new strategy for special initiatives in the field of democratization and human rights amount to 120 million USD per year. Sweden is also funding the new Civic Space initiative carried out by ICNL, CIVICUS, World Movement for democracy, and Article 19 to protect and expand civic space by enabling legal environment for civil society organizations and to strengthen the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association (Regeringkansliet, 2015).

Role of Civil Society in the Integration of Asylum Seekers

The role of civil society in the integration of immigrants must be understood in context to the Swedish welfare state and its political ideology (Torngren et al, 2018). Sweden is a state-centred society, where the public sector has taken on an extensive social responsibility of providing welfare services to citizens.

The reception and integration of newly arrived is the responsibility which is being divided between national, regional, and local public authorities. On the other hand, civil society is occupied in the field of culture, sports, and politics instead of the production of social services. It is being handled by the state. However, the trend has been changing since the 2015 refugee crisis. The governmental policy on integration recognized civil society as an actor, which should participate in the reception and integration programs (Torngren et al, 2018).

In 2010, the government also adopted a policy that has the objective to engage civil society organizations in the production of social services. Lately, an agreement has been established between state, civil society organizations, and the Swedish Association of Local authorities and regions (SOU, 2017). It becomes significant in the year 2015 and the civil society organizations involvement has increased and it can be broadly two categories. First relates to giving immediate help (for example offering clothes, medicines arranging transportations, and transit accommodations) to people who arrive at train stations and ferry terminals. The second task was in facilitating integration. This relates to organizing language training and study groups which link to Swedish society. For the second engagement, the government provides aid to civil society organizations (Torngren, Sayaka, and Emilsson, 2020).

However, civil societies in Sweden are dependent on the state, as they receive funding from the state on a national, regional, and local level (Amna E, 2005). The state funding directs civil society organizations in promoting the Swedish language and integration of immigrants in society, labour market, and health. Another field where civil society engagement is related deals with leisure time and adult education (SFS, 2016).

Current Scenario during Covid-19

During the pandemic, immigrants being the most vulnerable community faced many problems. Civil society organisations covering wide networks came up as big rescuers from providing basic essential needs to immediate medical help. They fulfilled an essential role not by just providing basic services like food, masks, medicine but also initiated public campaigns for awareness regarding transmission (Valeriani et al, 2020).

Role of Different Civil Society Organisations

1. Ensamkommandes Förbund (unaccompanied minors association)

The organization was set up in 2013 by former unaccompanied minors to provide a social space and services to newly-arrived unaccompanied minors. The facility houses provide space to minors for doing homework, several game rooms, and a music room. There are no codified official rules but it is governed on the principle of the golden rule that “everyone should be treated with respect”. It is governed by its members and a day today administer supervises funding, plans, and implements activities. The organization is growing steadily in different Swedish cities but funding remains a problem as the organization's track record is not sufficient enough to pool large grants (EESC, 2019).

2. Yalla Trappan

It is a social enterprise that employs migrant women who are not educated enough, have no work experience, and know limited Swedish language skills. The organization is based in Malmo. It integrates migrant women into the labour market by channelling their skills of cooking, sewing, cleaning into restaurants café. It operates with clients like IKEA and H&M. It has three sources of income, commercial activities, grant money, and subsidies from Public Employment Services.

It also faces some challenges as it is a social enterprise so neither it works on earning huge profits nor on charity so it is not able to sell its services at bargain prices (EESC, 2019).

3. Kontrapunkt

Kontrapunkt's function is based on collectivism. It works on the principle of a time and money sharing system. The organization does not officially employ anyone and whoever works in the organization brings money will be shared among them. It also assists asylum seekers and refugees with shelter, medical help, language training, etc. some recognized refugees are also involved who provide their services to newly arrived refugees. After 2015 when Sweden closed its border to immigrants and the need for shelter declined, Kontrapunkt started working as a café that collects surplus food and distributes it via a food bank system.

Kontrapunkt also faces challenges in pooling funds as it has started focussing on political and social work so getting funds from public authority becomes a challenge due to a mismatch in needs for society and money available for different activities (EESC, 2019).

Churches

Community building is the main theme on which churches work. They organize public worship, church choirs, and other meetings which bring the community together for the development of social cohesion (Wijkstrom et al, 2020).

In the year 2015, during the refugee crisis in Sweden, the church along with civil society organizations and national, regional, and local authorities have assisted refugees. More than 80 per cent of parishes became reception centres or were involved with other form activities which helped in the integration of asylum seekers. The parish staff members became active volunteers in the forefront of the reception at major train stations and other ports of entry. After the reception, they helped migrants in both long and short-term housing, food, language training, and counselling.

Even during the Covid19 pandemic church along with Swedish Red Cross, Swedish Sports Confederation, Save the Children have signed compact to help municipalities in assisting refugees. Municipalities needed volunteers for arranging medicine, groceries, and essentials for migrants.

Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organizations in Sweden

The relation between the public sector and civil society is complex. There is always tension concerning who will provide social service and whose task will be the organization of reception and integration activity (SOU, 2017). As responsibility and roles are directly related to the organizational framework. The representatives in interviews which were conducted by the government official reports assert that there is a need for some sectors (like employment, welfare, and basic rights) should be completely handled by the state as it is the right of every individual irrespective of being native or migrant (Torngren, Sayaka, Emilsson, 2020).

The biggest challenge faced by civil society organizations is coordination between the public sector and the municipality. Some of the representatives of civil society organizations who were interviewed revealed that there is a gap between what information they get and what is needed. They do not get complete information in all areas. Therefore it hinders their capacity to work in assisting asylum seekers or refugees (SOU, 2017).

The other challenge which civil society organizations have to face is related to funding and in exact terms what type of funding. Civil society organizations can acquire funds in several ways. First, they can acquire funds through project-based. Second, through commissioned funding which is based on market bidding which is indirectly established customer-executor relations with the state. But in the real crux, all these funds are directly or indirectly related to political decision-making (Kazepov, Y., 2008). This is the reason

most civil society organizations are critical of project-based and commissioned-based funding systems. They prefer for partnership funding model (Torngren, Sayaka, Emilsson, 2020) as it will lead to equal participation with cooperation.

The other challenge is related to the integration process as civil society organizations work more comprehensively rather than dividing sectors. On the other hand, the public sector divides them based on housing, employment, and language learning, etc.

Conclusion

Historically, Sweden in Europe has been a favourite destination for many migrants across the whole world. Traditionally Sweden is a welcoming society but after the 2015 refugee crisis, it has to be more careful and need assistance from different actors to manage that crisis. Statistics show that newcomers do pretty well in the domain of citizenship and long-term residence but Sweden's new policy of giving temporary residence for some time creates a problem for newcomers as well as to civil society organizations. The paper specifically tries to look into how state and civil society organisations handle the responsibility of assimilating immigrants not just for temporary residence but in other areas also, like employment, education, and poverty that create trouble for asylum seekers. In that context, the role of civil society organizations becomes very important. The study has already dealt with how the work domain of the civil society organization is evolving and now it's no more restricted to culture, sports or advocacy. Civil society has started taking part in the integration of asylum seekers and they were quite helpful too. The public authority has also realized their importance. Morgan Johansson, the Swedish Minister of Migration has said "if volunteers do not exist, everything would have crashed a long time ago" (Frykman and Makela, 2019).

Therefore, the state should treat civil society organizations as equal partners. To promote their involvement in the integration of refugees they should help them with funds and correct information and should let them work independently and comprehensively. In that circumstance, an open and constant dialogue between the public sector which includes (national, regional, and municipality) is the need of the hour.

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