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Circular migration

Mapping circular migration with register statistics

Note by the Statistics Sweden

I. Background and definitions on circular migration

1. In July 2009 the Swedish Government decided to appoint a Parliamentary Committee to examine circular migration. At several times the government has expressed the importance of facilitating the mobility of the labor migration. The need for a study on circular migration has for example its base in the budget proposition of 2009. There it is expressed that a long-termed sustainable migration policy should be ensured. This policy should, within the framework for the regulated immigration, protect the right to asylum, facilitate movement across borders, promote on-demand labor, utilize and take into account the development of migration as well as deepen the European and international collaboration. The Committee was tasked with mapping out circular migration and identifying the factors that influence migrants' opportunities to move between Sweden and their countries of origin. Statistics Sweden has contributed with migration data from the national population register. The statistics shows that more than 2,000,000 circular moves involving Sweden was made between 1969 and 2009. The result of the mapping was published in May 2010 and is the focus of this paper.¹

¹ The mapping was published in SOU 2010:40, Cirkulär migration och utveckling – kartläggning av cirkulära rörelsemönster och diskussion om hur migrationens utvecklingspotential kan främjas. In March 2011 a final report with proposals aimed at removing obstacles to increase mobility was published. The proposals were published in SOU 2011:28, Cirkulär migration och utveckling – förslag och framåtblick.

A. Dimensions of circular migration

2. Migration is traditionally seen as moving from one place to another where the migrant is expected to stay permanently. This view is stated unsatisfactory by the Committee. In today's globalised world migration is more and more circulatory. People move between countries, sometimes for longer or shorter periods, sometimes back and forth repeatedly. In the 1960s circular migration as a term figured within the demography and anthropology discussions about urbanization and the rural development. Not until the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century the term circular migration was beginning to be discussed in the international migration context. The discussions on circular migration intensified and during a United Nations dialogue on migration and development circular migration were highlighted by the Global Commission on International Migration as an important policy tool to promote the positive connection between migration and development. For the first time it was defined that all actors from the country of origin as well as the destination country and the migrant himself/herself was gaining from the migration process. In other words, the circular migration brings a threefold gain, a win-win-win situation.

3. Other definitions on circular migration also exist. The Migration Policy Institute has clarified that circular migration has strong connections to the globalization context while the European Commission has emphasized that circular migration is controlled rather than spontaneous. Controlled migration means migration within the frame of a bilateral agreement or a program where length of stay, issue of permits and return is defined. And spontaneous migration means migration that arises outside of special programs when supply and demand operates. Although at the same time this migration can be stimulated or restricted by different political regulations and actions.

4. Despite the lack of a clear definition of circular migration the Committee has identified a number of dimensions included in the differing definitions. The first dimension is the *spatial* one. For a migration to be circular the move needs to consist of at least two different places, origin and destination country. Next is the *time dimension* where the migrant can stay away for just a couple of months to years or maybe for a lifetime planning only to come back in connection with retirement. Further is a *repetitive dimension* necessary. The move needs to be back and forth thus involving more than one cycle. Finally, circular migration is characterized by a *development dimension*. According to the Committee this is what divide circular migration from other types of migration like for instance programs for guest work because those programs does not actively take into account the development in the origin countries (even if this type of migration also can generate spontaneous development effects). The Committee also highlights the difficulties to actually control migration. When circumstances change the migrants might not be so interested in returning home any more. The family of the migrants might rejoin them in the destination countries or new opportunities to work might open up etc. Then spontaneous migration, where supply and demand operates, offers the destination country a more predictable and flexible system and at the same time the migrant is given a higher degree of individual freedom. When trying to create conditions for integration, research and experience has shown that it is most advantageous when the migrants in the biggest possible extent can control their own lives. With this background the Committee emphasizes that they want to broaden the view on circular migration. It is the migrant himself that best can decide if the right conditions for a move exists. The Committee therefore established that it is spontaneous circular migration, rather than controlled migration, that best fits the Swedish conditions and that is the type of circular migration they have focused on. But how can one describe circular migration with statistics?

II. Statistical definition on circular migration

5. Focus is laid on circular migrants as *persons that on last of December 2009 lived in Sweden and in migration purpose had crossed the border at least two times during the period 1969-2009*. This population will hereby and forth be mentioned as circular migrants. People living outside of Sweden at December 31 of 2009 are not included in the study

6. The reason behind the starting point being 1969 is because the first computerized data is available from that year. The data on migration to and from Sweden is linked to the national registration. All people registered in Sweden are included in Statistics Sweden's ongoing population statistics. Everybody, with a residence permit, arriving to Sweden with the intention of staying in the country for 12 months or more shall register at the Tax Agency. The same goes for people moving from Sweden with the intention of staying abroad for 12 months or more. In addition to the registered population there are persons that might have moved to stay in the country for a shorter period than a year but should not be considered as tourists or temporary visitors. Who among these persons should be considered as migrants is difficult to say and is not included in the statistical description of circular migrants based on the population register. This will be discussed further on.

7. Thanks to the personal identification numbers (PIN), that every person is assigned when born or immigrated, we can connect information about persons in our different registers and thereby gaining knowledge about the persons migratory history as well as information about the persons educational level, profession and demographic background.

III. Results

8. In this section the extent of circular migration is given alongside a summary on which the circular migrants are. Only a selection of the results from the Committee study can be shown here.

A. The base of circular migration

9. Principally the entire Swedish population is potential circular migrants and part of the population has already managed to live and work part of their lives outside of Sweden. The population during the shift 2009/2010 consisted of 9 340 682 persons where about 14 percent were born outside of the country and thereby has begun their migration career. The foreign born part of the population has continuously increased, 11 percent was foreign born at the year 2000 and in 1960 only 4 percent was born outside of the country. The table below shows the Swedish population and different subgroups. These people have already different experiences of migration and can therefore be more prone to become circular migrants.

Table 1. The population of Sweden, 2009 - the base for circular migration

	Number	Share (%) of the total population
Total population	9 340 682	100
whereof foreign born	1 337 965	14
whereof born outside the Nordic countries and EU/EES	809 160	9
whereof foreign citizens	602 893	6
whereof citizens in a country outside the Nordic countries and EU/EES	295 633	3
whereof born in Sweden with two foreign born parents	395 948	4

10. The foreign born population has migrated at least once and now makes up diaspora groups in Sweden. The largest groups of foreign born outside of the Nordic and the EU countries are people born in Iraq, Iran and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many of these immigrants have become Swedish citizens while others are still citizens of their country of origin and some have dual citizenship. What citizenship one has can be important for the possibility to migrate back and forth.

Table 2. The largest groups of foreign born from third country in Sweden, 2009

Country of origin	Born in country of origin	Citizenship in country of origin	Share with citizenship in the birth country
Iraq	117 919	55 114	47
Iran	59 922	11 846	20
Bosnia-Herzegovina	56 127	8 451	15
Turkey	40 766	10 840	27
Somalia	31 734	24 699	78
Thailand	28 739	17 099	59
Chile	28 320	7 287	26
Libanon	23 701	2 543	11
China	21 202	11 817	56
Syria	19 646	3 422	17
USA	16 555	8 864	54
India	16 457	5 731	35

11. Almost 70 percent of the circular migrants are of European descent. Of the Swedish population at 2009, 283,400 persons (3 percent), has moved at least two times over the border, thereby being included in the population of circular migrants. Of the circular migrants 202,400 persons are born in Sweden and has thus at least one time moved out of the country and then returned. 81 000 circular migrants were born abroad which means that they have moved to Sweden, left Sweden for another country and then moved back again. A lot of the foreign born circular migrants are born in another Nordic country. Among the foreign born 41 percent were born in another Nordic country, almost one fifth were born in a country within the EU and further 10 percent were born in another country in Europe. To sum up, closer to 70 percent of the circular migrants originates from Europe.

Table 3. Foreign born circular migrants (with at least 3 moves) by region of birth. Living in Sweden 2009

Region	Number	Share(%)
Africa	4 714	6
Asia	12 000	15
EU27 without the Nordic countries	14 411	18
Europe without EU27 and the Nordic countries	7 826	10
North America	2 811	3
The Nordic countries without Sweden	32 990	41
Oceania	450	1
Unknown	12	<1
Soviet Union	317	<1
South America	5 460	7
Total	80 991	100

12. In relation to the whole group, Swedish born have the lowest share of circular moves. This strengthens the statement that if one already have migrated once one be more prone to migrate again. Although in numbers the Swedes constitute the largest group of circular migrants.

Table 4. Circular migrants (with at least 2 moves) by region of origin

Region	Number of circular migrants	Population in	Share (%) of circular migrants
		Sweden 2009, from the different regions	
Africa	4 714	103 077	5
Asia	12 000	388 037	3
EU27 without the Nordic countries	14 411	259 300	6
Europe without EU27 and the Nordic countries	7 826	217 072	4
North America	2 811	30 145	9
The Nordic countries without Sweden	32 990	266 519	12
Oceania	450	4 251	11
Unknown	12	751	2
Soviet Union	317	6 348	5
Sweden	202 381	8 002 717	3
South America	5 460	62 465	9
Total	283 372	9 340 682	3

13. Most circular migrants had only migrated a few times. Of the foreign born circular migrants 85 percent has made three moves that involve Sweden, i.e. they have moved in to Sweden, out of Sweden and back again. More numerous moves are less common, 12 percent has moved five times and only 3 percent has moved seven times or more. 500 persons had actually migrated ten times or more.

Table 5. Foreign born circular migrants by number of moves

Birth region	Number of moves			
	3	5	7+	Total
Africa	4 097	527	90	4 714
Asia	10 679	1 144	177	12 000
EU27 without the Nordic countries	12 522	1 547	342	14 411
Europe without EU27 and the Nordic countries	7 014	680	132	7 826
North America	2 466	304	41	2 811
The Nordic countries without Sweden	26 556	4 801	1 633	32 990
Oceania	401	43	6	450
Unknown	10	2	0	12
Soviet Union	279	33	5	317
South America	4 764	597	99	5 460
Total	68 788	9 678	2 525	80 991
Share	85%	12%	3%	100%

B. Well educated circular migrants

14. The circular migrants are rather well educated, which applies even more so for women than for men. Among the circular migrants a larger part has a higher education than the population as a whole. At the same time circular migrants that doesn't have a higher education instead has a lower level of education than the average in Sweden.

15. Some differences in educational level also exist between continents. The circular migrants from North America generally had a high level of education while migrants from countries in Europe that doesn't belong to the EU generally had a lower level of education.

C. Few children and older persons among the circular migrants

16. People in the working ages comprise the largest group of circular migrants while relatively few children have moved two times or more. This is partly explained by the fact that the older a person is the more time he or she have had to move but it is also explained by the fact that most people move when they are in the ages between 20 and 40. Among the children (0-18 years old) 20,000 has already made a circular migration. Repeated moves are more common among Swedish born and people from North America suggesting that people from these countries in greater extent move with their children. The possibility to transfer parts of social security is important when considering a move abroad. The possibilities to Swedish child support in certain cases are important to parents considering migrating. Another example on how migration is encouraged is the possibilities to bring Swedish unemployment compensation in certain cases when moving abroad searching for a job.

17. Of the persons 64 years and older 34 005 of them are circular migrants. Most of them, 21, 506 persons were Swedish born and 12 499 were born abroad. Of the foreign born persons 5,837 were born in another Nordic country, 3 377 were born in an EU country and 3,285 persons were born elsewhere in the world.

Table 6. Circular migrants in Sweden by age, 2009

Age-group	Number	Share (%)
0-18 year	22 813	8
19-64 year	226 554	80
65 years and older	34 005	12
Total	283 372	100

18. The number of people that might want to return to a former home country in old age among Sweden's foreign born population is considerably larger. This group is potential circular migrants. In 2009 Sweden had almost 200,000 retired persons that were born abroad. If one include those who in a couple of years will retire (people aged 55 or more in 2009) the group amounts to 365,000 persons. Many of these persons were born in another Nordic country (154,000) or in another EU-country (90,000) with which Sweden has special agreements regarding the possibility to transfer parts of the social security. In addition to the Nordic and EU born persons, 12 000 persons born in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 11,000 Iraq born and 7,500 persons born in Turkey are 55 years or older. Not everybody will move from Sweden but for many of them the possibility to migrate will be an important issue regardless of that migration being permanent or temporary. The possibility to migrate is here closely related to the possibility to bring different benefits one have in Sweden, for instance the possibility to bring retirement pension or compensations when sick or injured.

Table 7. Older foreign born living in Sweden, 2009

	Men	Women	Total
55-64 year	81 150	89 147	170 297
65 year and older	83 584	111 302	194 886
55 year and older	164 734	200 449	365 183

19. To recap, the results have shown that the geographical vicinity is clearly of great importance but that the globalization also has made its mark since the foreign born population has increased. A population that might be more inclined to migrate circulatory as they already have started a migratory career.

IV. Reflections

20. Now we will move the focus to what the study has not been able to let us know, and give example on a further study that can be made. Were nothing else is said the following parts are reflections from Statistics Sweden and not from the Committee study.

A. When one moves for just a short period

21. The Committee study on circular migration captures persons that at the end of 2009 was living in Sweden and that at least twice had crossed the border since 1969. Since the registered population is the source for the study only long-term moves are included. What the study therefore does not capture is persons that move for a shorter period than 12 months. Migrants that intend to stay in or stay away from Sweden for a shorter time than 12 months does not register and production of this statistics becomes problematic. The Committee mentions in their conclusions that reason exist to contemplate an evaluation of the system of the coordination numbers. The coordination numbers replace the Swedish PIN for persons with shorter stays. 51,000 persons was given a coordination number during 2011, a significant proportion in relation to the official number of the immigration that amounted to about 96,000. For instance, persons that works for a short time in Sweden and needs to pay tax in the country gets a coordination number. But the person that gets the coordination number does not in each case need to be in the country. Sailors working on a Swedish-owned business get for instance a coordination number but do not need to be living in Sweden. Guest students are an example of a group that doesn't get a coordination number at all. So improvement in the system needs to be made if it should be used in statistical purpose. But the main problem to use today's coordination numbers for production of statistics on circular migration is the fact that the persons getting coordination numbers does not need to deregister when they move abroad.

B. Where do the circular migrants reside while not in Sweden?

22. Uncertainties exist on how many persons residing outside of Sweden and where they move. Estimations on the total number of Swedes residing abroad has not recently been produced by Statistics Sweden. A study from 2004 estimates the number of Swedes to about 200 000 people². The Committee study found that 21,400 Swedish born circular migrants have left Sweden since the year 2000 and at the end of 2009 they still were residing abroad. Most of them, 32 percent, moved to other EU-countries and 29 percent moved to another Nordic country. About 14 percent moved to North America and 9 percent moved to Asia while only a few moved to Africa or South America. 169,500 foreign born persons has for a while lived in Sweden and since the year 2000 left the country. They too primarily move to other Nordic and EU countries. But the destination countries differ between the migrants origin. Somalis move in lesser extent to a country in Africa than people from, for instance, India move back to a country in Asia. Of the Somalis that has left Sweden sometime since the year 2000 only 23 percent has moved to Africa. The biggest

² Source: Demografiska rapporter 2004:5, SCB 2004. Efterkrigstidens invandring och utvandring.

part has instead moved to countries within the EU. Of the people from India that has left Sweden sometime since the year 2000, 59 percent has moved to a country in Asia and only 9 percent to another country in the EU.

Table 8. Emigrants who returned to their birth country in 2009. Countries for example

Country of birth	Migrated from Sweden	Migrated to their birth country	Share that migrated to their birth country (%)
India	637	477	75
China	447	297	66
Iraq	902	360	40
Bosnia-Herzegovina *	199	59	30
Turkey	509	111	22
Somalia	418	85	20
Ethiopia	108	21	19
Ukraine	56	9	16

* Please note that the share of returnees to Bosnia-Herzegovina probably is considerably larger since many of these people have Yugoslavia as birth country.

23. But this statistics is imperfect as a large group does not state where they intend to move. Some also move without notifying the authorities. When the Tax Agency sees that a person no longer resides in Sweden they write off that person as a migrant but has of course no idea on where that person has moved. Since 1998 the average share of emigrants moving to an unknown country has been 9 percent of the total emigration. But as we have seen above the statistics gives a good hint on where the migration goes.

C. What about chains of destination countries?

24. The Committee study has focused on moves back and forth to Sweden but when a migrant has moved say from Sweden to another country, continued on to yet another country and then moved back to Sweden we can't illustrate this, and moves between three countries or more are unknown to us. One approach to find out more about this would be to study whether the migrant comes back from the same country that the migrant notified he or she was moving to when leaving Sweden. A large amount of persons with differing countries when leaving and returning would suggest that we need to consider that the circular migrants move between chains of countries rather than between two countries back and forth. This is not something Statistics Sweden has studied but it is something that could be made.

D. Closing words

This paper has focused on the results from the mapping of circular migration initiated by Swedish Government. The results from this study are vast and only a selection of the statistics is shown here. Although some restraints exist we do have gained new knowledge about a field growing more and more important in our globalized world. We hope to see more studies investigating the complex area circular migration is.