



THE STATE OF
EXPAT LIFE IN
SWEDEN 2018



Expatriates' experience of Sweden is a silent issue that lies near dormant, beneath the surface of Swedish politics and society. Despite the efforts of some business lobby groups, in particular the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, the future role of expatriates, or expats, in Sweden's economy is largely ignored by politicians and society at large. Where expat issues are raised, the mainstream press focuses on specifics; such as expulsions of programmers or the integration of refugees. We argue that the focus needs to be broader than that; Sweden needs to think about how foreigners experience their move to Sweden. Because the forecast is that Sweden's economy has the potential to create 760,000 new highly-qualified jobs by 2025, well above the ability of Sweden's education system to supply the talent.

Many of these jobs will only be created if there are foreigners willing and able to move to Sweden to fill them. If job vacancies are not filled, companies cannot grow, and Sweden's economic outlook may be weaker as a result. Therefore, for the first time in many years, Sweden's economic future appears linked to its ability to attract foreign professionals to work in the highly-skilled jobs that Sweden's companies wish to create. For this to happen, new thinking is required that attempts to understand and address the needs of expatriates, both now and in the future.

The choice to move country for work involves uncertainty and risk. Individuals considering an expat move typically research the experience of existing expats to assess whether the experience is likely to be good for them and their family. This report helps those considering such a move, identifying issues clearly, so that they may be addressed. The report also considers implications for Swedish policy makers, aiming to make the experience better.

In late 2017, **Mundus International**, a provider of news, analysis and insight into Swedish current affairs to the foreign community in Sweden, **New in Sweden (NiDS)**, the expat membership and support service and Swedish language course provider, **Swedish for Professionals**, collaborated to uncover the true picture of life for expats in Sweden. We quizzed expats living here, the HR staff that organised their move and the Relocation Agents that supported them during the process. We dug deep to find out the full story about emigrating here and this report picks up on these issues from the expats perspective. It also goes further, by analysing international benchmarking studies of expats, and through asking expats what they needed to know more about, whether their career was going well and how they were enjoying their experience.

Previous studies - including benchmarking studies of expats experience here and Swedish culture traits - confirm many of the 'generally accepted' facts about expatriate life in Sweden. Expatriates identify Sweden as a safe country, with a high quality of living, noted especially for its healthy lifestyle and ability to live close to nature. Sweden gets votes for its excellent work-life balance,

outstanding family life and good job security. However, expats have not been as happy about their careers in Sweden, and Sweden scores poorly for personal finances, disposable income and the quality of relationships with locals.

Respondents to our survey reported a lack of understanding of how Swedish society functions, which meant that they had high information needs on certain issues, especially the healthcare system, property markets, work permits and taxation.

Our questions to expats focused specifically on the issues they faced in building careers, an area where Sweden achieved only mediocre results in international benchmarks. The results of the study suggest people fall into two different groups. Around half of expatriates are quite happy with the careers that they can establish and build here and are complimentary about the work-life balance and support for women and families. However, over one third of respondents were negative about their experience; frequently very negative. Those who were negative remarked about perceptions of bias against foreigners in the labour market, and issues to do with a lack of language and cultural skills. In addition, it was apparent that many lacked the networks required to build a successful career in Sweden, or whose skills lacked relevance to the local economy. Hence, the poor benchmark results are apparently the average of the happy group, scoring well, with a significant unhappy group which drags the results down.

Questions about **Making Friends and Finding Happiness** were included to look qualitatively at the bottom quartile results that Sweden received in international benchmarks in these areas. Around 40% of expats attributed a lack of Swedish relationships to an inability to speak Swedish fluently. A sizeable minority of expats replied that it was 'impossible to make friends' with Swedes. Those who had found success in making local friends understood that it takes a significant amount of time. Hence, our recommendation for expats looking to enjoy a shorter duration posting to Sweden is that they might look to seek the company of other expats. Government and NGOs have the potential to increase the speed of expats assimilation into society by providing focal points for foreigners to network both with other expats and Swedes. This is recommended for several reasons – as it would do much to satisfy needs for affiliation, professional networks and information transfer.

Expats with a clear need, or commitment to establishing a supportive local network of Swedish friends, would do well to follow the advice of cultural experts, such as Fons Trompenaars. In his view, it begins with being respectful and developing an understanding local culture. However, expats also need to remain true to self and their home culture and do things that they enjoy to stay positive. Choosing the time and location of efforts to build relationships with locals in ways that locals appreciate creates the foundation for success. In Sweden, this might mean putting children into local schools or joining local sports clubs, as Swedes enjoy interactions away from the office, in situations based around their private lives.

Next Steps



The impact of the massive increase in numbers of immigrants in Sweden over the last two to three years will continue to play out, changing the dynamics of school classes, highlighting gaps in healthcare provision, causing racial issues to be addressed and influencing culture generally. Services specific to refugees have been developed and deployed all over the country. This, coupled with the current experiences of expats living already in Sweden, will define what life could be like for people moving to Sweden in the coming years.

Towards the end of 2018 and, potentially every year from now on, we will run this survey again so that we can compare the effect of these changes on the experiences of expats arriving then. In the meantime, expats arriving at the moment can, at least, get help from us:

About NiDS, Mundus International and Swedish for Professionals



New in Danderyd and Sweden (NiDS) is a membership service that provides personal support and all the information needed (in English) for expats to move to, live in and enjoy life in Sweden.

Members sign up online before they move over (or shortly after they arrive), join a community of members and get two year's access to our support team and information. The information is kept right up-to-date and all provided in English. We don't link out to other sites, we make sure that everything from timetables to forms is available on our pages, saving time and a lot of effort for our members.

"New in Danderyd would have saved me a huge amount of time and energy sorting out our house when we arrived! Even food shopping would have been easier had I known where to get the food my family likes!" Lorraine McIntosh

The NiDS support team are there to handle specific needs, such as helping get furniture repaired that was damaged in the

move over to providing information on internationally-available English television channels.

Where a relocation agency is used, we take over once housing and schools have been found and the expats have arrived in Sweden.

In 2018, NiDS Sweden membership costs 1290 kr per family and the Danderyd package (includes local information) costs 1499 kr per family. Membership comes with a 14-day money back guarantee.

More information can be found at www.newinsweden.com

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For many international people living in Sweden there is a serious gap between what they need to know about Swedish society, politics, and economics than what they can easily access. **Mundus International** was founded in 2012 to provide information and analysis for foreign professionals working Sweden. **Mundus International** provides facts, analysis and interpretation - **pulling the whole story together for an international audience**. In our product portfolio, we cover politics, business and the economy with both daily news and deeper analysis, and provide tools to navigate the cultural bridge to local business practice.

"The first thing I do before getting started with work in the morning is reading through Mundus News. If you are looking for a daily quality brief on the main news in Sweden you will love Mundus News - whether you are a native Swedish speaker or not". Victor Millien, Managing Director, Chambre de Commerce France Suède

- **Mundus News:** The day's top news and business stories - with a particular focus on the booming tech sector - straight to your smartphone before 8.30am
- **Mundus Weekly:** Packed full of economic and policy data. Event calendar
- **Monthly Policy Review:** Detailed analysis of social, economic and political trends
- **Culture toolkit:** Take advantage of Fons Trompenaar's expertise with the Culture for Business app



We offer subscriptions for corporates, organisations and private individuals.

More information can be found at www.mundus-international.com

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Swedish for Professionals offers customised, flexible and interactive Swedish language courses.

SWEDISH FOR PROFESSIONALS



In 2014, Swedish for Professionals was founded as an innovative alternative to more traditional Swedish language learning. Claudia Olsson and Kristina Persson started the company with a focus on interactivity, flexible scheduling, digital tools and competent language coaches with the ability to engage and motivate adult learners.

Over 2000 participants have learned Swedish with Swedish for Professionals so far. To help expats integrate, Swedish for Professionals teaches Swedish at the workplace and enables them to combine language learning with work. The participants get access to digital content in an app and an online tool, as well as a book with exercises. The clients are mainly companies that choose to invest in the integration of their employees. Private customers can choose one-on-one tutoring and group courses, which are held in Swedish for Professionals' office in Södermalm, Stockholm. Partners accompanying expats to Sweden can submit their interest to such a group in order to learn Swedish and meet other internationals. Part of the offering for private customers is a specialised course focusing on Swedish that is valuable in the job-seeking process.

Find out more at www.swedishforprofessionals.com

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