

Changing Patterns of Emigration among Persons with Refugee Background in Sweden, 2000–2024

Introduction

This study investigates long-term trends in emigration among individuals with a refugee background in Sweden, focusing on the period 2000–2024. The population includes persons granted residence permits as refugees or as family members of refugees, as well as children born in Sweden to parents who immigrated for these reasons. Emigration is examined in five-year intervals to capture temporal shifts and demographic variations.

The emigration of persons with refugee background has varied between 3 000 and 4 000 per year during the period 2000–2004 to 2015–2019 and increased to on average nearly 10 000 per year during the last period, 2020–2024. Emigration of persons with refugee background constitutes an increasing share of total emigration from Sweden, from around 8 percent of total emigration from Sweden during the first four periods to 16 percent in the last period.

Theoretical Focus

A detailed understanding of migration developments within specific population groups is essential for setting realistic assumptions in population projections. In the Swedish context, the emigration behavior of refugee-background populations has become increasingly relevant, both due to their growing share of total emigration and the policy changes affecting their legal status.

Data and Methods

The study uses total population register data from Statistics Sweden (SCB), allowing for comprehensive coverage of the target population. Variables include gender, age, region of birth, educational attainment, citizenship status, and years since acquiring Swedish citizenship. For the later periods, the data also distinguish between temporary and permanent residence permits—a distinction that became particularly relevant after 2015, when Sweden introduced temporary permits as the default for asylum-related residence.

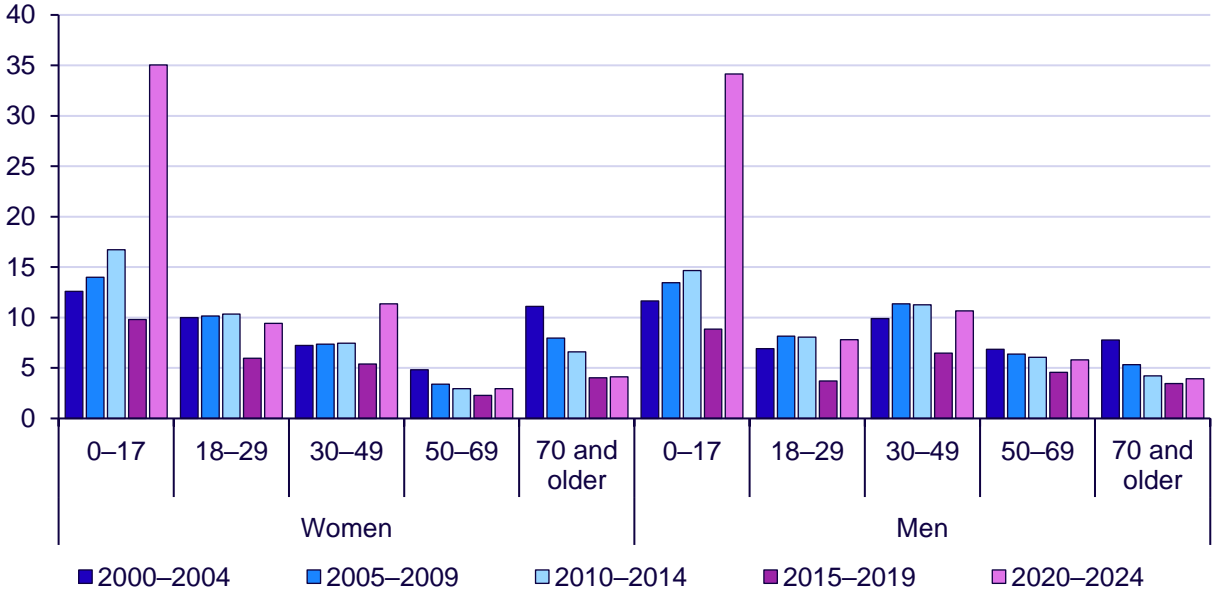
Emigration is analyzed descriptively across five periods: 2000–2004, 2005–2009, 2010–2014, 2015–2019, and 2020–2024. Emigration rates are calculated and compared both over time and across subgroups.

Findings

In general, former refugees emigrate to a lower extent than persons with other migrant backgrounds. Preliminary results show that emigration was particularly low during 2015–2019, with an emigration rate of 6 per 1 000. This coincides with the large refugee influx in 2015. In contrast, emigration increased during 2020–2024, to 12 per 1 000. The level of emigration during the 2020–2024 period is higher than previously recorded, marking a peak in the observed trends over the past two decades.

An increase in emigration is seen among both women and men and in most age groups but is particularly pronounced among women aged 30–49 and children under the age of 18. In these groups the emigration rates are significantly higher than previously observed.

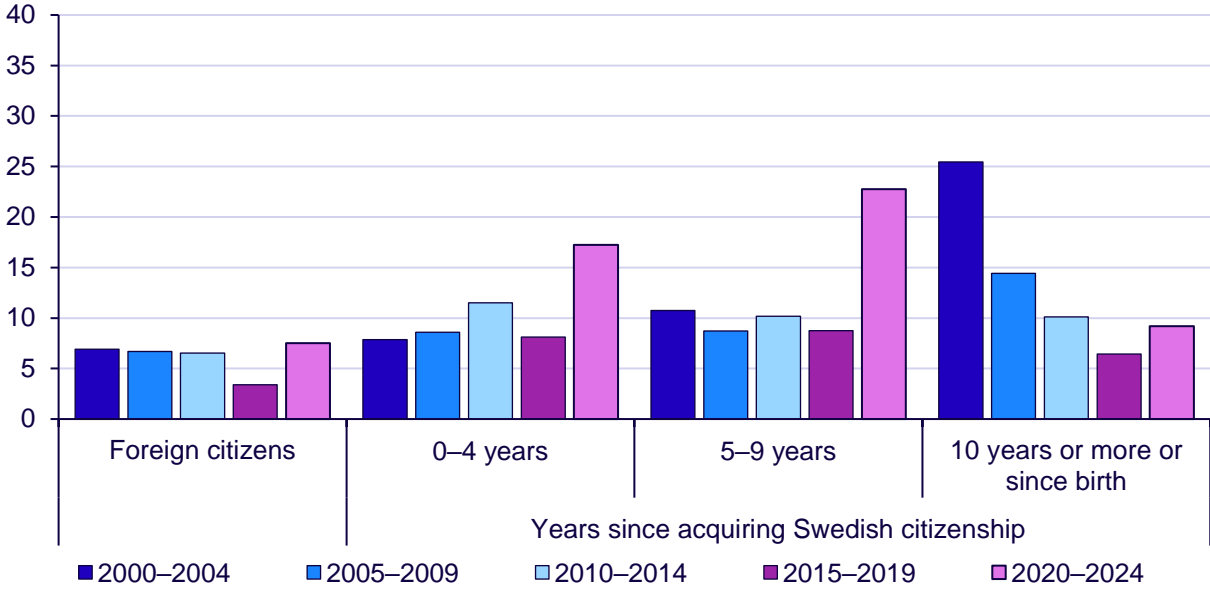
Figure 1: Emigration rates by gender and age group.
Number of emigrations per 1 000 in the population



In general, emigration is less frequent among former refugees with foreign citizenship than among those who have acquired a Swedish citizenship. The emigration has increased between 2015–2019 to 2020–2024 both among foreign and Swedish citizens. The increase is more pronounced for Swedish citizens. For foreign citizens, the emigration rates are at a similar level as earlier periods.

In the early 2000s, the emigration rates were highest among those who had acquired Swedish citizenship at least 10 years earlier. In the most recent period, the emigration rates were highest among those who acquired their Swedish citizenship more recently.

Figure 2: Emigration rates by citizenship status and years since acquiring Swedish citizenship
Number of emigrations per 1 000 in the population.



Conclusion

By providing a detailed demographic breakdown of emigration trends, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the mobility dynamics within the population with refugee-background in Sweden. Preliminary results suggest that the policy change regarding temporary residence permits has had little to no effect on the emigration among the population with refugee-background.