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Impact of Immigration on Family Structures in Sweden: Transnational Family Life, Intergenerational Relations, Gender, Housing and Integration

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Abstract

Immigration has become a major demographic and social force in Sweden, reshaping the composition, organization and everyday experiences of families. This manuscript examines the impact of immigration on family structures in Sweden through a narrative review of demographic statistics, Swedish migration policy, and sociological and migration research. The analysis focuses on family formation, family reunification, transnational households, partnership patterns, fertility and parenthood, intergenerational relations, gender roles, housing, children and second-generation families, and the interaction between family life and socioeconomic integration. Sweden provides an important case because immigration has occurred through multiple channels, including labour migration, refugee and humanitarian migration, student mobility, intra-European mobility and family-related migration. By the end of 2025, approximately 2.21 million residents of Sweden were foreign-born, representing just over one-fifth of the population, while 28 percent of the population had a foreign background when persons born abroad and persons born in Sweden with two foreign-born parents were combined (Statistics Sweden [SCB], 2026a; SCB, 2026b). These demographic changes have not simply increased the number of immigrant families; they have diversified household forms and produced new combinations of transnational, binational and intergenerational family relationships. The review shows that immigration can strengthen family networks through reunification and kin-based support, while migration processes can also generate prolonged separation, uncertainty and unequal access to family life. Children and young people may experience both opportunities associated with educational and social mobility and pressures related to language, identity, residential segregation and intergenerational expectations. Gender relations can be renegotiated through exposure to Swedish institutions, labour markets and gender-equality norms, although outcomes vary substantially by migration history, socioeconomic position and household circumstances. The manuscript concludes that immigration should not be understood as having one uniform effect on Swedish family structures. Instead, its effects are mediated by migration status, timing of migration, family resources, housing conditions, labour-market integration, welfare institutions, transnational ties and changing immigration regulations. A family-sensitive integration framework is therefore important for understanding demographic change and supporting social inclusion without treating immigrant families as a homogeneous category.

Keywords: immigration; family structure; Sweden; family reunification; transnational families; migrant families; intergenerational relations; gender; children; integration; housing; migration policy

1. Introduction

Immigration is one of the most consequential demographic and sociological processes affecting contemporary Sweden. Migration has changed population size, age composition, household patterns, neighbourhoods, schools, labour markets and the social networks through which people organize everyday life. At the same time, immigration is not a single process. People arrive in Sweden for employment, education, family formation, family reunification, protection, intra-European mobility and other reasons. Consequently, the consequences for family life differ according to migration pathway, legal status, country of origin, age at migration, socioeconomic resources and the composition of the household.

Statistics Sweden reported that 2,210,638 residents were foreign-born at the end of 2025, corresponding to slightly more than 20 percent of the population. In the same year, 2,936,800 people, or 28 percent of the population, were either born abroad or born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents (SCB, 2026a; SCB, 2026b). These figures demonstrate that immigration is not a marginal demographic phenomenon. It is part of the structure of contemporary Swedish society and therefore part of the structure of contemporary Swedish families.

The relationship between immigration and family structure is multidimensional. Migration can separate spouses, parents and children when one member migrates first and other relatives follow later. It can also reunite families after periods of separation. Migration can encourage new partnerships across ethnic and national boundaries, alter fertility timing, affect the age at which people enter unions, and transform patterns of intergenerational support. Families may simultaneously live in Sweden and maintain significant emotional, financial and caregiving relationships with relatives in other countries. In this sense, the family may become transnational rather than geographically bounded.

Sweden is particularly relevant for the study of immigration and family because of its welfare-state institutions, comparatively strong emphasis on gender equality, extensive public services, high levels of urbanization and a long history of migration research. Swedish family policy also interacts with immigration policy in ways that can either facilitate or constrain family life. Family immigration has been a major route into Sweden, while the legal conditions governing family reunification have changed over time. The Swedish Migration Agency has described close family ties as a major basis for residence permits and has emphasized that family-reunification provisions are based on the principle that families should be kept together (Swedish Migration Agency, 2025).

The policy environment has also become more restrictive. Sweden tightened some family-immigration rules in 2023, and legislation scheduled to take effect on 1 October 2026 introduces further changes, including a requirement that, for some groups, a reference person with a temporary residence permit must have been in Sweden for two years before family members can receive residence permits (Swedish Migration Agency, 2026). These developments are sociologically important because immigration rules do not merely regulate borders; they can influence the timing, composition and geographical organization of family life.

This article therefore asks: How has immigration affected family structures in Sweden, and through what mechanisms do migration, policy, socioeconomic conditions and transnational relationships reshape family life? The objective is not to portray immigrant families as inherently different from Swedish-born families, but to examine how migration experiences interact with ordinary processes of family formation, adaptation and social change.

2. Conceptualizing Family Structure and Immigration

Family structure refers to the organization of relationships among household members and kin, including partnerships, parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, extended-family connections and intergenerational ties. In migration research, family structure must be understood as both household-based and network-based. A family can consist of people living together in one dwelling, but it can also include relatives who live across cities, countries and continents while maintaining regular economic, emotional and caregiving relationships.

The concept of the transnational family is especially useful. Transnational families are families whose members live in different countries but maintain a sense of collective identity and continue to exchange resources, care and emotional support across borders (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Such arrangements may be temporary or long-lasting. A parent may migrate before a spouse and children; children may remain with grandparents; spouses may live apart while a residence application is processed; or adult children in Sweden may continue to support parents abroad.

Family migration also has a temporal dimension. Family reunification is rarely an instantaneous process. Documentation, residence permits, housing, income requirements and administrative procedures can determine when family members can live together. Research on Sweden shows that waiting can become a collective family experience and that uncertainty can affect caregiving practices, planning and the organization of couple relationships (Gustafsson, 2022). More recent research similarly finds that immigration rules, housing and labour-market conditions can create unequal waiting times and unequal access to family reunification (Gustafsson & Engblom, 2024).

A further conceptual distinction is between family composition and family functioning. Immigration may change who lives in a household without necessarily weakening family relationships. Conversely, a household may appear intact while members experience emotional or economic strain caused by migration-related uncertainty. Therefore, analysis must consider both demographic structure and the quality, stability and resources of family relationships.

3. Methodology

This article uses a narrative review and sociological policy-analysis approach. It does not present original survey data, interviews, clinical data or fabricated fieldwork. The analysis draws on official Swedish demographic statistics, Swedish government and Migration Agency documents, international organizations, and peer-reviewed research on migration, family life, integration and intergenerational mobility.

Sources were selected according to four criteria: (1) relevance to immigration and family structures in Sweden; (2) methodological or institutional credibility; (3) relevance to contemporary Swedish demographic and policy conditions; and (4) usefulness for explaining mechanisms linking immigration with family relationships. Official statistics were prioritized for population and household indicators, while peer-reviewed research was used for interpretation of family formation, reunification, intergenerational mobility and transnational family experiences.

The review is organized thematically around family reunification, household composition, partnership and marriage, fertility and parenthood, intergenerational relations, gender, children and second-generation families, housing, transnational practices, and migration policy. Because migration and family outcomes vary by country

of origin, legal status and socioeconomic position, the article avoids treating immigrants as a homogeneous group.

4. Immigration and the Demographic Context of Swedish Families

The demographic scale of immigration provides the background for understanding its influence on family structures. Sweden had approximately 2.21 million foreign-born residents in 2025, while 28 percent of the population had a foreign background under Statistics Sweden's definition of foreign-born persons or Swedish-born persons with two foreign-born parents (SCB, 2026a; SCB, 2026b).

Table 1. Selected demographic indicators relevant to immigration and family structure in Sweden

Indicator	Recent figure	Interpretation
Foreign-born population, 2025	2,210,638	More than one-fifth of the population was born abroad (SCB, 2026a).
Population with foreign background, 2025	2,936,800 (28%)	Includes foreign-born people and Swedish-born people with two foreign-born parents (SCB, 2026b).
Foreign citizens, 2025	828,544	Citizenship and country of birth are distinct measures; many foreign-born residents are Swedish citizens (SCB, 2026c).
Households, 2024	4,972,000	Sweden had nearly five million households at the end of 2024 (SCB, 2025).
Average household size, 2024	2.12 persons	The average declined slightly from 2.13 in 2023 (SCB, 2025).
One-person households, 2024	42% of households	Living alone remains the most common household arrangement in Sweden (SCB, 2025).

These figures demonstrate why immigration and family structure should be analyzed together with broader demographic change. Sweden is simultaneously experiencing immigration, population ageing, low fertility relative to historical levels, urban concentration and the persistence of one-person households. Immigration therefore does not replace existing family patterns; it interacts with them.

An important analytical point is that “foreign background” is not equivalent to “immigrant family.” A person born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents may have no direct migration experience. Likewise, a foreign-born person may have a Swedish-born spouse, Swedish-born children or a mixed family background. These distinctions matter because family outcomes often change across generations.

5. Family Reunification and the Reorganization of Households

Family reunification is one of the clearest mechanisms through which immigration changes family structures. Migration may begin with an individual who moves to Sweden for work, protection or study. Other family members may then migrate later. This process can transform a single-person or partial household into a family household.

The Swedish Migration Agency reported that, in the first half of 2024, close family ties were the second-largest basis for granting residence permits among major migration grounds (Swedish Migration Agency, 2024). The agency also notes that spouses, partners and children are central categories in family-related migration (Swedish Migration Agency, 2025).

Family reunification can reduce the social and emotional costs of separation. It can enable parents to resume direct caregiving, spouses to establish joint households and children to live with parents rather than relatives abroad. However, reunification may also create new adjustment challenges. Family members arriving at different times may have different language abilities, educational experiences and expectations. A spouse or parent who arrives later may have less familiarity with Swedish institutions and the labour market than the initial migrant.

Waiting periods are particularly important. Gustafsson (2022) found that waiting for reunification in Sweden could affect caregiving practices and family planning. Gustafsson and Engblom (2024) further show that housing and labour-market conditions, legal status and administrative restrictions can produce unequal temporal experiences of family reunification.

The family therefore becomes an important site where immigration policy is experienced. A residence permit decision can determine whether a family lives together, how long spouses live apart, whether children are raised by parents or relatives, and how caregiving responsibilities are distributed.

6. Transnational Families and Cross-Border Family Life

Not all migration produces geographically unified families. Some families remain transnational for months or years. Members may live in Sweden while parents, children, siblings or grandparents remain abroad.

Transnational family life can involve remittances, telephone and video communication, visits, emotional support, childcare arrangements and decision-making across borders. Digital communication has reduced some of the practical difficulties associated with distance, although it cannot fully substitute for physical presence.

The transnational family can be understood as a form of adaptation. Migrants may preserve family relationships across borders while establishing a new household in Sweden. Grandparents may remain important to children even when they live abroad. Parents may finance education or housing for relatives in their countries of origin while simultaneously investing in their children's lives in Sweden.

At the same time, transnationality can create emotional and practical tensions. Parents may experience guilt or anxiety when children remain abroad. Children may experience uncertainty when parents migrate first. Couples may have to make decisions about whether and when to reunite, and grandparents may become substitute caregivers.

The Swedish case also illustrates the role of welfare institutions. Where public childcare, education and health services are available, some family functions can be partially supported by institutions. Nevertheless, family networks remain important sources of emotional, cultural and practical support. The interaction between formal welfare services and informal family support is therefore central to understanding immigrant family adaptation.

7. Partnership, Marriage and Family Formation

Immigration can influence partnership formation in at least three ways. First, migrants may form partnerships with people from similar national or cultural backgrounds. Second, migrants may form relationships with people from other immigrant groups. Third, migrants or their children may form partnerships with native-born Swedes.

Research using Swedish register data has examined how exposure to Swedish society, age at migration and residential context relate to family formation among people who arrived as children. The research considers partnership status, intermarriage and timing of parenthood, demonstrating that family formation among immigrant-origin populations is closely connected to the social environments in which people grow up (Swedish Research Council, 2020).

Intermarriage and mixed-background families are especially important because they create family structures that connect different cultural, linguistic and social networks. Children in such families may have multiple national or cultural affiliations. They may also have greater access to diverse social resources.

However, mixed partnerships should not be interpreted automatically as evidence of complete cultural assimilation. Couples negotiate language, religion, traditions, relationships with relatives and child-rearing practices in different ways. Similarly, endogamous partnerships do not necessarily imply social isolation. Couples from similar backgrounds can participate extensively in Swedish institutions and social networks.

8. Fertility, Parenthood and Family Size

Immigration and fertility are related but should not be treated as simple cause-and-effect phenomena. Fertility patterns differ by migration history, age at arrival, duration of residence, education, employment, partnership status and country of origin.

Migration can alter the timing of childbearing. Some migrants postpone parenthood during migration or settlement, while others have children relatively soon after establishing residence. Reunification may also affect fertility because spouses who have lived apart can resume family formation after establishing a shared household.

Children born in Sweden to immigrant parents occupy an important position in this process. Their family experiences are shaped by Swedish educational and welfare institutions but also by parents' migration histories and transnational connections. Over time, fertility patterns among immigrant-origin populations can converge toward broader Swedish patterns, although convergence is not uniform across groups or generations.

It is therefore more useful to examine fertility as part of a wider life-course process than to attribute higher or lower fertility to “culture” alone. Economic security, housing, employment, partnership stability, childcare availability and migration timing can all influence decisions about parenthood.

9. Intergenerational Relations

Immigration can transform relationships between generations. In some immigrant families, migration strengthens intergenerational solidarity because relatives rely on one another for housing, childcare, translation, employment information and financial support. Extended family networks can provide resources that reduce vulnerability during the settlement period.

In other situations, migration may weaken intergenerational proximity. Grandparents may remain abroad, adult children may live in another Swedish city, or family members may have different migration statuses. The geographical distance can make everyday caregiving more difficult.

The experience of children of immigrants is particularly important. Swedish research shows that family background is associated with educational and labour-market outcomes, but also that mixed-background families may have different intergenerational mobility patterns from families in which both parents are foreign-born (OECD, 2018). Such evidence suggests that family structure, parental education and parental composition can interact with institutions to shape children's opportunities.

Table 2. Major pathways linking immigration to intergenerational family relations

Pathway	Potential family effect	Mediating factors
Family reunification	Restores co-residence and direct caregiving	Residence rules, waiting time, housing, income
Transnational separation	Reduces daily contact across generations	Distance, migration status, digital communication, travel resources
Extended-family support	Increases practical and emotional support	Kin proximity, employment, housing, cultural expectations
Children's educational mobility	May alter parent-child expectations and roles	School system, parental education, language, socioeconomic status
Mixed-background families	Expands cultural and social networks	Partnership patterns, neighbourhoods, language, parental resources
Residential mobility	Can separate or reconnect generations	Housing costs, labour markets, segregation, family networks

Intergenerational relationships may also change because children often acquire Swedish-language competence and institutional knowledge more quickly than parents. Children may therefore act as linguistic or administrative intermediaries. This can empower young people but may also reverse conventional parent-child roles in particular situations.

10. Gender Roles and the Immigrant Family

Gender is a central dimension of the relationship between immigration and family structure. Migration can redistribute paid work, unpaid care, household decision-making and economic dependence.

For some women, migration to Sweden can expand opportunities for education, employment and independent social participation. Swedish institutions, childcare services and gender-equality norms may facilitate women's participation outside the household. For some men, migration can require renegotiation of provider roles when labour-market entry is difficult or when partners have different employment trajectories.

At the same time, gendered inequalities can persist after migration. Women may carry disproportionate responsibilities for childcare and household work, especially during early settlement. Migrant women with limited language proficiency or interrupted education may face barriers to employment. Men may experience economic insecurity or loss of occupational status.

These patterns vary considerably across groups. It is therefore inappropriate to assume that immigrant families share a single gender ideology. Instead, gender relations should be examined through the interaction of

migration history, education, labour-market position, household income, family expectations and Swedish institutions.

Family policy can mediate these processes. Access to childcare, parental leave and employment services can affect how couples divide paid and unpaid work. In this respect, family integration is not separate from labour-market integration; the two processes are interconnected.

11. Children, Adolescents and the Second Generation

Children are often central to the long-term consequences of immigration. Children who migrate with parents may experience changes in language, school, peer networks and identity. Children born in Sweden to immigrant parents experience migration indirectly through family history and household socialization.

The distinction between first-generation, 1.5-generation and second-generation populations is useful. First-generation migrants are born abroad and migrate as adults or older children. The 1.5 generation migrates during childhood or adolescence and therefore combines experiences of the country of birth and Sweden. The second generation is born in Sweden to immigrant parents.

Research on immigrant children in Sweden emphasizes the importance of family background, education and institutional context. OECD research indicates a positive association between parental educational attainment and children's educational outcomes, while outcomes vary by family type and origin group (OECD, 2018).

Children can also become agents of family change. Their experiences in Swedish schools can influence household language use, aspirations, friendships and perceptions of gender and social norms. Parents may adapt to children's Swedish-language competence and social networks, creating a two-way process of cultural adaptation.

The family can consequently become a site of negotiation rather than simple transmission. Parents transmit values and practices to children, but children also introduce new practices and expectations into the family.

12. Housing and Residential Segregation

Housing is one of the most important structural conditions shaping immigrant family life. Where families live influences household crowding, children's school environments, access to employment, proximity to relatives and opportunities for social interaction.

Statistics Sweden reported substantial differences in housing between people with Swedish and foreign backgrounds. At the end of 2024, more than one-quarter of the population had a foreign background, and nearly half of people with a foreign background lived in rented apartments in multi-family buildings, compared with a substantially larger share of people with Swedish backgrounds living in owner-occupied housing (SCB, 2025a).

Housing conditions can affect family structure in several ways. A family reunited in Sweden may initially live in a small rental dwelling because of limited income and restricted access to the owner-occupied housing market. Large families may experience crowding. Young adults may remain with parents longer because independent housing is difficult to obtain. Conversely, improved employment and income may enable families to move to larger dwellings or different neighbourhoods.

Residential segregation can also shape family networks. Living close to relatives may provide childcare and emotional support but can limit opportunities for contact with people outside the community. Living in more mixed neighbourhoods may increase cross-group interaction but can make kin-based support less accessible.

These effects should not be attributed solely to migrant preferences. Housing supply, prices, income inequality, discrimination, municipal variation and labour-market geography are important structural factors.

13. Economic Integration and Family Stability

Family structures are closely connected to economic conditions. Employment affects household income, housing choices, parental stress, children's opportunities and the capacity to support relatives abroad.

The OECD has documented both strengths and challenges in the integration of immigrants and their children in Sweden, emphasizing the role of education, labour-market participation and skills recognition (OECD, 2016). Employment can increase family stability by providing income and reducing dependence on relatives or social assistance. However, employment quality also matters. Temporary, insecure or low-paid work may not provide the same level of stability as secure employment.

Family members can have different labour-market trajectories. A migrant spouse who initially provides unpaid care may later enter employment. A young adult may obtain higher education while parents remain in lower-skilled employment. Such differences can change household power relations and expectations about financial support.

Economic integration therefore operates at both the household and individual levels. The success of one family member can benefit the whole family, but unequal outcomes within a family can also create tensions.

14. Immigration Policy and Family Structure

Immigration policy has direct consequences for family organization. Rules governing who can enter, who can sponsor relatives, income requirements, residence status and waiting periods shape the timing and possibility of family reunification.

Sweden's policy trajectory illustrates this relationship. The Swedish Migration Agency reports that conditions for family immigration were tightened in 2023, including changes affecting age requirements and maintenance-rule exemptions (Swedish Migration Agency, 2026). In 2025, a government inquiry proposed further restrictions, including a possible two-year waiting period for certain categories of family immigration, stronger maintenance requirements and other conditions (Government of Sweden, 2025a). In June 2026, the government presented a bill proposing stricter conditions for family immigration (Government of Sweden, 2026).

As of September 2026, the Swedish Migration Agency has announced that new rules for immigration based on family ties will take effect on 1 October 2026. For certain reference persons with temporary residence permits, a two-year residence period in Sweden will apply before family members can receive residence permits (Swedish Migration Agency, 2026b). Because migration legislation can change, the exact legal position should always be verified against current Swedish authorities when applying the findings of this article to a particular family.

From a sociological perspective, these policy changes are important regardless of one's normative view of migration. They demonstrate that family structures are partly shaped by institutional rules. A longer period

before reunification can prolong transnational separation; stricter requirements may affect which households can reunite; and different rules for different residence statuses can produce unequal family trajectories.

15. Social Networks, Community and Cultural Continuity

Immigrant families frequently maintain community networks based on language, religion, ethnicity, nationality or shared migration experiences. Such networks can provide information, childcare, employment contacts, emotional support and cultural continuity.

Community networks can be particularly important during the early settlement period. New arrivals may rely on relatives or co-national networks to navigate housing, schools, healthcare and employment. These networks can compensate for limited familiarity with Swedish institutions.

However, strong community ties and broader social integration are not mutually exclusive. Families may participate in ethnic or religious networks while also maintaining Swedish friendships, workplace relationships and civic participation. Children may move between multiple social worlds.

The challenge for policy is therefore not to eliminate community networks but to ensure that families have meaningful opportunities to participate in wider society. Language education, schools, employment, sports organizations, libraries and local associations can create bridges between family and community networks.

16. Identity, Belonging and Family Negotiation

Immigration can produce complex forms of identity. Family members may identify with Sweden, a country of origin, multiple cultural traditions or a combination of these. Identity may differ across generations.

Parents who migrated as adults may retain strong emotional connections to their country of origin, while children born or raised in Sweden may have stronger identification with Swedish institutions and peer culture. These differences can produce both enrichment and tension.

Family negotiation can involve language, clothing, religion, marriage preferences, friendships, education and gender roles. Such negotiations should not automatically be interpreted as conflict. Cultural adaptation is often a normal part of intergenerational change.

Research on immigrant family formation in Sweden suggests that exposure to Swedish society and residential context can influence partnership and parenthood patterns (Swedish Research Council, 2020). This supports a dynamic understanding of identity: family practices are shaped by both inherited traditions and experiences in Swedish society.

17. Family Diversity and the Risk of Stereotyping

A central conclusion of the literature is that immigrant families are highly diverse. Differences may be greater within a broad immigrant category than between immigrants and Swedish-born families.

Relevant dimensions include:

- country and region of origin;

- migration pathway;

- age at arrival;

- residence status;

- education;

- household income;

- gender;

- urban or rural residence;

- length of residence in Sweden;

- family size;

- partnership composition;

- children's age;

- housing conditions; and

- strength of transnational ties.

For this reason, statements such as “immigrant families have larger households” or “immigration weakens family cohesion” are too general to be analytically useful. Some immigrant families may be larger than the Swedish average, while others are one-person households or childless couples. Some families experience strong intergenerational solidarity, while others experience conflict. Some women experience increased autonomy after migration, while others face barriers.

A sociological approach should therefore examine mechanisms and conditions rather than attributing outcomes to immigrant status alone.

18. Positive Contributions of Immigration to Family Life

Immigration can generate several positive family-level and societal effects.

First, family reunification can restore relationships interrupted by migration. Second, immigrant families can contribute to demographic renewal by adding younger working-age populations and children to communities experiencing ageing. Third, transnational networks can provide cultural and economic connections between Sweden and other countries. Fourth, mixed-background families can create social and cultural bridges. Fifth, immigrant parents and children may experience educational and occupational mobility over generations.

Immigration can also diversify family practices. Different approaches to intergenerational support, childcare, celebrations, food, language and kinship can contribute to cultural pluralism.

These contributions are not automatic. They depend on social conditions. Secure residence, employment, adequate housing, access to education and inclusive institutions can increase the capacity of families to benefit from migration.

19. Challenges and Risks

The principal challenges associated with immigration and family structure include prolonged family separation, insecure migration status, housing difficulties, labour-market inequality, language barriers, intergenerational tensions, discrimination and residential segregation.

Family separation can create emotional stress and caregiving gaps. Housing shortages can delay reunification or produce overcrowding. Employment difficulties can create financial dependence. Differences in children's and parents' language skills can change authority patterns. Residential segregation can limit access to diverse social networks.

Policy changes can create additional uncertainty. Families may have to make long-term decisions while rules are changing. Research on Swedish family reunification shows that temporal uncertainty can shape family planning and caregiving (Gustafsson, 2022; Gustafsson & Engblom, 2024).

The appropriate response is not to assume that immigration itself is the problem. Rather, analysis should identify the institutional and socioeconomic conditions that mediate family outcomes.

20. Table 3. Summary of immigration's potential effects on family structures in Sweden

Dimension	Potential Positive Effect	Potential Challenge
Family reunification	Restores co-residence and caregiving	Waiting periods and administrative barriers
Transnational family life	Maintains cross-border networks	Emotional and caregiving separation
Partnership formation	Greater social and cultural diversity	Negotiation of norms and expectations
Parenthood	New family formation and demographic renewal	Economic and housing constraints
Intergenerational support	Strong kin networks and mutual assistance	Distance from older relatives
Gender relations	New employment and educational opportunities	Unequal care burdens and labour-market barriers
Children	Access to Swedish education and welfare institutions	Language, segregation, and identity pressures
Housing	Family networks can support settlement	Crowding and unequal housing access
Economic integration	Increased household resources	Unemployment and precarious employment
Cultural identity	Multilingual and multicultural competence	Intergenerational disagreements
Community ties	Social support and belonging	Risk of social isolation when bridging opportunities are limited

21. Discussion

The evidence indicates that immigration has changed Swedish family structures primarily by increasing diversity in the timing, composition and geographical organization of family relationships. The effects are not reducible to household size. Immigration affects who lives with whom, where family members live, how caregiving is organized, how partnerships are formed, how children experience parental expectations and how families maintain relationships across national borders.

One of the strongest mechanisms is temporal. Families often do not migrate as a single unit. A person may arrive first, obtain employment or protection, and later seek reunification. The time between these stages matters. The longer the separation, the more likely families are to develop alternative caregiving arrangements and independent routines. Reunification may then require another period of adjustment.

A second mechanism is institutional. Family structures are partly produced through interaction with immigration law, housing markets, schools, employment systems and welfare institutions. This is particularly visible in family reunification. Legal rules determine which relationships qualify, while housing and income requirements affect whether a family can actually live together.

A third mechanism is generational. Children and parents may adapt at different speeds. Children who attend Swedish schools often acquire language and institutional familiarity quickly, while parents may maintain stronger ties to the country of origin. This can create both opportunities and tensions.

A fourth mechanism is socioeconomic. Family outcomes are shaped by education, employment and housing. Immigration interacts with class position. A highly educated migrant household with secure employment and adequate housing may experience very different family dynamics from a household with insecure employment and overcrowded housing.

A fifth mechanism is transnational. Family relationships can extend beyond Sweden. The transnational family is not necessarily a temporary failure to integrate; it can be a durable form of family organization. At the same time, prolonged separation can impose costs that should be recognized in family and integration policy.

22. Implications for Policy and Practice

A family-sensitive approach to integration should recognize that family life is an important resource for social inclusion. Several policy directions follow from the review.

First, family reunification procedures should be transparent and predictable. Where applications are subject to lengthy processing or waiting periods, clear communication and efficient administration can reduce uncertainty.

Second, housing policy should be treated as family policy. Families cannot fully benefit from reunification if adequate housing is unavailable or unaffordable.

Third, integration services should consider the household rather than focusing exclusively on individuals. Employment services, language programs, childcare and educational support can be coordinated to reflect family responsibilities.

Fourth, children's needs should be considered independently. Children should have access to education, language support and safe environments regardless of parents' migration status.

Fifth, support for women should combine employment opportunities with childcare and protection against economic dependence. Gender equality should be supported through accessible institutions rather than assumed to occur automatically through migration.

Sixth, policies should support intergenerational connections while also promoting broader social participation. Family and community networks can be important integration resources rather than obstacles.

Seventh, data systems should distinguish between country of birth, parental origin, migration age, citizenship and legal status. These variables capture different dimensions of migration experience and should not be treated as interchangeable.

23. Table 4. Suggested framework for strengthening family-sensitive integration in Sweden

Policy Area	Suggested Direction	Family-Level Rationale
Family reunification	Predictable procedures and clear information	Reduces prolonged separation and uncertainty
Housing	Expand access to adequate family-sized housing	Supports stable co-residence
Employment	Family-compatible employment and skills recognition	Strengthens household income and autonomy
Childcare	Accessible and affordable childcare	Supports parental employment and gender equality
Education	Targeted language and educational support	Supports children and parents during settlement
Youth services	Support identity, participation, and educational mobility	Reduces intergenerational disadvantages
Mental and social support	Community-based family support	Addresses stress associated with migration and separation
Data	Disaggregate by generation, migration age, and family type	Improves policy targeting and evaluation
Community integration	Strengthen bridges between local communities	Expands social networks while preserving family support
Legal information	Accessible multilingual guidance	Enables informed family decisions

24. Limitations

This manuscript has several limitations. First, it is a narrative review rather than a systematic meta-analysis. Second, Sweden contains diverse immigrant populations, and aggregate statistics can conceal substantial differences by origin, migration pathway, gender and socioeconomic position. Third, family structure is difficult to measure through household statistics alone because transnational family relationships may not appear in national registers. Fourth, migration policy is changing rapidly, especially in relation to family immigration, meaning that legal details can become outdated. Fifth, many available studies focus on particular migrant groups or specific family processes and cannot automatically be generalized to all immigrant families.

The article also does not claim that observed family differences are caused solely by immigration. Family structure is shaped by wider demographic, economic, cultural and institutional processes. Immigration is one component of this broader transformation.

25. Conclusion

Immigration has had a substantial and multidimensional impact on family structures in Sweden. The most important changes concern the diversification of household composition, family reunification, transnational family relationships, partnership formation, intergenerational support, gender roles, children's experiences and the relationship between family life and socioeconomic integration.

The evidence does not support a single conclusion that immigration either strengthens or weakens families. Instead, immigration produces different family outcomes under different institutional and socioeconomic conditions. Family reunification can restore caregiving and emotional relationships, while prolonged separation can create uncertainty and strain. Transnational ties can preserve strong family networks while also creating practical difficulties. Children of immigrants may experience both opportunities for social mobility and challenges associated with language, residential segregation and intergenerational differences.

Sweden's welfare institutions provide important resources for families, but access to housing, employment and education remains central to how immigrant families adapt. Changing family-immigration rules further demonstrate that migration policy is also family policy.

The central implication is that immigrant families should be understood as diverse social units embedded in Swedish institutions and transnational networks. A family-sensitive approach to migration and integration policy can recognize both the importance of family cohesion and the need for individual rights, social participation, gender equality and children's welfare. Future Swedish research should combine longitudinal population registers with qualitative research on transnational family practices, intergenerational change and the effects of recent policy reforms. Such research would provide a more complete understanding of how immigration is transforming Swedish family life.

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