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# Who's there?

– Establishing identity at government agencies

## Summary

The Swedish National Audit Office (“the Swedish NAO”) has examined agencies’ work on establishing the identity of individuals entering Sweden. The audited agencies are the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Tax Agency, the National Government Service Centre, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Pensions Agency. The Swedish NAO’s overall assessment is that the agencies’ efforts are not sufficiently effective to ensure establishing a correct and unique identity.

The identified shortcomings can have implications for many different areas. This concerns, for example, the possibility of ensuring that only those who are entitled to a residence permit in Sweden are granted one, and that various functions in society obtain an accurate basis for decisions and measures, through the population register. The shortcomings can pose risks of identity-related crime, threats to Sweden’s security and undue payments from welfare systems.

## Regulations and processes do not ensure establishing correct basic identities

If an identity is not correctly established when a person arriving in Sweden comes into initial contact with the authorities, this can have major consequences. The identity that is established at that point usually forms the basis for other agencies’ decisions.

The Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Tax Agency and the National Government Service Centre have important roles in enabling the establishment of correct and unique basic identity. Risks are present, especially in the Swedish Migration Agency's processing of asylum cases, because Sweden's international commitments to provide protection to people means that identity or – depending on the nature of the grounds for protection – nationality, only needs to be made probable. The fact that identity documents are usually absent poses a risk of failure to establish correct identity. The Swedish NAO therefore considers that the Swedish Migration Agency needs to bolster its efforts to ensure that asylum seekers submit identity documents early on in the process wherever possible.

Neither do the agencies' processes ensure that the identity data in the population registration database will be accurate and unique. Firstly, deficiencies at the Swedish Migration Agency affect the decisions of the Swedish Tax Agency. This is because, for individuals who have been granted a residence permit in Sweden, the Swedish Migration Agency's identity assessment serves as a basis for the identity established by the Swedish Tax Agency. Secondly, the audit shows that there are also shortcomings in skills and in technical equipment and digital system support at the Swedish Tax Agency and the National Government Service Centre that affect the Swedish Tax Agency's ability to establish a correct and unique identity. This is particularly serious in the case of EEA citizens, as the Swedish Tax Agency is usually the first and only agency to establish a basic identity for these individuals. In population registration cases, it is formally the Swedish Tax Agency that establishes identity. However, it is case workers at the National Government Service Centre, on behalf of the Swedish Tax Agency, who carry out the practical work of checking the identity documents and that they belong to the person concerned. The Swedish NAO finds that responsibility for performing such checks is not clearly formulated in statutes or the agreement regulating the tasks that the National Government Service Centre is to perform on behalf of the Swedish Tax Agency. It is also unclear how well the National Government Service Centre's identity checks and reporting of anomalies to the Swedish Tax Agency work, as the Swedish Tax Agency does not perform any follow-up on the processing.

## **Risk of undue payments out of the social insurance system due to misused identities**

There are major risks in the work of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Pensions Agency on ensuring that a person applying for benefits is actually who they say they are. Efforts to identify undue payments ensuing from misused identities are inadequate. The technical solutions used to confirm identity are vulnerable, as they cannot prevent another person from assuming the identity. The Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Pensions Agency largely rely on the person logging in and applying for benefits with e-identification actually being the person they claim to be.

## **The agencies do not ensure adequate skills and expert support**

On the whole, the agencies do not have sufficient access to skills to ensure accurately establishing identity. It is important that the agencies ensure that staff working with examining documents be given both training and the possibility of working on this task to a sufficient extent, enabling them to both acquire and maintain adequate skills. While several agencies have taken measures to sharpen their know-how, specialist expertise in the field of identity is a scarce resource nationally. The international comparison of the audit shows that Denmark and Norway have introduced special identity centres, which serve as national expert bodies for identity issues.

## **Deficiencies in the agencies' exchange of information**

The agencies have procedures for exchanging information and have implemented various initiatives for the exchange of knowledge and experience. At the same time, there is a need for heightened exchange of information at all agencies to improve establishing correct basic identities and detecting erroneous and false identities. This applies in particular to the collaboration between the Swedish Tax Agency and the Swedish Police Authority. In cases where the Swedish Police Authority encounters individuals wishing to claim asylum, the Swedish Migration Agency also has a need for the Swedish Police Authority to do more to attend to identity documents.

## **Inadequate means for storing, sharing and performing searches on biometric information**

The audit shows that the agencies are in need of further possibilities to store, share and perform searches on biometric information to reduce the risk of errors in establishing identity. The Government has also taken and initiated a number of measures that, combined, aim to improve these possibilities. At the same time, there are clear limitations ensuing from international law on the extent to which it is feasible to extend the possibilities of storing, sharing and performing searches on biometric information. In addition, improving possibilities for more systematic collection of biometrics could increase the risk of data being disseminated to unauthorised parties, for example in the event of hacker attacks. It is therefore important that account be taken of such limitations and risks in any changes to the regulatory framework.

## **Deficient implementation of new rules on coordination numbers and checks in population registration**

The agencies have had problems implementing the legislative amendments decided by the Riksdag to reinforce population registration and the coordination number system. This applies, for example, to the Swedish Tax Agency's ability to check

biometric data in notifications of immigration or applications for coordination numbers, as well as the Swedish Social Insurance Agency's implementation of the legislative amendments to enable distinguishing different levels of security of identity for coordination numbers. Because of these problems, the effect that the amendments are intended to have lags or fails to transpire.

## Recommendations

The Swedish NAO makes the following recommendations:

### To the Government

- Consider bringing together national expertise in identity issues in an agency-wide support function.
- Review the remit of the National Government Service Centre in the work on establishing identity.
- Follow up on the agencies' implementation of the legislative amendments aimed at reinforcing population registration and the coordination number system, in particular:
  - the possibility to check biometric data in identity documents in connection with immigration into Sweden and applications for coordination numbers
  - the possibility of deregistering false identities from the population registration database
  - the introduction of different levels of identity for coordination numbers and the possibility to make coordination numbers dormant.
- Instruct the relevant authorities to develop methods to prevent benefits from being paid to misused identities.
- Give the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Migration Agency and the Swedish Tax Agency a collaboration remit to identify and remedy the existence of false or erroneous identities in the agencies' registers.

### To the Swedish Social Insurance Agency

- Create the possibility to access and make available the information that the Swedish Tax Agency communicates concerning coordination numbers.

### To the Swedish Migration Agency

- Ensure access to the necessary skills and expert support at the agency.
- Develop work on obtaining identity documents and establishing identity as early as possible in asylum cases.
- Ensure that the decided equipment is available at all offices and missions abroad that work with establishing identity.

### **To the Swedish Police Authority**

- Improve the skills of police officers on the ground in terms of establishing identity.
- Ensure that document-related technical expertise is available and used in cases where it is needed.
- Ensure that staff on the ground have access to the requisite technical equipment for establishing identity.
- Improve the work on establishing the identity of individuals seeking asylum in contact with the Swedish Police Authority, and cooperation with the Swedish Migration Agency in this matter.

### **To the Swedish Tax Agency**

- Develop follow-up of the work on identity checks and reporting of anomalies.
- In consultation with the National Government Service Centre, ensure that relevant staff receive adequate training for establishing identity in cases of population registration and applications for coordination numbers.