

Open and Shut: Sweden's Identity Crisis

Ivar Ekman | Thursday, Oct. 15, 2015

Sweden, the biggest country at the heart of rich and peaceful Scandinavia, is in many ways in the eye of the current migration storm tearing through Europe. Although it is admitting fewer refugees than Germany in terms of sheer numbers, Sweden is—and has been for several years—the European Union's (EU) **biggest per capita recipient of refugees**

(<http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/09/daily-chart>) by quite a wide margin. In 2014, Sweden, a country with just 9 million inhabitants, received more than 80,000 asylum applications. This year, that number is set to grow substantially.

From one angle, no other country seems better equipped to handle this challenge. Having weathered fairly well both the recent economic crisis and a deeper transition to a globalized, European Union-infused economy, Sweden remains at, or close to, the top of global tables of wealth and well-being. It might no longer be the quasi-socialist paradise that many people looked to—and flocked to—in the 1970s, but it is one of the few European countries that still seems able to combine relatively solid growth, a strong welfare state and a genuine openness, both in economic terms and in immigration policy. Sweden is also already an “immigrant society”: At 16 percent, the **proportion of its foreign-born population** (<https://data.oecd.org/migration/foreign-born-population.htm>) is higher than that of not only Germany and Great Britain, but also the U.S. In other words, Sweden is a country that should easily be able to bear its share of the burden in the biggest global refugee crisis since World War II. ...



Thousands of people attend a "Refugee Welcome" demonstration at the Gotaplatsen square, Gothenburg, Sweden, Sept. 9, 2015 (AP photo by Adam Ihse).