



Unlawful influence on Swedish Migration Authority personnel

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English summary of Brå report 2016:14

**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) –
centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work.

This report is a summary of the Swedish report
Otillåten påverkan mot Migrationsverket, report no 2016:14.
The Swedish report can be ordered from Brottsförebyggande rådet, info@bra.se

Author: Erik Nilsson, Nicole Thorell and Johanna Skinnari

Production:
The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
Box 1386, SE-111 93 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 (0)8 527 58 400
E-mail: info@bra.se
Brå on the internet: www.bra.se

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URN:NBN:SE:BRA-719

Summary

This report addresses how the Swedish Migration Agency and its personnel are subject to unlawful influence in the form of harassment, threats, violence, vandalism, improper offers, and attempts at cronyism. The report also describes the parties exercising unlawful influence who are encountered by the employees and the consequences of the attempts to influence. The report is based on Migration Agency employees' response to a survey as well as on interviews, site visits, incident reports, police reports, and seminars.

Public Authority Sweden

Every public body in Sweden which is not a decision-making political body is a public authority. The Swedish public authorities comprise the Government, the courts, and the administrative agencies. In many cases, a public authority is formed to perform tasks for which a municipality or the State is responsible, including making decisions regarding the benefits, rights, and obligations of individuals.

Administrative authorities comprise all municipal and national authorities with the exception of the courts and the Government. Sweden has a wealth of public authorities. In 2017, there were 444 national authorities in Sweden – 240 administrative authorities, four authorities under the auspices of the Parliament, three State public service companies, six public pension system funds, 84 courts (including the National Courts Administration), and 107 Swedish public authorities abroad. In addition to these, municipalities also have public authorities.

Unemployment insurance fund

The primary task of an unemployment insurance fund is to administer and pay unemployment compensation to people without work. There are 28 unemployment insurance funds in Sweden, each with an operating area covering a specific job category or industry. While many unemployment insurance funds are linked to trade unions, membership in an unemployment insurance fund does not require membership in a trade union, and vice versa. In 2015, 71 per cent of Sweden's labour force belonged to an unemployment insurance fund.

In the study, the participating organisations are broken down into five groups: supervisory and regulatory authorities, paying agencies, criminal investigative agencies, adjudicative bodies, and enforcement authorities. These categories also illustrate how the work carried out by the organisations is connected in a chain.

Harassment is most common

Approximately one-half of the Migration Agency employees who responded to the survey stated that they were exposed to some form of unlawful influence during the most recent 18 months. The exposure varies among the types of influence. Previous studies of unlawful influence have found that although many exposed persons are afraid of violence, that is not where the risks lie. The results of the report show that violence is not particularly common at the agency (3 per cent of respondents exposed). The vandalism which occurs (7 per cent of respondents exposed) is directed primarily at the agency's premises and equipment.

The percentage exposure to threat is 16 per cent, and threats are often directed to the agency employee. Harassment stands out in the results, with 43 per cent of respondents stating that they have been exposed. Most commonly, this takes the form of an applicant saying that they will commit suicide if the agency does not do what the applicant wants.¹ The individuals with the most extensive contact with applicants are also those with the highest reported rate of exposure. In both survey responses and interviews, agency employees state that they perceive applicant contact in private contexts – by means of their private telephone number, email address, or social media – as annoying and, to a certain extent, unpleasant.

The frequency or percentage of improper offers and attempts at cronyism are, perhaps, not as comprehensive (7 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively) but, when compared with the other agencies which also responded to the survey, the Migration Agency experienced the highest percentage. This type of offer ranges from money to meals or gifts of very negligible value, for example boxes of chocolates. We are of the opinion that the study captures incidents other than pure bribes.

Notwithstanding this exposure, 85 per cent of the Migration Agency's employees experience their employment as safe. The perceived safety is somewhat lower (80 per cent) among those exposed to some form of unlawful influence. However, there are employees who express insecurity in interviews and in free text replies, but in such cases this is probably more related to the effects on the employee's private life than a perceived lack of safety at the actual workplace.

Persons exercising influence

According to the survey respondents, the overwhelming majority of the attempts to influence are based on desperation and psychological illness among Migration Agency applicants. This applies to all forms of influence, but is particularly clear for the most common forms – harassment and threats. Desperation and psychological illness are often believed to result from, for example, traumatic experiences and overall negative life circumstances, but interviews show that significance can also be ascribed to the contact with the Migration Agency. This primarily involves long waiting times, as well as difficult administrative steps and whether the officer raises false hopes among the applicants.

¹ This and previous studies show that some individuals use suicide threats as an attempt to influence. However, since such threats do not involve injuring another party, they are not characterised as threats but, rather, as a form of harassment.

Exposed persons at the Migration Agency believe that attempts to influence are most commonly made for the purpose of influencing the outcome of the matter but faster administration is the goal in a comparatively large number of the cases. Vandalism and improper offers are the forms of influence which deviate most from the basic pattern. The reason in respect of vandalism is that part of the vandalism directed against the Migration Agency is the work of activists, whom the exposed persons perceive to be leftist activists. The offers stand out in two ways – firstly because business people and suppliers are behind some of them and, secondly, because it is not uncommon that the offers are, for example, based on gratitude rather than desperation.

Consequences

Based on the survey, the primary impact of attempted unlawful influence on exposed persons is in their work environment and private lives. A relatively large number of them report that they thought about, or are thinking about, leaving or changing their position, and somewhat fewer that they have changed their non-work behaviour based on attempts to influence. Interviews and free text replies to the survey indicate that this often entails measures such as procuring an unlisted telephone number, choosing not to participate in social media, or taking another route home from work.

The consequences in terms of the Migration Agency's tasks appear to be significantly more limited. Individual matters can be influenced, either directly by changing the outcome, or more indirectly by influencing the administrative process in one way or another, but the results from the survey indicate that this only happens in exceptional cases.

Interviews indicate that the issues which are vulnerable to influence are primarily minor decisions and routines. Both survey answers and interviews show that in many cases, the prioritisation of matters can be influenced. The interviewed persons state that despite thinking that it is wrong, they prioritise matters in a way which facilitates workflow. The interviews also indicate that officers sometime allow themselves to be influenced in minor decisions, for example regarding minor payments, or in day-to-day custodial routines. The interviews also show weak points in the matter management which can be exploited for the purpose of influencing the outcome of matters. One such weak point is the one-person decision, which is applied in many permit matters. Another is the open matter management system, which makes it possible for an individual officer to handle a matter on their own initiative.

The Migration Agency's work against unlawful influence

The incident reporting system is important in that it makes it possible for the agency to learn of incidents of unlawful influence. Incident reports about violence and vandalism have the highest rate of reporting, while improper offers have the lowest rate of reporting frequency. The result from the survey and interviews indicates that there are many things that are not reported in the system, often because the agency personnel do not deem the incident especially serious, did not have time, forgot, or prioritised other job tasks. One conclusion from the interviews is that it must be simple for

the agency employee to file a report. Routines and instructions should be clear. The police reports which are reviewed clearly show that few matters lead to prosecution. The matters which, nevertheless, lead to prosecution are most often reports regarding vandalism against the agency.

Preventive work

To a certain extent, it is possible to prevent unlawful influence. Training to increase awareness among employees is part of this work. The Migration Agency has training on safety issues, but not all employees receive such training because the staff is growing quickly. Both survey answers and interviews make clear that communication and good interface are an important preventive measure. In particular, those employees who stated that they were exposed state that they use this method in order to avoid unlawful influence. Good communication makes it possible to avoid situations getting out of hand.

A very important factor in the risk of unlawful influence is the situation itself. There are often good opportunities for influencing the situation for the purpose of reducing the risk of unlawful influence. The premises and the physical environment can be designed with consideration given to the risk of unlawful influence, through furnishings in visiting rooms, alarms, and other security measures, while maintaining a somewhat welcoming atmosphere. However, in practice, it is difficult to maintain the same level of safety for personnel in the field at residential facilities. Finally, the manager is an important puzzle piece for preventive work, since the manager can create a calm atmosphere, encourage reporting when something happens, follow up on incidents, and share know-how on the subject of unlawful influence within the working group.

Brå's assessment

Brå's assessment is that the Migration Agency can, in several areas, develop and streamline the preventive work and its incident management routines. Among other things, the agency can work in order to counteract desperation, improve personnel training, and strengthen matter management and control systems so that the agency is better equipped to meet the risks of unlawful influence.