

# Swedish companies decry deportations of skilled workers

February 16 2018, by Gaël Branchereau

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Swedish companies say they are fast running out of skilled labour because of expulsions

The heads of Sweden's largest companies, including clothing giant H&M and telecoms maker Ericsson, denounced Friday deportations of highly-skilled workers as the nation's technology sector suffers a shortage of

staff.

In a letter published by the financial daily Dagens Industri and signed by around 30 bosses—including H&M CEO Stefan Persson and Ericsson chief Borje Ekholm—they said that expulsions of foreign employees "harm business" and that "Swedish companies need to hire globally".

"We cannot expect engineers, IT-technicians, and other specialists to leave their countries if they risk expulsion from Sweden for unpredictable reasons," they added.

The migration agency has faced criticism for refusing to extend foreign employees' work permits, leading to expulsion, on controversial grounds.

Hussein Ismail, a Lebanese engineer at a biotech company that he founded in 2012, is facing deportation along with his wife and children after cutting his own wage for three months in 2015 to help his company survive.

Sweden's strict laws against social dumping stipulate that if a foreign worker receives a salary below a collective agreement, then that employee must be sent back to the country of origin.

In other cases, the migration agency decided to deport a foreign worker who failed to take the required amount of holiday and because of an administrative error made by an employer.

The migration agency doesn't comment publically on individual cases but insists it respects Swedish law when sending deportation orders.

"We comply with the current legislation," migration agency spokeswoman Lisa Bergman told AFP.

Jenny Linden, head of an investment company, said the expulsions are "an absurd soap opera" that "weakens Sweden's competitiveness".

And Ericsson CEO Ekholm warned in the letter that if the company "wants to keep its research activities in Sweden, then economic immigration must operate in a transparent and predictable way".

## **Job shortages and unemployed foreigners**

Such complaints may have been heard. In December, the Migration Court of Appeal handed down a ruling aimed at introducing more flexibility in handling the cases.

"This is still insufficient, put an end to these tragedies and do it now," the bosses said in the letter.

According to Johan Attby, founder of the social network Fishbrain, Stockholm will have to find 60,000 IT professionals by 2020 or risk losing its status as a hub for startups.

"We have a continued broad job growth and a widespread labour shortage in several professions," Annelie Almerus, analyst at the Swedish Public Employment service, said in a report.

"This provides good job opportunities within a record amount of professions," she added.

The need for engineers, teachers and nurses in Sweden are evident.

Sweden has received 400,000 asylum seekers since 2012, a record per capita in Europe.

This boost to its ageing population will only bear fruit in the long run:

many applicants are still in school and others lack the required skills and qualifications.

"You need at least a high-school degree to get a long-term establishment in the job market," Almerus said.

Foreign-born residents are five times as likely (20 percent) to be unemployed as those born in the Nordic nation, according to the Statistics Sweden authority.

The unemployment average was 6.5 percent in January. Starting from May, Sweden's centre-left minority government is to expand subsidised entry-level jobs, a move demanded by employers.

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