

"The environment as a pretext for reduced immigration"

At SvD Debate 16/3, a group of researchers advocate a more limited immigration to Sweden. They do it with unfounded environmental arguments as a sweep.

The authors argue that there is a proportional relationship between increased population and increased greenhouse gas emissions, and that Sweden should therefore reduce its immigration. Now the relationship is hardly so simple. In some cases, increased population should be able to reduce emissions per capita (for example, a slightly larger population would provide a better financial basis for high-speed trains between Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, which would reduce the number of flights). But although it is true that there is a proportional relationship, immigration does not make any significant difference to climate change. It does not matter where these people are. They contribute to climate change even if they are outside Sweden.

The authors arguments only become relevant if they mean that immigrants would contribute more to climate change just because they ended up in Sweden, because people in Sweden have much more "organic footprint" per person than people in other countries. In that case, it is not an argument against immigration, but rather an argument that Sweden should tighten its environmental and climate policy in general.

The authors are also worried that increased population would increase the pressure on green spaces and arable land. Scenarios disregard that population increases and migrations are never so linear, but dependent on different circumstances in Sweden and abroad. And even with a significant population increase up to 2100, population density in Sweden would be comparatively low. We should remember that population density in Sweden today is approximately one tenth compared with Great Britain, Germany and Italy, and about one-sixth compared to Denmark and China. So an increased population in Sweden would hardly be a drama, in any case not compared with other true environmental and climate challenges that we face during this time frame.

In their eagerness to convince immigration injuries, the authors go beyond that. They state that "Strongly expanded labor supply (through large immigration) can create increasing gaps, lowering payroll rates or raising contributions". But wait now. Apart from the fact that the argument is completely out of the air, what does

this have with environmental effects? Nothing. It shows, however, that the authors' main purpose is to beat a blow to reduced immigration. And for this purpose, they are prepared to put together various loose environmental arguments as fungal reasons.

What I strongly object to is that the authors do not touch the ethical aspects of their environmental argumentation (although one of them is Professor of Environmental Ethics). Not a word about the world outside Sweden, such as war, disasters, humanitarian crises and increased migration, and about Sweden's responsibility to deal with these situations with other countries. Although the authors do not indicate it, their ethical point of departure is clear: in Sweden's environmental policy, Sweden should only look at its own house and ignore the conditions outside Sweden. Now they are not only blaming Sweden's responsibility for humanitarian crises, they also give a skewed picture of our responsibility and our solutions to reduce pressure on climate and social ecology systems.

We can discuss the different social impacts of immigration, and we can argue for and against immigration. But, of all possible measures to achieve a better and more efficient environmental policy and reduce our "ecological footprint", especially in a global context, reduced immigration is what would be of least importance.

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