

Global Immigration alert

January 2026

Sweden

Sweden to tighten rules for foreign workers and their employers

Executive summary

The Swedish government recently presented a bill to parliament that introduces changes to labor immigration rules. The proposal includes stricter conditions for issuing work permits, new measures to prevent exploitation and misuse of permits, higher penalties for unlawful employment and improved conditions for highly skilled workers. The changes are expected to go into effect on 1 June 2026.

Background

On 16 December 2025, the government published the bill "New rules for labor immigration" (Prop. 2025/26:87) following a government inquiry that was completed in February 2024 and was tasked with proposing reforms to prevent abuse of the work permit system and the exploitation of foreign workers. The February 2024 report recommended raising the wage threshold for highly skilled workers to the Swedish median wage level (from the current requirement of 80 percent of the median wage) and tightening permit requirements while improving conditions for these workers. Some measures, such as ending the possibility for former asylum seekers to switch to work permits, are already in force.

Key developments

The Swedish parliament is expected to review the bill early in 2026, with new rules anticipated to go into effect on or around 1 June 2026. The proposed changes include:

- **Higher salary requirement for work permits:** Work permit holders will be required to earn a minimum salary of 90% of the Swedish median salary (up from 80% currently), calculated at the time of application. With the current median monthly wage level (i.e., SEK 37,100), this means an increase from SEK 29,680

to SEK 33,390. The existing requirement that wages, insurance and conditions not fall below collective bargaining agreements or industry practice remains in place, so both conditions apply in parallel. For extensions, the salary level applicable at the time of the extension application (90% of the most recently published median salary) will apply. Minor deviations may be accepted, at the discretion of the authorities, based on a reasonableness assessment.

- **Exemptions to salary requirements:** The government may authorize exemptions from the salary requirement for specific professions or groups where local labor needs cannot be met. Examples may include certain licensed professions, recent graduates or highly skilled workers in roles where there is an acute shortage of skills. These exemptions will appear in published lists that include the professions and their codes (as determined by Statistics Sweden). The lists may be updated over time to prevent skills shortages and help employers retain talent.
- **Health insurance for short stays:** Applicants who stay in the country for a maximum of one year will be required to have, or apply for, health insurance that is valid in Sweden and covers healthcare and repatriation costs. This aligns with existing requirements for EU Blue Cards and Intra-Corporate Transfer (ICT) permits.
- **Extended permit periods for EU Blue Cards and seasonal work:** EU Blue Cards may now be extended up to a maximum of four years (up from two years currently). EU Blue Cards for individuals with employment



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contracts that are shorter than four years will be granted for the contract duration plus an additional three months beyond the employment end date. Seasonal work permits will be extended to a maximum of nine months per twelve-month period (up from six months currently).

- *New salary requirements for ICT and seasonal permits:* The current maintenance requirement for ICT permits, seasonal permits and assignments exceeding 90 days, will be replaced by a salary requirement. Employers will be required to pay foreign workers at least the minimum remuneration for full-time work under Swedish collective agreements or in line with industry practice.
- *More options to apply from within Sweden:* Individuals who hold a residence permit to seek work after completing their studies or research may apply for a research or doctoral permit without leaving Sweden. This change allows highly qualified individuals already in the country to move to a new permit category more easily.
- *Permits for newborn children in Sweden:* Children born in Sweden to researchers, EU Blue Card holders or ICT permit holders may obtain residence permits without leaving the country. A recent court ruling (MIG 2025:10) confirmed that children born in Sweden are not considered, under the law, to have "entered" the country, so the usual requirement to apply prior to entry does not apply.
- *Stricter employer compliance checks:* Work permits may be refused if the employer or representative is reasonably suspected or convicted of relevant crimes or incurred a special fee or tax penalty related to employment reporting. Employers with a history of misconduct may lose their eligibility to employ foreign workers.
- *Exclusion of certain occupational groups:* The government may issue regulations that exclude certain occupational groups from being eligible to obtain work permits due to widespread abuse and exploitation, in particular in labor-intensive and low-skilled industries. Examples include construction, cleaning, car washing, car repair shops, restaurants, beauty salons, transport, agriculture and forestry. Berry picking and personal assistance are expected to be included initially. Exclusions will apply to occupations, not entire industries, and will be listed in regulations that may change over time.
- *Increased penalties for unlawful employment:* The monetary penalty for employers that hire workers unlawfully will increase and be connected to the duration of the unlawful work. The current proposal seeks to increase penalties by 200%.
- *Transitional rules:* Transitional rules will apply to extensions and appeals to ensure that the previous rules are applied in these cases. Extension applications filed by 1 December 2026 will be assessed according to the requirements in place at the time of filing for "adequate means of support," and appeals of decisions made before the new rules enter into force will follow the current rules.

Impact on employers

The proposed reforms are expected to increase compliance obligations and result in a more complex application process. Stricter checks and additional documentation requirements may lead to longer processing times, which may delay onboarding and impact business operations. Employers may consider updating their internal policies and reviewing their workforce planning to mitigate delays and maintain access to critical foreign talent.

Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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