



SWEDEN IV. IRANIAN COMMUNITY

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This sub-entry will discuss the following topics: formation of the Iranian community (immigration), demographic profile and geographic distribution, economic, social, cultural and political life, and finally, return to Iran or emigration to other countries.

Formation of the Iranian community (immigration)

In 1976, a year before the beginning of the 1977-79 Islamic Revolution, there were 1,412 Iranian immigrants in Sweden. The majority of these were students who had come to the country to continue their higher education (Utas, p. 176), or businessmen who had found Sweden an appropriate place for their economic activities (Sohrabi, pp. 7-9).

With the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, the flow of Iranians to Sweden accelerated. The annual number of Iranians coming to Sweden did not, however, exceed 500 a year until 1984 (the only exception was 1980, with 579 immigrants, which coincided with the beginning of the [Iran-Iraq War](#)). During the first years after the revolution, Sweden remained a relatively unknown country for Iranians. As a result, Iranians leaving Iran chose those



countries with which they were most familiar: United States, England, France, and Germany (see diaspora viii. In the post-revolutionary period).

1984 was a turning point for the influx of Iranians to Sweden. In that year 1,074 Iranians immigrated to Sweden. From this date the rate of Iranians moving to Sweden increased exponentially and reached its peak in 1988 with 6,203 immigrants. As a result of this influx, within five years (from 1985 to 1990) the number of Iranian citizens in Sweden grew from 7,317 to 32,171.

The new wave of Iranian migration to Sweden was a result of certain push-pull factors in Iran and Sweden. From 1982 on, once the regime was relatively established, the Islamic government in Iran began an organized assault on the opposition and competing organizations. Furthermore, the war between Iran and Iraq escalated to a level which demanded greater human resources and threatened to affect all families with young members, particularly male. At the same time, Sweden became known in Iran for its generous immigration policy towards Iranians.

In 1989 the Swedish authorities took a series of measures to restrict the number of immigrants to Sweden. This led to a considerable decrease in the number of Iranian immigrants from 5,398 in 1989 to 2,854 in 1992. The implementation of a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq in 1988 further slowed Iranian migration to Sweden. This decline continued ever faster after 1992. The number of Iranians who came to Sweden after this year has varied between 712 in 1996 and 2,441 in 2006 (2006 country of birth data- Statistics Sweden).

The reasons for Iranian migration have been classified as follows by the Swedish authorities: political, ethnic and religious persecution, the refusal of war (*krigsvä grare*) and “de facto-refugees.” The last category refers to persons who have been allowed to stay in Sweden for reasons the same or similar to, but not identical with, those mentioned above (Emami, p. 53). [Table 1](#) presents the the figures for Iranian immigration to Sweden.

Demographic Profile and Geographic Distribution

According to the most recent available data (2006 country of birth data, Statistics Sweden), there are 55,273 first-generation Iranians living in Sweden. It should be noted that the figure 55,961 in [Table 1](#) refers to the number of Iranians born in Iran who, within different years have immigrated to Sweden,



while a number of these people may die, may emigrate from Sweden to Iran and other countries, and in some cases, which is very normal among Iranians, may immigrate again to Sweden after emigration; the figure of 55,273 is the number of the individuals born in Iran living in Sweden in 2006. By first-generation Iranians we mean individuals born in Iran who have migrated to Sweden. The children of this group comprise a second generation of 22,827 (12,207 born to two Iranian-born parents and 10,620 born to one Iranian-born parent). The number of males is slightly higher than females in both the first generation (29,274 against 25,999) and the second generation (11,691 against 11,136)

In terms of age, the overwhelming majority of the first generation is in the age category of 20 to 64. Eighty-eight percent of this generation (90 percent of men and 86 percent of women) belong to this category. Six percent are younger and 6 percent are older than this category. As could be expected, the majority of the second generation (90 percent) is under age 20. Among the first generation, approximately 48 percent are married (46 percent of men and 50 percent of women), 30 percent are single (36 percent of men and 24 percent of women), 20 percent are divorced (18 percent of men and 22 percent of women), and 2 percent (mostly women) are widowed. Given the young age of the second generation, it is not surprising that they are predominantly single. Only 3 percent of males and 4 percent of females are married.

Iranians in Sweden tend to be highly educated; 25 percent of Iranian-born men and women have completed at least three years of post-secondary education. Relatively few (12 percent) have less than an upper secondary school education. When considered amongst the ten largest immigrant groups in Sweden, the educational level of Iranians is matched only by Poles. Even when compared with Swedes, Iranians are 6 percent more likely to have a post-secondary education of 3 years or more. Many Iranians came to Sweden with university degrees from Iran but have nevertheless gone on to obtain secondary training or further degrees in Sweden as a way of re-educating themselves for the Swedish job market.

The second generation also appears to show a strong likelihood of attending university. Although this cohort is still young, 15 percent of those aged 20 or above have already completed at least three years of post-secondary education. The high level of education among Iranian immigrants does not reflect the overall education level of Iranians in Iran (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, p. 34). On the contrary, it would seem that Iranians who have chosen to come



to Sweden are a self-selected, highly educated group.

Iranians can be found in all counties in Sweden and, compared to some other immigrant groups in Sweden, are not highly concentrated in certain neighborhoods. However, in line with many other immigrant groups, most choose to settle in urban areas, and particularly in Sweden's four largest cities: Stockholm (36 percent), Gothenburg (16.9 percent), Uppsala (5.8 percent), and Malmö (5 percent). They are, as well, represented in relatively large numbers in a number of medium-sized towns, including Linköping, Lund, Borås, and Västrås, all of which have between 1,500 and 2,000 Iranian residents.

Economic Life

According to the 2006 country of birth data (Statistics Sweden), 54.4 percent of first generation Iranians of working age (20-64) were registered as employed in 2006 (57.7 percent of men and 50.6 percent of women). This is significantly below the Swedish average, which shows 81.6 percent as employed (83.4 percent of men and 79.9 percent of women), and slightly below the average for foreign-born residents, which sits at 59 percent (61.5 percent of men and 57 percent of women). The employment rate of Iranians in Sweden shows, however, a positive trend compared with 1990, when it was 49.3 percent (55.0 percent for men and 40.3 percent for women), and especially compared with 1995, when, due to an economic recession, the rate was as low as 30.7 percent (34.4 percent for men and 25.4 percent for women).

The reason for the lower rate of employment among first generation Iranians can be explained by their relatively short period of residence in Sweden. It takes time, especially for higher educated immigrants, to secure employment corresponding with the level of their education. It has also been argued that immigrants from other countries, especially from the underdeveloped ones, are discriminated against in the Swedish labor market (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, p. 31; 2002, pp. 121-33; Ålund and Schierup, p. 127).

The rate of employment among the second generation, with one or both parents born in Iran, is also low compared with the second generation of other immigrant groups. For Iranians the figure is 55.7 percent (53.9 percent for men and 57.7 percent for women), while the figure for the second generation of other immigrant groups is 73.2 percent (74.3 percent for men and 72.0 percent for women). This possibly discrepancy may possible find some explanation in Iranians' higher representation in post-secondary education.



The rate of employment for this generation decreased from 69.0 percent in 1990 to 50.9 percent in 1995, but has since increased to 55.7 percent in 2006.

Table 2 shows the work income distribution of Iranians in Sweden when compared to Swedes in general as well as other immigrant categories. Work income distribution is calculated according to the individual earnings of those of working age. As we see in this table, first-generation Iranians are concentrated in the lowest income category and earn considerably less than Swedes. While they earn slightly less than other foreign born residents in Sweden, their earnings are nevertheless higher than that of other immigrants from the Middle East.

The same is valid for disposable income, which calculates the average resources an individual has access to after income has been redistributed through taxation and the provision of social benefits (see Table 3).

Although the difference between work income and disposable income is not significant for Iranians as a whole, there is a difference in terms of gender. With work income, there is large gender disparity between Iranian men and women, with 6.6 percent more women concentrated in the lowest earning category and 8 percent more men concentrated in the top income category. This difference is reduced after income redistribution. In terms of disposable income, women are only 3 percent more concentrated in the lowest income category. Men, however, are still 8 percent more likely than women to be in the top income category.

Iranians are highly represented in the healthcare professions, with 24 percent working in healthcare related occupations. Iranian employment is 8 percent above the Swedish average in this sector. They are also 4 percent more likely to work in the hotel and restaurant industry, and 4 percent more likely to work in transportation related occupations, although the total number of Iranian workers in these two fields is relatively small (6 percent and 10 percent, respectively). Iranians are underrepresented in manufacturing, construction and fishing. Aside from this, they resemble typical occupational patterns in Sweden with small numbers employed in agriculture, mining, and the gas industry (less than 1 percent in each case), around 12 percent working in wholesale/retailing, 12 percent in real estate/property management, 10 percent in education and 4 percent in government and social services.

Social Life



In this section, we discuss three aspects of social relations among Iranian immigrants in Sweden: friendship networks, voluntary associations, and familial relations.

Thus far, there is only one study that has investigated the friendship networks of Iranians in Sweden. This study is based on survey data collected in 1993 by the Center for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relation (CEIFO) on four immigrant groups (Iranians, Chileans, Poles, and Finns) between 18 and 53 years old who have been in Sweden for more than six and less than 25 years.

According to this study, 71 percent of Iranians did not have any Swedish friends or had only 1-2 friends. Only 6 percent had more than 10 Swedish friends. Among the other immigrant groups included in the survey the equivalent figures were 62 percent and 9 percent for Chileans, 45 percent and 15 percent for Poles, and 42 percent and 15 percent for Finns. The rate of Iranians who never or seldom visited Swedes was 51 percent, and the rate of Iranians who often or mostly visited Swedes was 49 percent. The similar rates for Chileans were 42 percent and 58 percent respectively, for Poles 33 percent and 67 percent respectively, and for Finns 22 percent and 78 percent respectively (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, pp. 85-201)

Judging by these figures, it seems that Iranians either associate with people from their own country and/or with the members of other ethnic groups, or live in relative isolation. With a general observation the first alternative seems to be more credible. At least in the big cities where the majority of Iranians are living, the association of Iranians among their own group in the form of “dowre” or gathering in different meeting places, is fairly common.

According to this study, acculturation and the prospect of remaining in Sweden have a positive effect on the association of Iranians with Swedes, whereas their commitment to Iranian culture has a negative effect on it. Based on these results, one may conclude that the association of Iranians with Swedes is at present (2010) much richer than it was in 1993. Acculturation of immigrants in the new society and their prospect of remaining in this society are enriched by the passage of time, whereas their commitment to the culture of the country of origin generally diminishes by this factor (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, pp. 96-104)

This increase in association with members of the host society does not,



however, imply a decrease in their association with the members of their own ethnic group. According to the interviews undertaken by Hosseini-Kaladjahi, there seems to be a pattern in the association of Iranian immigrants (especially refugees) in Sweden. The newcomer Iranians usually prefer to associate with Swedes to forget the difficulties that pushed them to leave Iran and to win the possibility of success in the country where they intend to live in the future. Meeting difficulties, for various reasons, towards this aim (language barriers, the weakness of inter-subjectivity, their rejection by some Swedes, and so on) they then choose to come back to associate with members of their own community and/or with members of other ethnic groups.

According to Statistics Sweden, by the end of 2008, 1,292 men born in Iran had married women born in Sweden. This represents 9.37 percent of married men born in Iran. The equivalent figure for women born in Iran married to a man born in Sweden is 1,071, which is 8.10 percent of the married women born in Iran. At the same time, 2,112 men born in Iran (15.31 percent of married men) had married a woman born in a third country, and 1,781 women born in Iran (13.46 percent of the married women) had married a man born in a third country. Summing up these figures, the rate of Iranians married with an individual born in Sweden or a third country is 46.24 percent. This means that 53.76 percent of married individuals born in Iran have married another individual born in Iran.

It has been indicated that the length of residence in Sweden and the impact of acculturation have positive effects on the rate of inter-marriage between Iranian immigrants and Swedes (Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, p. 141). This means that the inter-marriage of Iranians with Swedes, and possibly with members of other ethnic groups, is likely to increase in the future. This does not mean, however, that members of the Iranian community are no longer likely to marry individuals in Iran. It is still common for members of the Iranian community (especially men) to travel to Iran and marry an Iranian. In recent years it has also become common for immigrants from Iranian parts of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan to travel to the Republic of Azarbaijan or to Kurdistan in Iraq to marry a person from these countries.

Marriages between Iranian immigrants are more vulnerable than marriages between individuals born in Sweden. They are also more vulnerable than marriages involving the majority of other immigrant groups. A study done on the power relations within the Iranian family indicates that the rate of divorce among Iranian immigrants (4.8 percent of marriages) is considerably higher



than the rate of divorce among Swedes (1.2 percent). With the exception of immigrants from Chile, with the highest rate of divorce (5.8 percent), Iranians have the highest rate of divorce among the other sizable immigrant groups in Sweden (between 1.7 percent and 3.9 percent). According to this study, this vulnerability is often caused by the changing dynamics of power within the marriage unit following immigration to Sweden, and the Iranian women's efforts to challenge traditional gender roles (Darvishpour, pp. 177-84)

Voluntary associations in Sweden are not bound to register themselves if they do not wish to apply for a grant from Swedish authorities. This makes it difficult to estimate their true numbers in Sweden. An approximate estimate can, however, be made by taking different sources into account. The homepage of the Iranian Federation in Sweden (Iranska Riksförbundet I Sverige [IRIS]) shows that there are 67 associations which are registered as members of this Federation. The Federation of Iranian Refugees in Sweden (Iranska Flyktingars Riksförbund i Sverige [IFRS]) has 19 member associations, according to its homepage. In addition, there are a number of other associations listed on the homepage of the Center for Research on Iranian Culture (Iranska Kulturforsknings Center) as well as some more organizations that can be found through other sources. Based on this, we can speculate that there are approximately 125-130 Iranian associations in Sweden. The number registered by the taxation authorities (*skattemyndighetens register*) was, according to Emami (p. 55), 106 for 1996.

Iranian voluntary associations can be found in 48 of Sweden's 288 municipalities. The majority are located in Sweden's four largest cities where most of Iranian immigrants live: Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Uppsala. Emami's study, mentioned above, divides the activities of these associations into the following working areas: giving advice and information, offering different courses, and organizing cultural, social, and athletic events and activities. According to this study, the distinguishing aspect of these organizations when compared to Swedish associations, is that their goals are oriented both to Iran and Sweden. They also differ from Swedish associations in that they are usually multifunctional and run a variety of activities (Emami, p. 191).

As mentioned above, more than half of Iranian associations in Sweden are affiliated with the Iranian Federation In Sweden, which is itself a member of an umbrella organization called the Cooperation Group for Ethnic Association in Sweden (Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige [SIOS]). The



Iranian Federation In Sweden was founded in 1994. The main goal of the Federation is, according to its constitution, to bring individual Iranians and Iranian organizations in Sweden together, to protect Iranians' political, civil, and social rights in Sweden, to support democracy in Iran, and to present Iranian culture to Sweden. According to Emami (p. 190), none of the associations affiliated with the Federation is involved in religious activities. The number of members in associations belonging to the Federation combined with the Federation's own individual members was 5,424 at the end of 2008, varying between 9 and 624 members for each association. It should be mentioned here that some associations created by Iranian Kurds in Sweden are members of the Kurdish Federation in Sweden, which is comprised of Kurdish associations from different countries.

The difficulties that Iranian associations face in achieving their goals in Sweden are, argues Emami (pp. 192-93), principally a result of the adaptation processes Iranians face in this country. While the external institutionalization—to employ the dominant model of voluntary organizations as organizational structures—has proceeded relatively fast and ended with the registration of associations, the internal institutionalization—to apply and practice the model, especially in the way of coping with internal conflicts—is a long process which is still in their formative stage of growth and evolution.

In relation to voluntary associations, we should also mention here the Iranians' "community radios" (*Lokal radio*). Community radio stations are those of local non-profit associations working as a channel of communication for these associations. With some exceptions, the broadcast areas of these transmissions are limited to the town level. These radio programs are financed by membership subscriptions, local authority grants, and/or advertisements. Iranian community radios are multifunctional. They give daily information to their listeners about news in Iran (mainly relaying the known international radio channels) and news in Sweden (mainly dealing with the Iranian community). They also provide music and other entertainment programs, stimulate social, cultural, and political debates, interview professional figures, send advertisements, and, most important of all, create dialogue among listeners. These programs are especially important for elderly Iranians, who often lack fluency in the Swedish language and therefore cannot actively participate in Swedish society. Behrooz Sheyda, an Iranian writer in Stockholm, explains the function of these radio programs for Iranians in



Sweden: “Without community radios, life would be problematic for many Iranians in Sweden. The programs sent by these radios serve as a meeting point for many Iranians, as a café on a road where one can relax, hear daily news, and listen to the music that one likes. Psychologically, this is of great significance. One feels secure and experiences a sense of belonging to the others” (cited in Pooya, p. 2, our translation).

According to the webpage of the Swedish Radio and TV Authority, 68 Iranian community radios are registered with this Authority. The amount of airtime used by these program providers varies between 1 and 40 hours per week (Pooya, p. 2). We should also mention here *Pejvak*, the Persian section of Swedish radio, which broadcasts Iranian, Swedish, and international news three times a week. Like the Iranian community radios, *Pejvak* is also active in organizing debates among Iranians in Sweden, providing support to their integration into Swedish society, and presenting Iranian culture to its listeners.

Cultural Life

The most distinguished parts of Iranians’ cultural life in Sweden are the conferences, seminars, meetings, concerts, and literary events that are held in different metropolitan cities of Sweden where the majority of Iranian immigrants live. There is almost no weekend without a poet, writer, artist, musician, researcher, political figure, or journalist invited from Iran or the wider Iranian Diaspora (mainly European countries, the USA, and Canada) to deliver a program. The number and type of individuals taking part in these programs vary according to the ideological persuasions and the popularity of the invited guest. The events with the most participants are naturally the concerts held by popular singers and musicians invited from Iran or from other countries. However, when a prominent political or cultural figure is invited there can be even higher levels of turnout. For example, the Iranian poet Aḥmad Šāmlu drew a particularly large crowd when he appeared in Stockholm in November 1988. According to the Swedish mass media, more than 2,000 Iranians went to hear him speak (Namdar).

Another remarkable cultural activity is the celebration of *Čahāršanba-suri* (Wednesday Feast) in the suburbs of different cities on the Tuesday night that precedes March 21 (i.e., the spring equinox). In Stockholm, such celebrations began among the Iranian community in the mid-1980s. Since then the event has steadily grown in size to be the quintessential symbol of Sweden’s Iranian



community. At present, thousands of Iranians of different backgrounds and political persuasions participate in the celebration. The celebration of Čahāršanba-suri contains different elements: music, dance, Iranian food, rituals like jumping over fire, advertisements, *haft sin*, *Hāji Firuz* (a traditional folk entertainer), the presentation of Iranian associations, and so on. The attempt by some Iranians to move the celebration from a suburban area to one of the central parks of Stockholm in 2009 failed because a fire was set at the scene the night before the celebration. The cause of this incident remains unknown.

What is most interesting about the celebration of Čahāršanba-suri in Sweden is the changes it has undergone in terms of also adopting and incorporating elements from local rituals. On the one hand, elements from *Nowruz* and Čahāršanba-suri have been put together to fuse both celebrations into one. It is possibly the public manifestation of Čahāršanba-suri which has led it to become the most important Iranian festival in Sweden, despite the fact that *Nowruz* is celebrated more in Iran. The Čahāršanba-suri celebration in Sweden has, on the other hand, appropriated some elements from Swedish rituals. For example, the collective character of Čahāršanba-suri, in comparison with its relatively private celebration in Iran, and the larger pile of fire now used seem to be elements from the Swedish “Valborg.” A Swedish ethnologist writes:

“As a whole, the Wednesday Feast has undergone changes outside Iran that are even more encompassing than the “valorization” and the transformations in the role of *Hadji Firouz*. Many older people born in Iran have assured me that, in Iran, *Charshanb’ Soori* never developed into a mass event of the kind that is staged in *Hallonbergen*: in Iran the jumping over little fires has always been a modest custom enacted in rural villages or urban neighbourhoods. It is in big cities outside of Iran, such as Stockholm and Los Angeles, that these village customs have been transformed into large-scale celebrations of *Iranianness*” (Klein, pp. 77-78)

The cultural life of the Iranian community in Sweden is naturally affected by the acculturation processes experienced by many members of the community. This is especially true for the community’s second generation or those who came to Sweden at a young age. At present, there are no studies that have provided a detailed examination of how Iranian immigrants or their descendants participate in Swedish cultural life. As we have noted, however, the majority of Iranians in Sweden are highly educated. It may, therefore, be



anticipated that their participation in the cultural life of Sweden has increased steadily since their migration to Sweden. The name of some Iranians in the artistic or literary circles of Sweden, who often attempt to enrich Swedish traditions with some Iranian elements, is indicative of this participation.

There are some tensions between the acculturation of Iranian immigrants in Sweden and the preservation of Iranian culture by the same group. Some elements of Iranian traditional culture are naturally not in accord with some elements of modern Swedish culture. The areas of tension between the cultural life of Iran and Sweden cannot be discussed in a short article. It suffices to mention here that the values and norms dealing with family relations and sexuality are possibly the most distinct area of tension between the two cultures. It is not coincidental that the research dealing with this area of tension is much richer in Sweden than the research dealing with other tensions. As has been documented by scholars (for example, Giddens, pp. 174-75, 239, 652), equality between the members of the family and attitudes towards sexual relations in Sweden is among the most liberal in the world, whereas the equality between members of the family and attitudes towards sexual relations in Iran are among the most conservative in the world.

We have already pointed out the exceptionally high divorce rate among Iranians in Sweden. This is explained, in the first place, by a shift in the balance of power relations among the members of the family in Sweden. We would like to mention here another study, carried out by Fataneh Farahani, which deals with the sexuality of Iranian women living in Sweden. This study shows that “the moral values of Iranian women in Sweden regarding sexual behavior undergo various and sometimes contradictory transformations.” Iranian women “live a hybrid experience of ‘Swedishness’ and ‘Iranianness’ along with other characteristics.” These transformations, according to the author, do not, of course, leave the other dimensions of family life untouched (pp. 277-86).

Political Life

Up to the 2002 election, the data on the voting behavior of immigrant groups was presented by Statistics Sweden according to country of citizenship. Even this data is lacking about Iranian immigrants in the latest election (2006). In this election, the presentation has been limited to general geographical regions. According to the 2002 election data, 29.8 percent of Iranian citizens living in Sweden (29.7 percent of men and 30 percent of women) participated



in the municipality elections of 2002. An equivalent figure for citizens of other countries in total is 35.1 percent (31.2 percent of men and 38.8 percent of women). The citizens of other countries cannot participate in parliamentary elections.

This figure, however, provides a misleading picture of the voting behavior of Iranian immigrants in Sweden. The voting figures should be considerably higher than this when one takes into account that Iranian immigrants who have received Swedish citizenship (and are possibly more integrated into Swedish society) vote more than those who have kept their Iranian citizenship and are not included in this data.

As in the case of participation in elections, due to lack of data we do not know how Iranians are represented in the membership structure of different political parties. However, Maryam Yazdanfar, a woman of Iranian origin, has represented the Social Democratic Party in the Swedish parliament. There are also several individuals occupying positions in municipality parliaments. We also do not know how members of the Iranian community vote for different political parties. Based on general observations of different meetings, especially the First of May Demonstrations, we can, however, judge that the majority of Iranians still ally with left-wing parties. This is true in spite of the fact that there seems to be a shift from the radical leftist political persuasion which characterized the political thinking of the majority of Iranian immigrants in Sweden in the 1980s (see Hosseini-Kaladjahi, 1997, p. 85) to a more liberal leftist viewpoint. Some cases of crossing over to right-wing politics can also be seen among some former leftist activists.

As anticipated, the participation of Iranian immigrants in the elections of Iran has not been significant. According to the homepage of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Sweden, the number of Iranian immigrants participating in the presidential elections of 2009, which may be considered as one of the highest turnout numbers considering the overwhelming interest in these election, was 1,927. This is less than 4 percent of the population of Iranian immigrants in Sweden over the age of 18.

The major reason for this meager participation is self-evident. The majority of Iranians in Sweden left Iran because they were, for one reason or another, against its political regime. According to a good number of this group, voting in Iranian elections is a way of recognizing and legitimizing the regime. Another important reason is the integration of Iranians into Swedish society



and the weakening of the perspective of return to Iran. Some other reasons, especially valid for the vital presidential elections in Iran in 1997, 2001 and 2009, have been mentioned. Among these are the negative attitudes of the Iranian government to attract the votes of Iranians living in other countries, and the lack of facilities for voting in these countries (see Hajighassemi).

The lower participation of Iranian immigrants in Sweden in different Iranian elections should not be interpreted as the passivity of this group in Iranian politics. The political exchange with opposition groups in Iran and the support of these groups in different ways has always been a part of the life of the Iranian immigrants in Sweden. This is especially true for the immediate aftermath of the presidential elections in 2009, when several successive demonstrations attracted thousands of individuals, including several members of the second generation.

Emigration

After migrating to Sweden, a number of Iranians have subsequently made the decision to return to Iran or to move on to a third country. The most recent data on migrants leaving Sweden shows that between 1979 and 2006, 10,597 Iranian-born men and women left Sweden. This figure represents 20 percent of Iranians who immigrated to Sweden during the same period (see [Table 4](#)).

According to this data in a two-year period (2005 and 2006), 451 Iranians or Swedes of Iranian origin (the second generation) moved to Iran. This means that 21 percent of first-generation emigrants and 14 percent of second-generation emigrants moved to Iran from Sweden, but the remainder went on to a third country. In 2005 and 2006, the top countries for Iranian emigrants after Iran were the United Kingdom (405 emigrants), the United States (319 emigrants), Norway (114 emigrants), Denmark (82 emigrants), Spain (75 emigrants), other West Asia (64 emigrants), Canada (62 emigrants), Germany (39 emigrants), and Iraq (27 emigrants). The top ten destination countries listed account for more than 70 percent of first- and second-generation Iranian emigrants during the specified period. A comparison of Iranian and Swedish emigration patterns reveals that Iranian emigration patterns resemble Swedish emigration trends with many migrants going to the United Kingdom and the United States. When viewed in terms of a percentage, however, fewer emigrants of Iranian origin go to the Nordic countries, while the percentage of Iranians (and particularly those of the second generation) going to the English-speaking countries of the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada is



higher than the Swedish average.

The reasons for onward migration are, at this time, relatively unexplored. It is possible that onward migration is part of a family strategy through which first-generation Iranians encourage their children to immigrate to what they perceive to be the countries with the most financial and social opportunities. Certain countries such as the USA and Canada are seen as offering more to immigrants in this respect than Sweden (Graham and Khosravi, p. 124). Obtaining a Swedish education may, nevertheless, help Iranians to gain admittance to other destinations.

Another possibility is that while Iranians may have intended to stay in Sweden, discrimination and disappointment in the new country have led them to move on to new places where they are more easily able to integrate. It may be that Iranians seek out societies that are perceived as being more open to foreigners only after spending a period of time in Sweden.

Iranians have used Diaspora networks and connections in other parts of the Iranian Diaspora to facilitate movement and seize opportunities available to them in different places. It is perhaps important to point out that migration is not only a one-way process. As some authors have argued (Graham and Khosravi, p. 127), there is a great deal of circulation between Iran and various parts of the Iranian Diaspora, including Sweden.

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