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Labour Migration, Trade Unions and Employers

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Project: Labour Migration, Trade Unions and Employers (Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, 2013-2016)

Participants: Professor Anders Kjellberg (project leader) and lecturer Olle Frödin, Department of Sociology, Lund University

Summary:

The aim of the project is to analyse the consequences of the radical reform of labour immigration to Sweden with regard to third-country nationals from non-EU countries, introduced in 2008. Until this time, the Employment Agency and the trade unions had a great deal of influence over the inflow of labour immigrants. The reform introduced a "demand-driven" model of labour immigration from third country, providing Swedish employers the right to unilaterally decide whether or not labour immigrants are needed, provided that pay and working conditions are in accordance with the collective agreements or the praxis within the industry. With this reform Sweden left a very restrictive system of labour migration and adopted one of the most liberal within the OECD. The work permits provided to immigrants are limited to two years and are tied to a specific employer. Under these circumstances the relations between employer and employee tend to become very unequal. Since the reform was adopted, half of the labour migrants have been recruited into low-skilled jobs where no labour shortage exists. This study seeks to explain the increase of the recruitment of immigrants in low-skilled sectors. It also aims to examine how trade unions and employers in the hotel and restaurant, and cleaning sectors experience the impact of the reform. The study will draw on statistics on coverage of collective agreements and union density among labour migrants and interviews with trade union representatives and employers at different levels.

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