

Handling internal displacement in Sweden- Who will take the lead?

Swedish organizations are not prepared to handle people being displaced within the country. Especially the coordination between different organizations, so that their actions align when displacement happens, could be improved. This raises the important question of which national organization should lead in clarifying roles, coordinating actions and initiating preparedness efforts.

Imagine a scenario where war would hit Sweden and tens of thousands of people would be forced to flee their homes. How would they evacuate? Where would they go? Who would take care of them? This study reveals that in scenarios where displacement grows larger and lasts longer, the answers to these questions become increasingly uncertain. Representatives from Swedish crisis management organizations, while being confident in their ability to handle such crises, suggest increasing preparedness measures as a way to address these uncertainties. However, challenges such as limitations of time and money, as well as the perception that internal displacement is unlikely to occur in Sweden, are in the way of taking concrete actions. Adding to this complexity is the decentralized nature of the Swedish crisis management system. The fact that there are many responsible organizations creates confusion about who should take the lead of coordinating efforts and initiating preparedness.

The need for a national actor to step up and take the lead in preparing for internal displacement is also mentioned by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, who stated that no organization in Sweden currently has this responsibility. Another aspect increasing the urgency of this topic is Sweden's recent NATO membership. This means Sweden must comply with NATO baseline requirements of managing uncontrolled population movements within its borders. However, the importance of clarifying roles and responsibilities before a crisis situation can also be shown through real-life examples. A recent snowstorm on the E22 left many people stranded on a road for hours. Rescue operations were delayed as it took time to assign responsibilities between the different actors involved. There is a risk that the managing of internal displacement could be handled equally slow and chaotic if responsibilities are not made clear beforehand.

This study, through qualitative interviews with representatives from numerous organizations within the Swedish crisis management system, provides insights into the perceived roles and responsibilities of the actors involved. It illustrates the status of preparedness and emphasizes the need for improvement. It also discusses the challenges and opportunities of working in a decentralized crisis management system. Lastly, it stresses that it is vital that more actors become aware of the risk of internal displacement. Thinking that such a situation cannot occur in Sweden would be naive, as recent events in Ukraine have shown how quickly a country's security situation can change. The fact that several participants in this study have expressed their intention to initiate a discussion within their respective organizations because of their involvement in this study can be seen as evidence of its impact.