

Update situation in Sweden

Return The Children, 23 mei

With the 12 women and 23 children repatriated between September 2021 and May 2022 - things are stabilising and step by step their situation and well-being are improving! But the first year of being back in Sweden has been a bit difficult for them, especially with the separations between children and mothers and the legal processes around the custody. As for RTC, we have been part of advocating for the authorities to place the children and mothers together, so that the social services could better assess the situation and observe the needs of the families. In all cases but 2 this is what eventually happened. We have been called by the families and their lawyers to testify in the court about the mothers role and describe that the mother is the key attachment person and the emotional and psychological safety for the children. Today, all mothers, except for the 2, has gotten the custody back and they are living together with their children.

With the two families where the children and mothers are still separated from each other, RTC do not have access to meet with the children, but we support the mothers and have helped them with a good lawyer. It has been very sad to see that after the suffering in the war and more recently in the prison camps, that the resettlement process back in Sweden have been the cause of further traumatisation for the children and their families. Unfortunately in many cases, the receiving authorities has not included the extended family members in the immediate reception. RTC has advocated that the children must be allowed to be in contact with and get to know their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins whenever appropriate - they are key persons in the children lives and will remain long after the interventions from the social authorities has ended. Finally, most of them are now seeing their extended family members regularly. Despite the shaky start back in Sweden, we are happy to see that the families are recovering, adapting, and are increasing their well-being and mental health situation step by step.

The children are all in kindergarten and school, and it is going well for the children! The older children are seeing child psychologists, but most of them do not have PTSD or similar symptoms. The mothers have changed their names and several of them moved to new places to start over. Three of the mothers started university this semester, and the rest of them have all found jobs.

Since May 2022 there has not been any new repatriations. Sweden unfortunately got a new, far-right, government and are for the time being showing no interest in continuing with the repatriations. There is also the political aspect of Sweden trying to become a NATO-member, and Erdogan blocking the application. It is not difficult to analyse that the Swedish government is being careful to not have any diplomatic relation with AANES when the situation between Sweden and Turkey is so sensitive. RTC are continuing to raise awareness and are keeping dialogue with the foreign ministry.

In Roj, there are at least 7 Swedish children remaining, belonging to 4 different mothers. However, only 1 of these mothers is a Swedish citizen. She was offered to be brought to Sweden with her kids one year ago, but declined. Few months later she changed her mind, but since then Sweden had gotten the new government, and nothing has happened in terms of steps for repatriation. With the 3 non-Swedish mothers, Sweden are, for the time being, not approving to bring them to Sweden. These cases are very difficult.

In al-Hol, we believe there is about 5 Swedish families, but we do not know them or their extended family members. They have not stepped forward as Swedish citizens. If they are in the camp, it could be that they are afraid to ask for repatriation, it could be that they are not willing to return, perhaps they would be scared of losing their children.

With the Swedish men, there is still no political will to bring them home. A couple of weeks ago, RTC arranged a meeting in the Swedish parliament with family members of men and members of the parliament. We invited MPs from all parties, however only politicians from the opposition (left and green) parties joined the meeting. This was though a big step for the families, for the first time to talk about their situation with politicians. We have also worked with a good journalist who published a story in one of the main newspapers on the situation of the men in the prison. The aim is to raise awareness and try to put pressure on the government to take action. How are things developing in your countries? Please, if you want, share a short summary of your current situation, what challenges you are facing, and also if you have strategies or ideas to share that could be helpful for others! Thank you!