Immigrants in Norway, Sweden and Denmark

There are very few good analyses that compare immigration and integration in different countries. Also in Scandinavia, establishing data that is of sufficiently good quality for comparisons is not without its problems. Sweden has by far the most immigrants, particularly refugees, both in absolute terms and in relation to the size of the population. Labour immigration from the EU has been relatively greater in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark. The integration of immigrants is often linked to differences in the extent and composition of the immigration.

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Immigration on a scale experienced in the Scandinavian countries over the last 40 years has never been seen before (see Figure 1). Some fundamental similarities have been observed in the three countries' migration patterns, and the countries also have strong historical and cultural similarities. Nevertheless, there are important disparities in the nature and scope of immigration that are well worth studying.

The blessings of comparisons...

With so many political and social similarities between the Scandinavian countries, we are as close to an experimental situation as is possible in social sciences. The purpose of comparative analyses of integration of immigrants in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, is to identify similarities and differences in the behaviour and living conditions of immigrants in the three countries. By doing so, we can form a basis for evaluating the effect of somewhat differing immigration and integration policies in the three countries.

Such comparative analyses are entirely dependent on the data used being comparable. This requires the data to be harmonised (i.e. the definitions that are used must be the same) and to be collected in the same categories in the three countries. This is the only way to achieve proper comparisons.

...and the scourge of harmonisation

Harmonising data across borders is not without its problems. The countries' statistics aim to protect important national interests. Each country's priorities may differ, and harmonisation could reduce the details that are perceived by the individual countries to be the most important, but which are not available in the other countries' statistics.

Data source
This article uses register data from Norway, Sweden and Denmark on the population's composition, education and labour participation. The data was made available by Statistics Denmark, Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden.

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Background
The article is based on the efforts to harmonise indicators of immigrant integration in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. This work was carried out by national statistical agencies and integration authorities prior to the Nordic government officials meeting on integration in autumn 2012. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) has funded the Norwegian contribution.

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Unfortunately, we have not been able to establish a uniform definition of "immigrant" for the three countries. Sweden uses the term "foreign-born" in its official statistics, while Norway and Denmark also look at the country of birth of the parents of a person born abroad (see text boxes with definitions and data sources). In Norway, immigrants made up 89 per cent of all persons born abroad as per 1 January 2012. There is reason to believe that the percentage is similar in Sweden. We perceive the Norwegian and Danish definition to be best suited for comparisons of immigrants' participation in education and employment.

The comparative analysis of participation in education and employment for individual countries of origin is only given for Norway and Denmark, since no corresponding figures were made available for Sweden. This is unfortunate since important disparities between immigrants from individual countries in Africa and Asia are lost when aggregated to a regional level.

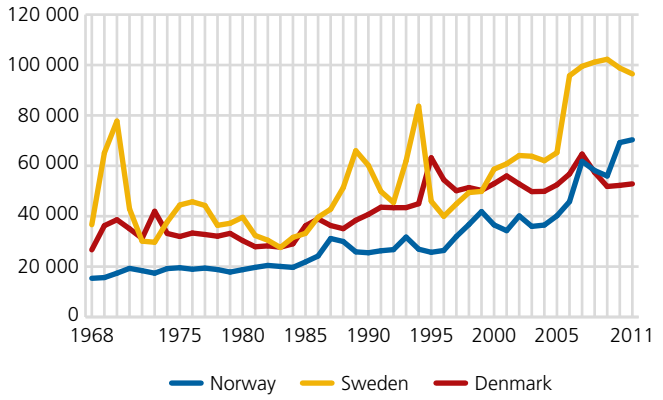
It is not yet possible to harmonise some relevant variables between the Scandinavian countries. This is particularly the case for *grounds for immigration* and *highest achieved level of education*. This is because we lack information on these factors in one or more of the Scandinavian countries, and because the definitions and registration schemes differ quite considerably. It is in many ways unfortunate, especially since *reason for immigration* could help explain some of the disparities between individual countries' immigrants that we are unable to examine in this analysis due to the lack of information from Sweden.

Gradual opening of country borders...

Immigration to Scandinavia must be viewed in light of the gradual opening of country borders, initially within the Nordic countries and then the EU, in addition to the national policies on labour migration, refugees and family reunification from countries outside the EU. There are many similarities between the Scandinavian countries in these areas, but also differences.

Since 1954, we have had a common Nordic labour market (Fischer and Straubhaar 1996), and since 1994, the entire Nordic region has been part of the open European labour market within the EU/EEA area. This means that for more than 50 years citizens from the Nordic countries have been able to freely live and work in another Nordic country, and that this right has largely been extended to all EU/EEA citizens (Norwegian Directorate of Immigration 2013). In addition, the Nordic countries have recruited workers from non-European countries, such as Pakistan and Turkey. For the migration pattern in the first half of the 1900s, see Østby 2005.

Figure 1. **Immigration to Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 1968-2011. Absolute numbers**



Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Definitions

Immigrant: a person who is born outside the country to two foreign-born parents, and who at some point has immigrated to Norway or Denmark (for Sweden, see foreign-born).

Descendant of immigrants: a person born in Norway, Sweden or Denmark to two immigrant parents (foreign-born parents in Sweden).

Country of origin: used for these purposes synonymously with an immigrant's country of birth.

Scandinavia: made up of the countries Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

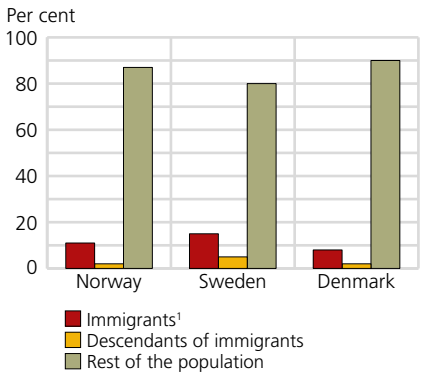
Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as associated territories; the Åland Islands, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Svalbard and Jan Mayen.

Foreign-born: defined for these purposes as a person living in Sweden who was not born in Sweden. The term encompasses more than "immigrants" since it also applies to persons whose parents were born in Sweden.

Composition effects

Immigrants' demographic and migration-specific composition in the three countries can have an effect on for instance national employment rates. This is often referred to as composition effects. A country with a large number of newly arrived refugees may have a lower employment rate than a country with many migrant workers. The disparity at national level can thus be partly due to the share of refugees, but also differing periods of residence, country of origin, gender distribution, family composition, and so on. It is therefore important to compare groups that are as similar as possible. The disparities that remain after such harmonisation may, to some extent, be explained by differences in integration policies, but there are of course other explanations that can play a part.

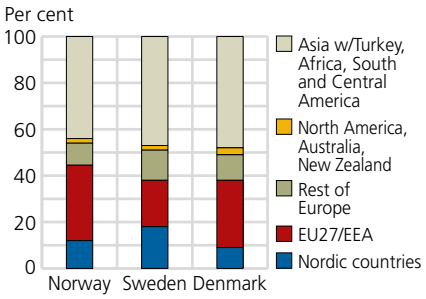
Figure 2. **Population composition in Norway, Sweden[1] and Denmark. 1 January 2012. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

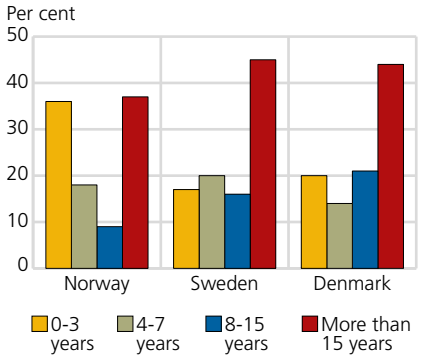
Figure 3. **Immigrants[1], by country of birth (region). Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 1 January 2012. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Figure 4. **Immigrants[1] by length of residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 1 January 2012. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Employment was the main reason for immigration until the start of the 1970s. Sweden's industry remained intact after World War II, and was ready to produce for a Europe that was being rebuilt and was in great need of labour - which was partly covered by south Europeans. Towards the end of the 1960s, immigration was dominated by Finns who had lost their jobs. Labour migration to all three countries stopped when the oil crisis in 1973 led to restrictions on immigration from countries outside the Nordic region. Then followed a long period of family reunification for migrant workers or new immigrants who were fleeing from war or persecution (from countries including Chile, Vietnam, Iran, former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Somalia). Since the eastward expansion of the EU in 2004, labour migration, particularly from Poland and the Baltic states, has characterised the immigration situation in the Scandinavian countries, in addition to continued family immigration and immigration due to flight.

Figure 1 illustrates that, for a long period of time stretching right up to the turn of the century, Denmark had almost as many immigrants as Sweden. Since 2000, immigration to Denmark has been fairly stable, while Norway and Sweden's immigration figures have doubled. Sweden had a particularly high number of immigrants until 1970 (from Finland), and a large influx of refugees in the early 1990s and from 2005. The increase in immigration to Norway after 2005 is due to the large numbers immigrating for work, particularly since the expansion of the EU in 2004.

Sweden has most immigrants

Despite similarities in the general immigration picture, there are major disparities between the Scandinavian countries in terms of immigrant numbers. Sweden currently has about three times as many immigrants as Norway and Denmark (1.43 versus 0.55 and 0.44 million). The figure for Sweden relates to foreign-born (see text box for definitions).

Sweden also has the highest percentage of foreign-born in Scandinavia, with 15 per cent of the population at the start of 2012, compared with 10 per cent on average for the EU; a figure provided by the European statistics agency Eurostat (2013). It is also in Sweden we find the highest share of descendants of immigrants, with 5 per cent. Then follows Norway with 11 per cent immigrants and 2 per cent descendants of immigrants (see Figure 2).

Half of immigrants are from Asia, Africa or Latin America

About half of all immigrants in Scandinavia are from countries in Asia, Africa or Latin America (see Figure 3), with a slightly higher proportion in Norway than Denmark and Sweden. This mainly relates to early migrant workers followed by refugees, as well as the families of these two groups.

The next largest group of immigrants are from EU countries outside the Nordic region, and this is currently dominated by labour immigrants from Eastern Europe. Immigrants from the Nordic countries make up the third largest group in Norway and Sweden.

A large number of Swedes are also in Norway to work, and in Sweden, Finnish immigrants make up the largest immigrant group due to historical reasons. From the rest of Europe, large numbers immigrated during the unrest in the Balkans in the 1990s, while immigrants from North America, Australia and New Zealand make up the smallest groups.

Over 40 per cent of the immigrants have lived in Scandinavia for more than 15 years (see Figure 4). In Norway, there are also many new arrivals; twice the share in Denmark and Sweden. The share of descendants of immigrants as a percentage of those with an immigrant background is far lower in Norway than in the other two countries. This is because a large percentage of immigrants in Norway have only been in the country for a short period of time and have not had time to have children.

The general picture is thus relatively similar for the Scandinavian countries. However, the variations are greater when we examine immigrants from each individual country of origin (see Tables 1 and 2). For example, relatively large numbers of labour immigrants and family immigrants came from Pakistan and Turkey to Norway and Denmark in the 1970s, although there were far fewer than the European migrant workers that came from the EU after 2004. Immigrants from Pakistan and Turkey are established groups with a long period of residence who have gradually increasing numbers of grown up children who have lived all or most of their life in Scandinavia. In Sweden, however, most Pakistanis are relatively new to the country, and many of them are male students, while immigrants from Turkey are more likely to be political or religious refugees than is the case in Norway and Denmark.

Table 1. **Immigrants[1] by country of origin. Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 1 January 2012. Absolute numbers**

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark
Turkey	10 696	43 909	32 379
Poland	67 339	72 865	28 043
Iraq	21 784	125 499	21 197
Somalia	20 976	40 165	9 951
Bosnia-Herzegovina	13 146	56 290	17 580
Pakistan	17 893	10 539	12 079
Vietnam	13 222	15 175	9 024

[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Table 2. **Descendants of immigrants, by parents' country of birth. Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 1 January 2012. Absolute numbers**

	Norge	Sverige	Danmark
Turkey	6 046	28 450	28 011
Poland	4 764	15 598	3 677
Iraq	7 151	37 509	8 687
Somalia	8 419	13 800	7 161
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3 192	16 030	4 765
Pakistan	14 844	3 117	9 563
Vietnam	7 649	6 533	5 283

Source: Population statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Liberal Swedes take in large numbers of refugees

Sweden is distinguished by having a more liberal refugee policy than the other Nordic countries. Sweden has, for example, taken in many more refugees from Iraq and the former Yugoslavia than Denmark and Norway, also in relation to population size. In Sweden, refugees from Iraq make up 1.3 per cent of the population, while the corresponding figure in Norway and Denmark is 0.4 per cent.

Another example of disparities in the composition of immigration is the immigration from Poland, which is substantial in all of the Scandinavian countries. While immigrants in Norway are dominated by relatively new Polish workers - currently the largest immigrant group in Norway – there are already a great deal of Polish political refugees in Sweden and Denmark who have been living in the country for a long time and who are often well established in the community. These disparities in length of stay and reason for immigration in the Scandinavian countries are important to take into account when analysing the integration and participation in society. There are important differences by country of origin, and between groups from the same country.

Integration policies differ

In general, it can be said that Sweden has the most liberal immigration and integration policy in Scandinavia, and that Denmark has a more stringent policy in this area than the other two countries. Norway falls somewhere in between. (For a detailed discussion on integration policies in the Nordic countries, see Brochmann and Hagelund 2012 and 2005, and Bevelander et al 2013). In Norway, the economy has been particularly favourable in recent years. We should therefore expect immigrants to have better access to the labour market in Norway than in the other two countries.

Below we examine immigrants' participation in education and employment in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and how they fare compared with descendants of immigrants and the rest of the population. We start with drop-out rates at upper secondary school. We then discuss participation in education

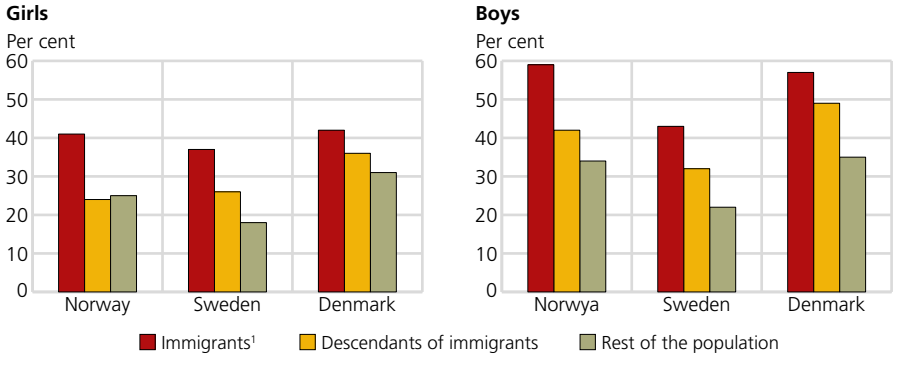
among the 20-24 year-olds, and employment among those aged 25 to 64. Finally, we examine immigrants who are neither studying nor working.

Although we have some knowledge of the effect of differing integration policies at a national level, we do not know whether the disparities we see in Scandinavia are due to different policies or "different immigrants". A great deal of research still needs to be done in this area, but the descriptions we present here will act as a good starting point for such analyses.

High drop-out rate in upper secondary schools throughout Scandinavia

All of the Scandinavian countries have a much higher percentage of boys than girls who do not complete upper secondary school within five years (see Figure 5). The drop-out percentage is much higher among immigrants than in the "rest of the population", while the share for descendants of immigrants lies somewhere in between. There are two exceptions in particular to this general pattern. The drop-out rate is lower in Sweden than in the other Scandinavian countries, especially among boys. Among female descendants of immigrants, the share is lowest in Norway, and is on a par with the rest of the population.

Figure 5. **Share who did not complete upper secondary school within five years, by immigration background. Norway, Sweden[1] and Denmark. 2011. Per cent**

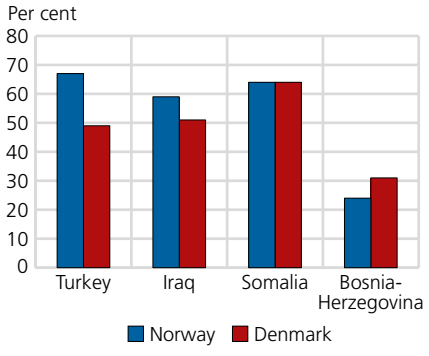


[1]Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Education statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark

Swedish authorities and Statistics Sweden are reluctant to publish data on foreign-born persons' participation in employment and education broken down by country of origin; the preferred method is to give figures by region. Country of origin figures are, therefore, only available for Denmark and Norway in this comparative analysis. Researchers do, however, have access to this Swedish data for analysis purposes.

Figure 6. **Share of immigrants who did not complete upper secondary school after five years, by country of birth. Norway and Denmark. 2011. Per cent**



Source: Education statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Denmark

Bevelander et al (2013) estimated their own figures for Sweden, and disparities emerged that largely correspond to the picture we present here for Denmark and Norway. For example, the drop-out rate from upper secondary school among those from Somalia is particularly high in Denmark and Norway (see Figure 6). These are interesting similarities. However, among those with a background from Turkey and Iraq, the drop-out rate is much higher in Norway than in Denmark. Why the rate is so high for the groups from Turkey and Iraq is not clear, but the pattern in Norway corresponds with several of the findings in a previous study of living conditions among immigrants (Blom and Henriksen 2008, and Henriksen 2010).

Higher education more common in Denmark and Norway

Among those who complete upper secondary school, there is a relatively wide variation between the Scandinavian countries in relation to whether a person continues on to higher education (see Figure 7). The share participating in higher education in Norway and Denmark is higher than in Sweden, and this is particularly the case for descendants of immigrants and "the rest of the

population." Thus, the picture is the opposite of what we saw for the upper secondary school drop-out rate.

In Denmark, there is little disparity between immigrants and other groups. There is therefore a far greater share participating in higher education in Denmark than on average in Sweden. In Norway, however, there are major disparities between the groups, with the higher education rate for descendants of immigrants being almost double that of the share for immigrants.

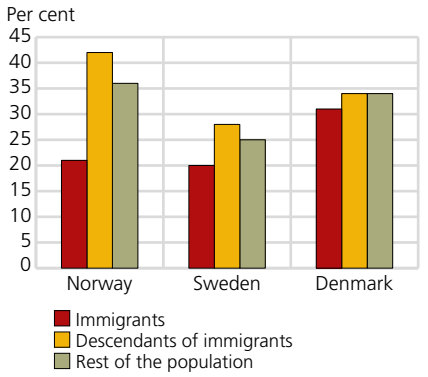
One important similarity between the Scandinavian countries, however, is that descendants of immigrants participate in higher education to a greater extent than the other groups, and as we have already observed, this is particularly the case in Norway. Denmark has relatively few migrant workers and few new arrivals, which may partly explain why the share in higher education is greater there.

Immigrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan and Vietnam, i.e. groups that on average have been in Scandinavia for a relatively long time, are more likely to participate in higher education than immigrants from Turkey, Poland, Iraq and Somalia (see Figure 8, Immigrants).

The fact that participation is lower among newly arrived refugees or migrant workers is not surprising, but it is interesting that it is so much higher in Denmark than in Norway. This may be due to a more stringent immigration policy in Denmark, and that some refugees who did not "meet the criteria" may have left the country (Bevelander et al 2013). Another factor that might also play a role in Denmark, is the 24 year age limit and strict economic requirements for family immigration. Some refugees below the age of 24 prepare themselves for meeting these requirements by getting qualified for well paid work when they reach the age when they can get the family into the country.

The large disparity in the share of Poles in higher education in Denmark and Norway is most likely due to the large influx of young Polish men coming to Norway to work, and because the share of students is therefore relatively small here. It is also worth noting that immigrants from Turkey, which have generally been in the country for a long time, participate in education to a much lesser extent than those from Pakistan, and this applies to both immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

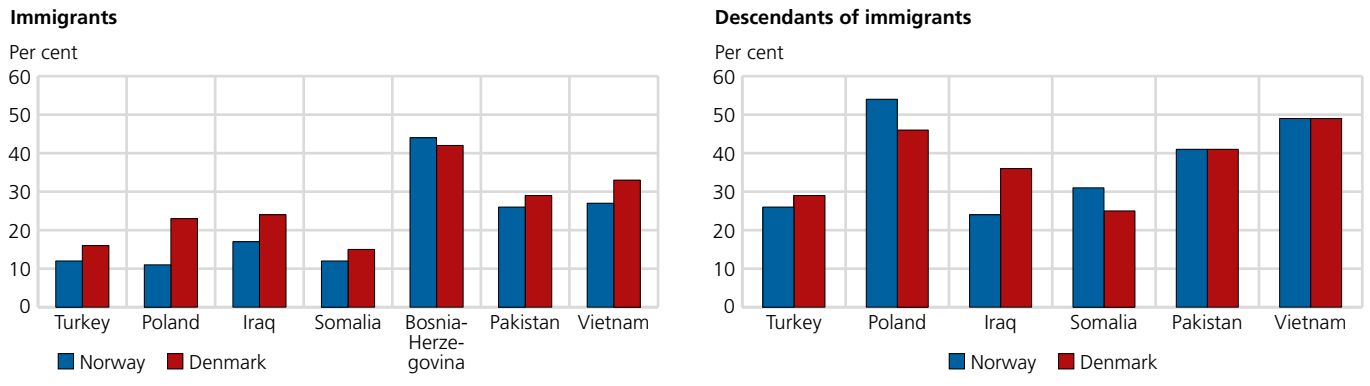
Figure 7. **Share in higher education, aged 20-24 years, minimum two-year length of residence, by immigration background. Norway, Sweden[1] and Denmark. 2011/2012. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born for Sweden.

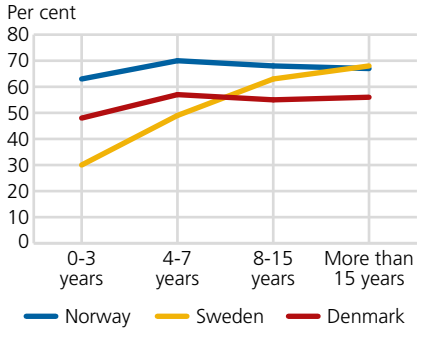
Source: Education statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark

Figure 8. **Share in higher education, aged 20-24 years, minimum two-year length of residence, by country background. Norway and Denmark. 2011-2012**



Source: Education statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Denmark.

Figure 9. **Share of immigrants in employment[1], aged 25-64 years, by length of residence. Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 2011. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Labour market statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

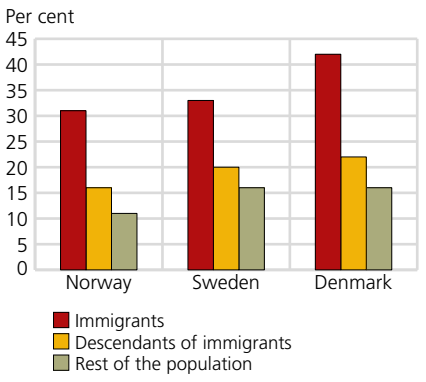
Table 3. **Share in employment aged 25-64 years. Norway, Sweden and Denmark. 2011. Per cent**

	Norway	Sweden	Denmark
Entire population	**79,9**	**78,5**	**74,4**
Immigrants[1]	67,9	57	54,6
Of this			
Nordic region	82,6	65,4	63,9
EU/EEA	78,6	63,3	65,4
Africa, Asia incl. Turkey, South and Central America	56,9	51,1	48,3
Descendants of immigrants	76,2	78,8	66,9

[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Labour market statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Figure 10. **Persons who are neither in employment nor education, by immigrant background. 18-24 years. Norway, Sweden[1] and Denmark. 4th quarter 2010. Per cent**



[1] Foreign-born in Sweden.

Source: Labour market statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden, Statistics Denmark.

Employment increases with length of stay in Sweden

In a period with a thriving economy and a need for labour, many immigrants have come to Norway to work. The employment rate for new arrivals is therefore higher in Norway than in Denmark and Sweden (see Figure 9). While the employment rate stagnates after four to seven years of residence and then drops slightly in Norway and Denmark, it rises sharply with length of residence in Sweden. Those who have lived in Sweden or Norway for more than 15 years participate in the labour market to the same extent. The pattern is the same for immigrant women and men from Asia, Africa and Latin America in Norway and Sweden.

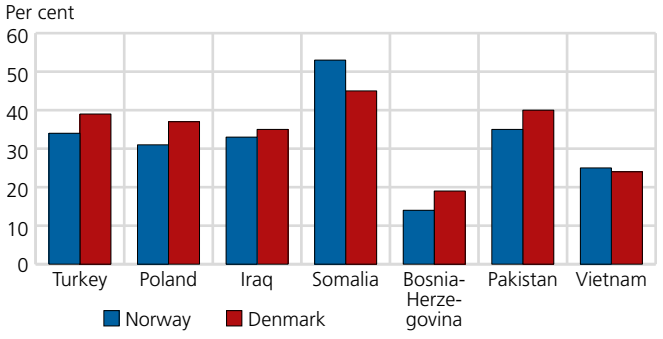
There is a significant disparity between the Scandinavian countries. According to MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index III); an index that compares integration policies in 24 European countries (British Council 2011), Sweden has the best policy for the inclusion of immigrants in the labour market, despite its lower employment rate (Table 3), particularly in the initial years after immigration (see Figure 9).

Fewer school drop-outs in Norway

We have already observed that many immigrants, especially boys, do not complete upper secondary school in Scandinavia. Some go back to studying later, while others go out to work. However, there are those who fall by the wayside. In Scandinavia, Norway has the lowest share of persons who are neither in work or in education regardless of immigration background in the age group 18-24 years (see Figure 1 10). This is partly because of the thriving economy and the high employment in Norway in recent years. In Sweden, a slightly higher share is outside the labour force and education, but relative to the rest of the population, immigrants were faring better in Sweden than in the other Scandinavian countries in 2010.

Denmark has the highest share of immigrants who are outside the labour force and education. This particularly applies to women (see also Olsen 2012). This disparity between Norway and Denmark applies to all countries of origin in this analysis, with the exception of Somalia (see Figure 11). Girls from Somalia are more likely to be outside the labour force and education in Norway than in Denmark. This may be related to the considerable emigration of Somalis from Denmark (Bevelander et al 2013).

Figure 11. **Immigrants who are neither in employment nor education, by country of birth. 18-24 years. Norway and Denmark. 4th quarter 2010. Per cent**



Source: Labour market statistics: Statistics Norway, Statistics Denmark.

What now?

The natural next step in this analysis will be to relate the disparities in immigration and integration to the individual countries' policies. We have not been able to do this here. Nevertheless, we can see the differing immigration scales and compositions in the countries partly as a result of the policy followed. Denmark has had relatively limited immigration and a restrictive immigration policy since the beginning of the new millennium. Sweden has a high level of immigration, which is particularly due to them taking in large numbers who are in need of protection. Norway's high immigration level is particularly linked to the low unemployment, high wages, the need for labour in some industries in Norway and problems in the labour market in many other countries.

Participation in education and the labour market differs for immigrants in the three countries, even when we take into account that the composition of the immigrant population is different. We have seen that these disparities are extensive, perhaps more so than we would have expected based on the significant similarities found in the countries' culture and history. It may be interesting to analyse how disparities in immigrants' living conditions can develop within the framework of the Nordic welfare model.

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