

Country Reports Nordic Region

A brief overview about the
Nordic countries on population,
the proportion of foreign-born
and asylum seekers

Nordic collaboration for integration of refugees and migrants

The Ministers for Nordic Collaboration has decided to establish a new collaboration programme for effective integration and inclusion of refugees and immigrants in the Nordic countries.

This decision was made as a response to the increasing numbers of asylum seekers to the countries in 2015, which posed certain challenges to the welfare systems – but also implied a clear potential to our ageing societies – especially in the more sparsely populated parts of the Nordics.

The aim of the programme is to increase the efficiency of Nordic integration practices. The project will become a hub for knowledge exchange, capacity building and networking between key actors working hands on with the inclusion of newcomers into the Nordic labour markets and communities. It can be public sector actors, such as national agencies and local integration coordinators, but also businesses and civil society organisations. Activities include thematic seminars for relevant actors as well as the forming of expert groups.

Main themes will be:

- The potential of immigration in shrinking municipalities – how to make newcomers stay?
- Faster integration into Nordic labour markets – competence building and matchmaking
- Segregated cities – housing and planning for more inclusive urban areas
- Kids and young adults in the integration process – the role of schools and social networks

Website: www.nordicwelfare.org/integration

Twitter: [@IntegrationNR](https://twitter.com/IntegrationNR)

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Country Reports Nordic Region

Over the course of the last few decades the Nordic countries have changed radically. Since 1990 the population of the Nordic region has grown by 15 percent. Two thirds of the growth of the population is a result of net-immigration, i.e. the difference between immigration and emigration. All together 2.9 million people have moved to live to the Nordic countries over the last decade. Previously, the immigrants of the Nordic region originated mainly from other Nordic countries. Nowadays, they come from a large number of countries. The state of the world strongly influences migration and many refugees have fled to the Nordic countries. For the countries this represents both opportunities and challenges. Integration has become a central issue on the agenda.

This is a brief overview aimed at providing basic information for each country: on population, the proportion of foreign-born and asylum seekers.

Norden

Since 1990 the population of the Nordic region (Norden) has grown by 15 percent. About 26,7 million people were living in the region in 2016. Two thirds of the growth of the population is a result of net-immigration, meaning the difference between immigration and emigration. Immigration to the Nordic countries has grown permanently during the last ten years, based on the widening of the EU and on the fact that a big part of refugees has made their way to Norden during the last years. All together 2,9 million people have moved to live to the Nordic countries in the last decade.

In Sweden, Norway and Denmark immigration has played the biggest role in the growth of the population. In Iceland the growth of population has mainly been based on a high number of births. In Finland the balance between immigration and natural growth of population is almost equal.

The countries of origin of the immigrants has become more varied

Earlier the immigrants of the Nordic region used to originate mainly from other Nordic countries. Following the widened of the EU in the beginning of this century, many people started to come to Norden from the new member states of the EU, especially from Poland. In Finland a large number of immigrants came from Estonia and from previous Soviet republics. The migration flow of refugees arriving in some of the Nordic countries during the recent years has usually been related to countries like Syria, Iraq, Eritrea and Afghanistan.

A larger number of population of the Nordic region is born in foreign countries

The proportion of migrants has internationally grown by 50 percent since the 1990-ies. But in the Nordic region this proportion has grown twice. Since the 1990-ies the number of people born in other countries has grown in the Nordic region from 1,3 to 3,0 million inhabitants.

A young age structure

The foreign born population in the Nordic countries has a young age structure. In the age group of 25-35 years their share of the population is bigger compared to the domestic population in all age groups. This means that being young people, they have a high potential to take part in the working life and to decrease the medium age of the Nordic population.

Immigration unevenly divided between regions

The immigration to the different regions in Norden differs concerning the scope, countries of origin, gender, education and other kind of background and also the reasons of migration (for example work, family, asylum-seeking).

Regional differences

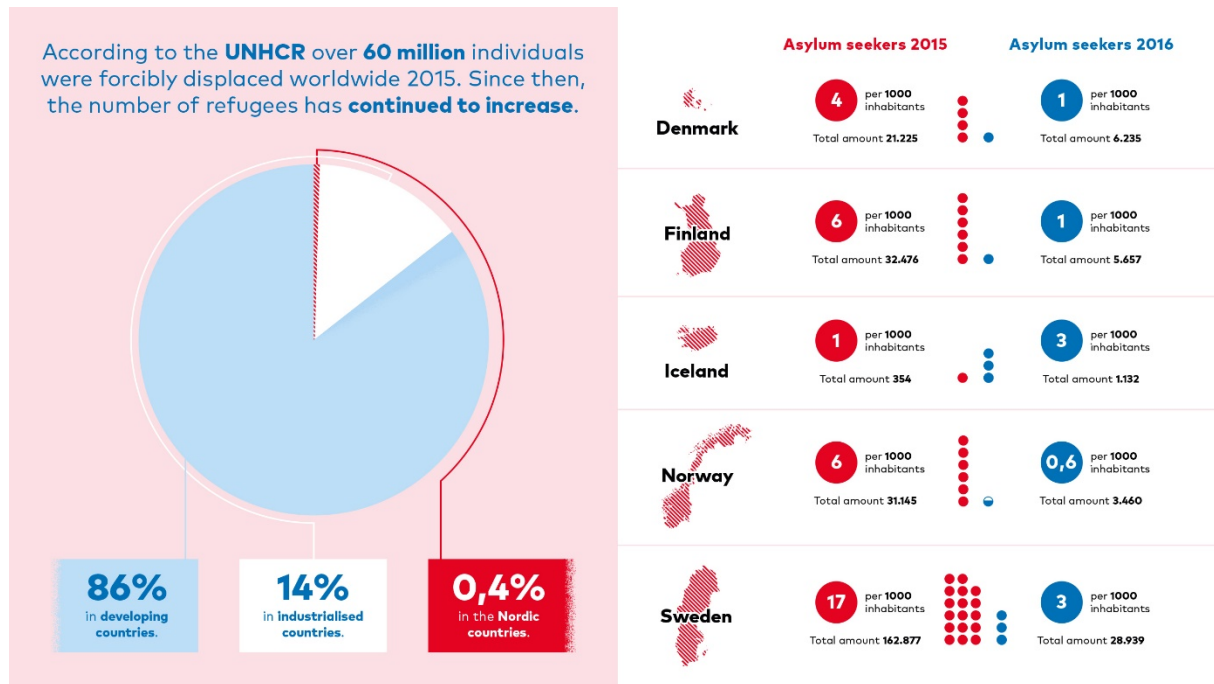
Most of the regions in Norway, many regions in southern Sweden, southern Finland and regions around Reykjavik in Iceland have a growing population both because of a higher number of births compared to the number of deaths, and because of net-immigration.

The contrary trend is noticeable in Finnish Lapland and certain regions in southern Finland where the population is decreasing both because of the low number of births and because of outwards migration.

Noticeable differences between international and domestic migration

Most of the northern and faraway regions in Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark have had moderate or remarkable emigration, while southern Sweden and regions around the capitals of the countries have a net-immigration from the regions. At the same time there is a noticeable trend of net-profit from the international immigration in almost all regions in Norden.

The biggest part of the foreign born population can be found in southern and central Sweden, in the urban regions of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö and in Oslo and Bergen in Norway. Even internationally Sweden and Norway have a higher proportion of foreign born population than any other Nordic country.



Denmark

In 2016 Denmark had about 5,7 million inhabitants. Denmark was for a long period a very homogenous country. In 1980 2,6 percent of the population were immigrants and 0,4 percent were children of immigrants. The share of people with foreign background (born outside Denmark or with parents born in another country) has steadily risen. In 2015 there were 21 255 asylum seekers. In 2016 this number was 6 235 persons. The people coming to Denmark originate mainly from Syria, Romania, Poland, USA and India. In 2015 11 percent of inhabitants were born in other countries.

Challenges

Integration has been a highly debated topic in Denmark during the last decades.

- Labour market is a central issue. In 2016 an agreement was reached between the state, employers and trade unions with an aim of creating effective tools for integration in the labour market.
- Integration of refugee children in schools is one of the topics that is widely discussed. There are two models used. One of them is a type of reception classes where the pupils are gradually prepared for entering the ordinary classes. The other model means that the pupils will have to join the regular education system right from the beginning.
- The housing market is another area that is mentioned as a challenge for integration.
- Many point out that it is inevitable to create a more effective asylum process.

Finland

In 2016 Finland had about 5,4 million inhabitants. Finland has had less immigration than the other Nordic countries, but even there the number of foreign born persons or people with parents born in other countries has grown. In 1990 only 1,3 percent of the inhabitants were born in a foreign country, compared to 5,0 percent in 2014. In 2015 there were 32 476 asylum seekers in Finland, in 2016 this number was 5 657 persons.

After 1990 the biggest group of immigrants arrived from the previous Soviet Union. Nowadays people arrive from a larger number of countries – Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea and others.

The foreign born inhabitants in Finland are relatively young and because of that there are yet no experiences with the “second generation of immigrants”.

About 50 percent of the immigrants live in Helsinki and the surroundings.

Challenges

- Labour market is pointed out as the most important issue of integration. Finland has had an economic depression and the unemployment among the foreign born inhabitants is higher than among the people born in Finland. New ideas for stimulating integration in the working life are of high value. It concerns efforts that more directly can lead to employment – for example professional internships in combination with language training.
- There is some discontent caused by the fact that the waiting period between receiving the residence permit and finding accommodation in a municipality is too long. It makes the integration process more complicated. The housing situation is problematic, especially in the Helsinki-region.
- The civic society was very active in the acute situation, when many people were moving to Finland. Now it is pointed out that the civic society has an important role even in the long term work for integration. It is said that the cooperation between different actors should be improved.

Iceland

In 2016 Iceland had about 332 000 inhabitants. In this year 9,6 percent of the population of the country were born in other countries, compared to 2 percent in 1996. The largest groups of immigrants came in 2016 from Poland, Lithuania and Philippines. In 2015 there were 354 asylum seekers in Iceland. In 2016 this number was 1 132 persons.

Challenges

The issue of integration is relatively new for Iceland. Those who had earlier arrived to Iceland, had come to work there. During the last 20 years only 634 persons have arrived as quota refugees via UN or as asylum seekers on their own. It is different from other Nordic countries that the labour market issue is not mentioned as a challenge concerning integration. Unemployment among immigrants in Iceland is low.

- The housing situation on the other hand is a more complicated topic, especially in the region around Reykjavik. It is quite usual in Iceland to own the place for living, the market of rental apartments is therefore very limited. Most of the immigrants are poor and have therefore no possibility to buy a home.
- In Iceland there are separate systems for receiving and supporting the quota refugees and the asylum seekers. There is an ambition that these two systems should come closer to each other.
- Many point out that the key to integration is language. Courses in Icelandic for immigrants are arranged only in bigger cities. The foreign born children did not earlier have a possibility for education in their home language – partly because there were so few of them, partly because of shortage of resources. This is changing now and on Saturdays the schools in Reykjavik have lessons in the home language of these children.

Norway

In 2016 Norway had about 5,2 million inhabitants. Norway was to a very high degree a homogenous country in 1990. 93 percent of the population were born in Norway with two Norwegian parents and four Norwegian grandmothers and grandfathers. In 2015 this part of the population had decreased to 78 percent. In this year 13,4 percent of the first generation of immigrants were without Norwegian background. After 2005 684 000 persons have come to Norway as immigrants, which makes 15 percent of the population. In 2015 the immigration decreased a bit, compared to the highest numbers in 2011. The largest group came many years ago from Poland, the current refugee situation has caused that many come also from Syria and Eritrea. In 2015 there were 31 145 asylum seekers in Norway. In 2016 the number of asylum seekers was 3 460.

Challenges

- Many actors have pointed out that the new arrivals have to spend a too long time in the asylum centres. It makes language learning, integration to the labour market and to the social life more complicated.
- Possibility to work is stressed as an important factor of integration – both from the societal perspective and from the individual perspective. But today many of them are not accepted, independent of having an education or not. There is a need for flexible solutions where one can combine work, training and education.
- One of the problems mentioned in connection to the refugees arriving in Norway concerns their missing documentation on educational background. They are often guided to adult education together with other refugees. This type of education has less resources, as it is noted, and it is of lower quality. There is a risk that this group of refugees might “fall between two chairs”.

Sweden

In 2016 Sweden had about 9,8 million inhabitants. About 1,6 million are born in other countries. This is about every seventh inhabitant of the country. From 2002 to 2015 the number of foreign born inhabitants grew from 12 to 17 percent of the population. Sweden is the country of the Nordic region with the highest proportion of foreign born inhabitants. The largest group of immigrants in 2015 came from Syria for the second year in the row. Almost every fourth, about 30 000 persons, were born in Syria. In 2015 there were 162 877 asylum seekers in Sweden. Out of these about 35 000 were unaccompanied children. In 2016 there were 28 939 asylum seekers in Sweden.

Immigration plays the most important role in the growth of the Swedish population. Sweden is the country with the largest immigration in the Nordic region since 2000.

Challenges

- It is important to speed up the entering into the labour market and integration of the refugees. Passive waiting is very negative for individuals and it makes a remarkable obstacle for integration.
- One of the challenges that has been mentioned is that the group of new arrivals is heterogeneous. It consists both of persons with high educational background who have been well established in their countries of origin, and persons with very low or none education at all.
- Housing is also mentioned as a significant problem.
- Unaccompanied refugee children bring along new challenges for different actors working with issues of integration.

Nordic Welfare Centre
Box 1073, SE-101 39 Stockholm
Visiting address: Drottninggatan 30
Phone: +46 8 545 536 00
info@nordicwelfare.org

Nordic Welfare Centre
c/o Institutet för hälsa och välfärd
PB 30, FI-00271 Helsingfors
Visiting address: Mannerheimvägen 168 B
Phone: +358 20 741 08 80
helsingfors@nordicwelfare.org