

Research in migration and integration

Key Findings and Impact of the Joint
Nordic-United Kingdom Research
Initiative 2019-2024



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Introduction

The past decades have witnessed an unprecedented increase in human migration worldwide, driven by diverse political, economic, social and environmental factors. In Europe, both earlier patterns of migration and the more recent large influx of refugees have had profound and lasting impacts on societies. The Nordic region, like many other parts of Europe, has experienced significant opportunities and challenges related to integration and settlement. These include questions of access to labour markets, health services, housing and education, as well as broader socio-political and cultural dynamics.

Recognising the importance of generating robust knowledge in this field, the Nordic Council of Ministers and NordForsk began developing an initiative on research collaboration in migration and integration in 2015–2016. This process resulted in a report, which identified key knowledge gaps and recommended a collaborative research effort. The NordForsk Board responded by launching the Nordic Research Programme on Migration and Integration, in partnership with national funding bodies from Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

By pooling resources, building critical mass, sharing data and infrastructures, and fostering new networks, the [Joint Nordic-UK Research Initiative on Integration and Migration](#) has sought to strengthen scientific excellence while supporting evidence-based policymaking. The call was launched in 2018, funding seven projects.

These projects reflect the breadth of issues at stake. They explore, for instance, how European migration management operates beyond its borders, how solidarity and notions of "deservingness" are negotiated in everyday welfare encounters, and how refugee young people experience relational wellbeing. Others investigate the role of home-making practices in integration, identify effective teaching strategies for migrant students, and analyse the impact of social frontiers on integration and mobility. A final project undertook a multidimensional comparative study of structural, cultural and social integration among youth.

Together, these projects demonstrate how collaborative research can generate new insights of direct relevance to policy and practice. This impact report highlights the achievements, outcomes and added value of the Joint Nordic-UK Research Initiative, and reflects on how cross-national collaboration has advanced the knowledge base needed to foster resilient and inclusive societies in the Nordic countries, the UK and beyond.

Arne Flåøyen
Director of NordForsk

Summary

The Joint Nordic–UK Research Initiative on Migration and Integration (2019–2024) brought together researchers from the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom to build a stronger knowledge base for migration and integration policy. The seven projects generated new empirical and comparative insights into how migration is governed, experienced, and negotiated across regions and institutions.

Research on EU migration management (EFFEXT) showed that linking development aid to migration control creates dependency and undermines local ownership, as African and Middle Eastern partners adapt or resist EU priorities to protect their own interests. The study of social frontiers (Life at the Frontier) found that sharp ethnic and social divides between neighbourhoods increase prejudice, lower property values, and harm mental health, while gradual mixing supports stability and wellbeing. MaHoMe revealed that migrants build “multi-sited homes” across borders, using creative and cultural practices to sustain belonging when policy-making on immigration and integration fails to capture their lived realities.

Solidarities demonstrated that ideas of who deserves welfare are constantly contested in local encounters between migrants, citizens, and frontline workers, often softening the effects of restrictive national policies. DrawingTogether showed that art-based methods help young refugees express experiences of loss and resilience, and that trusted relationships and participation in community life are key to wellbeing. IntegrateYouth found that second-generation youth in the Nordics have high educational ambitions and success rates, especially women, but face persistent barriers in employment and slower cultural integration. TEAMS identified that schools fostering collaboration among teachers, families, and support staff are more effective in meeting migrant students' needs than those relying on individual initiative.

Taken together, the projects reveal that integration succeeds when local actors, institutions, and migrants themselves have agency and when policies recognise the complexity of people's lives rather than imposing one-size-fits-all models.

Overall, the dissemination efforts of the projects demonstrate a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, practitioner engagement, and policy relevance, contributing to both scientific excellence and societal impact across the Nordic and British contexts.

Effects of Externalisation: EU Migration Management in Africa and the Middle East (EFFEXT)

Project leader: Cathrine Talleraas, Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway

Project duration: 2020-2024

Participating countries: Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom

Funding from NordForsk: 13,000,000 NOK

Project website: [Effects of Externalisation](#)

The project's overarching objective was to further the development of theory on global migration management, specifically through research on the effects of European Union (EU) external migration management policies in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). While preventing irregular migration had been a European priority, migration remained crucial for development in partner countries, creating a paradox in EU collaboration. The study explored how governments and stakeholders navigated competing national and global priorities within an EU-centric framework. Using a multi-scalar, interdisciplinary, ethnographic approach, the EFFEXT project advanced migration management theory, informed equitable policymaking, and revealed the institutional, implementation, and broader cross-scale impacts of EU policies.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

Combining migration control with development aid generates tensions. EU policies prioritizing a reduction of irregular migration over local development needs, risk harm to human rights, sovereignty and European-African relationships.

- The project examined how European migration policies affect governance in six African and Middle Eastern countries (Ghana, Senegal, Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya). Local actors are not passive recipients but strategically adopt, adapt, resist, or subvert EU agendas.
- EU externalisation often creates unintended "rippling effects": politicisation of migration, parallel formal/informal policy discourses, donor dependency, and in some cases instability.
- Combining migration control with development aid generates tensions. EU policies prioritizing a reduction of irregular migration over local development needs, risk harm to human rights, sovereignty and European-African relationships.
- Some of the country-level findings highlight varied dynamics:

Ghana: Modernised immigration services but also dependency and negative impacts on rural mobility.

Senegal: Civil society resists EU discourses through advocacy, but has limited influence in formal policymaking.

Libya: EU support deepens north–south divides and empowers militias.

Ethiopia: Ethiopia has tightened its border security to comply with EU priorities, but this has created tensions between external control and internal development goals

Jordan: Refugee compacts emphasise containment and labour market segmentation, creating frustration among locals and refugees.

Lebanon: Deliberate non-regulation allows elites to exploit ambiguity while EU influence remains mostly financial.

- Conceptual innovations include "rippling effects," a typology of policy navigation strategies, and "strategic non-regulation" to explain governance responses in partner states.
- The project's wide outreach — through academic publications, policy briefs, media, and events — has contributed to both research and policy debates, across the Nordics and the UK, and within the European Parliament, stressing the need for more equitable and context-sensitive migration partnerships.

How does the European Union's migration policy affect Africa and the Middle East?

A challenge is that partner countries in MENA and SSA regions experience that the partnership with the EU is primarily based on European political preferences and to a lesser extent takes into account what the partner countries themselves consider important in relation to migration.

"The EU should focus more on the rights aspect of this policy. Many of the countries want more ownership and co-determination in migration issues that affect their country. Increased co-decision making by the partner countries will lead to more sustainable solutions that include local actors and needs, rather than measures based primarily on European political objectives", says Cathrine Talleraas, project leader for EFFEXT.

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Talleraas, C. & Vammen, I.M.S. (2025) The rippling effects of European migration governance in Africa: a critical research agenda and analytical approach, *International Migration Review* 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183251359170>

Wiig, A., Kolstad, I., Kandilige, L. and Talleraas, C. (2025) Effects of information about irregular migration on transit community attitudes towards migrants, *World Development* 0(0). doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2025.107044

Talleraas, C. (2024) Externally Driven Border Control in West Africa: Local Impact and Broader Ramifications, *International Migration Review*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183241292318>

Knudsen, A. J. (forthcoming 2025). Continental containment: Crafting Middle East "host states". In T. Fakhoury & D. Chatty (Eds.), *Refugee Governance in the Arab World: The International Refugee Regime and Global Politics*. Bloomsbury.

Talleraas, C. (2024) The politics of migration policy implementation in Ghana, *Governance*, 1-18, [doi:10.1111/gove.12848](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12848)

Caponio, T, Schiller, M. & Talleraas, C. (2025) The Politics and Governance of Migration, *Governance* 0(0). doi.org/10.1111/gove.70055

Life at the Frontier: The Impact of Social Frontiers on the Social Mobility and Integration of Migrants

Project leader: Gwilym Pryce, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

Project duration: 2020-2024

Participating countries: Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom

Funding from NordForsk: 12,423,347 NOK

Project website: [Life at the Frontier](#)

The aim of the project was to understand the role of so-called “social frontiers” in determining the social mobility and integration of migrants and other groups. Social frontiers arise when neighbouring communities are very different in terms of their cultural, ethnic and/or social make-up, and the spatial transition in these characteristics is abrupt, rather than gradual. Social frontiers were linked to anxiety, depression, and crime. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, a multidisciplinary team studied these effects, collaborating with local and national stakeholders to inform policy and promote successful integration by improving social, educational, and economic outcomes for migrants and marginalised groups.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

Where migrants and majority groups live next to each other matters: gradual mixing can support both community ties and wider opportunities, while sharp divides (“social frontiers”) often increase tension, prejudice, and territorial behaviour.

- Integration means equal chances in jobs, housing, education, and health, not just effort from migrants themselves. But if society is already divided by class, income, race, or religion, integration becomes harder.
- Refugee policies have mixed results: Norway's dispersal policy gave only small job benefits, while Scotland's wider access to social housing reduced homelessness among refugees. In contrast, large-scale evidence from the UK shows that people with Asian or Polish names face clear discrimination when applying for housing.
- Migration patterns are highly persistent over time, as shown in Scotland across 40 years, making it difficult to break down segregation through policy alone.
- Where migrants and majority groups live next to each other matters: gradual mixing can support both community ties and wider opportunities, while sharp divides ("social frontiers") often increase tension, prejudice, and territorial behaviour.
- Neighbourhoods on the migrant side of frontiers are often disadvantaged with poorer housing, public spaces, and safety. They are also linked to worse mental health outcomes (such as higher depression rates), especially for Pakistani and other minority residents in England and Wales.
- Social frontiers have clear economic effects: lower house prices nearby, lower incomes for migrant men in Oslo, and reduced job mobility for both migrants and natives living close to them.
- Letting agents may be reinforcing divides by steering minority applicants into minority areas near frontiers, keeping residential separation in place over time.

Social frontiers can limit the mobility and progress of migrants

How should societies address the issue of social frontiers? Project leader Gwilym Pryce says that there is no easy solution, but one of the things the researchers have tried to do is to engage local communities and authorities on how to bridge that divide, instead of just sitting behind a computer analysing the data.

"By talking to people in different communities and sharing our results, it has become clear that social frontiers are a useful starting point for a conversation on how we got to this point as a society, why is it that nobody wants to live at the frontier and what it means for our behaviour in terms of avoiding each other and even avoiding walking through areas that you know are outside your territory."

"What I've been quite surprised by and encouraged by is the desire to have this dialogue across communities and I think also there is a desire and a feeling that that there's a disconnect between policymakers, local authorities, and the police on some of these issues. It's almost like the state has been withdrawing from these areas and issues, because they're too difficult and too sensitive to handle. I really feel there is an important role for researchers to have on a local level, particularly through community engagement," he says.

A direct outcome of the community work in Rotherham is the creation of the Steel City Community Consultancy, which was set up by local stakeholders to boost local agency as a strategic response to the challenges the research highlighted at the local level.

Established to improve the lives of residents and families, particularly in areas affected by social frontiers, SCCC runs sessions and activities ranging from sports and arts-based activities, to employability skills for people aged from pre-school to pensioners, and also provides advice to local community groups on fundraising, capacity building and government support.

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Andersen, H. L., Osland, L., & Zhang, M. L. (2023). Labour market integration of refugees and the importance of the neighbourhood: Norwegian quasi-experimental evidence. *Journal for Labour Market Research*, 57(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12651-023-00341-y>

Binner, A., Timmins, C., Pryce, G. (2024) Research Briefing: Discrimination in the UK Private Rented Sector, 'Life at the Frontier' (LATF) Research Briefing 2. Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

Iyer, A., & Pryce, G. (2024). Theorising the causal impacts of social frontiers: The social and psychological implications of discontinuities in the geography of residential mix. *Urban Studies*, 61(5), 782-798. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980231194834>

Olnier, D., Pryce, G., van Ham, M., & Janssen, H. (2024). The conflicting geographies of social frontiers: Exploring the asymmetric impacts of social frontiers on household mobility in Rotterdam. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 51(3), 625-640. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23998083231173696>

Piekut A, Pryce G, Rasool Z, Staples H. (2024). Research Briefing: Social frontiers and community life in Rotherham West, 'Life at the Frontier' (LATF) Research Briefing 1. Sheffield: University of Sheffield.

Zhang M, Piekut A, Rasool Z, Warden L, Staples H, Pryce G, (2024). Using residents and experts to evaluate the validity of areal wombling for detecting social boundaries: A small-scale feasibility study. *PloS one*, 19 (8), pp. e0305774 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0305774>

Making it Home: An Aesthetic Methodological Contribution to the Study of Migrant Home-Making and Politics of Integration (MaHoMe)

Project leader: Fran Lloyd, Kingston University, United Kingdom

Project duration: 2020-2024

Participating countries: Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom

Funding from NordForsk: 12,857,733 NOK

Project website: [MaHoMe](https://mahomeme.org)

The MaHoMe project explored how migrants make sense of home within the complex politics of integration in the UK, Denmark, and Sweden. Using a multi-disciplinary and multi-sited ethnographic approach, the project combined narrative analysis, visual ethnography, and participatory aesthetic methods to study both to study both policy-making on migration and integration and migrant home-making. By engaging migrants and NGOs as co-researchers, MaHoMe developed innovative outputs, including a legacy website, methodological toolboxes, films, publications, and exhibitions, thereby generating comparative insights and broad societal impact across research, policy, and practice.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

Integration discourses often treat home as singular and fixed. Migrants, however, create multi-scaled homes across places and times, maintaining continuity amid disruption.

- The project has provided an in-country and cross-country analysis of policy-making on migration and integration, cultural heritage and contemporary migrant expressions in Denmark, Sweden and the UK. The analysis of policy-making, art works and participatory workshops with migrants showed how integration discourses often treat home as singular and fixed. Migrants, however, create multi-scaled homes across places and times, maintaining continuity amid disruption. The study highlighted both the gap between policy and lived experience and the creative ways migrants sustain belonging and imagine alternative futures.
- Visual ethnographic and participatory workshops tested aesthetic methodologies, including montage techniques combining art, policy-making, and migrant testimony. These experiments revealed tensions and possibilities in home-making, producing co-created exhibitions, films, and toolkits that engaged policymakers, practitioners, and the wider public.
- The three-country analysis explored how migrant home-making intersects with welfare state traditions and cultural heritage. Visual ethnography interviews and arts-based collaborations showed how migrants use material and cultural practices to negotiate exclusion, maintain continuity, and shape new futures of belonging, highlighting the transformative potential of their cultural expressions.
- By bringing together analysis of policy-making, migrant cultural expressions, and the everyday practices of making-home in migration, the project has foregrounded both the gap between policy understandings of home and migrant lived experience, and the creative ways migrants sustain belonging and imagine alternative futures. These conceptual, material and affective findings have highlighted the need to reconfigure and reimagine dominant narratives of migration and integration.
- Through working with NGOs and migrants, engaging policy-makers and the wider public, the project has created new solidarities and disseminated research-informed scholarly and cultural outputs that contributes to this reconfiguring and to new understandings about migration and integration in Denmark, Sweden and the UK.
- Across the three sites, MaHoMe demonstrated the importance of recognising multi-scalarity in home-making and the limitations of reductionist integration policies. Working with over 160 migrants and NGOs the project produced films, exhibitions, toolkits, and a digital platform, fostering solidarities and generating knowledge with direct policy and societal relevance.
- Overall, the project advanced methodological and conceptual insights into home and migration while creating cultural and scholarly outputs that connect research with public engagement.

Creative research explores what home means to migrants

An intrinsic part of making sense of home is finding community and feeling valued in that community. That was one of the main findings of the project through the workshops and over fifty visual ethnographic interviews across the three countries.

"We wanted to try to dismantle and reconfigure the dominant narrative and understand what it really means on a day-to-day basis to be a migrant trying to build a home. That's one of the reasons why we developed films, held open screenings and had exhibitions, it was an effective way of engaging different communities in this debate and attract policy administrators and policymakers of all levels," says project leader Fran Lloyd.

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Lloyd, F., Narvselius, E., & Padovan-Özdemir, M., (eds) of (forthcoming 2026), *Aesthetic methodological interventions in migrant homemaking amidst divergent integration politics in Denmark, Sweden and the UK*.

Padovan-Özdemir, M., Wilkins, A. & Narvselius, E., *Policing Migrant Homemaking: Narrative Configurations of the Migrant-Home Nexus*, Routledge (Forthcoming, 2026, open access).

MaHoMe, [Making it Home: Re-Configuring Migrant Homemaking Together](#), 24 May 2024, Kingston University London, UK. Conference, Workshop, Exhibition & Long Table.

Philip Dodds, P., Lloyd, F., & Padovan-Özdemir, M. (2022), [Collective autoethnographic montaging of the politics of migrant homemaking](#)

Narvselius, E., Padovan-Özdemir, M. (2022) 'Utilitarian and Exclusive Humanism: Conditioned Welcoming through State- Sanctioned Migrant Home-Making', in [Ukrainian Refugees and the Nordics: Research-led best practice on how to cater for Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Nordic Region](#) (NordForsk, Oslo, April 2022, pp.48-54).

Exhibitions

[MaHoMe Exhibition: MAKING HOME](#), Gotlands Art Museum, Sweden, 3 March–1 May 2024.

[MaHoMe Exhibition: 'On the Move: Mobile Phones and the Tapestry of Home'](#). Beaconsfield Gallery, London, U.K. 1–16 March 2024.

Film

Fatehrad, A. & Norberg, A. (2024) ['Home Away From Home'](#).

Al-Hudaid, N. & Narvselius, E. (2025) ['Swedish Homes don't Look Like Us: Migrants Homemaking in Sweden'](#)

Migrants and solidarities: Negotiating deservingness in welfare micropublics (Solidarities)

Project leader: Mette Louise Berg, University College London, United Kingdom

Project duration: 2020-2025

Participating countries: Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom

Funding from NordForsk: 12,208,201 NOK

Project website: [Solidarities](#)

Solidarities examined how solidarities are imagined and practiced in negotiations of migrant deservingness. It explored the fundamental question of who is, and who is not, considered deserving of welfare services, how deservingness is negotiated and with what implications, in a context of increasing diversity driven by migration, welfare restructuring, and austerity. Such negotiations serve to draw boundaries between those migrants who have access to the support and services of the welfare state, or are believed to have access, and those who are excluded, e.g. because they are deemed as 'not belonging' or are seen as responsible for their own neediness. The study examined these questions across six case-studies including different groups of migrants and welfare providers in Denmark, Sweden, and the UK.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

Notions of deservingness were negotiated and contested in encounters between migrants and refugees, frontline workers, and third sector volunteers. The project found inequalities of welfare inclusion related to generational status and age for minority and migrant ethnic elders.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and significant political and legislative shifts in the three countries in the study, the project tracked how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion were redefined, with all three countries moving towards further restrictions on migration and asylum. Public and political debate around migration and asylum remained highly politicised and polarised in all three countries, and often at the centre of political debate. In this highly charged context, key findings include:

- Notions of deservingness were negotiated and contested in encounters between migrants and refugees, frontline workers, and third sector volunteers.
- A degree of disconnect between national politics and the many local encounters where people meet, see, and relate to each other as human beings rather than flat stereotypes. This has in different ways been the case in all three countries.
- Tensions and contestations between local and national governments over integration policies and practices, as well as between migrant support organisations and local and national governments in all three countries.
- Inequalities of welfare inclusion related to generational status and age for minority and migrant ethnic elders.
- Uneven and unclear protection statuses for different groups of people seeking asylum with considerable complexity and uncertainty for individuals depending on their country of origin and time of arrival.

In Denmark the so-called 'paradigm shift' from 2019 and a new focus on 'repatriation' instead of 'integration' created challenges for the cohort of Syrian refugees that came to Denmark in 2015, leading to existential uncertainty and insecurity. The ways refugees navigate Danish society, in which they might not have a future, became an important topic for the study. COVID-19 resulted in various forms of exclusion and 'corona-racism' vis-à-vis Muslim migrants and refugees. The concept of 'samfundssind' (civic consciousness/community spirit), which became prominent in political rhetoric during the pandemic contributed to the exclusion of ageing migrants.

In Sweden the 2022 elections led to a substantial change in discourse and policies on migrants and refugees, translating into tougher rhetoric, legislation, and implementation with the aim of reducing refugee migration, a shift from permanent to temporary refugee permits, and an increased focus on identifying and expelling irregular migrants. There were continuous tensions between local and national policies and practices. Migrant and refugee advocacy representatives navigated uncertainty and also felt the impact of declining refugee solidarity.

In the UK, legislative and policy complexity around entitlements to services and support are challenging at the local level. The country's system of privatised accommodation and support provision for people in the asylum system is fragmented, experienced as highly stigmatising by those within the system, and puts pressure on local communities. For migrants with limited leave to remain in the UK, as well as those who are undocumented, COVID meant increasing hardship. At the same time, the pandemic made exclusionary policies more visible in public debate resulting in some contestations and calls to reform.

In all three countries, the arrival of Ukrainians seeking protection in the wake of Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion affected political debate, public perceptions, policies, and practices. In light of these national and international developments, the project's focus on contestations around deservingness and solidarities was timely.

Research reveals disconnect between national and local level migration policies

"The political rhetoric around migrants, asylum, and refugees was harsh and hostile in all three countries, Sweden, Denmark and the UK, and we also saw quite dramatic policy interventions during the research project period," says Mette Louise Berg, project leader for Solidarities.

At the same time, the researchers observed solidarity and contestation of hostile policies from individuals who challenged both the rhetoric surrounding migration and national legislation at the local level.

"Our findings show that notions of deservingness are constantly being renegotiated in welfare encounters. We certainly saw a disconnect between national politics and discourse, and the local level. We noticed, for example, that central government policies were implemented in different ways within local authorities and municipalities."

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Berg, Mette Louise, Eve Dickson, Faith Nyamakanga, Nelson Gómez (2023). 'My name is not 'asylum seeker': countering silencing, unhearing, and labelling in the UK asylum system through co-research', in Claire Cameron, Alison Koslowski, Alison Lamont, and Peter Moss (eds) *Social Research for our Times: Thomas Coram Research Unit Past, Present and Future*, pp 209-226. London: UCL Press. <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/211074>.

Mulinari, D, A Neergaard (2022). The Swedish Racial Welfare Regime in Transition. In Fabio Perocco (Ed.), *Racism in and for the Welfare State* (p. 91–116). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06071-7_4

Rosen, R, E Dickson (2024). The exceptions to child exceptionalism: Racialised migrant 'deservingness' and the UK's free school meal debates. *Critical Social Policy*, 44(2), 201-221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02610183231223948>

Rytter, M (2023). "At the borders of the coronATION: Samfundssind, Muslim immigrants and suspicious solidarity in Denmark", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol 46(12): 2791-2812.

Exhibitions

[My name is not 'asylum seeker'!](#) Halifax, Doncaster, Huddersfield, London May 2024–May 2025.

[Fast grund under fødderne](#) Dokk1, Aarhus, Denmark. 1–19 March 2023.

Ethnographic film

Hatem, A. & Grüner. L (2023) [Thresholds of Belonging](#)

Relational wellbeing in the lives of refugee young people in Finland, Norway and Scotland (DrawingTogether)

Project leader: Ravi KS Kohli, University of Bedfordshire, United Kingdom

Project duration: 2020-2024

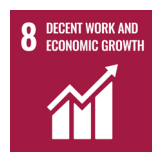
Participating countries: Scotland, Finland and Norway

Funding from NordForsk: 12,990,172 NOK

Project website: [Drawing Together Project](#)

The project team consisting of researchers, art therapists and artists explored how unaccompanied young refugees build new lives after settling in Finland, Norway, and Scotland. By mapping their networks and relationships as well as interviewing "value persons," the study examined mutuality, hospitality, and reciprocity in everyday life. Through a series of art workshops and interviews, young refugees depicted relational wellbeing across past, present, and future. The project highlights their journey from asylum's volatility to everyday vitality within diverse national communities.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

The use of art-based research methods proved essential in enabling young people to articulate complex emotions and experiences that were difficult to capture in conventional interviews. Art offered a non-confrontational medium to explore sensitive issues.

- **In Finland**, research highlighted the importance of family-like relationships for young refugees. With the absence of families of origin, young people relied on creating trusted, reciprocal networks to meet daily needs. Friendships formed in refugee group homes remained significant into adulthood. Findings also showed that encounters with nature fostered belonging through restoration in the present, reconnection with the past, and aspirations for the future. Exhibitions in Finland attracted large audiences.
- **In Scotland**, the project team produced a policy brief on refugee integration and engaged in two podcasts with the UNESCO Chair on Refugee Integration Through Education, Language and Arts. Art exhibitions and films gave young participants opportunities to communicate their experiences publicly, including at anti-racism events and professional development seminars. These activities showed how art can serve as both a research method and a platform for young refugees' voices in policy and public life.
- **In Norway**, case studies demonstrated how positive relationships within formal networks, particularly with professionals offering time, care, and understanding, contributed to coping and wellbeing. Community participation through sports, schools, religious spaces, and voluntary organisations also emerged as key arenas for reciprocity, mutual care, and support.
- Across all sites, the use of art-based research methods proved essential in enabling young people to articulate complex emotions and experiences that were difficult to capture in conventional interviews. Art offered a non-confrontational medium to explore sensitive issues.
- The Nordic collaboration added significant value by enabling shared exhibitions, co-authored articles, and direct exchanges between young participants across countries. The shared outputs, including a special issue of Social Sciences, strengthened the evidence base on relational wellbeing in refugee lives.

Young refugees build their new lives with endurance, talent, and hard work

What does it take for young migrants to succeed in Northern Europe?

Through a series of art workshops and interviews, the researchers explore how their social networks flow and evolve over time. By focusing on visual arts methods and film-making, the researchers offer ways of engaging with young refugees beyond the spoken word, where creativity finds an important place in their lives.

As a whole, the research illuminates the relational complexities of forced migration and integration as young refugees settle into new communities of (un)belonging. They scope the ways in which local, national and transnational relationships resonate for young refugees. They also consider how relational wellbeing changes over time and across contexts, as memories of the past, current experiences and the aspirations for the future all intertwine in the construction of life after a successful asylum claim.

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Kohli R, Fylkesnes M, Kaukko M, White S. (2024). Forced Migration: A Relational Wellbeing Approach. *Social Sciences*, (1), [doi: 10.3390/socsci13010052](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13010052)

Tiilikainen M, Fylkesnes M, McGregor S. (2023). Family-like Relationships and Wellbeing of Young Refugees in Finland, Norway, and Scotland. *Social Sciences*, (12), [doi: 10.3390/socsci12120667](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12120667)

Haswell, N. Friends from the Past, Friends for the Future: Exploring How Young Refugees' Friendship Practices Change and Endure Through Life Transitions. *YOUNG*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088251325025>

Documentaries

Korkman. P (2025) [Introduction to the Drawing Together project](#)

Korkman. P (2025) [Life in 4 chapters: the views and experiences of young refugees](#)

Podcast

[Exploring the Drawing Together project \(Part 1\)](#)

Structural, cultural and social integration among youth: A multidimensional comparative project (IntegrateYouth)

Project leader: Carina Mood, Stockholm University, Sweden

Project duration: 2020-2024

Participating countries: Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom

Funding from NordForsk: 12,995,948 NOK

Project website: [IntegrateYouth](https://integrateyouth.org)

The IntegrateYouth project aimed to describe and understand the fundamentals of integration of youth and young adults, and its variation across five countries in Norway, Sweden, England, Germany and the Netherlands using large-scale Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries (CILS4EU) and CILS-NOR data on immigrant and majority-origin youth. The study adopted a multidimensional approach, considering structural, cultural, social, and psychological aspects, and framed integration as the intersection of origins, destinations, and exposure. Covering eight scientifically and policy-relevant themes—including gendered integration, ethnic inequalities, selective acculturation, and Muslim/non-Muslim divides—the project aimed to provide a holistic perspective. By addressing gaps in knowledge, it informed evidence-based policy and advanced understanding of youth integration across multiple contexts.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

School segregation does not generally mean worse school quality for immigrant students in Sweden, but segregation matters for social integration. Cultural integration tends to be slow.

- Young people of immigrant background often have higher educational ambitions than majority peers, and in Norway and Sweden they are more likely to enter into and progress quickly in higher education. Outcomes are especially strong for second-generation women.
- High ambitions can support integration but also lead to challenges: many apply to demanding academic tracks even with average grades, which lowers completion rates. Later tracking systems, like in Sweden and Norway, help ambitions translate into higher attainment, while early tracking (Germany, Netherlands) reduces opportunities.
- Labour market integration remains uneven. Men of immigrant background, especially from Middle Eastern and African origins, face greater barriers to employment after vocational training, which may be due to discrimination or reliance on informal hiring networks.
- School segregation does not generally mean worse school quality for immigrant students in Sweden, but segregation matters for social integration.
- Cultural integration tends to be slow. Youth across backgrounds become more liberal over time, but religiosity slows this shift and there are large differences in attitudes between those with majority background and foreign background also in the second generation. Normative context matters: youth in Norway and Sweden tend to embrace gender equality ideals more than peers in Germany and the Netherlands.

Young people with immigrant background are not victims

According to project leader Carina Mood, the research results from IntegrateYouth show that it takes a long time to strengthen social and cultural integration. At the same time, the project has also highlighted the complexity of integration.

"The problem is that we want freedom for everyone, but at the same time we want fewer differences. But what is the norm, or the goal we want to achieve? It's a question that makes it difficult to come up with simple solutions to strengthen social and cultural integration."

"I fundamentally believe that young people with a migrant background are not victims. They make active choices, are well-informed and have a lot of power to shape their own future. Therefore, we must take data and facts into account when we talk about and work with integration," she concludes.

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Mood, C & Jonsson, J.O. (2025). Persistent boundaries. Partnership patterns among children of immigrants and natives in Sweden. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2478215>

Borgen, S.T. & Hermansen, A.S. (2023). Horizontal advantage: Choice of postsecondary field of study among children of immigrants. *Demography*. 60 (4): 1031–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-10823537>

Bracegirdle C, Jonsson J.O, Spiegler O. (2023). Neither Friend nor Foe: Ethnic Segregation in School Social Networks. *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231231214956>

Engzell, P., & Raabe, I. J. (2023). Within-school achievement sorting in comprehensive and tracked systems. *Sociology of Education*, 96(4), 324-343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2287404>

Friberg, J. H., & Jahanlu, D. (2023). Navigating new gender roles: impacts of cultural origins, context of settlement, and religious beliefs on gender attitudes among immigrant origin youth across five European countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 1-21. DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2023.2287404](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2287404)

Diemer, A. (2022). Endogenous peer effects in diverse friendship networks: Evidence from Swedish classrooms. *Economics of Education Review* 89: 102269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2022.102269>

Teaching that Matters for Migrant Students: Understanding Levers of Integration in Scotland, Finland and Sweden (TEAMS)

Project leader: Nataša Pantić, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Project duration: 2020-2025

Participating countries: United Kingdom, Finland and Sweden

Funding from NordForsk: 11,585,903 NOK

Project website: [Teaching that Matters for Migrant Students](#)

The aim of the project was to understand how schools and teachers address barriers and create opportunities for migrant integration in schools and to help teachers and schools meet the needs of migrant students. The project used social network analysis and ethnographic research across seven school sites in Scotland, Finland, and Sweden. The study adopted a multidimensional approach, considering structural, social, and institutional aspects, and framed integration as the interaction between students, teachers, families, and external agencies. It covered key themes—including risks of exclusion, barriers to learning, underachievement, and the development of protective networks—and aimed to provide a holistic perspective. By addressing gaps in knowledge, it informed evidence-based policy and supported inclusive school communities.

The project supports the following UN Sustainable Development Goals



Key Findings

At school level, institutional contexts strongly shaped practices. Schools with higher diversity and structured opportunities for collaboration developed more inclusive approaches, while autonomy without collaboration risked isolating efforts.

- TEAMS uncovered how schools and teachers address barriers and create opportunities for migrant student integration, while also developing resources to support teachers and schools.
- Teachers across the three countries showed strong relational agency by actively reaching out to colleagues, specialists, families and communities to support migrant students. Staff with migrant backgrounds were especially proactive, and inclusive pedagogical practices worked best when responsibility was shared rather than delegated.
- Cross-country comparisons showed different patterns of agency: Sweden reported the highest levels, followed by Scotland, while Finland's higher autonomy sometimes reduced collaboration. Gender and career stage also influenced professional agency and participation.
- At school level, institutional contexts strongly shaped practices. Schools with higher diversity and structured opportunities for collaboration developed more inclusive approaches, while autonomy without collaboration risked isolating efforts. Policies varied across countries, with mainstreaming in Scotland, targeted provision in Finland, and a mix in Sweden.
- The project also contributed methodologically, developing a mixed-method social network approach to analyse how relationships and institutional norms shape inclusion. Findings highlight the wider relevance of focusing on collaboration, belonging and inclusive school cultures.
- TEAMS created impact through workshops, policy briefs, an online toolkit, and student-led films, and by engaging with school networks, English as Additional Language (EAL) services and international organisations. Findings were shared broadly with practitioners and policymakers across Europe and beyond.

Inclusive school environments begin with knowledge sharing and collaboration

A pattern found across the data, both quantitative and qualitative, is that there is a lot of tacit knowledge among school staff on issues related to migrant students. The project findings call for more time and space for close collaboration and exchange of this tacit knowledge between teachers, health care workers, social workers and other school support staff.

"You can't expect teachers to know all the details of cultural differences or how to best help migrant students. But they need to know where they can get the information and support from and who they can collaborate on these issues with", says project leader Nataša Pantić.

Therefore, it is important to create collaborative, inclusive cultures at schools, as well as structured opportunities for staff to exchange the knowledge that exists in the school community, and seek new solution to challenges they face.

"School leaders are key figures who can facilitate these interactions. In the best practice examples, there is a family-like environment in the school and genuine care for the students and other staff members."

[Read the full story.](#)

Key outputs

Gialdini, C. & Pantić, N. (2024). [Rethinking English as Additional Language \(EAL\) Services to Support Inclusion of Migrant Students](#). *Languages, Society and Policy*.

Hökkä, P., Räikkönen, E., Vähäsantanen, K., Sarazin, M., Lund, A., & Pantić, N. (2025). School staff members' professional agency in Finland, Scotland and Sweden – A comparative study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 159, 104998. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.104998>

Pantić, N., Gialdini, C., Packwood, H., & Viry, G. (2025). A matrix of educational policies to support migrant students across Europe. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14749041251337232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041251337233>

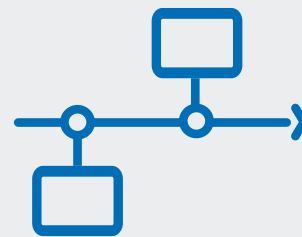
Pantić, N., Sarazin, M., Coppe, T., Oral, D., Manninen, E., Silvennoinen, K., Lund, A., Hökkä, P., Vähäsantanen K. & S. Li (2024). How do teachers exercise relational agency for supporting migrant students within social networks in schools from Scotland, Finland, and Sweden. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 139, 104442. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104442>

Tarnanen, M., Oral, D., Niklasson, E., de Riba-Mayoral, S., Vähäsantanen, K., Pantić, N., & Manninen, E. (2024). Exploring integration in schools by using the lens of cultural diversity and multilingualism in policy documents from Finland, Scotland and Sweden. *Language and Education*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2430501>

[Policy briefs from TEAMS.](#)

Key Figures

*Based on data reported in
Researchfish between 2021-2025.



7
Projects



35
Influences on Policy,
Practice & the Public



240
Dissemination
Activities



88

Million NOK
Funding Value



12

Awards and
Recognitions



50

Collaborations
and Partnerships



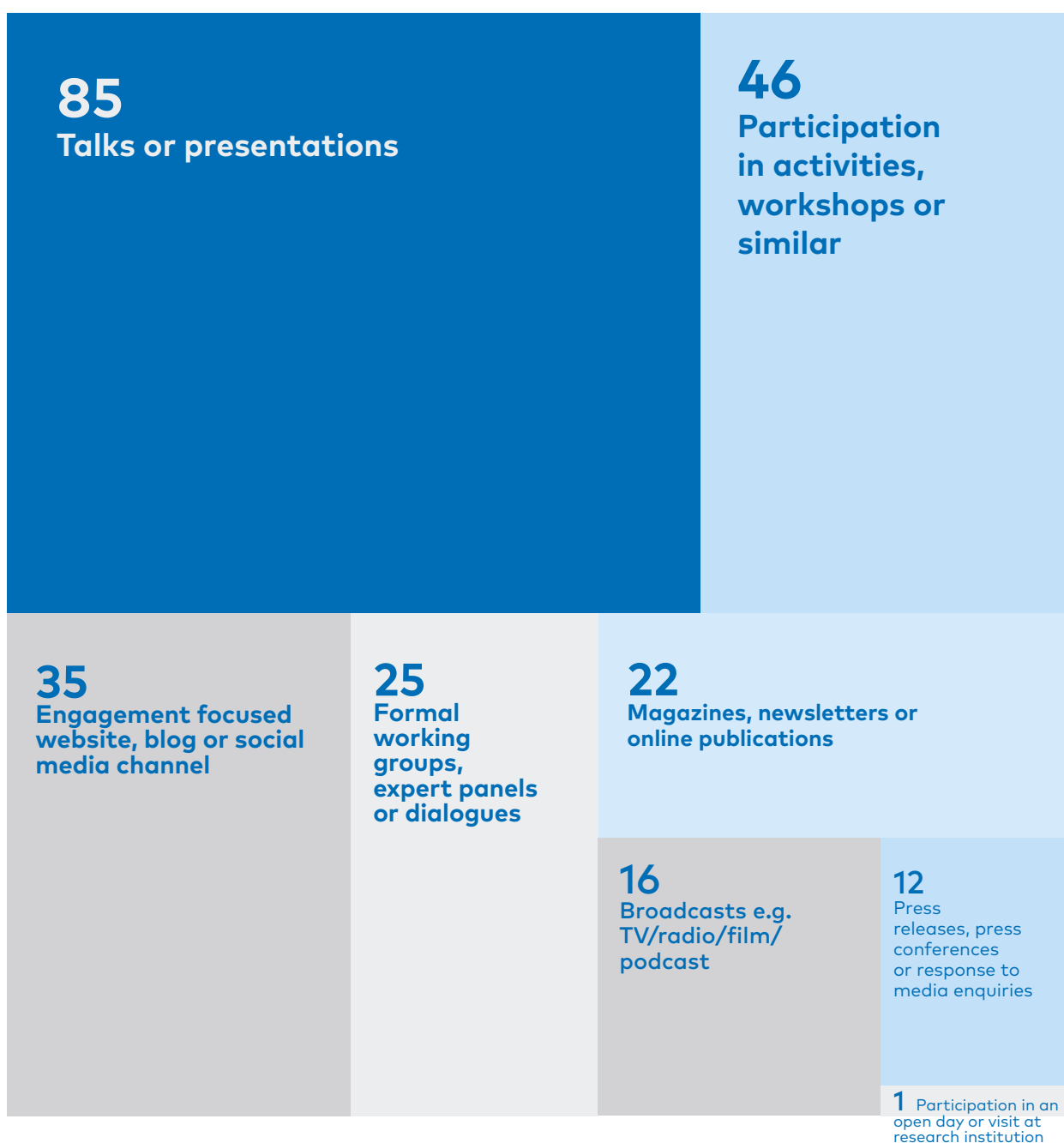
184

Publications

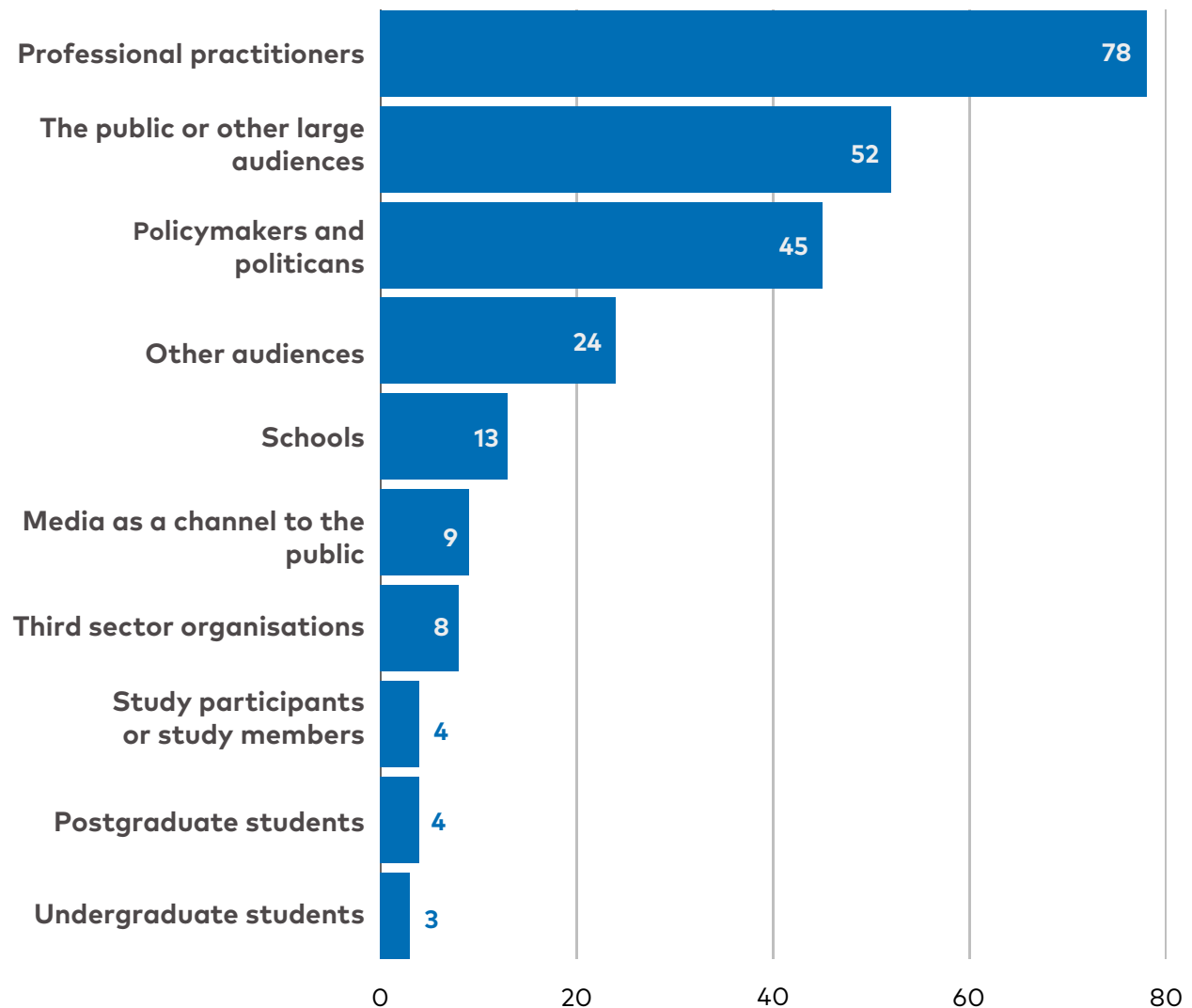
Dissemination activities

The seven funded projects have engaged in a wide range of dissemination activities aimed at reaching diverse audiences across academic, policy, and public spheres. Collectively, the projects reported 240 dissemination activities, reflecting a strong commitment to knowledge exchange and societal impact. A substantial share of these efforts targeted and involved professional practitioners, including teachers, social workers, NGO representatives, and other welfare service providers working directly with migrants and refugee communities. Several projects collaborated closely with migrants, schools, and civil society organisations to ensure that research findings were accessible, relevant, and actionable. Many also produced policy briefs, contributed to Nordic and EU-level policy discussions, and provided input to ongoing debates on migration and integration. Dissemination activities also included creative formats, such as exhibitions, podcasts, and documentary films.

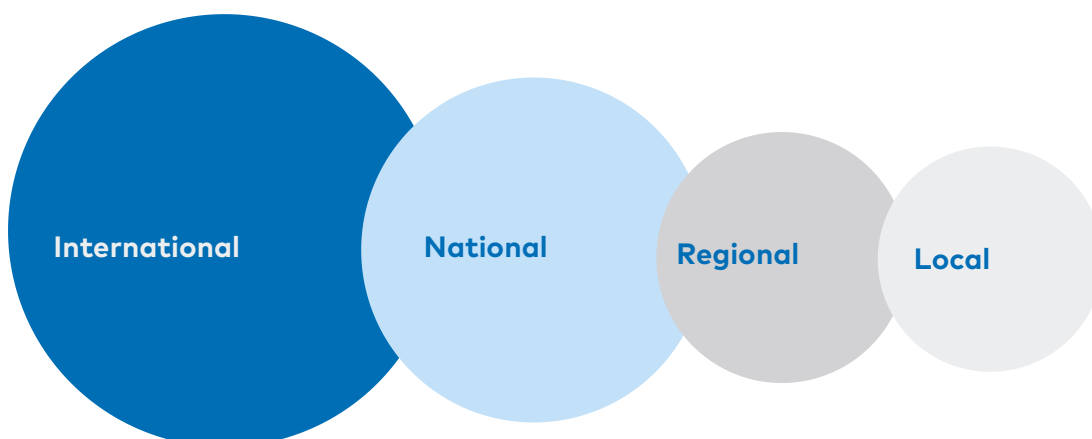
Dissemination activities by type



Dissemination activities by primary audience



Dissemination activities by geographical reach



Conclusion

The Migration and Integration initiative aimed to strengthen cooperation among knowledge communities in the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom, addressing the complex challenges and opportunities of migration and integration. Between 2019 and 2024, seven interdisciplinary research projects were funded to generate high-quality, policy-relevant knowledge with impact within and beyond academia.

The projects produced a rich body of empirical and conceptual work. Findings highlighted the structural, cultural, and social dimensions of integration, including the role of education, housing, labour market access, and community networks. Several projects emphasized relational wellbeing, supportive social networks, and inclusive pedagogical practices in fostering belonging and resilience among migrant youth. Others examined spatial segregation, showing how neighbourhood boundaries shape opportunities, discrimination, and mental health. Research on external migration governance traced how African and Middle Eastern actors navigate EU policies, often adapting or resisting them in ways that challenge dominant narratives.

Extensive dissemination ensured findings were accessible and actionable, with over 240 activities reported, including policy briefs, exhibitions, podcasts, films, workshops, and educational resources. Creative approaches included several art exhibitions around the United Kingdom and the Nordics; podcasts and films exploring identity and wellbeing; and educational toolkits and workshops promoting inclusive teaching. Policy briefs informed national and Nordic/EU strategies.

Cross-country collaboration in each project was a hallmark of the initiative. Collaboration between researchers in the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom generated outcomes and impact of greater value than could have been achieved through national efforts alone. Through co-authored publications, shared data and methodologies, researcher mobility, and joint events, the projects contributed to strengthening the Nordic and British research ecosystem. As an additional element of added value, NordForsk engaged the projects in a [report on best practices for supporting Ukrainian refugees](#) and funded [the INFLUX project](#), commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers, to provide research-based guidance on integration.

Overall, the initiative combined academic excellence with societal relevance. Building on this foundation, [seven new Nordic–Baltic projects on migration and integration](#) were launched in 2025, with results expected between 2027 and 2029, offering fresh insights and further strengthening regional cooperation.



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