

How is the second generation doing?

Promoting integration of migrants and their families in the Nordic countries



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1. Introduction

The number of individuals born in Nordic countries to immigrant parents is growing. The second generation experiences a different reality compared to their parents, shaped both by their parents' cultural and migration backgrounds and their own upbringing in Nordic societies.

This report provides an overview of the discussion and topics raised at the Annual Nordic Conference on Integration in Helsinki in 2025. The conference focused on a rapidly growing group of the Nordic population. Across all Nordic countries, the share of individuals with parents born outside the region continues to rise. As this group ages, it plays an increasingly significant role in shaping the Nordic countries' democracies and welfare systems. The conference programme was designed to give a broad overview of the key areas affecting the integration outcomes and well-being of this group, both in policy and practice.

The conference opened with political remarks from Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council, and Arsim Zekaj, Minister of Health and Social Affairs from Åland. Their introduction was followed by a thought-provoking speech by writer and stand-up comedian Melody Farshin from Sweden. Two reports were then presented to provide an overview of educational outcomes, labour-market participation, and demographic developments across the Nordic region. After this, three researchers from different Nordic countries shared insights on how integration is measured, how the population group experiences belonging and acceptance, and how policies targeting first-generation migrants can create intergenerational effects.



The second day began with another thought-provoking keynote, delivered by Mustafa Panshiri, author and lecturer on issues of integration. A panel discussion followed, featuring three experts from youth organisations working to amplify young people’s voices and strengthen the participation of children of migrant parents in democratic processes. The programme continued with three presentations showcasing promising practices that support the belonging and well-being of children of migrant parents. The conference concluded with an invitation by Rasmus Stoklund, the Danish Minister for Immigration and Integration, to attend the 2026 Integration Conference in Copenhagen.

In what follows, this report will discuss main points and conclusions raised by the experts speaking at the conference in 2025. The experts explored the theme from different angles, including new figures on second-generation outcomes in education, employment, and social participation, as well as policies and practices to bridge socioeconomic gaps and foster belonging across generations. To gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge behind the different parts of the report, tap the link at the top of each section guiding you to the research or programmes discussed in the presentation.

The conference was organised by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment in Finland, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the Nordic Welfare Centre under the 2025 Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The conference, titled *How is the second generation doing? Promoting integration of migrants and their families in the Nordic countries*, was held at Finlandia Hall in Helsinki on 24–25 November 2025. The conference brought together policymakers and experts working on integration and was moderated by Shadia Rask, Entrepreneur and Professor of Practice at Hanken School of Economics. This report is written by freelance journalist Sebastian Dahlström and edited by the Nordic Welfare Centre.



Welcoming address:

2. The importance of belonging and participation

Karen Ellemann, Secretary General, Nordic Council of Ministers

Arsim Zekaj, Minister of Health and Social Affairs, Åland

In her welcoming address, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers **Karen Ellemann** emphasised that the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision is for the Nordic region to be the most integrated and sustainable region in the world by 2030.

– This requires cohesion, and focus on inclusion, equality, and welfare. Effective integration policies benefit society as a whole.

Karen Ellemann noted that integration policies usually concentrate on equality, education, and employment initiatives. However, to strengthen the integration of descendants, she argued that it was also essential to address the sense of belonging.



Arsim Zekaj, Minister of Health and Social Affairs in Åland, maintained that the focus on children of migrant parents is timely, as the size of the population born in the Nordics to migrant parents is growing across this area. This challenges Nordic societies to look beyond traditional integration models.

– We are called to reflect not only on outcomes in education, employment, and civic life, but also on deeper questions related to identity, belonging, and opportunity. The lives of children of migrant parents are shaped by both the migration journeys of their families and the social realities of our communities in the Nordics.

Minister Zekaj emphasised that integration is not limited to a single policy area but intersects with policies broadly.

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I want us to commit to a broader vision of integration. When people feel excluded from civic life, it affects their sense of belonging, their well-being, and their trust in society. So let us invest in better data, more inclusive policies, and collaboration across borders. Let us ensure that the second generation not only inherits our societies but also participates in shaping them.



3. Facts and figures in the Nordics

Commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the following two presentations at the conference introduced new and previously unpublished analyses of facts and figures on immigration and integration. This chapter is an overview of the key findings from these presentations and the researchers' conclusions based on the findings.

Research shows that the Nordic integration outcomes vary substantially between countries and between different groups of descendants. Still, long-term investments in integration, education, and access to the labour market are producing positive effects – even as descendants of migrants continue to face barriers such as discrimination, overqualification, and growing up on average in low-earning socioeconomic families more frequently than the average Nordic child.

Research presentation: State of immigrant integration in the Nordics

Emily Farchy, Senior Economist, OECD

Knowledge base for the talk

Senior Economist Emily Farchy drew on an OECD report (2025) titled *State of immigrant integration – Nordic countries*. The report was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The report is available at:

- [*State of immigrant integration – Nordic countries* / NVC](#)
- [An interview with Emily Farchy on the Integration Norden website](#)

This report provides a comprehensive overview of immigrant integration in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It examines integration across the labour market, education, language learning, social outcomes, and civic participation, with particular attention to specific groups such as humanitarian migrants and children of immigrants. The analysis highlights both the strengths of the Nordic model – high employment, strong participation in education and training, and inclusive welfare institutions – and the challenges that remain in ensuring equal opportunities and long-term social cohesion.

Senior Economist **Emily Farchy** at the OECD emphasised that integration is inherently complex and unfolds over many years. Although public debate has become increasingly negative, she pointed out that earlier investments are beginning to show results.

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Actually, the Nordics are doing quite well, reflecting the outcomes of policies implemented seven to ten years ago. I believe this period of supporting and investing in integration does seem to have some advantages, especially compared to other countries that haven't invested in similar integration programmes.

In conclusion, Emily Farchy noted that immigration outcomes in the Nordics are highly varied and context-dependent. In particular, employment rates among foreign-born individuals are significantly lower in some groups and lag behind those of the native-born population.

Before turning to recent immigration statistics and her overall assessment of integration trends, Farchy outlined the substantial differences in immigration histories across the Nordic countries. A country's historical approach to immigration strongly shapes its current outcomes, which the Nordic region illustrates clearly.

– The Nordic countries are generally quite different when it comes to integration. They have diverse immigration histories and varying compositions of migrant populations. The characteristics shared by the Nordics include similar labour markets and social protection standards, in addition to linguistic disparities, which create barriers that you don't see, for example, in France or the UK.



Sweden has a long-established immigrant population with a significant number of humanitarian migrants. Denmark is an established destination for migrants, while Norway has a moderate history of immigration. Finland is a relatively recent country of immigration, and Iceland's immigration history is very recent. The proportion of immigrants among the total population is lowest in Finland (under 10%) and highest in Iceland (over 20%).

– In Sweden, and to some extent in Finland and Norway, humanitarian migrants make up a larger share of the population than in many other OECD countries.

On average, humanitarian migrants have a low or a very low level of education. This can influence and prolong their integration pathways in countries where the native-born population has very high educational attainment.

But Emily Farchy also noted that compared to humanitarian migrants in other OECD countries, a larger proportion has a high level of education. They encounter unique challenges, different from those of the low-skilled population. These non-EU-born individuals are often overqualified, and their skills go unused, particularly in Finland, Iceland, and Norway.



– In terms of employment rates, those born outside the EU and many who arrived for humanitarian reasons are less likely to find work. However, the employment rates of non-EU immigrants are not low in international comparison, especially considering the composition of the migrant population and the high-skilled Nordic labour market.

Emily Farchy notes that opportunities for upskilling are widespread in the Nordics. Among those with lower levels of education, many receive adult education and training during the integration process. At the same time among highly educated immigrants in Norway and Sweden, many apply for recognition of their qualifications. In Finland, however, many are deterred by the perceived costs and complexity to apply for recognition of former education.

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We often bemoan the difficulties in bringing migrants into the highly skilled labour market and the fact that the integration processes take a long time. Those with strong skills could be utilised more effectively, and it is clear that overqualification remains a concern.

Emily Farchy observed that among young migrants and children of immigrant parents, the number of those not in employment, formal education, or training (NEET) is relatively small in the Nordics, compared with international averages.

Emily Farchy also noted that language skills are key to students' overall academic success.

According to PISA results, reading score disparities are significant across all Nordic countries compared to the overall EU and OECD averages. Additionally, there are gaps in reading scores between native-born children of native-born parents and children with foreign-born parents. These differences are particularly pronounced in Finland.

– Much of this is likely explained by language. It is common for many migrants to fall behind, particularly in countries where the national language poses a significant challenge. If the family does not speak the host country's language, formal childcare can play a very important role in helping the child learn it.

Migrant children's integration also affects their aspirations and perceptions. Despite significant disparities, employment rates of female migrants are relatively high in the Nordics, which can boost the aspirations of the next generation.

– Seeing their mothers work and realise that they can earn a living is very important for the success of children with migrant parents.

Research presentation: What does research say about migrants' descendants in the Nordic labour market?

Debora Birgier, Senior Research Fellow, Nordregio

Knowledge base for the talk

Senior researcher Debora Birgier talked on the basis of a Nordregio report (2025) titled Labour market integration of migrants' descendants in the Nordic countries. The report was commissioned by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The report is available at:

- [Labour market integration of migrants' descendants in the Nordic countries | NVC](#)
- [An interview with Debora Birgier on the Integration Norden website](#)

This scoping literature review examines the labour market integration of migrants' descendants across Nordic welfare state contexts. Despite the region's comprehensive welfare infrastructure and documented patterns of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility, substantial structural disadvantages persist in this population's attainment of economic parity with peers of native parentage. Drawing upon multidisciplinary scholarship published since 2010, this review synthesises empirical evidence concerning employment outcomes, human capital utilisation, and the institutional and social mechanisms underlying persistent labour market inequalities.

The second presentation narrowed the focus down to the main theme of the conference, children of migrants. Senior research fellow **Debora Birgier** provided a brief overview of the key findings from a scoping literature review and her conclusion was, the descendants of immigrants are making progress in the labour market, but they still do not match their peers with native-born parents.

Birgier's explained that the term migrant descendants refer to the children, grandchildren, and subsequent generations of immigrant families. In her presentation she used the definition employed by the Nordic Statistical Database, which defined the descendants as individual born in one of the Nordic countries with two parents born abroad.

In Sweden, migrant descendants account 7% of the total population, while in the rest of the Nordic countries their share is smaller. Although children of migrants currently represent a small proportion of the working-age population in the Nordic countries, their share is increasing.

The main findings from the literature review suggest that the descendants of migrants still face disadvantages in the labour market, with outcomes varying between different groups and by gender.

Descendants of migrants generally have high educational aspirations. But educational attainment does not always guarantee an equal outcome in the labour market compared to individuals who are not of migrant background.

– In the literature review, we found papers focusing on discrimination in hiring, suggesting it still exists and also affect the descendants of migrants.



What the literature review also indicated were signs of labour market sorting. There is a higher concentration of migrants and to some extent also their descendants in certain jobs in the labour market compared to the native population. Birgier gave an example from Norway, where a research paper showed that most non-migrant natives worked in organisations with a limited number of migrants.

– The situation for migrants is different. They typically work in organisations with higher proportions of migrants, and their income levels are lower. The work situation of descendants of migrants falls between the two, doing better than migrants but not as well as the native population.

Another research paper in the review shows that income differences between migrants and natives with the same education can be significant. The difference is smaller for descendants of migrants, but it still not equal to that of the native population. However, once controlling for occupation and organization, the gaps are reduced and become non-significant for most descendants' groups.

Labour market sorting can be explained by both discrimination and the descendants' own strategies. Discrimination is evident, according to research that has tested callback rates for equal job applications with different names.

– In all the Nordic countries, the callback rate for individuals with a foreign-sounding name is lower compared to natives.

Another explanation for labour market sorting may be strategies that immigrants themselves engage in.

– There are papers which suggest that descendants of migrants use different strategies in the labour market to some extent to avoid discrimination by choosing the right job, adapting their cultural habits, or otherwise changing their behaviour to fit in.

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We do observe clear intergenerational mobility, and the descendants of migrants have higher educational aspirations. They want to be part of the educational system, engage with society, and integrate.

– Some key insights are that many of the disadvantages faced by descendants of migrants are related to their socioeconomic background and the environment in which they grew up, not solely to their immigration status. Additionally, we know there is heterogeneity by gender and the parents' country of origin that influences their outcomes.



4. New insights

The following section of the conference focused on questions of belonging, participation, the integration paradox, and policy effects. Integration appears as a layered and at times a contradictory process across the Nordic countries. Progress in one dimension does not always translate into progress in another. Research from Sweden shows that children of immigrants are structurally well-integrated in school and often highly motivated, yet cultural differences and limited social interaction with peers with native born parents persist. Findings from Norway highlight the integration paradox: the more established and successful immigrant families become, the more discrimination and weaker societal acceptance their children report. Long-term evidence from Finland demonstrates that well-designed integration policies for adults can positively influence their children's educational and labour-market outcomes many years later. Together, the studies show that integration advances unevenly across structural, cultural, social, and psychological dimensions – and that both policy design and societal attitudes shape the next generation's opportunities.

Research presentation: Integration among youth in a multidimensional perspective

Carina Mood, professor, University of Stockholm and The Institute for futures studies in Stockholm, Sweden

Knowledge base for the talk

Professor Carina Mood shares her findings based on 16 years of research on integration and inequality.

The main research papers and reports informing her presentation are available at:

- [Karriärer och barriärer – en ESO-rapport om och etablering för unga med utländsk bakgrund, ESO 2023:8](#)
- [Integration bland unga – en mångkulturell generation växer upp | Institutet för Framtidsstudier](#)
- [Persistent boundaries. Partnership patterns among children of immigrants and natives in Sweden](#)
- [Attitudes in motion: acculturation in views on family, sexuality and gender roles among immigrant-background youth in Sweden](#)

Professor **Carina Mood** from the University of Stockholm defines integration as multidimensional, distinguishing four dimensions:

- ***Structural integration***, which relates to education and work.
- ***Cultural integration***, concerning identity and values.
- ***Social integration***, involving relationships between groups and individuals.
- ***Psychological adaptation***, which pertains to potentially negative psychological effects of migrating or being in a minority.



Regarding structural integration, Carina Mood states that, despite widespread concerns in Sweden, there is no evidence that students with foreign backgrounds attend lower-quality schools. Students report receiving the support they need, they are not discriminated against in tracking or grading, and they have higher school engagement than students with native-born parents.

At the same time, students from foreign backgrounds have lower grades. The descendants of immigrants tend to achieve higher grades than the children who have migrated, but they still do not reach the level of students with a Swedish background. Carina Mood describes the overall situation as bipolar. Students with parents who have migrated face disadvantages at lower levels of education, but they are not disadvantaged in attaining higher educational qualifications, despite starting from a weaker socioeconomic position.

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They have higher aspirations and more positive attitudes towards education. However, they often have fewer parental resources and lower grades. Students with migrant parents are more likely to start tertiary education and face no disadvantage at university.

Regarding cultural integration, research has identified the most significant differences compared to the Swedish native population.

– Students with migrant parents are most commonly Muslim, accounting for 50% of such students, while one third are Christian. Among students of native-born parents, more than half are Christian, and more than 40% report they have no religion.

As many as 75% of students with migrant parents say religion is important, while only 14% of Swedish-background students say that religion matters to them. Religiosity decreases somewhat over time in both groups, but it does not converge between the student groups. Individuals with migrant parents also have more conservative values on non-married cohabitation, homosexuality, divorce, and abortion.

– All groups become less conservative over time, but the gap between Swedish and those with immigrant backgrounds remains constant. When it comes to attitudes towards gender roles, there is a slightly declining gap over time.

Regarding ethnic identity, researchers have found that it makes a difference where the parents of the children were born. At 16 years of age, almost half of those born in Sweden to foreign-born parents define themselves as having a dual identity, both Swedish and tied to their parents' home country.

As for the psychological adaptation, individuals with migrant parents have the same mental well-being as others and higher self-related health, stronger beliefs in the future, greater life satisfaction, and greater self-confidence than youth with Swedish-born parents.

– The overall picture indicates selective integration. According to our survey, social integration is not as strong as structural integration. Young people from different backgrounds often move within separate social circles, shaped by differing socioeconomic conditions, values, and levels of everyday interaction.

Research presentation: Integrated but not accepted – when fitting in does not make you feel at home

Kristin Dalen, Researcher, FAFO, Norway

Knowledge base for the talk

Researcher Kristin Dalen has extensive experience of research on living conditions, political preferences, and policy development. She has worked as a researcher for the past 20 years.

The main report that Dalen draws on is available at:

- [Hverdagsliv og integrering. Deltakelse, tillit, tilhørighet og diskriminering blant personer med innvandrerbakgrunn](#)

According to classical integration theory, immigrants and their children will experience less discrimination as they become more integrated in society. However, this is not always the case. Studies have shown that children of immigrants are at least as exposed to discrimination, and that several indicators of integration (such as length of residence, generation, socioeconomic status) are associated with more, not less, experienced discrimination and lower belonging and acceptance.

– This is sometimes called the integration paradox. You have been living in a country for a long time, and have achieved good results both in education and on the labour market. And yet you don't feel you belong, and the feelings of discrimination may be higher compared to migrants who have arrived more recently.

Research director **Kristin Dalen** presented results from a survey-based study on how immigrants in Norway perceived their own and their children's Norwegianness, and how they think the rest of society sees them.



More than half of all immigrants consider that they are completely or somewhat Norwegian, regardless of their origin. Migrants from Western countries generally feel that others perceive them as Norwegians, whereas fewer immigrants from Eastern Europe and elsewhere feel that they are perceived as Norwegians.

Regarding immigrants from non-Western countries, there is a notable gap between how Norwegian they feel and how they perceive society views their integration. Of immigrants from non-Western countries, 60% feel Norwegian themselves, and 77% see their children as Norwegian, while only 30% believe that society views them as Norwegian, and 60% think society sees their children as Norwegian.

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But the most striking result comes from children of non-Western immigrants: 73% of these children see themselves as Norwegian, but only 43% believe they are perceived as Norwegians by society.

The gap between how people feel and how they think others feel about them was also reflected in how integrated and accepted the second-generation immigrants feel. This gap becomes even wider among children of immigrants, in alignment with the integration paradox.

– They grew up in Norway and went through the Norwegian educational system. Many of them pursued higher education. Yet, there remains a gap between how they feel that they have integrated into society and how they see others accepting them for who they are, Kristin Dalen says.

Norwegian-born children of immigrants report the largest gap between feeling integrated and being accepted. They experience higher levels of discrimination and negative everyday encounters, particularly in public social settings, and often in the form of subtle status-reducing behaviour.

Those with higher education report more discrimination and negative experiences – and they tend to react more strongly to them.

Research presentation: Effects of an integration policy on the next generation

Hanna Pesola, Research Director, VATT Institute for Economic research

Knowledge base for the talk

Research Director Hanna Pesola's research focuses on labour markets and immigration-related issues. Her ongoing research analyses issues such as the educational choices of immigrants' children and labour-market outcomes of immigrants. Hanna also works in Statistics Finland Research Services on developing research data. She gained her PhD in economics from Aalto University in 2011.

The main research paper that Hanna Pesola builds her speech on is available at:

- [Intergenerational spillovers of integration policies: Evidence from Finland's integration plans | The review of economics and statistics | MIT Press](#)
- [An interview with Hanna Pesola on the Integration Norden website](#)

Interventions aimed at adult immigrants can influence their children, but the benefits of integration policy reforms may only become apparent after an extended period. Research director **Hanna Pesola** from the VATT Institute for Economic Research in Finland emphasises the importance of considering this when evaluating the costs and advantages of potential reforms.

Hanna Pesola highlighted the fact that children of immigrants often struggle in school. There are significant gaps between children of immigrants and children of natives in completing secondary education.

– We know that immigration programmes targeted at adult immigrants are quite positive in how they impact labour-market outcomes. We also know that school-based interventions for immigrant children can have a substantial impact on both educational outcomes and on entry into the labour market. Also, parents' earnings and success in the labour market can influence their children, and job loss can be detrimental to their children's education.



In her presentation, Hanna Pesola highlighted the effects of the 1999 Act on the integration of immigrants and reception of asylum seekers in Finland, which introduced individualised training, subsidised work, and other active labour-market programmes.

– The integration plan was mandatory for recently arrived immigrants who were unemployed or collected welfare benefits on a non-temporary basis.

Hanna Pesola explains that by focusing on a policy implemented many years ago, she and her research colleagues were able to study the children of individuals who constituted the policy's original target group in the late 1990s.

Hanna Pesola presented new statistics on this, showing that the 9th-grade grade point average (GPA) increased among children of immigrants affected by the policy.

– The same children also enrolled in and completed degrees with higher average earnings. Their actual annual earnings at age 31 were higher compared to the children of immigrants who arrived before the mandatory integration plan.

Examining the heterogeneity of the study, Hanna Pesola points out that the majority of the GPA effect is driven primarily by girls, indicating that the intervention received by their parents had a comparatively greater effect on them. There were no substantial differences by country of origin.

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The main takeaway is that an integration reform that targeted adult immigrants also had a positive effect on their children. This is positive and should be considered in future policy development. We cannot say much about the mechanisms. Still, based on our findings, it seems reasonable that parents' exposure to host-country labour markets may support children in making more informed educational choices.

Panel discussion: How identity, policy, and perceived acceptance intersect

Carina Mood, professor, University of Stockholm and The Institute for futures studies in Stockholm, Sweden

Kristin Dalen, Researcher, FAFO, Norway

Hanna Pesola, Research Director, VATT Institute for Economic research

The first panel discussion of the conference began by exploring the dual identity many young people with immigrant parents report, as well as the gap between how they see themselves and how they believe others perceive them.

– I think it is quite clear that visibility, whether it is the religious markers you wear or the colour of your skin, actually drives the discrepancy between how you see yourself and how society perceives you, Kristin Dalen says, reflecting on the research results she presented earlier in the conference.

When evaluating integration policies and their outcomes, the researchers agreed that it is important to analyse outcomes for boys and girls separately, as they may differ. Hanna Pesola, who studied the impact of integration reforms in Finland in the late 1990s and their effects on immigrant children, says the Finnish study mainly found positive results for girls in terms of grade point average. At the same time, a similar study in Denmark also found positive results for boys in terms of reduced crime rates. New research in this field is ongoing in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden.

– There will be some follow-up studies on many interventions that have been seen as positive for adults and are currently being examined in the context of their children. There is ongoing work on this as well as previous results, especially from Denmark. In many of these cases, researchers have found that the intergenerational effects are just as significant, or even larger, for the children, Hanna Pesola says.

Reflecting on the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, the researchers expressed concern that the Nordics have not fully recognised the value of this, which could lead to a brain drain if young people choose to leave.

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Let me make a plea for data; that is the only way to know these things. We need evidence-based policy. We have wonderful register data, but in addition to that, we need to collect subjective data on how people feel continuously, though it is very costly, Carina Mood said.



– We can't be misled into thinking that integration is successful if we only achieve the hard measures; integration is multidimensional and also subjective. Achieving integration goals is always a two-way process, Kristin Dalen added.

The researchers also reflected on the current direction of Nordic integration. Regarding immigration policies, the conditions under which people can stay in the country, Hanna Pesola noted that the Nordics have many common goals. For instance, language skills are seen as necessary.

– We need to consider how to better include people in society. If parents feel they don't belong, it will have consequences for their children. Substantial research shows that making it more difficult to obtain permanent residence or citizenship is generally not beneficial for integration. Therefore, restrictive immigration policies may not incentivise the newly arrived but rather have the opposite effect: they will feel that they will never be able to meet these demands, Hanna Pesola says.

The panel also noted the exchange of good practices and knowledge among the Nordics. The benefit of having similar institutions is that we can learn from each other, and there is strong Nordic collaboration between researchers.

– However, I think we could be better at communicating the research that we do, both to policy makers and to the broad audience, Kristin Dalen concluded.



5. Moving forward

Panel discussion: Empowering young voices

Cecilia Huhtala, Youth Representative, NORDBUK, Nordic Committee for Children and Young People at the Nordic Council of Ministers, Finland

Catalina Negrei, Fryshuset, Sweden

Tawab Qaderzada, Make Some Noise, Finland

Knowledge base for the talk

The three youth participants come from the following organisations. For more information about these programmes, click on the links listed below:

- [Nordic Committee for Children and Young People \(NORDBUK\) | Nordic cooperation](#)
- [Fryshuset, Sweden](#)
- [MakeSomeNoise speakers' network | Deaconess Foundation, Finland](#)

The second panel discussion of the conference involved a youth panel, focusing particularly on issues affecting young immigrants and children of immigrants. One main theme is the feeling among young people that they do not have a say in society's decisions that affect them. The panel also discussed what youth organisations are doing to change this.

– Building trust through long-term commitment and creating a safe space is important. Young people also need tools to build positive relations with other young people. Influence and independence are also important, whereby the young people can advocate for themselves, says **Catalina Negrei**, explaining the Fryshuset way of work as a model that, in general, can work well in interacting with young immigrants. Fryshuset's model creates inclusive, youth-driven spaces where young people can explore their interests and take part in meaningful activities. By involving youth directly in decisions and adapting support to their needs, the model builds confidence and empowers young people to shape their own future.



The discussion emphasised how civil society initiatives can prevent criminal behaviour among the second generation and highlighted the importance of offering second chances.

– If young persons have experienced a difficult life in their home country and then arrive in Finland only to find they can never truly feel part of society, this could lead them into a criminal lifestyle, **Tabaw Quaderzada** noted.

Cecilia Huhtala agreed.

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Having no hope for the future leads to a lack of engagement, because you feel your voice doesn't matter, and on top of it, you feel people are prejudiced against you. Politicians need to take this seriously. Civil society is doing a great job, but we need the resources, Huhtala states.

– The main message we get from political narratives today is that immigrants are a burden to society. The children of migrants don't want to be involved in politics because they feel they don't have a space there, or that politicians only want to involve them to create a false sense of inclusion, Quaderzada adds.

Regarding practical solutions to increase the inclusion of children with migrant parents in public discourse, the panel highlighted the challenges posed by shrinking funding for civil society organisations, which makes this work more difficult. Mentoring programmes and safe spaces remain essential, as well as collaboration at various levels – from school-level to country-level.

– We need to give people hope for the future and make them feel at home. And we need to be curious about each other and non-judgemental. Additionally, young people need role models and representation in youth leadership and politics, Negrei says.

The panel discussion concluded with a focus on the slogan 'nothing about us without us' and how it can be applied to decisions affecting young immigrants and children of immigrants, agreeing that communication is key. Cecilia Huhtala delivered a clear message to policymakers.

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Bring the young people to the table, and ask them directly. It shouldn't be so hard.

– Stop making excuses. If you genuinely prioritise youth participation, you'll find the answers, Catalina Negrei added.



Promising practice:

6. Examples on how to support the integration of families and the next generation

Baba: Strengthening the role of fathers

Adeel Ismail Naseem, Manager for Fathers and Sons Programme, Fund for Social Responsibility, Denmark

Knowledge base for the talk

The Baba programme at the Fund for Social Responsibility in Denmark is a community initiative that engages fathers in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Baba has been active since 2014 and is currently established in 15 areas across Denmark. Approximately 250 volunteers participate in the programme, serving as mentors for other fathers in vulnerable neighbourhoods. Each volunteer is also required to complete an extensive course.

More information about Baba and other programmes conducted by the Fund for Social Responsibility in Denmark is available at:

- [Baba - Socialansvar.dk](https://www.baba-socialansvar.dk)
- [An interview with Baba on the Integration Norden website](#)

Manager **Adeel Ismail Naseem** says Baba focuses on three main areas: strengthening fathers' sense of identity and confidence in their role, building stronger cooperation between fathers and professionals who work with children, and inspiring men to take on the role as an emotional provider.

– The first step for us is to map and understand the problem around fatherhood in the target communities. Before we started Baba, we talked with over a thousand fathers to understand the issues, Naseem said.

The main problem Baba strives to address is the lack of interaction between immigrant fathers and authorities.

– Many fathers distrust authorities such as schools, nurseries, and the local council. Additionally, many lack confidence in their ability to meet their children's needs. Many fathers also lack a culture and space where they can discuss father-related matters. Therefore, we focus on how we can better include fathers and create connections between professionals and fathers.



Distrusting the authorities is common, but the distrust is usually mutual.

– Sometimes the relationship between fathers and authorities resembles a bad marriage, and our role is to be the marriage counsellors, Naseem explained.

Adeel Ismail Naseem emphasises that building involvement and strong relationships with the target group is more important than intercultural competencies. Consider this quote by a Danish healthcare professional: 'It's not because things are difficult that we don't dare – it's because we don't dare that things become difficult'. It captures the situation in which misunderstandings between authorities and immigrant groups can occur.

– If you want to involve a vulnerable or difficult target group, remember that barriers to participation in communities are more universal than cultural, and you can achieve much more with your professional expertise than you think.

In recruiting volunteers, Adeel Ismail Naseem says trust-building is essential. All fathers want the best for their children. To engage fathers requires relational work that calls for courage and the ability to build trust. He sums up Baba's mission in five comprehensive steps:

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Map the problem, trust your expertise, trust people, get out of your comfort zone, and make it relevant.

Involving parents in school and working life: Finnish language and working-life skills for immigrant parents

Sari Svensson, Project Manager, City of Vantaa, Finland

Knowledge base for the talk

Project manager **Sari Svensson** introduced the Vamu project, focusing on parents involved in school and working life in the city of Vantaa, Finland. The project is aimed at immigrant parents with children in school, daycare, or home care. Through the project, parents are guided by a coach, learn Finnish through activities, and get to know the area, local services, Finnish society and culture, and the education system.

More information about Parents involved in school and working life in the city of Vantaa, Finland is available at:

- [Vanhemmat mukaan kouluun ja työelämään | Vantaa](#)

Project manager Sari Svensson introduced the initiative by highlighting its distinctive approach to supporting parents' integration into Finnish society.

– What we do differently is that we offer parents the possibility to participate in early childhood education group activities or primary school teaching once or twice a week. The parents are observing the lessons or can lend a hand to the teacher when needed. This practice has increased their trust in the schooling system, Sari Svensson said.

Within the project, activities for parents are organised four days a week, and the objectives are to strengthen Finnish language skills in everyday and working life, promote inclusion and participation in society, support cooperation between home and school or early childhood education and develop study and work skills, and support parenting. During the 2024–2025 school year, five groups and five coaches were active within the project.



– All in all, we have almost 200 parents in the project, mostly women. In practice, parents are not seen as the target group, but as active participants and experts in their own lives. Language studies go beyond a traditional Finnish course. What we offer is an immersive dive into Finnish society, Sari Svensson explained.

The Vamu project focuses on four main areas for parents: language, hobbies, health and well-being, and culture. In addition to immersive language training, the programme introduces participants to various hobbies, and the groups also visit healthcare professionals and cultural sites, such as libraries, museums, and cultural centres.

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The goal is that the group is a safe place. By influencing parents, especially mothers, to increase their involvement and understanding of society, we are influencing the next generation.

FÖS: A parenting programme in Sweden

*Lina Devgun, Development Manager in Social Sustainability,
County Administrative Board of Stockholm, Sweden*

Knowledge base for the talk

The project Parenting in Sweden seeks to provide parents with information about areas important for family life in Sweden, and to offer opportunities for group discussions. The content is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, research, and Swedish legislation, as well as identified needs among newly arrived parents. It addresses topics such as what it is like to be a family in a new country, parents' rights and responsibilities, gender equality, and how services such as preschools, schools, and healthcare function.

More information about Parenting in Sweden is available at:

- [Föräldraskap i Sverige](#)

– We want to encourage children to go to school and get good grades, and a structured leisure time. We also want to see warm and caring parent–child relationships.

Development manager **Lina Devgun** says parenting support within the project is defined as various interventions, activities, and services aimed at parents to strengthen their parenting skills and the relationship between parent and child. Parenting in Sweden is a community-oriented programme for foreign-born parents with children aged 0–18 years.

– This may involve providing parents with knowledge about children's rights, health, and development. But it can also include strengthening parents' relationships with one another or with their social networks.

The aim of the programme is to provide parents with information on aspects vital to family life in Sweden, and offer opportunities for group discussions on parent–child relationships.



– The main aim is to strengthen the bond between families and society, and in this way, it may differ from other programmes that focus primarily on the relationship between the child and the parent. However, we hope that the programme will positively influence the parent–child relationship and the entire family unit.

The programme consists of five group sessions, focusing on discussions of the following topics: being a family in a new country, children’s leisure time, preschool, school, boys and girls, health and healthcare, parents’ rights and responsibilities, and being a parent of a teenager.

The Parenting in Sweden programme started in 2018. Today, there are over 500 group leaders across the country. The programme can be accessed through social services, preschools and schools, Swedish immigrant courses, the Swedish church, and other non-governmental organisations working with newcomers and families.

Lina Devgun says results are promising, and parents have responded positively to the programme.

– An evaluation of the programme points to increased trust in social services and healthcare, and increased knowledge among parents about where to turn for help and support. More parents responded in accordance with Swedish laws and guidelines to the question about monitoring teenage daughters, and group leaders reported important and engaging discussions within the groups.

Lina Devgun concluded that there is a lack of culturally sensitive programmes aimed at strengthening parents’ resilience early in the resettlement process. There is also a shortage of parenting support programmes delivered in the parents’ native language.

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We have seen that parents trust group leaders who show sensitivity and awareness of cultural beliefs, manners, and traditions. I think that this is something to be aware of if we want to build trust.

Lina Devgun left the audience with a question: 'Are migrants hard to reach or underserved by those in power?'

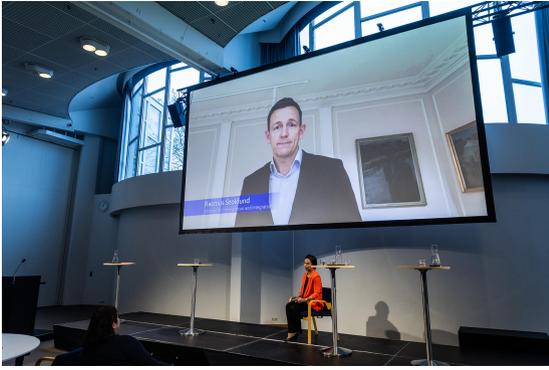


7. Political Closing Statement and 2026 Priorities

The closing session of the conference shifted from research findings to political perspectives, as the Danish minister for Immigration and Integration **Rasmus Stoklund** outlined Denmark's priorities for next year's integration conference. In his remarks, he emphasised the importance of protecting Nordic values such as freedom, equality, democracy, and community, which are challenged in certain ethnic minority communities. Here, cultural values concerning honour is placed above the individual's right to freedom. He also highlighted the importance of sharing experiences on this matter between the Nordic countries, as we can thereby create better solutions to our shared challenges in the years ahead.

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The Nordic cooperation is something I highly value. It provides an opportunity for us to share common challenges and solutions in our informal Nordic tone. During the Danish and Faroese presidency, we will strengthen the Nordic cooperation on integration with a specific focus on combating negative social control and strengthening active citizenship.



Furthermore, minister Rasmus Stoklund thanked Finland and Åland for their presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2025, and for a well-organised conference in Helsinki. Denmark and the Faroe Islands hold the presidency in 2026, and Stoklund welcomed participants to the upcoming conference in Copenhagen.



8. Concluding remarks

The conference explored how integration in the Nordic region is shaped by multiple, interlinked dimensions that unfold across generations. Research presented throughout the conference programme shows that structural indicators such as education and employment tell only a part of the story. Children of immigrants often demonstrate strong motivation, rising educational aspirations, and improved outcomes compared to their parents, yet they continue to face barriers tied to cultural differences, discrimination, and limited social interaction with native-born peers. These gaps between achievement, belonging, and societal acceptance reveal that integration is not solely about measurable progress but also about recognition and inclusion.

Across the Nordic countries, the findings point to a persistent tension: young people with migrant parents increasingly see themselves as part of their societies, while feeling that others do not fully acknowledge them as such. This integration paradox underscores the importance of addressing subjective experiences alongside traditional policy indicators. At the same time, long-term evidence from Finland demonstrates that well-designed integration policies aimed at adults can have substantial positive effects on their children's educational and labour-market trajectories many years later. Integration must therefore be understood as a long-term investment with intergenerational returns.

The discussions also made it clear that political choices will shape the next phase of Nordic integration. Ministers emphasised the need for inclusive policies, stronger data, and continued cooperation across borders. They warned that restrictive approaches risk undermining belonging and participation, while coordinated Nordic efforts can strengthen active citizenship and social cohesion. Taken together, the conference points toward a shared conclusion: successful integration requires not

only equal opportunities, but also a sense of belonging, societal recognition, and policies that support families across generations. A positive conclusion emerges from the research: **the Nordics are already well on their way**. Compared with many European countries, the region performs strongly on key integration indicators, and long-term investments are beginning to show measurable results.

About this publication

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Visit the knowledge bank www.integrationnorden.org for more information.

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