



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Policy frameworks for migrant integration in the Nordic countries 2025 – an overview



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Foreword

This report offers concise and comparative insights into the policy frameworks guiding integration across the Nordic region in 2025. It outlines responsible actors, strategic priorities, and key measures, such as introduction programmes, settlement schemes and language training for different categories of migrants.

A key feature is the [overview table](#) at the end, which summarises the main findings for easy comparison across countries.

We hope this overview will serve as a useful resource for authorities, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, media representatives and other experts. Understanding the policy frameworks provides an essential foundation for mutual learning and collaboration across the Nordic countries. The challenge of ensuring effective integration is a shared one, and a vital part of building a socially sustainable, cohesive, and resilient Nordic region.

Integration policy is a constantly evolving field, shaped by shifting migration patterns, political priorities, and societal needs. To reflect these changes, we aim to update this Nordic overview regularly.

This initiative is a collaboration between the Nordic Welfare Centre and Nordregio, as part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation programme on integration. We sincerely thank the Nordic steering group, consisting of leading civil servants at the national ministries, for their valuable contributions throughout the process with this report. A special thank you to the authors Anna Berlina, Hjördís Guðmundsdóttir and Jonas Kačkus Tybjerg at Nordregio for their excellent work on the report.

For more information on Nordic co-operation on integration and inclusion, please visit the Knowledge bank at www.integrationnorden.org.

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1. Introduction



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

This report offers up-to-date and, where possible, comparable information on how the integration of migrants and refugees is steered, coordinated, and implemented across the Nordic countries. It provides an overview of how responsibilities for integration are distributed among the ministries, agencies, and local-level actors. The report presents a snapshot of strategic policy directions and recent legislative developments, alongside practical insights into the implementation of key integration measures, such as introduction programmes, settlement schemes, and language training in each country.

The data were collected as desktop research conducted between May and September 2025. This included a review of official government websites, legislative texts, policy documents, and reports from relevant national authorities. The findings were complemented and validated through expert interviews and written contributions from each country.

The report is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 introduces the study, key terminology and the methods used to conduct the study.

Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of immigration to the Nordic countries based on data from the [Nordic Statistics database](#).

Chapter 3 provides a country-by-country overview of key actors, strategic directions in integration policy, and specific integration measures, such as introduction programmes, settlement schemes, language education and access to social assistance, financial support, and healthcare and schooling for different categories of migrants. The main focus is on Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, with shorter sections covering the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands.

Chapter 4 summarises the main findings, highlighting similarities and differences in how the Nordic countries address integration. The study concludes with a [comparative summary table](#).

The study was commissioned by the Nordic Welfare Centre and carried out by Nordregio, with significant input from the Steering Group of the Nordic Integration Programme, consisting of representatives from the national ministries responsible for integration.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Asylum seeker: A person who seeks protection from persecution or serious harm in a country other than their own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In the EU context, a third-country national or stateless person who has made an application for protection under the Geneva Refugee Convention and Protocol in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken. In most EU Member States “application for asylum” is understood as a synonym to application for international protection (EMN, 2025).

Beneficiary of temporary protection: A person who enjoys temporary protection under the Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC) uses the term ‘person enjoying temporary protection’ (EMN, 2025).

Civic orientation course: A part of the (national) integration programmes for migrants/third-country nationals residing legally in a host country which aims to convey knowledge and understanding of the fundamental values of the host country, the legal system, the residents’ rights and duties, access to the labour market as well as important knowledge for everyday life which is needed to participate in society (EMN, 2025).

Descendant: Native-born with two foreign-born parents (Nordic Statistics Database, 2025).

Displaced person: A third-country national or stateless person who has had to leave their country or region of origin, or has been evacuated, in particular in response to an appeal by international organisations, and is unable to return in safe and durable conditions because of the situation prevailing in that country (EMN, 2025).

Family migrant: Immigrant who arrives to join family members (EMN, 2025).

Family reunification: The entry into and residence in a country by family members of a third-country national residing lawfully in that EU Member State in order to preserve the family unit, whether the family relationship arose before or after the resident’s entry (EMN, 2025).

Foreign-born: A foreign-born individual with two foreign-born parents (foreign-born with native-born adoptive parents are excluded) (Nordic Statistics Database, 2025).

Immigrant: A person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence (IOM, n.d.).

Integration: The two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities, and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion (IOM, n.d.)

Integration programme: Set of measures put in place by the public actors and/or civil society organisations to support the integration of legally residing migrants/third-country nationals into the host society (EMN, 2025).

Labour migrant: Immigrant who moves from one country to another primarily for the purpose of employment (IOM, n.d.).

Migrant: An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons (IOM, n.d.).

Newly arrived: The term lacks a single, clear legal or statistical definition but generally refers to individuals who have recently immigrated and are eligible for specific integration measures. In Sweden, for example, it typically refers to those granted a residence permit and resettled in a municipality, usually for a period of two to three years while receiving integration support. The term also extends to their family members (EMN Sweden, 2025a).

Reception centre: Allocation with facilities for receiving, processing and attending to the immediate needs of refugees or asylum seekers as they arrive in a country of asylum (EMN, 2025).

Refugee: A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (IOM, n.d.).

Residence permit: is usually issued by a government authority and which evidences the permission a person has to reside and/ or work (IOM, n.d.).

Rest of population: Total population excluding descendants and foreign-born with two foreign-born parents (Nordic Statistics Database, 2025).

Settlement in a municipality: Refers to the formal process of assigning new newly arrived immigrants (typically refugees or those granted residence permits) to a specific municipality for residence. This process, often called municipality placement, makes the local government responsible for providing housing, services, and integration support. For example, in Sweden, this is as mandated by the Settlement Act (2016:38).

Quota refugees: A quantitative restriction on the number of migrants (refugees and other individuals in need of international protection) admitted into a country. The person is admitted as part of a planned and organised programme, often in cooperation with the UNHCR. The number of quota refugees received is determined by the national government (EMN Sweden, 2025a).

2. Key figures on immigration and integration in the Nordic countries



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

This chapter presents a brief overview of immigration and integration in the Nordic countries. It is based on the descriptive statistics and harmonised data from the [Nordic Statistics database](#).

Definitions of migrants vary across the Nordic countries, particularly in terms of generational tracking. To enhance comparability in migration and integration statistics, the Nordic Council of Ministers launched a collaborative initiative involving the Nordic statistical institutes (Østby & Gulbrandsen, 2020, 2022). As a result, the Nordic Statistics database now uses uniform definitions: 'foreign-born' refers to individuals born abroad with two foreign-born parents (excluding those adopted by native-born parents); 'descendants' are those born in the country to two foreign-born parents; and 'the rest of the population' includes all others.

These harmonised definitions allow for meaningful comparisons across countries, revealing significant differences in both migration patterns and the proportion of foreign-born residents (Figure 1). While the share of foreign-born population has grown in all Nordic countries except for Greenland since the 1990s, Sweden has consistently had the highest proportion relative to its total population, whereas Finland has the lowest. In recent years, Iceland and the Åland Islands have also approached Sweden in terms of the share of foreign-born residents, reaching 20% of the population, but their absolute numbers are substantially smaller.

In absolute terms for 2025, the number of foreign-born residents is as follows: Denmark – 862,000, the Faroe Islands – 8,930, Greenland 6,804, Finland – 583,000, Åland 6,453^[1], Iceland 82,000, Norway 1.06 million, and Sweden 2.2 million. To allow for comparison across the Nordic countries, the graphs below illustrate the share of migrants as a percentage of each country's total population.

1. The figure does not include those born in Finland

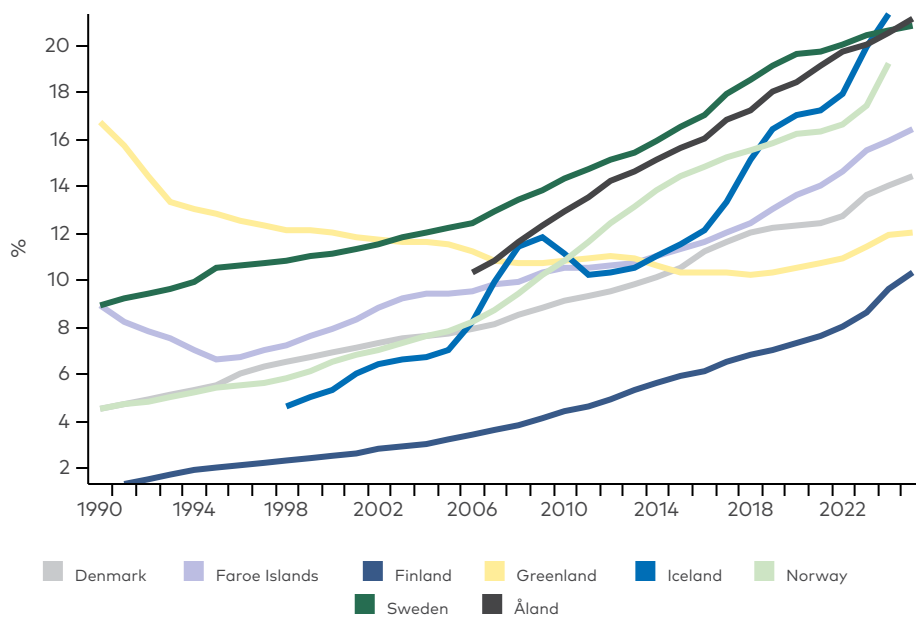


Figure 1. Share of foreign-born individuals in Nordic countries in 1990–2025. Source: Nordic Statistics database, CITI02.

Figure 2 shows the share of foreign-born individuals in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden in 2022, categorised by their length of stay in the country^{[2][1]}. In all four countries, approximately 60% of the foreign-born individuals have lived in the country for more than 8 years. In both Denmark and Sweden, around 40% have resided in the country for over 15 years, indicating long-standing immigration patterns. The proportion of new arrivals, those with 0 to 3 years of residence, is relatively consistent across the countries, ranging from 18% to 20%.

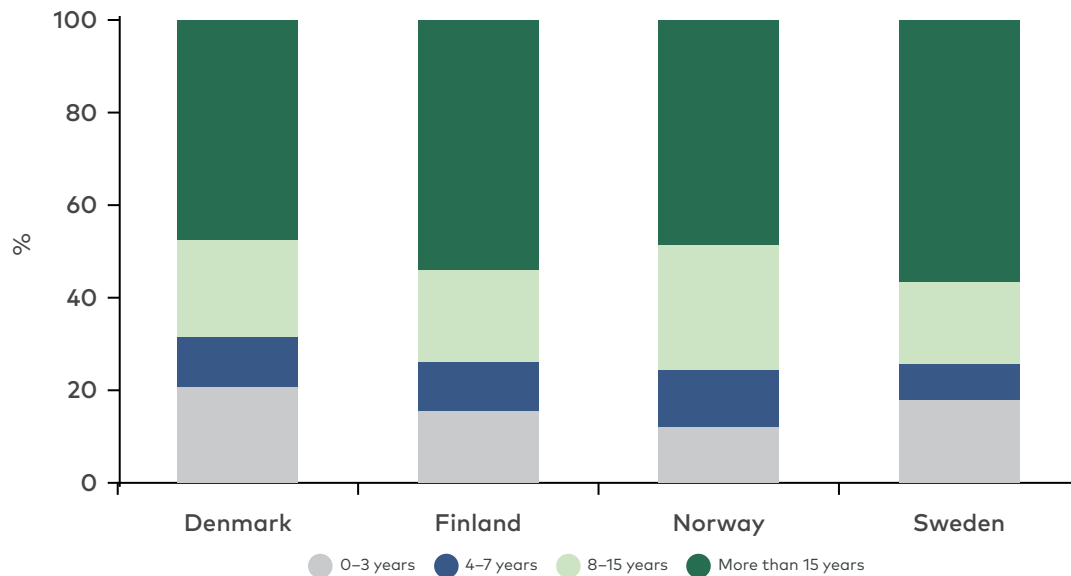


Figure 2. Share of foreign-born individuals in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden by length of stay (time since first date of registered residence), 2022. Source: Nordic Statistics database, MIGR06.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the foreign-born population in 2022 by region of origin for Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. Each pie chart illustrates the composition of the foreign-born population in the respective country by geographic background.

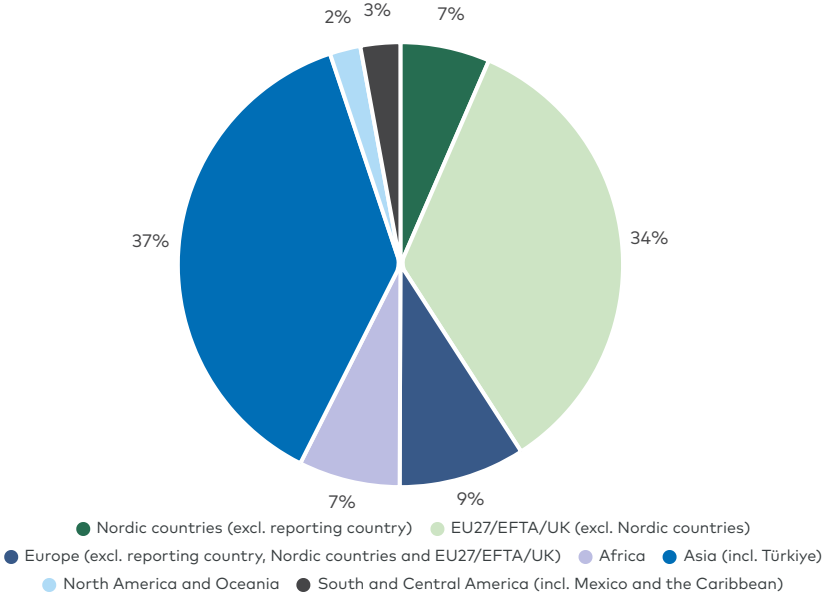
The largest share of foreign-born residents in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland have a background from Asia (including Türkiye), accounting for 43%, 38%, and 33%, respectively. In Norway, this group is the second largest at 31%, while the largest share comes from EU27/EFTA/UK countries, representing 35% of Norway's foreign-born population. This

2. It is important to note that refugees and asylum seekers are not automatically registered as residents in the Nordic countries. As a result, they are not fully captured in this dataset. This is particularly relevant for recent arrivals from Ukraine, who may not yet meet the criteria for population registration and are therefore underrepresented in the data. This is also important to consider in interpreting other figures.

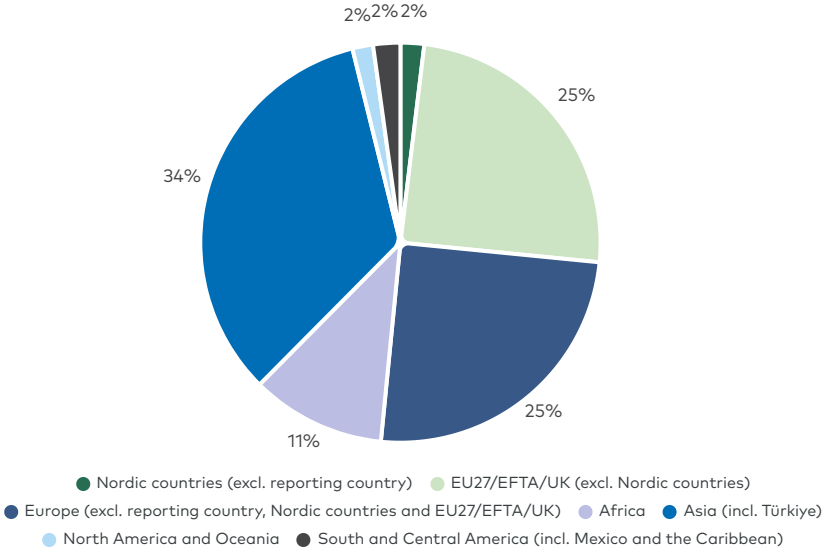
category also forms the second-largest group in Denmark (34%), Finland (24%), and Sweden (19%).

Foreign-born from other European countries outside the EU/EFTA and Nordic regions make up 24% in Finland, 11% in Sweden, 9% in Denmark, and 8% in Norway. Other notable groups include migrants from Africa and those from other Nordic countries, who together account for a significant share of the foreign-born populations across the Nordic region.

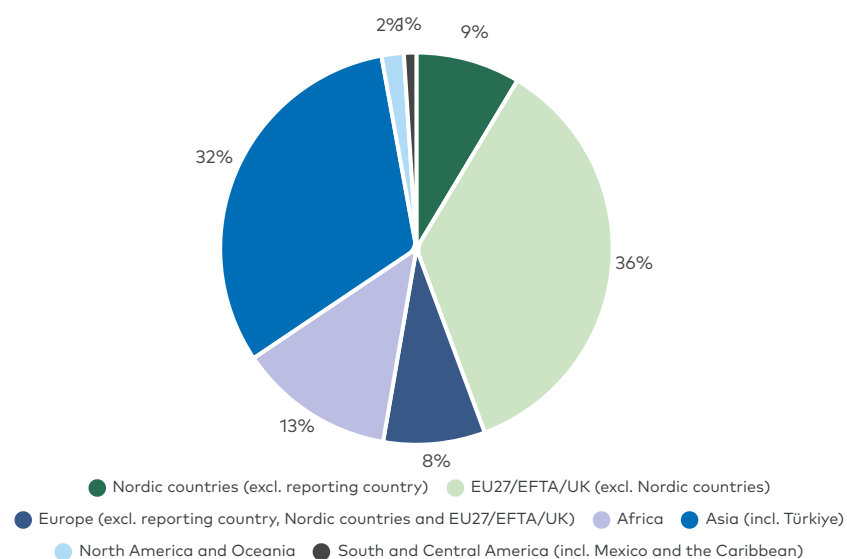
Denmark



Finland



Norway



Sweden

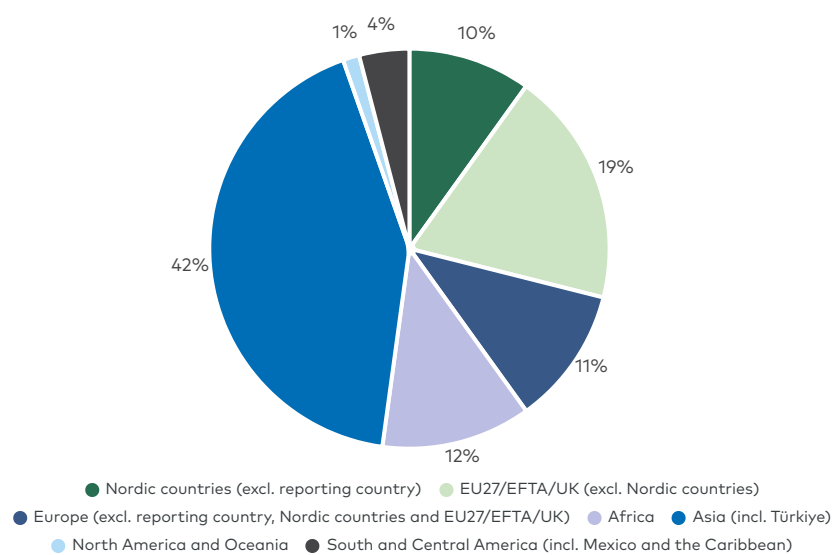


Figure 3. Share of foreign-born individuals in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden by region of origin, 2022. In the case of Denmark, individuals born in Greenland and the Faroe Islands are recorded as Danish-born. Source: Nordic Statistics Database, MIGR06.

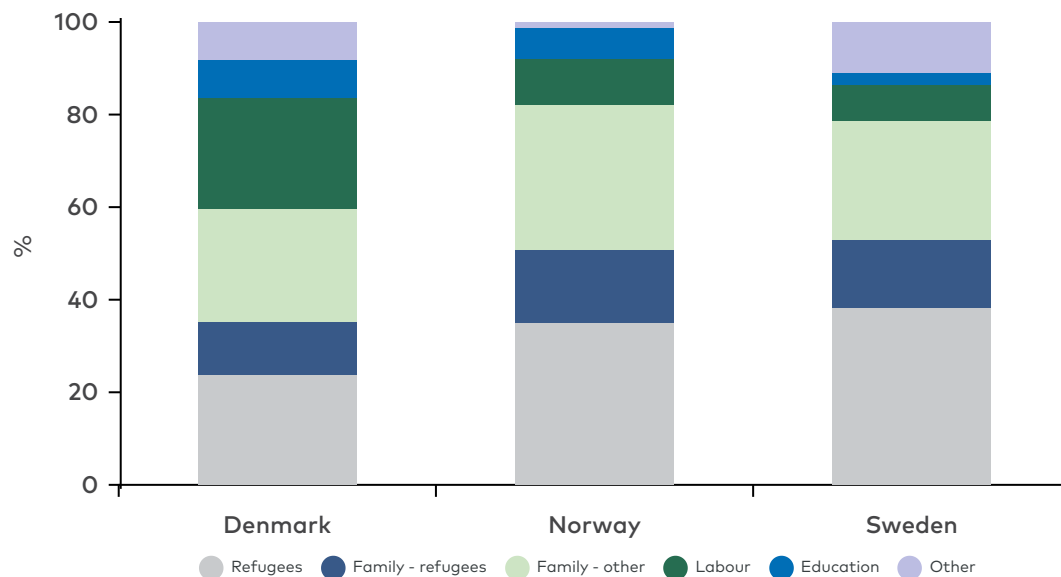


Figure 4. Reason for residence permit among non-EU immigrants in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, 2022. Source: Nordic Statistics database, MIGR07.

In 2022, refugee status accounted for nearly 40% of all residence permits issued to non-EU migrants in Norway and Sweden since 1997, which was the largest share among permit types (Figure 4). In Denmark, by contrast, labour migration and family reunification (excluding refugee-related cases) together made up the majority of residence permits. These differences reflect both historical migration patterns and variations in national immigration policies, particularly with regard to humanitarian protection and labour migration.

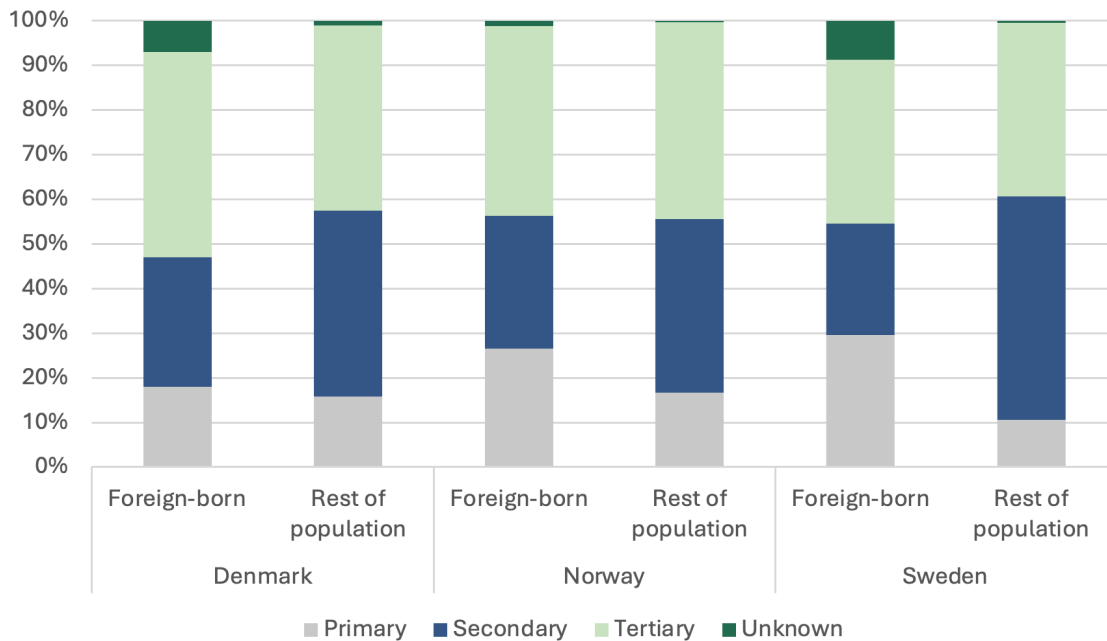


Figure 5. Educational attainment in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden by level of education and population group (aged 25-64 years) among registered resident population. The figure includes all education – both received abroad and in the country of destination. Source: Nordic Statistics database, EDUC32.

Educational attainment is associated with individuals' opportunities for labour market participation, social mobility, and broader integration outcomes (Giotis et al., 2025). Among the foreign-born population, a higher proportion have only primary education, particularly in Norway and Sweden, where nearly over 25% fall into this category, compared to just 10–15% among the rest of the population^[3] (Figure 5). At the same time, the share of individuals with tertiary education is higher among the foreign-born than the rest of the population in Denmark, while in Norway and Sweden, the proportion with tertiary education is roughly equal across both groups. This diversity partly reflects differences in migration channels, with humanitarian migration traditionally playing a larger role in Sweden, and labour migration being more prominent in Denmark.

3. 'Rest of the population' refers to individuals with one or both parents born in the reporting country.

A closer look at the enrolment of foreign-born individuals in tertiary education reveals both cross-country differences and changes over time (Figure 6). Denmark stands out with the highest share of foreign-born young people (aged 16–29) enrolled in tertiary education, ranging from 20% in 2016 to around 19% in 2021, despite a gradual decline in recent years. In contrast, Sweden has consistently reported the lowest enrolment rates throughout the period. Norway saw a notable increase in enrolment, particularly between 2019 and 2020, indicating improved access to or uptake of tertiary education among young foreign-born individuals.

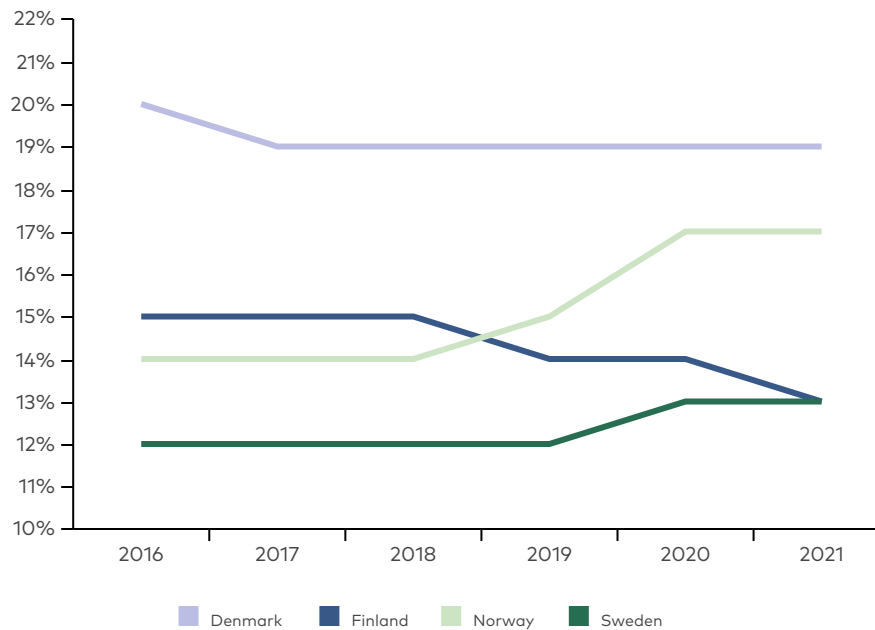


Figure 6. Foreign-born individuals with more than two years of residence enrolled in tertiary education (ISCED 5-8), aged 16-29 years. Source: Nordic Statistics database, EDUC30.

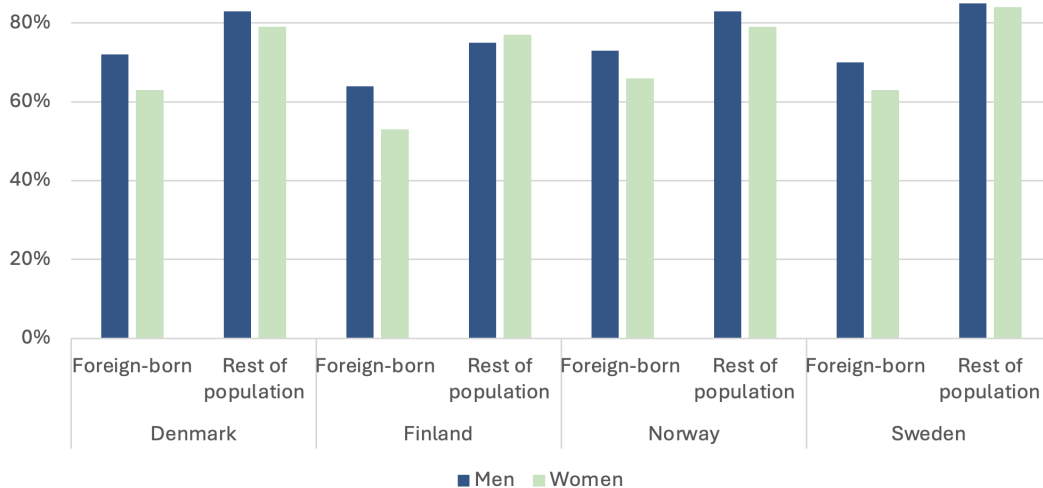


Figure 7. Employment rate by sex and background in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, 2021 (aged 20-64 years). Source: Nordic Statistics database, WORK30.

There is a substantial employment gap between foreign-born individuals and the rest of the population, particularly for women (Figure 7). Foreign-born men have consistently lower employment rates than native-born men in all four countries, with the widest gap in Sweden (85% compared to 70% in the three other countries). Foreign-born women have the lowest employment rates across all groups in every country. The disparity is especially notable in Finland and Sweden, where their employment rates are 24 and 21 percentage points lower than among native-born women, respectively. In Finland, only 53% of foreign-born women were employed. The smallest employment gaps between foreign-born and native-born individuals are found in Norway for women and Denmark for men.

'Length of stay' is also associated with employment rates across all countries: both foreign-born men and women show higher employment rates the longer they have lived in the country (Figure 8). In addition, the gender gap in employment generally narrows over time, with those residing for more than 15 years showing the smallest gaps and, in many cases, the highest overall employment rates among foreign-born individuals.

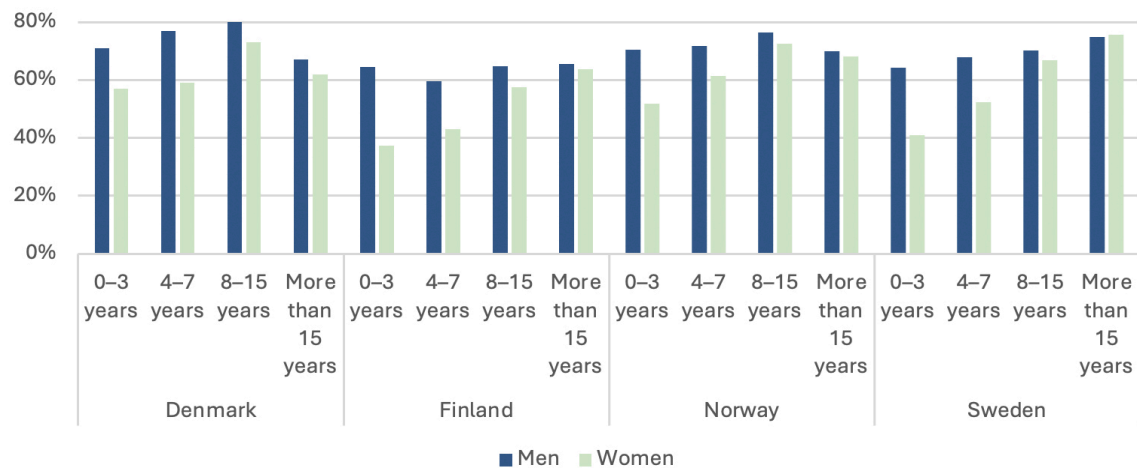


Figure 8. Employment rate of foreign-born individuals by sex and length of stay in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, 2021 (aged 20–64 years). Source: Nordic Statistics Database, WORK31.

3. Country-specific overview

Denmark



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

Governance model and responsible actors

The Danish integration governance model is divided into the national level and the municipal level. At the national level, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration is the central authority, overseeing Denmark's integration policies (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, n.d.-b).

Danish integration policies are governed primarily by the Integration Act ([LBK nr 1146 af 22/06/2020](#)), the Aliens Act ([LBK nr.1009 af 02/09/2024](#)), the Repatriation Act ([LBK nr 1021 af 27/08/2024](#)), the Special Act on temporary residence permit granted to people who were displaced from Ukraine ([LBK nr 324 af 16/03/2022](#)) and the following amendments that have significant changes to these acts. The Integration Act is the main document guiding the integration policies in Denmark. The Act was originally passed in 1998 and was most recently amended in 2024 and 2025. The Aliens Act ([LBK nr.1009 af 02/09/2024](#)) regulates the entry, residence, and family reunification in Denmark while the Repatriation Act ([LBK nr 1021 af 27/08/2024](#)) supports the repatriation of persons and provides individuals with the basis for considering and possibilities of deciding to repatriate.

The Ministry of Immigration and Integration is responsible for managing the legal framework, including housing, the Introduction Programme, employment, assigning refugees to municipalities and allocating funding. The Ministry of Immigration and Integration is also responsible for coordinating early preventive measures against radicalisation and honour-related conflicts. The Ministry operates through the Danish Immigration Service, the Danish Return Agency, and the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI). Each of the three authorities have their own responsibilities and roles.

The Danish Immigration Service is responsible for handling cases of foreigners' right to visit and stay in Denmark; the Danish Return Agency is responsible for the return of immigrants who do not possess a legal right to stay in Denmark, ensures specific accommodation for these migrants, and offers advice on, for example, repatriation support. SIRI is in charge of processing work and residence applications from non-EU/EEA citizens who wish to study or work in Denmark, and also ensures EU/EEA citizens easy access to the country and supports the municipal level in their integration tasks (Hjemrejsestyrelsen, n.d.; SIRI, n.d.; Udlændingestyrelsen, n.d.).

Municipalities function as the executive authorities (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). The Integration Act delineates the municipal responsibilities, including finding housing, conducting health evaluation, and carrying out the Introduction Programme for refugees, which involves labour market activation measures and Danish language lessons (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

The municipal council can decide to set up an Integration Council, which advises the municipal council on issues regarding local integration efforts. In addition, the Minister of Immigration and Integration appoints representation in the National Integration Council, which gives advice to the Minister on issues pertaining to the integration efforts in Denmark (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). However, the Danish government has proposed closing the National Integration Council as of June, 2026 (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2025c).

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

In 2019, the Danish integration policies underwent a 'paradigm shift' in adopting a stricter approach (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2019). Instead of pursuing integration of migrants, as before, the new policy strategy placed greater emphasis on the return of migrants as soon as internal and international law allow it.

Higher requirements were also introduced for labour market integration, language proficiency, and participation in Danish social life in the Act on Active Social Policy ([LOV nr 1654 af 30/12/2024](#)). Following amendments to the key legislation that came into force in 2025, all references to 'Self-support and Return Programme or Introduction Programme' in these laws were replaced with 'Introduction Programme' (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2024b). Some target groups are nevertheless still governed by the Self-support and Return Programme (see section describing the integration programmes).

The Danish integration policy seeks to integrate the migrants into the Danish labour market to ensure self-sufficiency. For instance, as of January 1, 2025, refugees who receive benefits, are obliged to participate in employment-related activities for 37 hours per week (standard working week in Denmark) in an internship, a wage subsidy job, community service, or upskilling (Styrelsen for International Rekruttering og Integration, 2025). In addition, the Danish integration policy framework seeks to limit the presence of so-called parallel societies – migrant communities that remain disconnected from Danish society.

One strategy for limiting the concentration of migrants in migrant-dense environments is a specific housing dispersal policy, otherwise called the Ghetto Package and administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing. The policy was laid out in a strategy, published in 2018, called 'One Denmark without parallel societies. No ghettos by 2030'. As the name implies, its main objective is to disperse all ghettos across Denmark by 2030 (Regeringen, 2018). The strategy targets areas which have predominantly non-Western migrants as residents. It is divided into five propositions: (1) physical demolition and transformation of vulnerable neighbourhoods, (2) stricter control of who can live in these areas, (3) increased policing and stiffer punishment to fight crime and increase safety, (4) ensuring a good start of life for all children, and (5) the Government's continuous monitoring and updating of activities against parallel societies (Regeringen, 2018).

Protection seekers from Ukraine

Denmark is not legally bound by the Council of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) due to its opt-out of certain EU policies. However, as a reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Denmark created a Special Act for displaced persons from Ukraine, which, after several extensions, is valid until March 2027 (European Commission, 2022, 2024; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2025b). The act, very similar to the TPD, was adopted shortly after the activation of the EU directive (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022).

In Denmark, only individuals who meet specific criteria can be granted a temporary residence permit under the Special Act. These include Ukrainian citizens who resided in Ukraine before 1 February 2022, refugees who benefited from international protection holding a residence permit in Ukraine, Ukrainian citizens residing in Denmark on that date, as well as their close family members (European Commission, 2022; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022, 2023b).

Since the Special Act grants Ukrainians a temporary residence permit, they are not considered refugees under the Aliens Act. As other refugees and migrants, Ukrainians receive a personal identity number (CPR) when they are allocated a municipality of residence. While allocation times vary on a case-by-case basis, they are generally shorter for displaced people from Ukraine than for regular refugees, since they are not classified as refugees and the criteria applied to them are more specific (Personal communications, 2025).

Like other refugees, Ukrainians with a temporary residence permit and a personal identity number (CPR) under the Special Act gain the right to work, school, vocational education, basic integration education, access to healthcare services, social benefits, access to the Self-support and Return Programme, and temporary accommodation. They are governed by the Law on Temporary Residence Permit for Persons Displaced from Ukraine ([LOV nr 324 af 16/03/2022](#)) (European Commission, 2022; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022).

Integration or establishment programmes

In the past years, there has been a significant number of amendments to the Integration Act, outlining the integration programmes, their content and target groups. Previously, there was a distinction between the Self-support and Return Programme and the Introduction Programme. Following the most recent changes, the main integration programme is now referred to simply as the Introduction Programme. However, displaced persons from Ukraine covered by the Special Act remain under the former framework of the Self-support and Return Programme (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2024b).

As of 1 January 2025, there are three types of programmes offered to newcomers to Denmark: (1) the Introduction Programme (*introduktionsprogram*) for refugees and reunified family, (2) the Self-support and Return Programme (*selvforsørgelses- og hjemrejseprogram*) for displaced people from Ukraine under the Special Act, and (3) the Introduction Course (*Introduktionsforløb*) for immigrants and accompanying family members (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

The municipalities have primary responsibility for the practical implementation of the programmes, with some aspects of the programmes (such as social benefits and some parts of the education) taken up by the Ministry of Employment or companies where the refugees carry out their working duties. Within a month of assuming responsibility for a refugee or displaced person from Ukraine, the municipality must sign a contract with them that outlines the duties of the integration programme, including the aim to find a job within a year, as well as planned activities, goals, and the scope of educational offers (KL, 2025; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

The purpose of the Introduction Programme is for the refugees and reunified family members who are above the age of 18 to achieve ordinary employment and full or at least partial self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. They should embark on the Introduction Programme no later than a month after a municipality has taken over the responsibility for the foreign national (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). If not achieved within one year, the programme can be extended for up to five years (Styrelsen for International Rekruttering og Integration, 2024; Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

The Introduction Programme contains both monetary benefits (now under the Ministry of Employment, see section on social assistance and financial support) and employment-oriented measures, as well as Danish language education (see section on language training) (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). The programme distinguishes between refugees and reunified family migrants. However, participation is mandatory for both groups if they receive monetary benefits. If not, the participation is voluntary (Personal communications, 2025).

As of 2025, the Introduction Programme also includes a work obligation requiring refugees who do not meet the residency or employment requirements and receive benefits to work 37 hours per week (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2024b). For this target

group, the programme consists of a continuous effort combining internships, employment with wage subsidy, ordinary wage employment, or other work (e.g., community service).

These efforts are also supported by Danish language education up to 15 hours per week, and possible employment guidance. The designated 37 hours include actual working hours, time spent on Danish education, job search away from home, and travel times.

Displaced persons from Ukraine under the Special Act are covered by the Self-support and Return Programme, which differs slightly from the main Introduction Programme. They are not subject to work obligation and other changes made to the Introduction Programme after 2025 that apply to refugees and reunified family. As with the previous rules on the Self-support and Return Programme, displaced people from Ukraine are required to participate in Danish language education, receive employment-oriented offers (e.g., internships), averaging 15 hours per week, as well as guidance, and upskilling (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2024b; Styrelsen for International Rekruttering og Integration, 2024).

In addition to the programmes and their variations above, an Introduction Course is also offered to immigrants (foreign nationals, job immigrants, etc.) (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). As per the Integration Act, the course is offered to immigrants above 18 years of age, primarily focusing on Danish language education. The Introduction Course is distinct from the Introduction Programme. Immigrants participating in the Introduction Course are not subject to strict employment requirements and benefit frameworks unlike refugees in the Introduction Programme. The course begins as early as possible – and no later than a month after the municipality registers the immigrant as having moved to the municipality in the Civil Registration System (CPR).

The course takes a maximum of three years and should be tailored to the immigrant's purpose of staying in Denmark. The Introduction Course includes Danish language education (lasts up to five years) and employment-related offers, if the immigrant wishes to receive them. Municipalities may also fund workplace 'supervisors' to help immigrants navigate the Danish labour market (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). While the municipality must offer the Introduction Course (Danish education and employment offers), immigrants can choose to opt out.

It is also important to highlight the basic integration education (IGU) offered to refugees and reunified family migrants in Denmark, although it is not formally part of the integration programme. The programme is a part of the employment condition between the employer and the refugee and is therefore beyond municipal responsibility. The two-year training aims to ensure work and upskilling opportunities and also includes a paid internship. IGU can be taken by refugees and any reunified family members (including from Ukraine and those who assisted the Danish forces in Afghanistan), who are between 18 and under 50 years of age and have not been registered in Denmark for longer than 20 years (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, n.d.-a).

Language training

The municipalities are responsible for offering Danish language education to newly arrived adult foreigners with a temporary residence permit or another permanent legal stay in Denmark. All categories of migrants are eligible to participate in such language courses for up to five years (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

Danish language education is mandatory for refugees and reunified family holding a temporary residence permit as part of their programme (Fabricius & Westerberg, 2023). The education is provided in most cases free of charge and should be offered no later than a month after a residence permit is issued and the immigrant has arrived at the assigned municipality. In some instances, a self-providing migrant will have to pay a deposit which is returned upon completion of every module and the final exam (Styrelsen for International Rekruttering og Integration, n.d.)

If the requirement to attend language classes is not upheld by the refugee or a reunified family migrant receiving social benefits, cash benefits are reduced (OECD, 2021a). The municipalities cover the costs of Danish language education. However, the state reimburses the municipalities 50% of expenses in connection with foreigners' participation in the programme, including Danish language education. In addition, municipalities can receive a financial subsidy when a foreigner successfully completes the Danish language education.

Settlement process

Before receiving a temporary residence permit and a decision of placement at a municipality, asylum seekers and displaced persons from Ukraine are required to live in asylum centres. In some cases, they are allowed to reside privately with a spouse at their own residence, friends, or family. Generally, after asylum seekers arrive, they are placed at reception centres and are later transferred to accommodation centres and, if a residence permit is denied, to return centres (Ny i Danmark, 2023). While Ukrainians are not considered regular refugees, they are still placed at asylum centres until the decision for their stay is taken (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2022). Relocation times vary, but municipalities usually take responsibility for refugees within two months, and for Ukrainians within 15 working days (KL, 2025).

After receiving a residence permit, newly arrived refugees are placed in municipalities on the basis of a mandatory national quota system, to ensure an equal geographic distribution of refugees. They receive a personal identity number (CPR) and must reside in the assigned municipality for the duration of the Introduction Programme (up to five years). On arrival at the municipality, they are assigned temporary housing in, for example, dormitories, rooms, or in rare cases, apartments. It is the refugee's responsibility to find permanent housing themselves afterwards. Both in temporary housing and later, the refugees pay the rent themselves, but a municipal rent cap is ensured in temporary housing. The decision of the Danish Immigration Services is binding and cannot be appealed to other institutions. Refugees can, however, apply to move to a different

municipality and continue their programme and receive social benefits there if this is accepted by the new municipality. According to the Integration Act, the municipality has to accept the application if there are compelling circumstances for such relocation (medical treatment, work, etc.) (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, n.d.-c).

The municipality must provide temporary housing for a refugee referred to the municipality by the Danish Immigration Service. If the rent exceeds half of the household's income, full housing support for the refugee cannot be denied (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020).

Social assistance and financial support

In some instances, refugees can receive certain social financial benefits (*kontanthjælp*) (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2024a). For instance, if a person cannot provide for themselves or their family (and are not supported by others), they can receive the social financial benefits. The amounts of such benefits vary depending on the social status of the refugee (and their family). For instance, as of 2025, persons (such as refugees) who have not lived in the Kingdom of Denmark (Denmark, Faroe Islands, or Greenland) for nine years within the past ten years, receive the minimum allowance of DKK 6,789 per month, if they do not meet an employment requirement and a residence requirement (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025b).

It should be noted, however, that for some immigrants not receiving social benefit is a prerequisite to obtaining a permanent residence permit (Ny i Danmark, 2025a). There is a variety of instances where different amounts of social benefits are additionally allocated, based on living circumstances, age, commitments, etc. (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2025a, 2025b). Migrants can also receive such welfare support as housing allowance, child benefits, and subsidised or free childcare (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2019; borger.dk, n.d.).

The refugees' and reunified family migrants' duties are listed in a contract that is signed with the municipality at the beginning of their stay. The contract outlines an integration plan for the migrant in terms of activities that would ensure a job is acquired within a year (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2020). Failure to uphold the contract's clauses on participation in activities or refusal of work results in sanctions such as reduced or suspended financial benefits.

While waiting for a residence permit, asylum seekers receive basic allowance that is intended to cover expenses for food, personal hygiene, etc. The basic allowance is paid out to those asylum seekers who do not receive free meals at the asylum centres. The basic daily allowance for an asylum seeker over 18 years of age is DKK 60,51. However, if one lives with a partner at the asylum centre, the amount is DKK 47,91 per adult per day (Ny i Danmark, 2024).

Healthcare and schooling

Refugees and other migrants have full access to the public healthcare on the same terms as Danish citizens. For children, it is compulsory to receive education, which is also free of charge.

The Faroe Islands

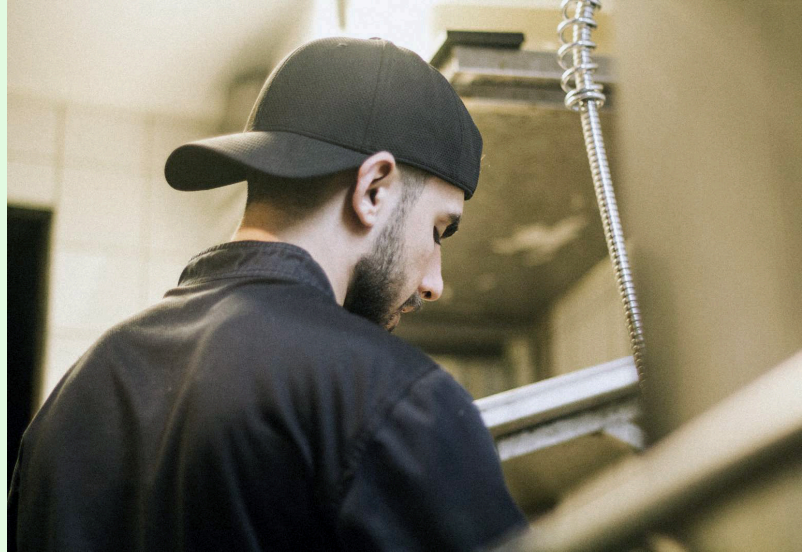


Image: Isabella Lindblom / norden.org*

The Faroe Islands, a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, is responsible for both immigration and integration processes. The responsibility of processing permit applications started on 1 September, 2024, and the new Integration Act came into effect on 1 July 2025 (New to Denmark, 2024) (Personal communications, 2025).

Working through the Immigration Office and operating under the Ministry of Justice, the Integration Authority is the main body responsible for coordinating immigration and integration efforts (Útlendingastovan, n.d.). It conducts mandatory integration consultations with immigrants (Løgmlaráðið, 2024) and provides information on migrants' rights and responsibilities. The Immigration Office also promotes integration by collaborating with other actors, including municipalities, public authorities, and institutions. By 1 of July 2026, each municipality – either individually or in co-operation with others – must appoint an integration coordinator tasked with organising regular meetings with immigrants and coordinating these efforts with the Immigration Office (Løgmlaráðið, 2024). Municipalities are generally in charge of providing local services and social integration measures.

The Faroese national [Integration Act](#) was adopted in 2024 and entered into force on 1 July 2025, with additional provisions taking effect on 1 January and 1 July 2026 (Løgmlaráðið, 2024). These include a civic orientation course for newcomers, a course on parenthood, a health visit for children by a nurse, and Faroese language courses for adults and children of different ages (Ministry of Justice, 2024a) (Personal communications, 2025). The Act also places special emphasis on migrants with children under 18, requiring them to attend an integration consultation shortly after arrival, regardless of their permit type. This is the first formal integration law of the Faroe Islands formerly characterised by uncoordinated solutions.

With an increasing arrival of migrants and limited human resources in the Faroe Islands, the Integration Act introduced a comprehensive framework outlining migrant rights and responsibilities, defining migrant categories, and establishing the Integration Authority. It also outlines the roles of municipalities in the integration process (Løgmlaráðið, 2024). The Act aims to provide consistent information to migrants, promote language acquisition and knowledge of Faroese culture and society, support labour market integration, and improve the well-being of newcomers.

The Integration Act divides migrants into three categories: (1) labour migrants and accompanying family members who have a residence permit for employment purposes, (2) individuals who have a residence permit under the rules on family reunification, and (3) displaced persons from Ukraine, despite the Faroe Islands not being bound by the European Temporary Protection Directive, TPD (Løgmlaráðið, 2024). Protection seekers from Ukraine are legally defined in the same way as in Denmark (see section about Denmark).

All migrants who apply for a permanent residence permit in the Faroe Islands are required to have participated in one integration consultation. However, follow-up consultations are now considered for those who express the need for them (Personal communications, 2025). In addition, a course in Faroese as a second language is offered (700–1,200 hours depending on language proficiency), and a civic orientation course is also planned as of 2025. All courses are offered free of charge (Løgmlaráðið, 2024).

Greenland



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark but has wide-ranging autonomy, which was extended in 2009. However, this does not include foreign and security policy or currency policy (Norden, 2025). Because Greenland has received relatively few migrants, integration is not explicitly defined within the responsibilities of the Greenlandic government, and no dedicated integration legislation currently exists (Government of Greenland, 2025a). However, responsibilities for the different parts of the integration process are shared by Naalakkersuisut (Government of Greenland); the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and the Interior; the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Church; and local municipalities.

Although Greenland has not adopted an Integration Act, there are various political and legislative measures in place that address integration indirectly. As a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, immigration and asylum policies remain primarily under Danish jurisdiction (Statsministeriet, 2009). Greenland and Denmark plan to strengthen co-operation in the area of immigration and integration in response to a growing number of foreign nationals moving to Greenland (Government of Greenland, 2025b). Integration efforts in Greenland are generally managed by local authorities through existing public services, as the self-government holds responsibility for housing, education, and social services (Schultz-Nielsen, 2021).

Labour market participation is the cornerstone of the integration process in Greenland. Most people move to Greenland in connection with specific employment relationships. In many cases, integration therefore takes place through the workplace connection. To date, there has been only one case where asylum was granted in Greenland (Personal communications, 2025).

The Aliens Act of Denmark (Udlændingeloven) does not automatically apply to Greenland (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2024). However, in 2001, the Danish Aliens Act ([LBK nr.1009 af 02/09/2024](#)) was extended to Greenland with specific amendments to accommodate local circumstances (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2001). Further amendments were made in 2023 to address the application of the Schengen Convention in Greenland (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2023a). According to the Self-Governing Act, any Danish law that applies directly to Greenland, including the Aliens Act, must be approved by the Greenlandic Parliament. Therefore, the latest amendments to

the Aliens Act, outlined in 2023, came into force in 2025 (Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet, 2025a).

A more formal integration is described primarily through a linguistic focus. The most recent coalition agreement among the ruling parties states that Greenlandic is the national language and outlines the government's commitment to strengthening the integration of immigrants (Demokraatit, Inuit Ataqatigiit, Siumut and Atassut, 2024). Language integration is further outlined in the Inatsisartut Act on Language Policy, which highlights that linguistic integration is directed towards (1) those who need to learn Greenlandic, (2) those who need to learn Danish or English, and (3) those needing an introduction to Greenlandic culture, history, and social conditions (Government of Greenland, 2010).

Future priorities for immigrant integration in Greenland include continued government efforts to support immigrants settling in the country. According to the coalition agreement between the ruling parties, plans are also underway to develop technologies that strengthen the use of the Greenlandic language, particularly within the labour market. Greenland remains committed to promoting more active use of Greenlandic in everyday life, especially in legal and economic contexts, while acknowledging that, for the foreseeable future, Danish will continue to play a significant role in the public sphere, with translations provided into Greenlandic (Demokraatit, Inuit Ataqatigiit, Siumut and Atassut, 2024).

Finland



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

Governance model and responsible bodies

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM) is in charge of Finland's national integration policy, and is responsible for planning, development, and coordination with other policy sectors and relevant ministries. TEM coordinates the preparation of a national integration programme every four years. The ministry also leads the national planning of referral to municipalities (placement of quota refugees). Other ministries support integration within their own administrative areas (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023; TEM, n.d.).

KEHA Centre is a national government agency responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of integration efforts, supporting skills development and providing legal advice on the implementation of the Integration Act at the national level (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023).

Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland is a national government agency tasked with managing and providing basic social security benefits to residents with a valid residence permit. Its support covers a wide range of life situations, including unemployment, illness, old age, family life, and disability (Kela, 2025).

At the regional level, ELY Centres (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment) are responsible for coordinating and monitoring integration and settlement services, and ensuring their availability, quality, and effectiveness for municipal integration clients who are not registered as jobseekers. ELY Centres support and advise municipalities and well-being services counties in matters related to the promotion of integration, and also handle regional referrals (assigning immigrants to municipalities) in collaboration with municipalities, well-being services counties, and other relevant authorities (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023).

At the beginning of 2025, municipalities assumed the main responsibility for promoting integration and organising employment services under the new Integration Act. Employment services, previously managed by state TE Offices (Employment and Economic Development Offices), have been transferred to municipalities and municipal co-management areas. At present, 45 employment areas provide these services, including information, guidance, counselling, coaching, labour market training, and transition

security training (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023; TEM, n.d.). Furthermore, municipalities are responsible for developing local integration programmes and preparing individual integration plans and embedding integration into broader municipal strategies (Integration.fi, n.d.-f). In addition, they provide primary and secondary education, and ensure service accessibility (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023).

Since 2023, well-being services counties have taken over the responsibility for integration within health and social services. Finland's 21 well-being services counties provide public healthcare, social welfare, and rescue services for all residents – a responsibility previously held by municipalities (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-b). They also support refugee reception in their regions, for example by establishing family group homes or other residential units for unaccompanied children and youth, and in some cases contribute to municipal integration programmes (Integration.fi, n.d.-c).

In its integration programme, the Finnish government highlights the important role of the third sector in integration. These organisations, including those led by immigrants, complement public services by offering counselling, language training, and orientation activities that support settlement. Some civil society organisations (CSOs) also act as service providers in the wider migration field, for example by operating reception centres.

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration ([681/2023](#)) (The Integration Act) entered into force in 2025 and repealed the previous Act of the same name. It aims to strengthen immigrants' employment, capacity to work and language skills, and to increase their participation in society, as well as their health and well-being. The Act also emphasises equality, non-discrimination, and positive interaction between different population groups (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023; Integration.fi, n.d.-h).

Other important acts include the Social Assistance Act, the Reception Act, and the Aliens Act. The Social Assistance Act ([1412/1997](#)) regulates last-resort financial assistance under social welfare. It defines eligibility, rights, and types of social assistance. The Reception Act ([746/2011](#)) governs the Finnish reception system and the support provided to applicants for international protection, persons under temporary protection, and victims of human trafficking. The Aliens Act ([301/2004](#)) establishes the legal framework for immigration, managed migration, and the provision of international protection. It applies to aliens' entry into, exit from, and residence and work in Finland.

The national integration programme, adopted every four years, sets the government's strategic goals for integration. According to the Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government and Government Integration Programme 2024–2027, the government aims to increase immigrants' responsibility for their own integration, reduce the state's financial burden, and make the system more obligation-focused rather than rights-based (Bruun, 2025). Key objectives for integration during the current term are: (1) Integration in Finland through work, (2) Immigrants to take more responsibility for their integration with an increased focus on their obligations, (3) Combating the emergence of parallel societies, and (4) Integration is in the interests of the whole family. The programme sets out 32 measures to support these goals (Bruun, 2025).

As part of the reform by the present government, the main responsibility for integration promotion and organising employment services is transferred from central government to municipalities. The Integration Programme outlines specific measures such as reductions in certain allocations and individual benefits. These include increased use of social assistance and labour market support cuts to sanction immigrants who fail to meet integration requirements. In autumn 2023, Kela began reducing the basic component of social assistance, thereby lowering individual benefit payments. In addition, the duration that state compensation is paid to municipalities and welfare areas for integration services (e.g., assessments, plans, interpretation) has been cut: from four to three years for quota refugees, and from three to two years for other refugees, including those under temporary protection. Additionally, support for unaccompanied minors transitioning to adulthood now ends at age 23 (Statsrådet, 2024).

According to the Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government, a reform of integration services will follow (Bruun, 2025). An amendment to the Integration Act is planned to reform the organisation of integration training. A legislative proposal is expected to be submitted to Parliament in spring 2026. The reform will primarily address the funding structure to simplify the system and centralise funding responsibilities within municipalities (Interview).

Protection seekers from Ukraine

Finland is bound by the European Temporary Protection Directive) and has extended temporary protection for refugees from Ukraine until 4 March 2027 (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-c). Beneficiaries of temporary protection are issued a separate permit category and receive a personal identity code. This permit gives them access to public employment services, such as job matching, guidance, integration training, wage subsidies, and allows them to study Finnish or Swedish for free under an integration plan. However, they are not eligible for labour market support and are not entitled to the introduction benefit, unlike ordinary refugees. As a result, relatively few take part in the introduction training.

During the first year, displaced persons from Ukraine have the same rights as asylum seekers and are offered mandatory language courses in the reception centres. After one year, they may apply for registration and settlement in a municipality, which they can choose freely, gaining full resident rights and obligations equivalent to permanent residents, and access to broader municipal and welfare services (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-b; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024).

Integration or establishment programmes

Municipalities are required to draw up an integration programme as a municipal service package supporting immigrants in the early stages of integration. Its goals are to promote employment, entrepreneurship, skills development, and participation in society,

while also supporting equality, inclusion, non-discrimination, and well-being. An integration programme must follow a multi-sectoral approach and involve cooperation with NGOs and employers (Integration.fi, n.d.-d). Under the Integration Act, the programme must include at minimum, an assessment of skills and service needs, an individual integration plan, multilingual civic orientation courses, integration training, education and services to develop language, literacy, social and work skills, and support for employability and entrepreneurship. Ongoing guidance and advisory services are offered throughout the programme (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023).

Municipalities provide integration training free of charge to individuals with a residence permit who have an integration plan (Artemjeff et al., 2024), including unemployed jobseekers, beneficiaries of international protection and their family members, recipients of long-term social assistance, and those receiving the child home care allowance (Integration.fi, n.d.-i). It is not available to labour migrants unless, for example, they become unemployed. For registered jobseekers, integration training is mainly provided as labour market training, but it can also comprise self-motivated studies.

Integration plans are individualised agreements between eligible immigrants and local authorities. They are developed for immigrants based on their goals, circumstances, competencies, and assessed needs. The plan outlines tailored services and measures to support integration, employment, or entrepreneurship. Each integration plan outlines individual short- and long-term goals related to integration, employment, or entrepreneurship. It also specifies the services needed to support integration, work, business development, health, well-being, and civic skills. The plan includes Finnish or Swedish language studies, participation in civil society activities, and access to guidance and advisory support (Integration.fi, n.d.-i).

The first plan can be up to one year, with a total maximum duration of two years, extendable by up to two more years under specific circumstances. If an immigrant refuses, without a valid reason, to participate in the preparation, review, or agreed services in the plan, the unemployment benefits may be restricted, or social assistance may be reduced (Integration.fi, n.d.-g).

Language training

Language training is an integral part of integration training (Integration.fi, n.d.-e). Under the Integration Act, municipalities are responsible for organising language courses and related services that promote knowledge of Finnish and Swedish. They must ensure training is available, either by providing it directly or in co-operation with other providers. Eligibility follows the same criteria as for integration training: individuals with a valid residence permit, including unemployed jobseekers, beneficiaries of international protection and their family members, recipients of long-term social assistance, and those receiving the child home care allowance. Courses typically last about one year from the start of the integration plan. In addition to formal training, Finland offers diverse non-formal options, and the Act promotes flexible models such as workplace-based language learning (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2023; Fabricius & Westerberg, 2023).

Settlement process

Upon arrival, asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection can stay in a reception centre or private accommodation. Private housing is not supported financially, and individuals must still remain registered with a reception centre to access reception services (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-a).

Directed placements in municipalities primarily target quota refugees, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable groups (Bruun, 2025). While it is generally voluntary for municipalities to receive refugees, there are strong incentives and coordination mechanisms in place. The relocation of individuals to specific municipalities is guided by annual national referral objectives set by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Based on these objectives, ELY Centres coordinate municipal allocations within their regions, and municipalities sign agreements with ELY Centres regarding placements. When offering a placement, municipalities commit to securing housing for the assigned individual (Integration.fi, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

Those granted residence permits through the asylum process may move from a reception centre to their own accommodation and be registered as a resident in a municipality either through an official municipal placement or by relocating on their own. Most choose the latter, in which case they are free to select their municipality but they must arrange and finance their own housing. The Finnish Immigration Service supports those who move independently to find an apartment and settle in the municipality. Individuals on low incomes may apply for a housing allowance through the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, Kela (Bruun, 2025; Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-a). The same rules apply to beneficiaries of temporary protection, and they may apply for a municipality of residence after one year in Finland (Finnish Immigration Service, n.d.-b).

Social assistance and financial support

The right to health and social services in Finland depends on a person's legal status and whether they have a registered municipality of residence. Individuals with a residence permit and a municipality of residence are entitled to the same health and social services as other residents. This includes access to healthcare and social welfare services provided by the well-being services county, individualised guidance and advisory support, expanded social services based on individual needs, as well as student welfare and occupational healthcare services (Integration.fi, n.d.-c; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024):

Residence-based social security benefits are available for permanent residents. These include health insurance; unemployment, child, and disability benefits; and housing allowance. Eligibility is primarily based on the individual's status as a permanent resident, rather than the employment status. Individuals earning at least EUR 800.15/month (2023) can access certain social security benefits, such as child and health insurance, even without permanent residence (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2024).

Asylum seekers are not eligible for residence-based benefits but receive a reception allowance for basic needs. Beneficiaries of temporary protection living at reception centres also receive a reception allowance and may receive supplementary allowances based on individual needs.

Social assistance benefit under the Social Assistance Act ([1412/1997](#)) is intended to promote self-sufficiency and prevent social exclusion. Eligibility is determined by financial need and is not dependent on residence permit. The benefit becomes available when reception services end and individuals transition from reception centres to a municipality of residence without sources of income. The assistance includes basic social assistance granted by Kela, as well as supplementary and preventive social assistance provided by well-being services counties (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2025).

Immigrants who have an integration plan may receive unemployment benefits. Finland offers three types of unemployment benefit, which are taxable: earnings-related allowance, basic daily allowance, and labour market subsidy (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.). To qualify for the labour market subsidy, individuals must hold a residence permit and be registered as unemployed jobseekers. Beneficiaries of temporary protection are not eligible for labour market support due to the temporary nature of their B residence permit (Integration.fi, n.d.-j).

Healthcare and schooling

Asylum seekers are entitled to urgent and necessary healthcare. Asylum-seeking minors receive health services on the same basis as all other Finnish residents. Upon being granted a residence permit, refugees are entitled to the same healthcare as residents (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, n.d.).

Children without a municipality of residence are not subject to compulsory education but have the right to attend school. Once assigned a municipality, they become subject to compulsory education and gain entitlement to early childhood education and care.

Municipalities should arrange preschool, basic education, or preparatory education as soon as it is confirmed that a child resides in the municipality and is seeking protection or is otherwise present in the area. Education for immigrant children is either provided within the general education system with individualised support or in preparatory classes leading to basic education (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.).

Åland Islands



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

The Åland Islands enjoy a unique autonomous status within Finland, established through the *Act on the Autonomy of Åland* (1144/1991). This autonomy grants Åland legislative and administrative powers in a wide range of areas, including municipal administration, education, social welfare, health care, environmental protection, promotion of employment, and cultural affairs. On the other hand, the Finnish State retains authority over matters such as foreign affairs, legislation on aliens, marriage and family relations, and citizenship.

In Åland islands, the Åland Provincial Act on the Promotion of Integration (2012:74) applies alongside relevant provisions of Finland's national Integration Act (681/2023). The Åland Act covers immigrants (foreign nationals) who move to Åland through regulated immigration, that is, those with a valid residence permit, right of residence, or residence card in Finland and a registered place of residence on Åland. Asylum seekers and individuals awaiting residence permits are not covered by the Åland Act and fall under national legislation (Ålands landskapsregering, 2012).

The Åland Act aims to promote equality, non-discrimination, and positive interaction between different population groups. Its overarching goal is to ensure that immigrants can attain a status equal to other Åland residents in terms of rights and responsibilities. The Act also emphasises bidirectional integration, encouraging both immigrants and the host society to engage in mutual adaptation (Personal communications, 2025). The Åland Government is responsible for legally mandated integration measures, including providing basic civic information, planning and evaluating integration efforts, and ensuring public services are accessible to immigrants. The Act requires the Åland Government to adopt a four-year integration programme, outlining goals and measures to promote integration. Municipalities, either individually or jointly, are also required to draw up similar four-year programmes for their respective areas of responsibility (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2023).

The Åland Government's Integration Promotion Programme 2024–2027 focuses on language learning, vocational training, employment, and active social participation. This work is cross-sectoral and carried out in collaboration with municipalities, public agencies, and the third sector, within frameworks set by regional legislation and municipal programmes (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2023).

Under the Act on the Promotion of Integration, the AMS (Åland Labour Market and Student Service Authority) is tasked with starting an initial assessment for unemployed immigrants registered as jobseekers, while municipalities are responsible for those residing permanently or long-term, as well as for immigrants receiving social assistance. Either AMS or the municipality may also initiate assessments for immigrants who apply for or are deemed in need of such services (Personal communications, 2025).

The individual integration plan is a cornerstone of the Åland model. It is a personalised roadmap detailing the services and measures designed to support the immigrant's acquisition of Swedish language skills and other competencies necessary for societal and labour market participation (e.g., employment support and civic orientation). The plan seeks to facilitate the immigrant's full and equal involvement in community life in Åland. The plan's duration is set individually, based on the person's background and needs. Its duration is tailored to the individual's background and needs, lasting up to three years, with the option of a two-year extension if additional integration support is needed (Personal communications, 2025).

Refugees are entitled to full healthcare, including dental care, on par with other residents. However, dental services prioritise refugees with special health, social, or financial needs. Åland municipalities must provide education to children without a registered home municipality, from compulsory school age until completion or July 31 of the year they turn 18.

Iceland

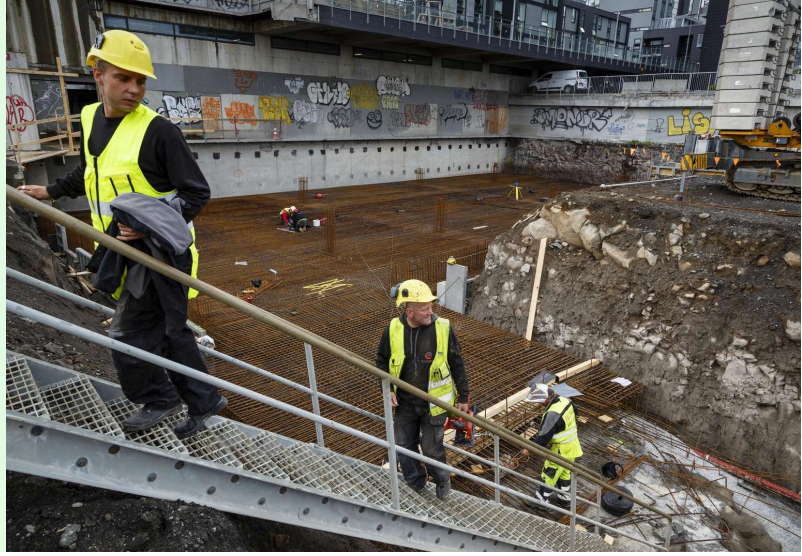


Image: Yadid Levy / norden.org*

Governance model and responsible actors

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing is responsible for social issues of migrants and refugees, while legal issues are the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice.

There are two administration levels in Iceland, national government and municipal authorities. The municipalities are responsible for preschools, primary schools, and social services, including child protection and financial aid.

The Act on Immigration Issues ([Althingi, nr. 116/2012](#)), adopted by Iceland's Parliament (Althingi) in 2012, is the main legal framework for promoting integration of immigrants into Icelandic society. The Directorate of Labour, under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, is responsible for implementing the law, as well as providing counselling to migrants, issuing work permits, and supporting municipalities with the reception of refugees. With headquarters in Reykjavík, the directorate of labour runs ten service centres across Iceland, including the Multicultural Information Centre.

The provisions of the [Foreign Nationals Act No. 80/2016](#) apply to the authorisation of foreign nationals to enter Iceland, their stay in Iceland, and their right to international protection. The Act is administered by the Minister of Justice, and is enforced by the Directorate of Immigration, the Immigration and Asylum Appeals Board, the police, the District Commissioners, Registries Iceland, and others (Government of Iceland, 2016).

In 2022, the responsible body for refugees and asylum seekers transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing. Applicants for international protection now receive services from the Directorate of Labour while their application is being processed.

In 2022, the responsible body for refugees and asylum seekers transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing. Applicants for international protection now receive services from the Directorate of Labour while their application is being processed.

A reception centre opened in the centre of Reykjavík in 2022, where applicants for international protection can access Directorate services, including housing, health

services, and financial assistance. Upon approved application, the responsibility is transferred from the Directorate of Labour to the host municipality. The reception centre will be moved to the international borders at Keflavík in 2026, to fulfil Iceland's obligations towards Schengen (Interview 1).

Municipalities across the country have signed agreements on the so-called coordinated reception of refugees (Government of Iceland, 2022). Currently, 13 municipalities are participating in this initiative. The agreements are made with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Directorate of Labour. Municipalities themselves decide how many refugees they will receive under the agreement and receive reimbursements from the Icelandic state during the first three years of residence per refugee (Government of Iceland, n.d.).

The Directorate of Labour is responsible for pairing refugees and participating municipalities, according to individual circumstances, employment opportunities, etc. The drawback of this system is that by the time refugees are granted asylum and consequently are paired with a host municipality, they oftentimes have already settled in a different municipality during the period of the application processing period, with their children already enrolled in local school or other ties established (Interview 2).

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

The Immigrant Affairs Act established formal bodies such as the Immigration Council and Refugee Committee to advise on policies and funding. The Act also mandates a four-year Action Plan on Immigration Issues, which the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour must present, following consultations with other ministries and organisations. The current Action Plan (2022–2025) was approved by Althingi on 16 June 2022 (Althingi, 2022). A new Action Plan 2026–2029 is scheduled for Althingi in March 2026 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, 2025). The Development Fund for Immigrant Issues, established by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in 2007, gives annual grants to research and development projects aiming to facilitate the integration of immigrants (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024b).

A new policy on immigration matters 2025–2038 has been drafted, and over 550 people were consulted. Over half of these were migrants in Iceland (Interview 1). Consequently, the [Green Paper](#) (Status Assessment and Strategic Options) was published in November 2023, the [White Paper](#) (draft policy for open consultation) came out in May 2024 and lastly, a [draft proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution on Matters of Immigrants](#) was issued in September 2024. The new proposed policy is directly related to the Education Policy for 2020–2030, the Regional Development Programme 2022–2036, the Parliamentary Resolution on a Strategic Plan for Local Government for 2024–2038 and the action plan for the years 2024–2028, the proposed urban policy, and the Action Plan for the Icelandic Language 2023–2026. Furthermore, the National Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2025–2030 incorporates the needs of women and girls who arrive in Iceland as refugees or applicants of international protection (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

The draft policy has three specific objectives: (1) Participation and Diversity, (2) Information, Access, and Services, and (3) Communication and Language, 10 key topics and 17 key targets and indicators. The key topics include: simplifying and improving assessment of previous education and work experience of migrants, ensuring the involvement of immigrants in decision-making, and reducing poverty of immigrants. Indicators for integration include migrants' voting turnout, their representation in the media, and content produced by migrants for the national broadcaster (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024a). A new coalition government took office on Althingi in December 2024. The new draft policy has been delayed due to the changes in government. The new administration has not issued any statement regarding the project's continuation (Interview 1).

In 2024, Althingi approved amendments in the Foreign Nationals Act 80/2016 which concern applicants of international protection and refugees. The amendments pertain to access to the asylum procedure and the legal effects of international protection. These include reducing the validity of residence permits from four years to three years for permits given on the basis of international protection and on the basis of international protection through family reunification with a refugee. The validity of residence permits based on subsidiary protection was reduced from four years to two. Furthermore, residence permits on humanitarian grounds must now be renewed annually instead of after two years. Among other changes are the inclusion of adopted children on the list of those entitled to receive protection through family reunification, and provisional residence permits can no longer be granted if the application for international protection has been rejected (Directorate of Immigration, 2024).

Protection seekers from Ukraine

Iceland is not bound by the European Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), but the Minister of Justice activated a similar process under Article 44 of the Foreign Nationals Act No 80/2016. The reception of refugees in Iceland covered the same groups as determined by the EU. The protection period was initially for maximum of three years but has been extended to maximum five years, or until March 2027 (Ministry of Justice, 2024b).

Individuals granted collective protection receive a residence permit for humanitarian reasons, granted for one year at a time, for up to five years. It entails an Icelandic identity number, access to housing, maintenance, social services, healthcare services, and access to the labour market. A humanitarian permit entails the right to work in Iceland without a work permit. These are the same social and economic rights and support as apply to other refugees (Directorate of Immigration, n.d.; Island.is, n.d.).

Integration or establishment programmes

Unlike the other Nordic countries, there is no official integration programme for newly arrived immigrants or refugees in Iceland. The Ministry of Social Affairs assigned the

Directorate of Labour to create teaching material in community education for adult immigrants in Iceland. The material, *Landneminn*, takes 50 hours to teach and is freely available online in nine languages for self-paced remote studying (Landneminn, n.d.). Various institutions and actors such as the Police, insurance companies, and labour organisations were keen to be involved with the material, but the key hindrance to the programme is accessibility, i.e., finding suitable classrooms, transport to and from classes, and teachers (Interview 2).

The project Education, Reception, Culture (MEMM) was introduced in 2024 to establish a standardised approach nationwide for the reception and education of children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, and after-school programmes. MEMM also aims to develop and ensure strong advisory services, educational materials and tools, as well as support for addressing more complex situations (Government of Iceland, 2024a).

The project Diversity enriches (*Fjölbreytin auðgar*) is a course on the benefits of diversity to combat all forms of discrimination, prejudice and racism, intended for employees of the state and municipalities, particularly frontline staff in public service institutions (Mimir, n.d.).

Language training

Educational centres receive financial support from the Icelandic state to carry out language courses in Icelandic, but individuals are not entitled to official language support (Interview 1). Those who receive financial assistance from their municipality, those with a refugee status, and jobseekers are entitled to reimbursement for two courses in Icelandic (Multicultural Information Centre, n.d.-c). Other types of migrants are expected to pay for their language courses (OECD, 2021b). For migrants employed in Iceland, most labour unions offer reimbursements for course fees. The new policy draft for 2025–2038 puts a heavy emphasis on improved access to language training. The platform for the coalition government signed in December 2024 states actions targeting access to language training for immigrants (Government of Iceland, 2024b).

The new draft policy targets a group of immigrants currently underserved in the system – individuals with very limited or no work experience, who often face significant linguistic and social disadvantages (Interview 2).

Settlement process

Upon arrival in Iceland, applicants for international protection and refugees from Ukraine are directed to the reception centre in central Reykjavík, which offers initial support and services to applicants for international protection, including displaced persons from Ukraine. The Directorate of Labour provides temporary housing during the processing of the application and for up to eight weeks after an application has been approved. The Directorate of Labour is responsible for matching municipalities with people who have

received international protection in Iceland. The matched municipality has eight weeks to prepare housing for the refugee after the refugee has accepted to participate in the coordinated programme. Once the refugee has moved the legal residence to a municipality, the responsibility for social assistance is transferred from the Directorate of Labour to the municipality. The participation of municipalities in the coordinated reception of refugees programme is voluntary; the municipalities decide for themselves how many refugees they accept under the agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing (Directorate of Labour, 2025).

Migrants and refugees have full freedom of movement, and outside of the coordinated reception programme, there is no quota system for the distribution of refugees among the different municipalities. Refugees paired with a municipality are not obliged to accept the offer. However, those who choose not to relocate to the municipality offering accommodation are responsible for securing their own long-term housing. Refugees are legally entitled to certain services, and the level of need depends on individual circumstances. However, reimbursement is only given to municipalities participating in the coordinated reception programme.

Social assistance and financial support

Applicants for international protection, including Ukrainian citizens, receive basic services from the Directorate of Labour while the Directorate of Immigration processes the application, and up to eight weeks after approval. This includes housing in a residence programme, currently offered at 17 locations in three municipalities. The Directorate of Labour also offers financial assistance for food (EUR 56 per week for the first four weeks and EUR 75 per week thereafter for an individual, and up to EUR 196 per household depending on size). The conditions for the food payments are that the individual does not live in housing with full board included, that the individual attends the interviews and meetings they have been invited to attend, and that the individual complies with the housing rules of their residence. The basic services also provide bus tickets, healthcare services, medicines and psychological services, and maternity and infant care. The Directorate of Labour is also responsible for the application for school enrolment of children aged 6–18 (Directorate of Labour, n.d.).

Refugees are entitled to the same services as other residents in the municipality where they hold a legal residence, including financial assistance and housing for those in need. The services can vary between municipalities, and each municipality sets its own rules on financial assistance. Most municipalities require a minimum legal residence in the municipality for three consecutive months before financial assistance can be applied. The set amount of financial assistance differs between municipalities. For example, in Reykjavík municipality the monthly amount for an individual is up to EUR 1745 and EUR 2790 for a couple, and additional support is provided per child with a legal domicile with those granted the financial assistance. This additional support is provided to meet costs of daycare, school meals, and other services offered by the municipality and is paid to the Department of Education & Youth (Council of Reykjavík, 2021). In the neighbouring

municipality Kópavogur, the financial support for an individual is up to EUR 1820 and EUR 2910 for a couple per month. In addition to covering the cost of daycare and school meals per child, Kópavogur also provides EUR 211 per month per child during holidays to meet the costs of organised summer activities (Kópavogur Council, 2025). In Reykjanesbær municipality, the amount is up to EUR 1378 for an individual, or up to EUR 2205 for a couple (Reykjanesbær Council, 2022).

Financial aid from the municipality can affect decisions regarding applications for permanent residency, because the requirements for a renewed residence permit, a permanent residence permit, and applications for Icelandic citizenship include secure and independent means of financial support. This condition does not apply to holders of residence permits on grounds of international protection or for humanitarian reasons (Directorate of Immigration, n.d; Multicultural Information Centre, n.d.-a).

The Directorate of Labour is responsible for applications and payment of unemployment benefits and parental leave benefits, and general job-seeking assistance for both migrants and refugees. Other relevant benefits to migrants permanently registered in Iceland include housing benefits allocated by the Housing and Construction Authority and child benefits allocated by the Icelandic Tax authorities.

Healthcare and schooling

Anyone who has a legal residency in Iceland for six consecutive months is covered by the Icelandic health insurance on the same basis as other residents. Individuals who have been granted international protection or a residence permit on humanitarian grounds do not have to meet the condition of having legally lived in Iceland for six consecutive months (Multicultural Information Centre, n.d.-b).

Primary and lower secondary education is compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16 living in the country.

Norway



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

Governance model and responsible actors

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion is responsible for integration policies and has a coordinating role between other ministries and sectors. It oversees refugee resettlement, the introduction programme, language training, and issues related to work, welfare, inclusion, and anti-discrimination. The ministry is also responsible for grants for integration measures, support for volunteer organisations working on integration and diversity, translator services in the public sector, preventing negative social control, honour-related violence, and combating racism and discrimination.

Key state directorates that implement the policies of the ministry include the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), which is responsible for settling refugees in municipalities and coordinating integration measures. IMDi's mandate is to promote the active participation of immigrants in working and civic life. The Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) has the overall pedagogical responsibility for teaching Norwegian language and social studies to adult immigrants (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a). HK-dir also has the overall responsibility for career guidance for refugees, which is conducted by the counties.

Immigration policies are the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. It is in charge of the registration, reception, and housing of asylum seekers, as well as the processing of immigration and asylum applications. The key state directorate under the ministry is the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), which implements immigration and asylum policy. Its main tasks include processing applications for residence permits under the *Immigration Act* and the *Citizenship Act*, managing asylum seeker reception centres, and overseeing assisted return efforts. This directorate also manages the operational responsibility for housing and initial assessment in reception centres, and processing asylum applications. Another directorate under the ministry is the Police Immigration Service that handles the registration and identification of immigrants and asylum seekers (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

Municipalities are responsible for offering refugees and immigrants introduction programmes and other public services such as healthcare, adult and primary education,

and child welfare services (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a). It is voluntary for municipalities to settle refugees. The IMDi and municipalities jointly decide where refugees are settled (Regjeringen, 2024). The task of following up refugees in a municipality is typically handled by a "refugee service/office," a Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), or an adult education centre (Regjeringen, 2025).

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration offices deliver both state and municipal labour and welfare services to users. In many municipalities, NAV is responsible for refugee services, the provision of social assistance and benefits, and supporting refugees' integration into the labour market. NAV also assists municipalities in the planning and implementation of introduction programmes (Regjeringen, 2025).

County Municipalities (*fylkeskommuner*) are responsible for regional coordination of integration work and managing grants for inclusion and diversity. Since 2021, they have held formal responsibilities under the Integration Act, including recommending refugee settlement numbers, providing career guidance for introduction programme participants, and ensuring Norwegian and social studies training for those in full-time upper secondary education (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a; Regjeringen, 2025).

County Governors represent the state in the county and are responsible for following up on decisions, goals, and guidelines from the Norwegian Parliament and the government. They conduct annual supervision of municipalities' compliance with integration regulations. Since autumn 2022, they have also been tasked with guiding and assisting municipalities with the temporary regulations for displaced persons from Ukraine under the Integration Act (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

Civil society and NGOs also play key roles in integration efforts, supported by government grants administered by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity.

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

The Norwegian immigration and integration policies build on core legislation and measures, including the [Immigration Act](#) (2008), the [Integration Act](#) (2021), and the [Norwegian Nationality Act](#) (2005) (Regjeringen, 2025).

In 2022–2024, Norway introduced temporary changes to its migration policies to balance humanitarian considerations with domestic priorities. In response to the high influx of refugees from Ukraine, the government adopted more restrictive measures and placed greater emphasis on work-oriented introduction programmes (Regjeringen, 2025). The White Paper *Meld. St. 17 (2023–2024) On integration policy: setting expectations and providing support* outlines a more targeted approach to integration, focusing on labour market inclusion, community building, equal opportunities, and access to language training for both refugees and labour immigrants (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

The Norwegian government's integration policy, as outlined in Hurdalsplattformen^{[4][1]}, aims to increase labour market participation, strengthen local communities, promote equality, and combat negative social control (Statsministerens kontor, 2021). It emphasises faster case processing and balancing support with clear expectations: adults granted residence are expected to contribute to society quickly on equal terms with others (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

In 2023, Norway also strengthened its return policies, prioritising voluntary returns for rejected applicants and streamlining forced returns through enhanced co-operation with countries of origin (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

The recent amendments to the Integration Act, approved by the Storting on 20 June 2025, aim to strengthen the focus on employment and formal education in the introduction programme while simplifying the regulatory framework. Key changes include expanding the eligible age group from 55 to 60 years, extending the programme duration for participants pursuing upper secondary education, and introducing minimum requirements for employment-oriented activities. The amendments also clarify municipal responsibilities for coordinating programme elements and introduce oversight of county-level duties under the law (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2025). Most of the amendments will take effect from January 2026.

Protection seekers from Ukraine

Norway is not legally bound by the Temporary Protection Directive, but it has chosen to implement a system of temporary collective protection for displaced persons from Ukraine that largely mirrors the EU directive. This was done by triggering the use of section 34 of the Immigration Act in March 2022. The residence permit granted through this scheme does not lead to permanent residence but provides the right to family reunification and to work (Regjeringen, 2025). Initially granted for one year with extensions up to three years, the maximum duration was extended to five years in November 2024, following a government proposal and cross-party support (Hernes et al., 2024). The scheme is currently valid until 1 July 2026.

Displaced persons from Ukraine granted temporary collective protection have the right to reside in Norway for up to five years, are permitted to work and, though not obliged, can participate in the introduction programme, including Norwegian language and social studies training. They are also eligible for related financial support, as well as access to social and healthcare services. In addition, they qualify for public settlement assistance, with an average waiting time of less than three months from the approval of their residence permit to municipal settlement, as of September 2024 (Regjeringen, 2025).

Stricter rules for Ukrainian refugees have been introduced recently, including restrictions on travel back to Ukraine and exclusions for dual citizens from the collective protection

4. Hurdalsplattformen is the political platform or government-declaration that was agreed upon by the Norwegian parties Arbeiderpartiet (Labour Party) and Senterpartiet (Centre Party) when they entered government in 2021.

scheme (Tronstad et al., 2025). In October 2024, Norway designated some areas in western Ukraine as 'safe', making residents from those regions ineligible for protection in Norway (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

Integration or establishment programmes

The introduction programme is a full-time, individually tailored measure aimed at helping newly arrived immigrants gain skills that enhance their opportunities for employment, social participation, and financial independence. Its core components include Norwegian language and social studies training, along with activities that prepare participants for further education or entry into the workforce (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2025). All participants must take an empowerment course, and parents with children under 18 must attend a parental guidance course (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

Eligible individuals have both the right and the obligation to participate, and municipalities must offer the programme. This applies to the first settlement municipality. Organisation of the introduction programme is not legally regulated, allowing municipalities flexibility and resulting in significant variation in how integration is followed up (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

The target group consists of persons between 18 and 60 who have been granted asylum or resettlement as refugees, received a residence permit on humanitarian grounds, or reunited with these groups through family reunification. Additionally, the target group includes individuals who, following the breakdown of a marriage or cohabitation, have been granted a residence permit on an independent basis due to abuse in the marriage or cohabitation (as from 1 July 2011).

The Integration Act (2021) tailors the introduction programme to participants' backgrounds and individual goals. The programme can last from 3 months to 4 years, depending on education and experience. Those with upper secondary education typically follow a shorter 3–6-month programme, extendable up to one year, aimed at preparing them for higher education or the labour market (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

As mentioned above, the recent amendments to the Integration Act, approved by the Storting on 20 June 2025, aim to strengthen the focus on employment and formal education in the introduction programme while simplifying the regulatory framework. Key changes include expanding the eligible age group from 55 to 60 years, extending the programme duration for participants pursuing upper secondary education, and introducing minimum requirements for employment-oriented activities. The amendments also clarify municipal responsibilities for coordinating programme elements and introduce oversight of county-level duties under the law (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2025). Most of the amendments will take effect from January 2026.

From July 2024, participants aiming for work are required to spend at least 15 hours per week on work-related activities after their first three months in the programme (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024c). This requirement is now being implemented in the ordinary regulations (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2025).

Refugees from Ukraine receive integration grants covering language training and the introduction programme. They have the right, but not the obligation, to participate (Tyldum et al., 2024). Some adjustments have been made to the programme for refugees from Ukraine. For instance, they have no right to participate in social studies training (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2025). Initially, part-time participation in the programme was possible, but from June 2024, this became limited to cases where municipalities face capacity issues.

Language training

Under the Integration Act, municipalities must provide Norwegian language training. This right is separate from the Introduction Programme, and those in short programmes often still have a right to language training after finishing the programme (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). The goal is for immigrants to attain sufficient Norwegian skills to enter the workforce and engage in society. Language skills are a requirement for permanent residence and Norwegian citizenship, regardless of country of origin (Tronstad et al., 2025).

The target group includes newly arrived adult immigrants (aged 18–67) with residence permits that can lead to permanent residency. This includes family members of immigrants, as well as of Norwegian and Nordic nationals. Third-country labour immigrants eligible for permanent residence are required to complete 300 hours of training at their own expense. Individuals from EEA/EFTA countries are not covered by the Integration Act and are neither entitled nor obliged to participate (Tronstad et al., 2025).

Those with upper secondary or higher education are entitled to up to 18 months of language training and must complete 75 hours of social studies within one year. Individuals with temporary collective protection are entitled to 12 months of training, with a possible 6-month extension, depending on municipal capacity (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

In 2024, a national system for digital Norwegian language training was launched by the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills to supplement regular municipal language training, particularly in municipalities facing capacity or competence challenges. The programme aims to increase the capacity and flexibility of local language services and is available to adult immigrants entitled to training under Chapters 6 or 6A of the Integration Act (HK-dir, 2024).

Settlement process

Most refugees, including those under temporary collective protection, and those granted residence on humanitarian grounds or special ties to Norway, stay in reception centres until they receive protection and a residence permit. Norway's reception system for asylum seekers also includes the AMOT scheme, allowing municipalities to voluntarily take over the responsibility of providing accommodation and follow-up for asylum seekers. For

this, they receive a financial grant in return. Normally, asylum seekers lose access to free housing and allowances if they choose to live privately, but AMOT is an exception, allowing them to live outside reception centres without losing financial support.

In addition, to handle the large influx of Ukrainian refugees, a temporary MAMOT scheme extended this model to persons with temporary collective protection. Abolished in February 2024, it enabled Ukrainians to live in private housing within municipalities, often with family or networks, while still receiving public assistance (Regjeringen, 2025).

After receiving a residence permit and a protection status, individuals become eligible for public settlement through the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). Resettlement with public assistance for refugees is neither a statutory right nor an obligation; municipalities choose whether to participate or not. Resettlement occurs through agreement between the IMDi and the municipality, and most refugees are placed via such agreements. Refugees receive only one settlement offer, which may be in any municipality. Participating municipalities receive state grants to support resettlement. Access to the Introduction Programme and related benefits requires a formal settlement (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a; Regjeringen, 2025). Those who choose to self-settle lose the right to integration services and financial support.

Since 2015, the system also allows 'agreed self-settlement', enabling refugees to find their own housing. However, to retain access to financial support and the Introduction Programme, they must formally apply for settlement in the municipality. This form of settlement has increased, especially following the arrival of Ukrainian refugees (Hernes et al., 2024).

Social assistance and financial support

In Norway, asylum seekers receive a basic allowance during the application process to cover essential needs while living in reception centres. The amount varies based on age, family situation, and whether meals are provided (Hernes et al., 2024).

Once protection has been granted and the asylum seekers are formally settled in a municipality, financial support is tied to participation in the Introduction Programme. Participants receive an introduction benefit (taxable), which is reduced for unexcused absences. The amount of the benefit is equivalent to twice the National Insurance basic amount per year (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a). In 2024, this was NOK 20,666 per month (NOK 248,056 annually), with participants under 25 receiving two-thirds of this amount (Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2024).

After the introduction programme, those eligible may apply for means-tested social assistance, which varies by municipality and is based on a family's overall situation (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024a).

In 2023, the government increased the asylum allowance by 50% for all protection seekers. However, following a surge in arrivals from Ukraine in late 2023, new regulations were introduced to reduce financial benefits, aiming to make Norway less attractive to

Ukrainian refugees. Additional restrictions came into effect in June 2024 after a public consultation (Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2024b).

Both asylum seekers and those with residence permits have equal access to healthcare, on a par with Norwegian citizens.

Healthcare and schooling

Children who turn one by the end of November have the right to attend kindergarten, provided they have a permanent residence permit and a registered address in a municipality. Children of asylum seekers do not have this right until their application is approved and the family is formally settled (Tronstad et al., 2025).

According to the Education Act, all children above the age of six are required to attend primary and lower secondary school when the child is expected to stay in Norway for more than three months, regardless of legal status (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2023).

Sweden



Image: Yadid Levy / Norden.org*

Governance model and responsible actors

The governance of integration involves several important legal acts and ordinances. These include, though not exhaustively: [the Act \(1994:137\)](#) on the reception of asylum seekers; [Ordinance \(2010:1122\)](#) on state compensation for measures for certain foreign nationals; [Act \(2013:156\)](#) on societal orientation for certain newly arrived immigrants; [Law \(2016:38\)](#) on the reception of certain newly arrived immigrants for settlement; [Law \(2017:584\)](#) on responsibility for establishment efforts for certain newly arrived immigrants (*Etableringslagen*); [Ordinance \(2017:820\)](#) on establishment efforts; and [Ordinance \(2017:819\)](#) on benefits for participants in labour market policy measures (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

At the national level, the Ministry of Employment is currently responsible for coordinating the government's integration policy. It oversees the integration and establishment of foreign-born individuals, the settlement and municipal reception of certain newly arrived immigrants, exclusion at various levels, and interpreter services. The ministry also governs labour market policy, gender equality, and anti-discrimination efforts. Additionally, the Ministry of Education is responsible for matters concerning preschool, school, and municipal adult education, including Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), which is a key integration measure (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Some government agencies have integration-related tasks in their instructions. The Public Employment Service facilitates the labour market integration of newly arrived refugees, individuals in need of protection, and their families through establishment measures. It is the responsible authority for the establishment programme (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Swedish Social Insurance Agency is responsible for administering several forms of financial support for participants in the Establishment Programme.

The Swedish Migration Agency is the central administrative authority for matters relating to residence permits, work permits, reception of asylum seekers, allocation to municipalities, voluntary return, and pre-arrival integration information. It also handles reimbursements to municipalities and the selection/transfer of refugees (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Municipalities are responsible for both targeted integration measures, such as Swedish for Immigrants and civic orientation, and for general services for newly arrived migrants, including housing provision, education, adult learning, elderly care, and social services (Regeringskansliet, 2024b). Municipalities are required to receive newly arrived refugees, other persons in need of protection, and their family members, and must provide civic orientation to eligible newly arrived migrants registered in the municipality (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

County Administrative Boards are responsible for strengthening and supporting municipal preparedness and capacity to receive both assigned and self-settled individuals (Länsstyrelserna, 2025). They also set local allocation quotas and promote collaboration between municipalities, state agencies, businesses, and civil society (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Civil society organisations carry out a wide range of initiatives aimed at supporting the integration of foreign-born individuals into the labour market and broader society. These include mentorship programmes to facilitate labour market entry, work training opportunities, language support, and homework assistance for both children and adults (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

Sweden currently lacks a coordinated, cross-sectoral integration strategy. The most recent strategy dates back to 2008 (Gov. Comm. 2008/09:24) (Regeringskansliet, 2024b). A new integration objective introduced in the 2024 Spring Amending Budget emphasises that those residing in Sweden long-term are expected to make an effort to become part of Swedish society, while society must both set requirements and provide opportunities for integration. Five complementary sub-goals guide the work, focusing on economic, linguistic, educational, democratic, social, and cultural integration. Special focus is also placed on improving education outcomes for children with foreign backgrounds and promoting labour market entry for foreign-born women (Regeringskansliet, 2024a).

The government is implementing a paradigm shift in the area of migration and integration, moving from an asylum-based model to one focused on labour immigration, including faster processing for highly skilled workers (Regeringskansliet, 2024d). Individuals arriving in Sweden are expected to establish themselves in the labour market and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible (Regeringskansliet, 2024a).

The government has initiated a range of reforms, including a restructured reception system that will abolish the current EBO model (self-arranged housing) in favour of state-run reception centres (Sveriges Riksdag, 2025). Additionally, the government has provided authorities with new tools to increase the rate of returns, including enabling more internal immigration checks and establishing return centres (Regeringskansliet, 2024d).

In the 2025 Budget Bill, the government proposes several initiatives aimed at improving labour market entry and language acquisition, particularly for foreign-born individuals. These include (Sveriges Riksdag, 2025):

- Expanded access to regional vocational adult education to support employment;
- Language and literacy support in early childhood education, as well as for staff in schools and elderly care; and
- Improved monitoring of integration outcomes (Regeringskansliet, 2024c; Regeringskansliet, 2024d).

Protection seekers from Ukraine

Sweden is bound by the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which it has extended until 4 March 2027. Those covered by the TPD have access to the rights listed in the directive, such as housing and meals, access to the labour market, basic healthcare, education for children, and limited financial support – similar to asylum seekers in Sweden.

Under Chapter 21 of the Swedish Aliens Act, individuals with temporary protection are not entered into the population register if their stay is expected to be under three years. They remain under the Act on the Reception of Asylum Seekers, receiving daily allowance and may be assigned housing (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

Until July 2024, beneficiaries only received coordination numbers, limiting access to services such as BankID, full healthcare, and certain employment support. From July 2024, those with two years of protection became eligible for registration, and from November 2024, the threshold was lowered to one year (Regeringskansliet, 2024b; Sveriges Riksdag, 2025).

Registration in the Swedish Population Register leads to gaining a personal identification number and grants access to expanded rights, including the establishment programme, financial support under the Social Services Act, municipal adult education known as Komvux, and compulsory schooling for children (SKR, 2025). Those granted temporary protection on or after 5 September 2025 are generally not eligible for registration, due to the fixed end date of 4 March 2027 (Skatteverket, 2025).

Integration or establishment programmes

The establishment programme is a labour market initiative to facilitate and accelerate the integration of newly arrived refugees, persons in need of protection, and their family members into work and society (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.c; Regeringskansliet, 2024b). Refugees from Ukraine gain the right to participate once they are registered in the Swedish Population Register. Targeting individuals aged 20–65, the programme offers coordinated and tailored support to promote self-sufficiency, labour market participation, civic engagement, and Swedish language acquisition (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.b; Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

The Swedish Public Employment Service designs and coordinates the programme, draws up the establishment plan together with the participant, and provides job-seeking support, education, and labour market activities. Municipalities are responsible for certain

parts, such as Swedish language training (SFI), civic orientation courses, and social services.

Participation is voluntary but requires active engagement. Participants receive financial compensation. The programme can be full-time for up to 24 months, and individuals may participate within a 36-month window from the date of receiving a Swedish personal identity number. Participants may re-enter the programme within this time frame. Examples of programme activities include Swedish for Immigrants, civic orientation, vocational or academic training, internships, job search support, business startup guidance, and skills validation (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.b).

Language training

Municipalities must provide free Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) to all eligible residents aged 16 and over who lack basic Swedish skills. To be eligible, individuals must hold a residence permit and have a Swedish personal identity number (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

The government seeks to strengthen SFI by raising standards and broadening access, including for Ukrainian refugees. Since June 2023, municipalities have been permitted, though not obliged, to offer SFI to individuals under the TPD. Initially excluded from Komvux, a reform in July 2023 allowed TPD beneficiaries to study Swedish at both basic and upper secondary levels within municipal adult education (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

In May 2025, the government received the final report from the inquiry on improving civic orientation for newly arrived immigrants ([SOU 2025:55](#)). The report proposes integrating civic orientation into SFI, making it mandatory for individuals receiving financial support, and introducing a written final exam (Regeringskansliet, 2025).

Settlement process

Asylum seekers may choose to live in accommodation provided by the Swedish Migration Agency (*ABO*) or in their own housing (*EBO*) while their asylum applications are being processed (Boverket, 2025). From 1 March 2025, asylum seekers in EBO will generally no longer be entitled to financial support, such as daily allowance or special support, unless they live with close family already residing in Sweden or have exceptional reasons (Migrationsverket, 2025). This policy aims, among other things, to encourage more dispersed settlement and reduce pressure on areas facing social and economic challenges.

Municipalities are required to receive newcomers for settlement, based on the municipal quota. The Settlement Act ([2016:38](#)) obliges municipalities to receive and settle newly arrived refugees, other protective status holders, and their family members. The term 'settlement' encompasses both the formal process where the Swedish Migration Agency directs individuals to a specific municipality, and the subsequent support provided by that municipality.

The Settlement Ordinance ([2016:39](#)) specifies that settlement support in a municipality applies primarily to quota refugees and individuals living in Migration Agency housing (ABO) who cannot secure housing on their own (Länsstyrelserna, 2025; Regeringskansliet, 2024b). Each person receives only one municipal settlement offer; if they decline, the right to assistance and accommodation from the Swedish Migration Agency ceases, and they must find housing on their own (Migrationsverket, n.d.).

Municipalities must offer housing to designated permit holders within two months of being appointed as a reception municipality, with responsibility lasting two years during the establishment process. Permit holders who settle independently still retain access to municipal services such as SFI, core education, and social assistance (Migrationsverket, n.d.).

Since July 2022, municipalities have also been responsible for housing refugees from Ukraine. They may register as residents after one year in Sweden, which grants the right to municipal settlement. Those unable to arrange housing may receive settlement assistance, but if they decline the offer, they lose Migration Agency support once registered in the population registry (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

The current settlement system for newly arrived immigrants is under review in the ongoing Inquiry on a New System for Settlement, which submitted its report [Etableringsboendelagen](#) (SOU 2025:35) in April 2025. Now under consultation, the proposal aims to create a more equitable, consistent, and flexible framework while giving municipalities greater influence over the process (Sveriges Riksdag, 2025).

Social assistance and financial support

Establishment Programme participants (newly arrived refugees, persons in need of protection, and their family members) can receive several types of financial support. The establishment benefit provides SEK 231 per day during the initial assessment period and increases to SEK 308 per day once the individual integration plan is approved; this benefit is tax-free (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.-a). The establishment supplement is available to guardians of children under 20 and ranges from SEK 800 to 1,500 per child per month, depending on the child's age (Försäkringskassan, 2025). In addition, housing compensation may be granted to single participants living alone, based on actual rent costs, up to a maximum of SEK 3,900 per month (Försäkringskassan, 2025).

These benefits are not taxable, not pension-qualifying, and do not count toward sick pay. However, they count as income when calculating housing allowances. Benefit levels have remained unchanged since 2010, often requiring participants to seek additional municipal support to cover living costs (Regeringskansliet, 2024b).

Individuals registered as job seekers with the Swedish Public Employment Service and participating in programmes or activities arranged through the agency may be eligible for financial support from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Arbetsförmedlingen, n.d.-b). There are two main types of support. Activity support is available to individuals over the

age of 25 and can amount to up to SEK 223 per day (taxable), depending on their unemployment insurance status (a-kassa). Development allowance is intended for individuals under 25 without a-kassa, with the amount based on their education level and adjusted annually (Försäkringskassan, 2025).

Asylum seekers are entitled to accommodation, daily allowance, and special grants to cover basic needs like food, clothing, and toiletries. The daily allowance, introduced in 1994 and unchanged since, ranges between SEK 24/day (with food) for a single adult to SEK 71/day (without food) (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

As mentioned above, refugees from Ukraine who are registered in the Swedish Population Register are eligible for full social benefits and can participate in the Establishment Programme. This excludes child benefits, housing allowances, and support for the elderly (EMN Sweden, 2025b). Those who are not registered are entitled to the same daily allowance as asylum seekers but are not eligible for additional allowances or social security. However, they can still access certain support from the Public Employment Service, including subsidised employment options such as labour market entry agreements, introductory jobs, new start jobs (*nystartsjobb*), and disability-related job support (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

Healthcare and schooling

Asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection are entitled to emergency medical and dental care, as well as other non-deferrable healthcare. Children and adolescents have the same access to healthcare and dental services as all children in Sweden. After obtaining a Swedish personal identity number, individuals have the same right to healthcare as anyone else who lives in Sweden (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

Asylum-seeking children and those with residence permits under the TPD have the same right to education as other children in Sweden, though attendance is voluntary. Once registered in the population register, children, youth, and adults gain the same education rights and obligations as all other residents (EMN Sweden, 2025b).

4. Cross-country comparison and summary table



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org*

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings from Chapter 3, highlighting similarities and differences in how the Nordic countries govern and implement integration measures. It does not include direct references to original sources. For detailed information and full references, please refer to Chapter 3. **The comparative table summarizes the country-specific subchapters in a concise format.**

Governance model and responsible actors

Across all Nordic countries, integration is coordinated at the national level, often involving multiple ministries. State agencies are typically responsible for implementing specific elements of integration policy.

Municipalities play a key role in implementing integration measures across all Nordic countries. With strong traditions of local self-governance, they are responsible for delivering a wide range of services. This includes designing and delivering integration programmes (in Finland, Denmark, Norway, and partly in Sweden); organising language training; providing housing; and ensuring access to essential services such as primary and secondary education and social services. In Finland, municipal responsibilities were recently expanded to include employment-related services, which were previously managed by the central government.

The role of regional authorities is generally limited to healthcare provision (as in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). In Finland, this responsibility lies with the Well-being Services Counties, while in Iceland it is handled at the national level. However, regional state authorities play an important function, such as county governors in Norway, county administrative boards in Sweden, and ELY Centres in Finland. They are typically tasked with coordinating, monitoring, and supporting the implementation of national integration policies at the local level.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a complementary role in integration across all Nordic countries. Frequently recognised in national policy documents, CSOs provide services such as counselling, language training, and orientation activities, and in some cases act as formal service providers, for instance, operating reception centres in Finland.

Current national integration policies: goals and objectives

In recent years, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have moved toward more restrictive immigration and integration policies. No significant policy shifts have been approved in Iceland until now, though a new policy on matters of immigrants 2025–2038 has been drafted.

There has also been a noticeable shift from a rights-based approach to one centred on obligations and individual responsibility. Finland and Sweden have explicitly highlighted immigrants' personal responsibility in the integration process, while Norway describes this as 'balancing support with clear expectations'.

These policy shifts generally reflect a stronger focus on labour market integration, higher language proficiency requirements, and increased expectations on active participation in society. For instance, Denmark explicitly aims for migrants to achieve self-sufficiency within one year, while Sweden and Norway emphasise that newly arrived adults are expected to contribute to society and become self-sufficient 'as quickly as possible'. In both Finland and Denmark, integration policies also aim to prevent the development of parallel societies—migrant communities that remain socially and culturally isolated from the wider population.

At the same time, integration strategies continue to stress the importance of providing support and promoting equity, which are explicit objectives in both Norway and Finland. Norway, for example, has extended the Introduction Programme's eligibility age from 55 to 60, lengthened the programme for those pursuing upper secondary education, and introduced minimum standards for employment-oriented activities. Finland continues to promote health, well-being, and equity as key objectives, and Iceland's draft policy for 2025–2038 puts a strong emphasis on improving access to language training and ensuring equal opportunities.

Refugees from Ukraine

Sweden and Finland have implemented the Council of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). Iceland, Denmark, and Norway are not bound by the TPD but have adopted similar national frameworks for displaced persons from Ukraine. Currently, protection is valid until March 2026 in Denmark, July 2026 in Norway, and March 2027 in Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.

In all Nordic countries, refugees from Ukraine are granted a distinct residence permit that bypasses the regular asylum process. They generally have access to work, housing, education, integration or establishment programmes, and health and social services, though eligibility may vary depending on legal classification and population registration. In Sweden, for instance, they become eligible for establishment programmes after being registered in the Swedish Population Register and residing in the country for one year.

In Denmark, individuals are granted temporary residence permits under a Special Act. Upon municipal placement, they receive a personal identity number (CPR) and gain access to benefits similar to those granted to other refugees, including the Self-support and Return Programme, and they may access Basic Integration Education (IGU).

In Finland, beneficiaries of temporary protection receive a distinct residence permit and a personal identity code. They are entitled to public employment services, free Finnish or Swedish language courses under an integration plan, and, after one year, may apply for a municipality of residence. Once registered, they receive full rights and responsibilities equivalent to permanent residents.

In Iceland, displaced persons from Ukraine are granted residence permits on humanitarian grounds, with rights equal to those of other refugees. Upon settlement in a municipality, typically within two months, they become eligible for the same benefits and services as other residents.

In Norway, refugees from Ukraine are granted temporary collective protection under a separate scheme. They are entitled, but not obliged, to participate in the Introduction Programme and receive related financial support. They also qualify for public settlement assistance, with placement in municipalities generally completed within three months.

In Sweden, individuals under temporary protection are initially classified as asylum seekers and receive coordination numbers. This limits their access to services such as Swedish for Immigrants (SFI). However, amendments in July and November 2024 now allow those who have held protection for at least one year to register in the Population Register, granting them full access to services and a personal identification number.

Integration or establishment programmes

Integration programmes are in place across all Nordic countries, with the exception of Iceland, which lacks a formal programme but offers some elements, such as community education (often delivered online) and language training. While approaches differ, the core components of integration programmes across the Nordic region include labour market preparation, language training, and civic or social studies.

In recent years, all Nordic countries have increasingly prioritised employment-oriented measures as a core aspect of integration programmes. Denmark, for example, requires refugees and reunified family members to participate in 37 hours per week of work-oriented activities under its Introduction Programme. Similarly, Norway temporarily strengthened the work component of its introduction programme by requiring participants to engage in at least 15 hours of work-related activities per week after the first three months.

Municipalities play a key role in designing and delivering integration programmes, usually in collaboration with state actors. In Sweden, for instance, the Public Employment Service coordinates the programme, while municipalities are responsible for elements such as Swedish language instruction and civic orientation. There is often flexibility in how municipalities organise and deliver services, allowing local adaptation.

Personalised integration plans are used to tailor integration measures to individual needs, with a strong emphasis on this approach in Norway and Finland, and to some extent in Sweden. These plans align activities with participants' backgrounds, education, and employment goals. In Denmark, such plans are also developed but are part of a formal contract with the municipality, outlining the migrant's duties, obligations and mandatory activities aimed at securing employment within one year.

Across the Nordic region, eligibility and obligations related to integration programmes vary by residence status. Participation is generally mandatory for the target group, except in Sweden. In all countries, financial support is conditional on participation, making these programmes both a support mechanism and a compliance tool; benefits may be reduced in cases of unexcused absences or non-compliance with a contract or integration plan. In Denmark, the Introduction Programme is compulsory for refugees and reunified family members. In Finland, it is mandatory for unemployed jobseekers, beneficiaries of international protection and their families, long-term social assistance recipients, and those receiving the child home care allowance. In Norway, the programme is required for individuals aged 18 to 60 who have been granted asylum or resettlement as refugees, received a residence permit on humanitarian grounds, or been reunited with these groups.

Language training

All Nordic countries recognise language training as a key component of integration into work and society, delivered both as part of broader integration programmes and as standalone measures. Municipalities are the primary providers in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, while in Iceland they act more as facilitators.

Denmark offers free language training even to third-country labour immigrants, whereas in Norway, this group must pay for courses. Language training is mandatory in both Denmark and Norway, though the conditions differ: in Denmark, it is required for refugees and family migrants with temporary residence permits and is linked to social benefits; in Norway, it is tied to eligibility for permanent residence and citizenship.

In Finland, language training is not strictly mandatory but is offered as part of individual integration plans for those with valid residence permits. Sweden provides broad, free access to Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) for all residents aged 16 and over with a residence permit and personal identity number. While currently voluntary, ongoing reforms may introduce mandatory language training for some groups. In Iceland, educational centres receive state funding to offer Icelandic language courses. Partial reimbursements are available for refugees, jobseekers, and some union members, with upcoming reforms aimed at improving access and support for language training.

Settlement process

There are notable differences across the Nordic countries in how refugee settlement is organised, particularly whether municipal participation is mandatory or voluntary, and the extent to which individuals have freedom of movement.

In Denmark, refugee settlement is a legal obligation, with state-set regional quotas. If regional agreements cannot be reached, the state imposes municipal quotas. Similarly, in Sweden, settlement is mandatory. The state assigns residence permit holders, including refugees, individuals in need of protection, and their family members, to municipalities, which are obliged to receive them.

In contrast, Norway operates a voluntary settlement model, based on agreements between the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) and municipalities. Finland does not impose a national municipal quota. Instead, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment sets annual national referral objectives, and ELY Centres negotiate municipal placements based on these. In Iceland, municipalities voluntarily decide how many refugees to receive through agreements with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing and the Directorate of Labour.

Regarding freedom of movement, Denmark has a restrictive approach, with binding settlement decisions. Settlement decisions in Denmark are binding and cannot be appealed by refugees or municipalities. Although relocation is possible, a new municipality is only required to accept the individual if compelling reasons exist.

Sweden, Norway, and Finland offer more flexibility, often linked to whether the individual is receiving state-supported housing or integration services. In Sweden, individuals who can arrange their own housing may settle independently. However, those requiring housing support receive only one settlement offer from the Swedish Migration Agency. Refusing the offer results in the loss of accommodation and settlement assistance from the Agency.

In Norway, access to integration services and financial support is granted only to individuals settled through IMDi. Individuals may choose to self-settle but then they lose the right to these entitlements. Refugees must accept one official settlement offer to receive public assistance. In Finland, refugees typically have freedom to choose their municipality once they have received a residence permit, except for quota refugees, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable groups, who are directly assigned to municipalities.

Iceland offers the greatest freedom of movement. Refugees are not required to accept municipal accommodation offers and may relocate freely. However, those who decline housing support must secure long-term accommodation independently.

Social assistance and financial support

Access to social assistance and financial support in the Nordic countries varies, influenced by factors such as permit type and registration status – for example, whether an individual is registered as an unemployed jobseeker. In most cases, individuals with a residence permit and municipal registration are entitled to extended social assistance and financial support, often on the same terms as other residents.

Asylum seekers typically receive a basic allowance to meet essential needs, along with access to services such as healthcare, psychological support, and maternity care. The

amount provided depends on factors such as age, family composition, and whether meals are included at reception centres.

As described above, financial support is often conditional on participation in introduction programmes. The level of social assistance can also vary across municipalities within the same country. For instance, in Iceland, the monthly amount may differ by up to EUR 500 per person, depending on the municipality.

Healthcare and schooling

In Denmark and Norway, both refugees and asylum seekers have full access to public healthcare on the same terms as citizens. In Iceland, individuals with legal residency for six months are covered, but refugees and those with humanitarian permits are exempt from the waiting period and receive equal access immediately. Sweden and Finland provide emergency and non-deferrable care to asylum seekers, while children have full access; broader access follows issuance of a personal identity number and municipal registration.

School attendance is compulsory and free for children with residence permits. All countries ensure access to primary and lower secondary education for refugee and migrant children. In Finland and Sweden, children without a municipality of residence are not subject to compulsory education but have the right to attend school. In Iceland and Denmark attending school is compulsory for all children, also in Norway if the child is expected to stay in Norway for more than three months.

Cross-country summary and table

Table 1. Integration goals and measures in the Nordic countries: a comparative table. Due to space constraints, Åland is included under Finland, and both Greenland and the Faroe Islands are included under Denmark. Source: Authors' compilation.

[Download table 1 as a A4 pdf](#)

	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Iceland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>
Governing authority (authorities) & examples of responsibilities	Ministry of Immigration and Integration National agencies: Danish Immigration Service, Danish Return Agency, Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI). Municipalities (local execution: housing, health evaluation, school education, carry out integration programmes). Faroe Islands: Ministry of Justice (Integration), Ministry of children and education (language courses). National agencies: Integration Authority, Immigration Office, Directorate of Education. Municipalities provide local services and social integration elements. Greenland: The Government; Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and the Interior; Ministry of Education, Culture, and Church; and local municipalities (no dedicated integration authority) Municipalities ensure integration-related public services.	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM) National agencies: KEHA Centre, KELA. Regional: ELY Centres; well-being services counties Municipalities (integration programme, integration training, school education and service access; since 2025: manage public employment services) Åland Islands: Åland Government (oversees integration policy and adopts 4-year integration programme); AMS-Åland Labour Market and Student Service Authority (labour market services for immigrants who are registered as jobseekers). Municipalities conduct assessments for immigrants receiving social assistance; develop 4-year integration programmes either independently or in cooperation with other municipalities.	Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing; Ministry of Justice; Directorate of Labour; Directorate of Immigration. Municipalities (preschools, primary schools, and social services, including child protection and financial aid).	Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion; Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi); Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir); Ministry of Justice and Public Security; Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Regional: County Municipalities, County Governors. Municipalities (integration programme and public services such as healthcare, adult, primary and lower-secondary education, and child welfare services). Local Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV offices).	Ministry of Employment. National agencies: Public Employment Service; Swedish Social Insurance Agency; Swedish Migration Agency. Municipalities (civic orientation, Swedish for Immigrants (SFI), general services: housing, education, adult learning, elderly care, and social services).

	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Iceland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>
Key integration policies & goals	Increased focus on return migration, labour market integration, self-support, language proficiency, participation in Danish social life; limiting migrant 'parallel societies' (e.g., through 'Ghetto Package' housing dispersal policy). Work obligation for refugees (37h/week) in internships, wage subsidy jobs, community service, or upskilling. <u>Faroe Islands:</u> New Integration Act: Mandatory integration consultation meeting to provide information, ensuring civic orientation course, language course and health check-ups. Strong focus on immigrants with children under the age of 18. <u>Greenland:</u> No national integration policy, but strong co-operation with Denmark. Integration primarily takes place through participation in the labour market. Formal integration takes place through language training.	Since 2025: increased focus on employment, language skills, increased participation in society, health and well-being, equality. More obligation-focused; reduce financial burden. Responsibility for integration promotion is transferred from the state to municipalities. <u>Åland Islands:</u> Åland Integration Act applies only to immigrants with valid residence and permit in Åland; asylum seekers fall under Finnish national law. The Integration Act excludes asylum seekers, visa/visa-free stayers, and first-time residence permit applicants until a permit is granted.	New policy on matters of immigrants 2025–2038 (not adopted): create an inclusive society, enhance access to services, promote language acquisition, fair employment opportunities. New Action Plan for immigration 2026–2029 is scheduled for Althingi in March 2026.	Work-oriented programmes, incl. work obligation requirements 15 h/week, language acquisition, social participation, increased return focus. Stricter rules for refugees from Ukraine.	New 2024 objective: integrate and become self-sufficient quickly, setting requirements and providing opportunities for integration. Focus on enhancing labour market entry (incl. immigrant women) and language acquisition, incl. children with foreign backgrounds. State-run reception reforms; Increased return focus.

	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Iceland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>
Protection seekers from Ukraine	Not bound by Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), but Special Act valid until March 2027. Temporary residence permit under the Special Act, similar rights as other refugees in Denmark, exempted from work obligation. Personal identity number (CPR): yes Access to the Self-support and Return Programme, which includes mandatory Danish language training and 15 hours/week of employment-related activities. Excluded from work obligation. Eligible for basic integration education (IGU)	Bound by TPD (extended to March 2027). Personal identity number: yes Mandatory Finnish or Swedish language courses during year one in reception centres. May participate in integration training but are ineligible for the introduction benefit. Full-service access after one year after receiving a municipality of residence.	Not bound by TPD, but similar collective protection activated (valid to March 2027). Residence permit for humanitarian reasons. Same rights and support as other refugees. Personal identity number: yes Full access to services on a par with other residents in Iceland after settlement in a municipality.	Not bound by TPD but implemented temporary collective protection (valid to July 2026). May participate in the introduction programme and receive financial support, but only after formal settlement; participation is voluntary. Eligible for public resettlement assistance. Municipal settlement within 3 months. Personal identity number: yes Stricter rules apply from 2024: restrictions on travel back to Ukraine and exclusion of dual citizens from the collective protection scheme.	Bound by TPD (extended to March 2027). Same rights as asylum seekers until registered in population registry and issued a personal identity number, usually after one year (per November 2024 amendments). Registration gives extended access to services (full healthcare, Swedish for Immigrants, eligibility for establishment programme and certain employment support). Personal identity number: yes (issued after one year in Sweden (per 2024 amendments)).
Integration or establishment programmes	Three types: (1) Introduction Programme for refugees and reunified family (+18). 37 hrs/week work obligation. Mandatory, unless they do not receive benefits. Contract required; sanctions for non-compliance. (2) Self-support and Return Programme for refugees from Ukraine. No work obligation, but ca 15 h/week Danish language education is mandatory. Mandatory participation, unless they do not receive benefits. Contract required; sanctions for non-compliance. (3) Introduction Course for immigrants and accompanying family members (foreign nationals, job immigrants, etc). No work obligation, no associated financial benefits, voluntary participation. Basic Integration Education (IGU) for upskilling (includes vocational/language studies and paid internships) for refugees and reunified family migrants, incl. refugees from Ukraine.	Integration training; individual integration plans. May include language learning, employment support, entrepreneurship, health, well-being, and civic skills. 1–2 years (extendable); sanctions for non-compliance. Integration training target group: residence permit holders, unemployed jobseekers, beneficiaries of international protection and their families, long-term social assistance recipients, and child home care allowance recipients. <u>Åland Islands:</u> An individual integration plan is developed jointly by AMS, the municipality and the immigrant. It may include Swedish language training, employment support, and civic orientation. It can last up to 3 years, with a possible extension of 2 additional years.	No standardised programmes as in other Nordic countries. 'Landneminn' community education material (online). Directorate of Labour provides support for learning Icelandic and job market integration.	Full-time, tailored introduction programme; 3 months to 4 years; language, work training, social studies, parental courses. Since April 2025, increased focus on employment and formal education. Mandatory for refugees and their family members (aged 18–55) settled in a municipality. Mandatory language & civic training (part of introduction programme) for immigrants (aged 18–67) with residence permits leading to permanent residency. Asylum seekers: required to complete 175 hours of Norwegian and 25 hours of social studies while in reception centres (aged 18+).	Establishment programme for newly arrived refugees, persons in need of protection, and their family members aged 20–65. Full-time up to 24 months; voluntary participation. Includes SFI, civic orientation, internships.

	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Iceland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>
Language training & education	Municipalities provide Danish language courses (up to 5 years) for all migrants. Self-sufficient migrants pay deposit for the course and get reimbursed after completion. Mandatory for refugees, reunified family and displaced persons from Ukraine receiving benefits. Non-compliance reduces benefits.	Free Finnish/Swedish language courses (=1 yr) organised by municipalities as part of the integration plan. Eligible: see Integration training target group.	No universal right to free Icelandic courses. Refugees, jobseekers, and those on municipal aid reimbursed for 2 courses; others pay. Labour unions often cover fees for employed migrants. Policy draft 2025–2038 and 2024 coalition platform emphasise expanded access.	Norwegian language training is mandatory and separate from Introduction Programme. Target group: adults (18–67) with residence permits leading to permanent residency, incl. family migrants. Requirement for permanent residence/citizenship. Labour migrants must complete 300 hrs at own cost; EEA/EFTA not covered. Digital learning introduced in 2024.	Free Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) to residents aged 16+ with residence permits and personal ID numbers. Since 2023, access expanded to TPD beneficiaries. Reform proposals (2025) include integrating civic orientation into SFI, making it mandatory for those on financial support, and adding a final exam.
Settlement processes	Compulsory for municipalities to settle refugees based on national quota allocation. Asylum seekers: at reception centres, accommodation centres, private housing in some cases, return centres. Refugees: must accept the placement offer; binding decision. When relocated to a municipality, refugees receive temporary housing (municipal rent cap applies) and later, they have responsibility to find permanent housing. They pay rent themselves with support in some cases.	No mandatory municipal quota, relocation guided by national targets and ELY–municipality agreements for quota refugees, unaccompanied minors, and vulnerable groups. Asylum seekers: at reception centres or private housing. Quota refugees: assigned placements; municipalities must provide housing. Other refugees and permit holders: may receive formal placement or relocate independently.	Reception centre in Reykjavík; municipal pairing based on employment prospects; not obliged to accept municipal offer. Municipalities (part of the Coordinated reception programme) decide how many refugees to receive and are reimbursed for the first three years per refugee.	Voluntary for municipalities to settle refugees. Asylum seekers: at reception centres, agreed self-settlement without losing financial support is possible by application (AMOT scheme). One settlement offer must be accepted to access public support (incl. collective protection, humanitarian grounds, or special ties). Self-settled refugees have limited access to introduction programmes and social assistance.	Asylum seekers: at Migration Agency housing (ABO) or private housing (EBO). Compulsory for municipalities to receive newly arrived refugees, protection status holders, and their family members based on municipal quota. Both municipal settlement (mainly quota refugees and individuals living in ABO) and self-arranged housing possible. One municipal offer only.
Social assistance & financial support	Migrants with 9 years of residence of the past 10 years in the Kingdom of Denmark qualify for full benefits; if needed, others (e.g. refugees) may receive benefits (minimum rate). Amounts vary by status and need (receiving benefits might hinder receiving a permanent residence permit). Basic daily allowance for asylum seekers. Labour market guidance is offered for all.	Services depend on legal status; full access for those with residence and municipality. Basic allowance for asylum seekers. Social assistance for permit holders.	Asylum seekers: basic services and allowance; those with permits (e.g., refugees), full access to housing, healthcare, and social services like other municipal residents. Financial assistance levels vary by municipality.	Basic allowance for asylum seekers. Social assistance for residence permit holders. Support is conditional on participation in the Introduction Programme. Full access to benefits requires municipal registration.	Daily allowance for asylum seekers. Establishment benefit for establishment programme participants. Eligibility for full social services after registration at the Swedish Population Register.

	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Iceland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>
Healthcare & school attendance	Healthcare for refugees and other migrants is fully accessible. School attendance is mandatory for all children.	Asylum seekers: urgent/necessary care. Refugees: full healthcare as residents. Right to attend school but no obligation; becomes compulsory upon municipal registration. Åland Islands: Refugees: full healthcare, including dental care. Right to attend school regardless of municipal registration in Åland.	Full healthcare access after 6 months' legal residence; immediate coverage for protection/humanitarian permit holders. School attendance is mandatory for all children.	Equal healthcare for all. School attendance is mandatory for children, if stay exceeds 3 months regardless of legal status.	Asylum seekers: urgent/necessary care; full care for children under 18. After population registration: full healthcare rights as residents. Right to attend school for asylum-seeking children, but no obligation. Same for TPD permits until registered in the Swedish Population Register

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About this publication

Policy frameworks for migrant integration in the Nordic countries 2025 – an overview

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Nord2025-038

ISBN 978-92-893-8411-7 (ONLINE)

ISBN 978-92-893-8412-4 (PDF)

<http://doi.org/10.6027/nord2025-038>

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Layout: Louise M. Jeppesen / KEEP YOUR DARLINGS

Cover Photo: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org

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This publication is produced by the Nordregio research institute for the Nordic Welfare Centre in the Nordic cooperation programme for integration of refugees and immigrants. The programme Integration Norden generates and disseminates research-based knowledge and collect examples of promising integration work from the Nordic countries. The purpose is to contribute to better integration policies and initiatives and to strengthen the opportunities for refugees and immigrants to become active members of society. Visit the knowledge bank www.integrationnorden.org for more information.

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Ved Stranden 18

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