

FORSK2025

Forslagsstiller: CBS

Key actors in consultation process:

Dansk Erhverv (Confederation of Danish Enterprise)

Titel of Focus Area

Integrating Migrants in **Nordic** Societies and Labour Markets (**WellMigrateNordic**): Turning a Challenge into an Opportunity.

Summary

WellMigrateNordic addresses the challenges Nordic societies face in integrating migrants into their societies and labour markets. Key research will be generated about the politics, policies and processes of integrating migrants into Nordic labour markets and welfare societies. Particular focus will be put on uncovering challenges of culture, skills, language and religion in the integration into society and into the labour market. These factors all need to be included to generate a holistic picture of factors. There is a need for research in this area to provide research-based knowledge which can inform decision-makers about ways to innovate and develop Nordic labour markets and welfare societies to accommodate permanent migration. The challenges are of such complexity that they can only adequately be addressed through multiple disciplines so research efforts will need to combine theory and methods from economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, communication and linguistics. Strengthening research within this area will contribute to turning a potentially serious challenge, viz. a large inflow of skilled and unskilled migrants who do not become properly integrated into the Nordic societies and labour markets, into an opportunity of increased innovative potential and growth.

Societal challenges & opportunities

The OECD highlights that current challenges – primarily migration to advanced industrialized economies due to war, poverty and climate change, but also aging populations and new family forms – are not only permanent but in fact, accelerating. In addition to this type of “push” migration, the level of “pull” migration, where Danish businesses recruit skilled employees abroad, is also likely to continue to increase. The European and Nordic population is projected to shrink over the next 100 years. At the same time, societies are becoming more polarized as evident in the shrinking middle-class, less generous welfare state services and rising inequality. The Nordic societies are also becoming more diverse in terms of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural composition. This presents a particular risk for trust and social cohesion and a high level of well-being which is characteristic among the Nordic countries.

This is the context in which the challenge of integration of migrants into the Nordic labour markets and welfare societies develops. Integration challenges not only arise for migrants with low skills, but also migrants with high skills that lack adequate language skills and/or recognition of their skills and education, factors which may well impede efficient and successful integration into the Nordic labour markets. Furthermore, the success of integration is affected by how they are received in Nordic welfare societies and labour markets as well as the mental health of migrants upon arrival in the host society. Business managers and employees need to have adequate communicative and cultural competences to facilitate successful integration in spite of any barriers constituted by culture, language or religion.

Another major challenge concerns political and popular attitudes towards integration. The political debate dealing with migration into the Nordic countries has extensively addressed the extent to which migrants have managed to integrate and to contribute to growth and welfare. In many cases the debate has been conducted from polarized positions, which will increasingly call into question the crucial trust base of Nordic welfare societies. Generating a stronger research base shedding clearer light on the process of integration into society and the labour market will inform leadership decisions in a context of permanent migration.

Need for research

Given, firstly, the challenges of equality, well-being and growth in Nordic welfare societies, particularly in the context of permanent migration, it is crucial to develop state-of-the-art research to understand how the Nordic countries and indeed the European Union can continue to be inclusive and grow successfully. With a view to being relevant for decision-makers, a focus on a Nordic and comparative European perspectives on policy, politics and processes relevant to migrant integration is called for. This includes labour market policies, pensions and life-long learning policies as well as work place integration. Exploring these areas, research needs to take account of particular factors which facilitate or impede integration, such as mental health of migrants, communication, language, culture, and as well as attitudes to migrants in Nordic societies and the development of networks among migrants as well as network building with citizens in host countries. Identifying crucial factors which facilitate or impede integration are key to improving processes, informing policies, and developing leadership both on the political and organizational level.

Implementation

To ensure policy relevance, research projects within this focus area should be developed and organized with close involvement of stakeholders within industry and policy-makers in the

Nordic countries. The factors which facilitate or impede integration into the labour market and in welfare societies can be managed at the level of political and organizational leadership. As a consequence, research and research dissemination need to be conducted in close collaboration with industry, industrial organizations, ministries and other relevant actors in order to ensure that the design of research is relevant from a societal and organizational perspective.

Danish preconditions

Nordic welfare societies have – thus far - maintained their status as role models internationally, throughout various financial crises and pressures, due to their capability to adopt and implement policy changes rapidly in response to various challenges. Although inequalities are increasing, thus far the basis of welfare and work, as well as social trust and a high level of social cohesion, still characterize the Nordic countries. But they must increase informed political and industrial leadership and develop increased adaptability to meet the challenges of permanent migration.

CBS has a number of research environments with research competencies for welfare policy, including the Department of Business and Politics; Department of Economics; Department of International Business Communication; Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy. The researchers include leaders in international research on welfare state issues:

- Labour markets (Janine Leschke, Birthe Larsen, Fane Naja Groes, Herdis Steingrimsdottir and Caroline de la Porte)
- European level policy and politics in welfare and migration (Caroline de la Porte, Birthe Larsen, Janine Leschke, Svend Erik Hougaard Jensen)
- Workplace integration, cultural and linguistic barriers, and the role of identity (Sine Nørholm Just, Dorte Lønsmann, Sarah Louise Muhr, Annette Risberg, Lotte Holck)
- Intercultural competences and education (Maribel Blasco, Minna Paunova, Bjarne Ørsnes)
- Econometrics and the economic effects of migration on growth and productivity (Lisbeth la Cour, Fane Naja Groes, Herdis Steingrimsdottir)
- Network analysis on integration of migrants (Lasse Folk Henriksen, Christoph Houman Ellersgaard, Anton Grau Larsen)
- Analysis of role of civil society in migration (Liv Egholm Feldt and Center for Civil Society studies)
- Religious ethics underlying the economic behaviour of migrants (Stefan Schwarzkopf)

Denmark has a tradition of analyzing welfare state issues and producing relevant micro and macro level data. There are various relevant centers amongst which collaborations should be initiated or strengthened, including the Center for Welfare State Research, at the University of Southern Denmark. In particular, Romana Careja who has migration and integration in welfare societies as a core competency is a possible collaborator. Other relevant collaborators include

Bo Rothstein, from the University of Gothenburg, concerning the analysis of trust in the welfare state; Gisela Waisman from Sulcis, Stockholm University; and the group of cultural anthropologists around Mikkel Rytter at Aarhus University.

Goals and perspectives

WellMigrateNordic would have as ambitions to

- 1) develop new and *applicable* research on factors which facilitate or impede the integration of migrants in the Nordic Societies and labour markets in the context of permanent migration;
- 2) strengthen research collaboration among leading centres and universities in Denmark and the Nordic countries, including the center for welfare state research, University of Southern Denmark, the Center for study of Government, Gothenburg University;

Stakeholder involvement

The focus area proposed enjoys the support of the Confederation of Danish Enterprise (Dansk Erhverv), who represent 17,000 Danish companies and 100 trade associations within trade, tourism, business services, IT, welfare services and transportation. Those companies and trade associations would be primary beneficiaries of the knowledge generated under the proposed research theme.

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