

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN THE NORWEGIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT:

ITS STABILITY AND NOT BEING AN EU MEMBER HAS HELPED NORWAY AVOID THE ECONOMIC DISRUPTION AFFECTING SO MANY COUNTRIES GLOBALLY. THE HIGH LEVEL OF SECURITY AND WELFARE ENSURED BY THE NORWEGIAN STATE HAS ATTRACTED MANY IMMIGRANTS IN SEARCH OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES, BETTER THAN IN THEIR HOMELANDS. SUDDENLY, THE SMALL, HOMOGENOUS STATE HAS FACED NEW CHALLENGES SUCH AS THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS AND RESHAPING THE POLICIES IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE EQUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS FOR ITS DIVERSE POPULATION, NOT AN EASY TASK FOR A CONSISTENT AND UNIFIED SOCIETY. HOWEVER, THE NORWEGIAN STATE HAS CREATED A FRAMEWORK TO MANAGE THE ISSUE WITHOUT ANY DISCRIMINATION. THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO COORDINATE THE POLICIES AND LEGISLATION CONCERNING EQUALITY, DISCRIMINATION AND INTEGRATION.

THE PRESENT STUDY INTENDS TO ANALYZE THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN, EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE PROCESS OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION, ESPECIALLY THEIR NEED OF BEING INVOLVED AND CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT.

KEY WORDS: IMMIGRATION POLICY, INTEGRATION, CULTURAL DIVERSITY, EQUAL RIGHTS, NON-DISCRIMINATION.

INTRODUCTION

According to Statistics Norway, there are 698,600 immigrants and 149,700 Norwegian-born to immigrant parents in Norway, at the beginning of 2016. The largest group comes from Poland, followed by Lithuania, Sweden, Somalia, Germany, Iraq, Pakistan, Denmark, Philippines, and Vietnam, representing 13.4 per cent of the total population. Immigrants from Syria have increased their number from 5,400 in 2015 to 9,700 in 2016. The main reason for immigration is still labour, followed by refuge, family reunion and education.²

The new wave of immigrants represents challenges that come along with this rapid growth of the minority population and presupposes solutions to face issues such as integration, cultural diversity and immigration. Thus, the state sought to create a coherent

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²Statistics Norway, accessed June 23, 2016, <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/statistikker/innvbef/aar/2016-03-03>.

policy to regulate this process as a framework to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all people who live in Norway, regardless of their background, without any discrimination. The development of the Norwegian state in the economic, political, social and cultural fields needs an active contribution of the minorities, using their own knowledge, skills and capabilities

THE NORWEGIAN INTEGRATION POLICY

It is well known that Norway has a high level of stability, security and welfare which makes it attractive for immigrants in search for better living conditions. Trying to reduce inequalities, the country fights to ensure the same opportunities for immigrants and the majority population and to help them integrate and participate in the labour market, educational system or various social activities.

“To achieve solidarity and cohesion among its inhabitants, several measures are required:

- Strengthening unity and citizenship: government should ensure equal treatment for all members of society
- Promoting diversity in a Norwegian framework of values: national identity that is not based on ethnic identity must be credible to all citizens; cultural and religious diversity should support and not undermine the fundamental values associated with the Norwegian society
- Representing diversity: the state must ensure minority representation in important positions in politics, bureaucracy, media, academia, healthcare, education etc. Also, immigrants should be encouraged to participate actively in public life through volunteering, sport activities or employment
- Prevention of discrimination: ethnic segregation trends in the labor market must be prevented, and anti-discrimination legislation should be implemented.”³

Employment is the only way to obtain financial independence, prevent poverty and social gaps, therefore the state intends to increase the rate of employment by helping immigrants find a good job according to their skills. In order to support that, they provide language and qualification trainings in different fields, making their integration easier. Moreover, the recognition of their homeland education is an important step forward.

Immigrant children and young people should have an educational system adapted to their needs and diversity, from kindergarten, primary, secondary or high school to university studies. In this respect, the Government intends to:

- “improve multicultural competence for employees in kindergartens, primary, lower and upper secondary school and for those who teach adults
- strengthen the knowledge base relating to the learning environment of students with minority language backgrounds
- recruit more persons with immigrant backgrounds to teacher training.”⁴

In the healthcare area, the state struggles to provide the same services and to adapt to specific health problems that immigrants may have.

Regarding housing, a Norwegian Government agency offers financial support to buy or rent a house.

In relation to public authorities, they have the responsibility to adapt their services to the needs of the new diverse population and offer support in their own language.

³Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Immigration and National Identity in Norway* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), 1.

⁴A *Comprehensive Integration Policy. Diversity and Community*, Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013, 10.

In Norway, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion has the task to ensure the integration of immigrants and their families. Therefore, an integration policy was established, in order to help them adapt, get involved and contribute to the Norwegian society. The best way to achieve that is by learning the language for an easy communication and by becoming active on the labour market.

This policy is regulated by three main documents, the Immigration Act, the Introduction Act and the Nationality Act. Norway intends to facilitate the integration process by paying attention to the basic needs of the immigrants, such as an educational system, jobs, health services and housing.

“The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) implements the integration policy and is the Ministry's expert body. IMDi provides professional advice and act as a competence center for the municipalities and sector authorities.

VOX, The Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning has the responsibility to teach adult immigrants the Norwegian language.”⁵

The Act of 15 May 2008 on the Entry of Foreign Nationals into the Kingdom of Norway and their Stay in the Realm (the Immigration Act) establishes the conditions for foreigners to enter and reside in Norway. A residence permit grants the foreign national the right to stay in Norway and take employment here. Initially, this is a temporary residence permit. A permanent residence permit may today be granted after three years of legal residence in Norway if certain conditions are satisfied.⁶

The Act on an Introduction Programme and Norwegian Language Training for Newly Arrived Immigrants (the Introduction Act), in force since September 2003, has as purpose “to increase the possibility of newly arrived immigrants participating in working and social life and to increase their financial independence.”⁷

“The right and obligation to participate in an introduction programme applies to newly arrived foreign nationals between 18 and 55 years who have been granted:

- a) asylum.
- b) a residence or work permit after being given leave to enter the country as a resettlement refugee.
- c) a renewable residence or work permit.
- d) a residence or work permit as members of the family of such persons.”⁸

Newly arrived foreign nationals have stayed in Norway for less than two years. After three months of living in the country, the authorities must provide an introduction programme.

The introduction programme aims to:

- a) provide basic Norwegian language skills;
- b) provide basic insight into Norwegian social conditions;
- c) prepare for participation in working life.”⁹

⁵<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/immigration/integrering/hvem-gjor-hva-i-integreringspolitikken/id2343464/>, accessed June 23, 2016.

⁶“The Act of 15 May 2008 on the Entry of Foreign Nationals into the Kingdom of Norway”, accessed June 23, 2016, <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/immigration-act/id585772/>.

⁷“The Act on an Introduction Programme and Norwegian Language Training for Newly Arrived Immigrants (the Introduction Act)”, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>.

⁸“The Act on an Introduction Programme and Norwegian Language Training for Newly Arrived Immigrants (The Introduction Act)”, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>.

⁹“The Act on an Introduction Programme and Norwegian Language Training for Newly Arrived Immigrants (The Introduction Act)”, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>.

The programme lasts two years usually, and every participant has an individual plan, adapted to their needs. This training comprises 550 hours of Norwegian-language studies and 50 hours of social studies.¹⁰ During this period, the participant is entitled to a sum of money.

Section 7 of the Act mentions that: “The right and obligation to participate in Norwegian language training and social studies free of charge for a total of 300 hours shall apply to foreign nationals between 16 and 55 years of age who have been granted:

- a) a residence or work permit pursuant to the Immigration Act that constitutes grounds for a settlement permit, or
- b) collective protection in a situation of mass outflow pursuant to section 8 a of the Immigration Act.”¹¹

The introduction programme has as main goal the training in Norwegian language and social studies, preparing the participant with the necessary skills and competences for entering other educational programmes or the labor market. Also, the newly arrived need to know and be informed about their rights and duties.

The Nationality Act explains how an immigrant can become a Norwegian national. Applying for Norwegian nationality presupposes that the person:

- a) “has provided documentary evidence of or otherwise clearly established his or her identity
- b) has reached the age of 12
- c) is and will remain a resident of the realm
- d) fulfils the conditions for a settlement permit laid down in section 12 of the Immigration Act
- e) has spent a total of seven years in the realm in the last ten years, with residence or work permits of at least one year’s duration, residence during one or more application-processing periods to be included in the seven-year period.
- f) satisfies the requirement regarding Norwegian language training
- g) has not been sentenced to a penalty or special criminal sanction or has observed the waiting period
- h) satisfies the requirement regarding release from another nationality.”¹²

Moreover, the applicant requires a good character certificate from the police and a 300 hours Norwegian training. The Nordic nationals can apply for Norwegian nationality after two years of residence. Foreign nationals who are covered by the Agreement on the European Economic Area (the EEA Agreement) and the Convention establishing the European Free Trade Association (the EFTA Convention) can apply after three years.¹³

CONCLUSIONS

A unified, secure and wealthy community is a desirable model. Thus, the Norwegian integration policy emphasizes the main values that represent the core of the society: “gender equality, equal rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and belief, solidarity, socio-

¹⁰<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/immigration/integrering/introduksjonslov-og-arbeid/opplaring-i-norsk-og-samfunnskunnskap/id2343471/>, accessed June 23, 2016.

¹¹<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/immigration/integrering/introduksjonslov-og-arbeid/opplaring-i-norsk-og-samfunnskunnskap/id2343471/>, accessed June 23, 2016.

¹²“The Act on Norwegian Nationality (The Nationality Act)”, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20050610-051-eng.pdf>.

¹³“The Act on Norwegian Nationality (The Nationality Act)”, accessed June 23, 2016, <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20050610-051-eng.pdf>.

economic equality, tolerance, participation in working life, democracy and civil society, protection of children's rights, diversity and multilingualism as a resource."¹⁴

As the integration policy reinforces, "no person can be described according to only one dimension, as all of us have many characteristics and identities. You may be a woman or a man, immigrant or born in Norway, young or old, employed or unemployed, religious or atheist, homosexual or heterosexual, or have a disability. Categories and labels attached to individuals or groups may have a stigmatizing effect and contribute to exclusion from the community. It may put individuals into a category which may create and reinforce differences which lead us to think in terms of "us" and "them". Language must be inclusive. There must be acceptance for the fact that there are many ways of being Norwegian."¹⁵

The integration can be achieved only with the acceptance of diversity, human rights and democracy as the founding principles of the Norwegian state. The policy intends to approach sensitive issues such as access to educational and professional development, social protection and inclusion, housing or health services. These represent the basic needs for every community in order to feel secure and at home in the adopting country.

In conclusion, the Norwegian welfare model is a success because of the high employment rate and the relatively equal distribution of incomes, helping them escape the economic disruption that occurred at continental and global level. Also, the social crises are less dramatic than in other European countries. But to maintain this high level of economic and social comfort, Norway has to rely on a constant integration policy.

¹⁴A *Comprehensive Integration Policy. Diversity and Community*, Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013, 14.

¹⁵A *Comprehensive Integration Policy. Diversity and Community*, Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, 2013.

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