

# THE FRAMING OF IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN SWEDEN AND NORWAY: *A Comparative Study of Official Government Reports*

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## Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the landscape of immigration and integration policies in Sweden and Norway. The study sheds light over differences and similarities between these countries, based on an analysis of official government documents in the period 2010–2018. Empirically, a variety of topics concerned with immigration and integration policies are analyzed, how immigration influences the welfare state, integration issues, policy plans, and different integration measures. Furthermore, the study explores how problems are defined, the source of the problem, who is responsible, and what are the kinds of solutions that are suggested. The findings show that although there are many similarities, some distinct differences are observed in the framing of immigration and integration policies. Not only do the countries focus on different topics but they also have different evaluations of problems and solutions. As the analysis shows, these differences were quite consistent during the eight-year period.

## Keywords

Immigration policy • integration • frames • welfare • policy documents

## Introduction

During the last decade, most European countries experienced increased immigration, with a heightened intensity during the refugee crisis of 2015. This situation presents a considerable challenge to authorities at all levels (local, regional, and national) in Europe. In the short term, it is a matter of providing shelter and food for thousands of people arriving at a very short notice. In the longer term, the challenge is to integrate and include the newcomers into European societies in general, such as the education system and labour market. This article consists of a comparative study of Sweden and Norway, both of which share a Scandinavian welfare model with a comprehensive welfare sector. Both countries aim

at a high degree of participation at the labour market in addition to universalistic welfare benefits. Another commonality is that since the 1970s, immigrants in Sweden and Norway have been relatively similar concerning causes for migration. Brochmann & Hagelund (2011: 15) noted that in an early phase, immigration in the Scandinavian countries was characterized by labour migrants and a relatively high proportion of humanitarian migrants after the “immigration stops” in the mid-1970s. Olwig (2011: 179-180) pointed out that the three Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway and Denmark) provide an interesting and fruitful framework of comparison. They share a parallel history of migration, being dominated by out-migration until the 1960s and 1970s, after which they experienced a great increase in unskilled foreign labour migrants needed in industries. Following a brief period during the 1960s, of relatively liberal immigration policy, the Scandinavian countries have increasingly instituted restrictions so that immigration has virtually become possible only through family reunification or the conferral of refugee status. Olwig further noted that immigration increasingly appeared in the political discourses of these countries as social problems with relevance not only to immigration control regimes but also to social policy. As such, the welfare system has provided an important framework for integrating immigrants and refugees in the Scandinavian countries. This study explores whether some of the same political discourses that Olwig (2011) found in his study may also be observed in official policy documents in Norway and Sweden. What particularly has been in focus for the present study is how reports frame immigration and integration issues, what kinds of discourse can be identified in these documents, how are the discussions played out, which analyses are used, which topics dominate, and lastly, what do Sweden and Norway have in common concerning the understanding of themes related to immigration and integration, and what differentiates these countries?

## Immigration and welfare sustainability

Research has shown that in the Scandinavian context, the welfare state plays an important role as a framework for politicians when defining problems and solutions to issues related to immigration and integration. Overall, the welfare state’s most important role has historically been to take care of its citizen’s well-being, and in the Scandinavian countries, the welfare state has been given huge responsibility in taking care of immigrants. For example, some politicians and researchers have asked whether the welfare state is able to combine immigration with economic sustainability. Brochmann & Hagelund (2011) have analyzed patterns in the discourses concerning the issue of immigration and welfare in Scandinavia. Their analysis of the Scandinavian welfare states shows that the integration policy has changed quite considerably in the decades since the advent of the new post-war immigration. While maintaining a common ground in the Nordic welfare model, the three countries have gone through a process of divergence in the sense of adopting different approaches to integration and multiculturalism – institutionally and ideologically (Brochmann & Hagelund 2011: 22). However, there is an ongoing discussion on whether Norway really has had a multiculturalist approach (see for example Gressgård 2010).

As the starting point of this study I have used official formulated goals in the Norwegian immigration policy, as well as formulations from official policy documents. The official line in the Norwegian immigration policy has been directed towards integration, where the ideal is that immigrants must be able to adjust to the Norwegian society, while at the same given the opportunity to sustain their own culture of origin. However, there has been a concern for the state's ability to cope with challenges, especially during times of increased immigration. One key concern is that although the comprehensive welfare states depend on high employment rates, yet they may have institutional features that may exclude immigrants from the labour markets. Economists Barth & Moene (2009) noted that the Scandinavian labour markets are characterized by high entry-level wages and are accordingly difficult to enter for people with low or unknown productivity. Additionally, high-skilled workers tend to have lower unemployment rates than low-skilled workers. This can increase the barrier to the labour markets for immigrants with low skills. Despite being similar in many aspects, understanding of immigration may also vary in Sweden and Norway. This paper focuses on common themes and discussions such as challenges related to immigration, the responsibility of the welfare states regarding integration, and how such issues can be interpreted differently.

## **Integration of immigrants in Sweden and Norway**

According to Breidahl & Fersch (2018), there is a shared feature of the Scandinavian countries' self-understanding and their respective immigrant integration models. Activation policies targeting newly arrived immigrants exemplify how the ambition of states to promote functional, individual autonomy is also an important, ongoing process in diverse policy areas of the welfare state and not restricted to early integration instruments. Breidahl & Fersch's (2018) study of the Scandinavian welfare states demonstrates that while the countries differ on a number of counts with respect to immigration control, national integration philosophies and citizenship policies, the activation policies aimed at newly arrived immigrants share several features. The main conclusion is that there is a strong interconnection between activation policies and the civic turn and that this seems to be exceptional to the Scandinavian welfare states. The study illustrates how path-dependency policy traditions emphasize the influence of common institutional features of the Scandinavian welfare states. Furthermore, these policies have been closely related to, and inseparable from, more general welfare state changes. Hernes (2018) also found similarities in the Scandinavian integration policies and pointed out that these policies converged as a result of the refugee crisis in 2015. Her study involved policies of permanent residence, citizenship, family reunification, and access to social benefits. The analysis of policy processes found that a logic of regulatory competition led to goal convergence, as all three countries explicitly adapted their policies relative to other countries' policies. Nonetheless, when comparing the configuration of policy instruments and their settings, the cross-national gap persisted as all three countries took restrictive steps, thus showing traits of path dependency.

## The making of a report

Politicians often meet complex challenges and are dependent on specialized expert knowledge in order to govern and make well-informed decisions. Turner (2003) noted that an “expertification” of politics has taken place. While politicians earlier based their professional advice from a well-educated staff of permanent officials, they now ask for advice from expert groups, scientific counsellors, contract researchers, and committees where researchers are represented. According to Lentsch & Weingart (2011), the relationship between science, expertise and politics has gradually become more interconnected. The Nordic countries have had a long tradition of using bureaucratic competence on certain issues, as well as input from external actors, in the process of policy formation. Different committees and boards have been used in Norway since 1814, and the tradition of evaluation goes further back than the political parties, parliamentarism, and modern mass politics (Arter 2008: 1969; Solvang & Moren 1974). The Norwegian Official Reports (NOUs) are published after the Norwegian Parliament requests the government to establish a committee on a certain issue. A review of committees appointed by the Norwegian government shows an increase in the use of researchers in the committees. This can be explained by a general trend towards using expert knowledge as a foundation for policy shaping. While the number of researchers used in NOU committees has risen (Hesstvedt 2018), in Sweden, there is an increasing tendency to appoint bureaucrats in committees working on State public reports (SOU) (Petersson 2015). The SOU committees can be regarded as equivalent to the NOU committees, and the result from their work is published as “State public reports” (SOU). I refer to these reports as “Swedish reports”. The SOU committees are appointed by the Government of Sweden. Although experts have usually been drawn from the government administration to the Swedish committees, one can also find many examples of representatives from interest organizations and parties in the “expert” category (Meijer 1969). One interpretation of the use of government officials has been that the committees may function as a prolonging of the “Government’s long arm” (Öberg 2011). The composition of members appointed in Sweden and Norway shows a mix between researchers, bureaucrats, consultants, as well as unified groups of politicians recruited from the national parliament. These kinds of reports often attract a great deal of public attention and may influence public debate as well as policy solutions. Even if the conclusions in the documents do not automatically translate into practical policy, they are important since they can influence much of the political agenda and public discussion.

## Method

Framing is a method that is most frequently used within studies of the media but is often also applied within areas such as in the study of policies or other documents. According to Goffman (1986), frames are abstractions that people use to organize and structure message meanings in their everyday lives, and the frames that they internalize greatly

influence how data are interpreted, processed, and communicated. Framing is at the centre of the immigration and integration debate. Framing in this context has to do with how “immigration” has shaped politics, defining what counts as “problems” and constraining the debate to a certain set of issues. According to Entman (1993), framing is a process whereby the author(s) selects some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item. According to De Vreese (2005: 53), from a researcher’s perspective, two main strategies exist in defining frames. The first is inductive where no predefined frames are used and frames emerge during the course of analysis. The second is deductive where texts are analyzed using frames that are defined and operationalized prior to the investigation. This study uses a combination of inductive-based frames that were identified after studying the data material as well as deductive frames that were identified through a qualitative pre-study of the documents. I commence with the assumption that different representations of the problem are pre-articulated. These representations include a diagnosis (what is the problem, where is it located, and what/who causes this problem?) connected to a prognosis (how should the problem be resolved, which ends and means should be used, and who is responsible for the solution?) and a rationale or call to action (what courses of action are recommended and who is responsible for this?).<sup>1</sup> These elements of a frame are translated into an analytical tool that contains categories (see Tables 1 and 2). I rely partly on Entman’s (1993) four processes of identifying frames, namely, how to define problems, diagnosing causes, make moral judgements, and make suggestions for remedies. Building on Entman’s approach, the documents were further divided into three overarching divisions: 1) problem definition, 2) problem source, and 3) responsibility and solution. First, *the problem definition* is concerned with how the issue is defined, what conditions apply when investigating the problem, and what are the premises for the evaluation of the problem? Second, the *problem source* deals with the reason or cause of the problem, what makes it difficult to deal sufficiently with the problem, and which resources are available in order to “fix” the problem. Third, *responsibility and solution* have to do with who is seen as having an obligation to deal with the issue, who is accountable, and who has the opportunity to influence the outcome. The solution also has to do with which kinds of overarching tools are useful and available in order to deal with the problem. The same issue can also be dealt with through contradictory frames such as a problem- or a resource-oriented frame. The problem-oriented perspective focuses on immigration as having negative effects and is therefore framed as a burden, and sometimes even as undesirable. This perspective points to certain negative outcomes of immigration as well as potential future problems. Although, even if the problem-oriented focus can normatively be interpreted as something negative, it can on the other hand be understood as a realistic analysis of a situation that needs to be acknowledged and dealt with in a proper manner. Simultaneously, an overly optimistic focus on immigration can normatively be interpreted as something positive, but at the opposite as naïve since it may not deal sufficiently with possible negative outcomes.

## Data material

The empirical data are based on Swedish and Norwegian reports of the period 2010–2018. The reports are publicly available in the archives of the government official homepages of Sweden and Norway. The Norwegian reports are available at Regjeringen.no and the Swedish reports at Riksdagen.se. In Norway, these documents are called NOUs (Norges offentlige utredninger; Regjeringen 2018). In Sweden, the equivalent documents are called *The State Public Reports* (Statens offentliga utredningar 2018), abbreviated as SOU. The eight-year period was used in order to compare similarities and differences over time. The data were categorized within frames, and the analysis contained a discussion on a selection of documents that illustrate main trends in the data material. In order to ensure a wide scope of the content, every relevant document covered by the search words “immigration” and “integration” was included from 2010 to 2018, and the selection of reports consisted of seven NOUs and seven SOUs. There were other reports that contained the search words, but these were excluded since neither immigration nor integration was their central theme. Typically, the selection of reports covered overarching themes or questions that influence the societies in both short and long-term perspectives. I looked for the overall focus and topics within immigration and integration, and obtained an overview of the themes after searching these words. I reviewed the most relevant parts of the reports that covered immigration and/or integration, and selected parts that either presented the themes in the title or in other parts of the reports. For the analysis, I used the parts that were especially suited to illustrate main tendencies in the data material. These parts consisted of both a description of problems and solutions, which are illustrated in Table 1. It was useful to categorize the reports into two main frames: 1) immigration and integration in a welfare perspective and 2) integration, social services and education. The first frame was predefined and based on some of the core discussions in the immigration debate (see for example Brochmann & Hagelund 2011) and was consistent with findings in the data material. The second frame was developed after a closer reading of the reports. They were further analysed through a problem- and a resource-oriented focus, which was inspired by Vliegthart & Roggeband’s (2007) study of how the Dutch media frames immigration and integration. The reports that did not cover the two main frames were excluded from the analysis.

## Welfare sustainability: Is immigration a problem or a resource for the welfare state?

Table 1 illustrates some main trends concerning the issue of welfare sustainability and immigration. This issue can have both a problem-oriented frame and a resource-oriented frame. In a problem-oriented frame, Swedish reports overall focus on job barriers, low competence among immigrants, discrimination among the Swedish majority population, and prejudice among employers. The reports evaluate the problem as having to do with the Swedish society, where integration tools and social services need improvement. In a

Table 1. Framing of immigration in a welfare perspective

Frame	Problem orientation	Resource orientation
Problem definition – Sweden	Migrants meet barriers on the path to permanent job	Migrants are important future members of the labour work force. Migrants rejuvenate an ageing population
Problem definition – Norway	Immigration may have some unfortunate effects. One main concern of migrants is being too costly for the welfare state	Potential desirable effects of immigration, especially depending on the type of new arrivals
Problem source – Sweden	Low competence among immigrants, language barriers, and discrimination	How to improve integration, quality of social service provision as well as education system
Problem source – Norway	Low competence among immigrants; language barriers, dependent on type of migrants; cultural barriers	How to improve integration and increase quality of social service provision as well as the education system
Responsibility and solution – Sweden	The political system and the Swedish majority population, employees	International responsibility to receive refugees. Create better incentives for immigrants to work
Responsibility and solution – Norway	Political system and social services	Improve social services, create better incentives for immigrants to work, and reduce welfare generosity

resource-oriented perspective, the Swedish reports evaluate migrants as important in order to maintain a large public sector, and that migrants, particularly from the EEA (European Economic Area), make an important contribution. Overall, the Swedish reports are quite concerned with an international responsibility to live up to international conventions and obligations to receive refugees. Even if the documents from the two countries identify some of the same problems, Norwegian reports overall have a more problem-oriented focus, for example, they overall question whether immigration is *sustainable* in a welfare perspective, while Swedish reports evaluate immigration as *necessary* in order to maintain the welfare state. I will discuss welfare and sustainability more closely in the next two sections. Overall, the Norwegian reports point to some potentially desirable effects of immigration. However, problems are more emphasized, such as concerns about low competence among immigrants in addition to language and cultural barriers.

## Sweden: Immigration is necessary in order to maintain the Swedish welfare

As a starting point, an SOU from 2010 shows that the attitude towards immigration is positive. Immigration is seen as playing an important role in a country's development, especially in the light of globalization. "This influences all countries and demands, both when it comes to national and international cooperation" (SOU 2010: 40). Even if the document overall portrays immigration as a necessary contribution to the labour force, there is also a focus on why foreign-born immigrants have a weaker position at the labour market (p. 116). It states that there are several reasons for this, including a weak network, poor language, low competence, etc. However, these problems are seen as practical reasons for the lack of integration, while the main reason is discrimination and prejudice from employers (SOU 2010: 40, p. 117). The report states that circular migration can lead to advantages for the destination country since the migrant "is a source of demanded labour force that is needed in order for the host country to function" (p. 28). In addition, immigrants are seen as a source of tax income for the state. Migration is characterized as a win-win situation, since it can have advantages for both the migrants and the host country. The report "Migration, Aging Population and Public Finances" (SOU 2015: 95) takes up an issue related to the kind of challenge an aging population represents for the future financing of the public sector in Sweden. The demographic change was that the proportion of pensioners in the population has rapidly increased during 2014; immigration is here framed as something positive: "Immigration leads with certainty to a rejuvenation of the Swedish population. This rejuvenation is clearly seen in migration patterns in recent years" (SOU 2015: 95). Furthermore, immigration is seen as a solution to the demographic challenge of an aging population.

Overall, the trend revealed in the Swedish reports between 2010 and 2018 is quite consistent. There is overall a resource-based orientation where immigration is regarded as beneficial for the society. Even if some challenges related to newly arrived migrants are thematized, the advantages are overall seen as outweighing the burdens. The reports clearly state that the country is dependent on migration in order to maintain the welfare state and to finance the public sector. Furthermore, they focus on the Swedish responsibility to live up to its international obligation to receive immigrants.

## Norway: Is immigration compatible with the maintenance of the welfare model?

Unlike Sweden, the focus in Norway is more on problems related to immigration and integration. In the report "Welfare and Migration" (NOU 2011: 7), the welfare state is seen as the framework for immigration policy. "If the Norwegian welfare state in itself is to be considered a social integration project, new issues are raised when new large groups of people who have not gone through the basic socialization in Norway settle here" (p. 7). Immigration is seen as having both desirable and unfortunate effects when considered from

a welfare state perspective. However, the consequences of migration for the development of the welfare model are perceived as being dependent on the type of new arrivals, the resources they bring, and to what extent they are integrated into the Norwegian working life and society (NOU 2011: 7). Unlike the Swedish reports that framed immigration as a solution to consequences of an ageing population, the above-mentioned NOU report points out that the combination of an ageing population and low employment rates in significant population groups may challenge the sustainability of the model in the long run. Overall, immigration is seen as bringing specific challenges to the Norwegian welfare model as it presupposes large labour participation and a relatively equal income distribution in order to maintain a generous and universal welfare state. One concern is that wide-ranging welfare programs could undermine the incentives to search for paid work. The NOU concludes that both immigration and emigration affect the sustainability and function of the welfare model, and the increased costs of financing the model in the long term may challenge the population's support for equal distribution and generous programs.

Other reports focussed on measures directed towards immigrants. The report "Work-Related Measures" NOU (2012: 6) deals with adjustments made towards family-related and humanitarian migration. The report "Wage Configuration in View of New Economic Developmental Traits" (NOU 2016: 15) concludes: "In order to maintain a large welfare state in future years, Norway is dependent on a huge work effort". This implies that more immigrants need to participate in the job market and remain there throughout the retirement age. This is in line with the report "Integration and Trust" (NOU 2017: 2), which deals with the long-term consequences of high levels of immigration. The main conclusion is that "high immigration, entailing an influx of people with little ability to provide for themselves, will represent an additional challenge and increase the pressure on public finances." The Norwegian welfare model is perceived as both a resource and a problem when considered in the light of the integration of immigrants and their descendants. As the report states: "The model is vulnerable to the immigration of a high number of adults with low qualifications" (NOU 2017: 2, p. 20). When comparing the twin NOUs from 2011 and 2017, it is interesting to note that many of the themes and conclusions were similar, even if the composition of the two committees was different. This may indicate that the mandate given can be just as important as the composition of the committees. Both reports focussed strongly on how immigration might influence the sustainability of the welfare state. The main difference was that the first report focussed on labour migration, while the second dealt more with refugees. Both reports led to public debate on how failed integration could threaten the Norwegian welfare model and laid the foundation for many of the problems and solutions that were later presented. For example, the director of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organization (NAV) suggested several new integration measures after the last report.

From a problem-oriented perspective, Norway overall focuses on long-term negative effects on the welfare system, low competence, and lack of qualifications among immigrants, in addition to language and cultural barriers, whereas from a resource-oriented perspective, immigration is framed as having potentially desirable effects. However, this depends on the success of integration, the type of immigration, and whether social services can be properly

equipped in order to improve integration. Overall, the pattern over time shows that the Norwegian reports compared to the Swedish reports draw a far more pessimistic picture of the effect immigration has on welfare sustainability.

## Integration – a task for the welfare state

Both Swedish and Norwegian reports emphasize the responsibility of the welfare state for the integration of the newly arrived immigrants. The governments are perceived as having responsibility through different social services and the education system. While both countries focus on service provision and the education system, the Swedish reports also attach more weight to the responsibility of the majority population, more specifically related to prevention of negative migrant attitudes as well as the responsibility of employers with regard to hiring more foreigners. Compared to Norwegian reports, the Swedish reports frame integration more in relation to other political issues such as the promotion of human rights, economic policy, immigration policy, and discrimination policy.

Table 2 shows some of the main trends in the issues of integration, social services, and education. Swedish and Norwegian reports combined elements from both problem- and resource-oriented perspectives. From a problem-oriented perspective, Swedish reports focus on how the Swedish society overall can be better prepared for integration while there is also much weight attached to the hostility towards immigrants among the Swedish majority population. To a certain degree, the level of integration is explained by failings of the Swedish system in not being sufficiently prepared to receive immigrants. Integration is regarded as a responsibility of the Swedish society, and as such, the integration tools and social services need to be improved. From a resource-oriented perspective, immigrants are framed as an important contribution and something from which the Swedish society may benefit. Immigration into Sweden is regarded as something that will continue, and restriction on the number of immigrants is not an issue. The outcome of integration is framed as being dependent on the efforts of the Swedish society and the majority population. While both countries attach considerable weight to the responsibility of the state and social services, Swedish reports are more concerned with the responsibility of the Swedish majority population and private actors, such as employers when recruiting immigrants. From a problem-oriented perspective, Norwegian reports overall focus on barriers towards integration such as conflicting values between the Norwegian majority and the new ethnic groups, challenges related to cultural differences, and that immigration exerts too much pressure on the social services and the education system. There are also concerns related to how increased immigration may weaken the foundation of unity and trust among the majority population. From a resource-oriented perspective, immigration is framed as having potentially desirable effects such as the contribution of highly qualified workers from the European Economic Area. The type of immigration, the success of integration, and whether social services can be better equipped in order to improve integration are seen as the main factors that will decide whether immigration overall can have desirable effects for the Norwegian society.

Table 2. Framing of integration, social services, and education

Frame	Problem orientation	Resource orientation
Problem definition – Sweden	How can Swedish society be better prepared for integration? Concern of hostility towards immigrants among the majority population	Immigrants can be a valuable contribution to the national economy. Refugees can be a future resource for their country of origin if or when they return
Problem definition – Norway	Difficult to integrate refugees, inequality, conflicting values, and crime rate. Cultural differences may weaken the foundation of unity and trust and the legitimacy of the Norwegian model	European Union citizens are a valuable contribution to the national economy
Problem source – Sweden	Integration is difficult because the Swedish system has not been sufficiently prepared to receive many immigrants. Hostility and discrimination exist among Swedes	How to create better systems for receiving immigrants and increase the capacity within the services
Problem source – Norway	Integration is difficult because of too much pressure on the social services and education system	How to create better systems for receiving immigrants and increase the capacity within the services
Responsibility and solution – Sweden	Sweden needs to improve services. Increased immigration from outside of Europe may increase pressure on the system	Work-related measures through the state and improve education for immigrants
Responsibility and solution – Norway	Increased immigration from outside of Europe may increase pressure on the system	Work-related measures through the state

## Sweden – barriers to work, education, and immigrant hostility

The report, “The Way to Work – Job Market Policy, Education and Job Market Integration” (SOU 2010: 88) emphasizes that many important factors explain the labour market situation for immigrants in Sweden. Among the main factors discussed are education, earlier job market experience, language skills, network, employer’s preferences, ethnic discrimination, and policy interventions. State and policy measures are considered as important, but there

is also a focus on how the Swedish population can become better prepared and make a greater effort in the integration process. The report “The Xenophobe Within” (SOU 2012: 74, p. 29) notes that “the main threat to vulnerable groups is not the extremist groups in our society; instead it is the attitude of the masses”. The conclusion is that many Swedes are still guilty of various forms of everyday racism. It continues: combined with the “wrong signals from leading politicians this can quickly evolve into more severe forms of xenophobia” (SOU 2012: 74, p. 29). Furthermore, the report states that the work against more “brutal forms of xenophobia must begin with the xenophobia observed in everyday situations. We must start with ourselves” (SOU 2012: 74, p. 29). Considerable weight is attached to the commitment to live up to “Sweden’s international responsibility” (SOU 2017: 12 p. 306) and to “learn from experience and develop insight to improve the future readiness” (SOU 2017: 12, p. 330-335). In addition, the institutions’ role and responsibility is emphasized when it comes to integration. The report “More Newcomer Students Must Achieve Connection to High School (SOU 2017: 54) focuses on the schools’ responsibility to implement measures to improve results among newly-arrived immigrants in schools.

## Swedish optimism

Experience shows that different ethnic groups can coexist side by side very well, without automatically falling into conflict. The fact that there are different groups in a country is not a problem in itself; it is what the people and their leaders make of the situation that determines whether the groups will live in peace or, in a worst-case scenario, fight bloody wars. Experience also shows that people are flexible. We are well suited to live well in many different cultural contexts. Additionally, each cultural environment offers not one but several types of lives (SOU 2012: 74, p. 29).

While Swedish reports also address challenges, they are overall quite optimistic when it comes to immigration and its consequences, and is considered as a contribution to the development of the society. One report uses the concept *circular migration* where immigration is described as having a developing potential for the country of origin as well as for the receiving country, especially related to fulfilling a need for employment (SOU 2011: 28, p. 278). There was also a self-critical view on the handling of the refugee crisis during 2015. One report points to failings within the reception system and that this made the situation more difficult for the newly-arrived refugees (SOU 2017: 12, pp. 336-432). Overall, Swedish institutions, as well as society and population in general, are addressed as the main causes for failings in the integration of immigrants.

## Norway – a balance between pessimism and optimism

Immigration has both desirable and unfortunate effects when considered in a welfare state perspective. The consequences of migration for the development of the welfare model depend on the type of new arrivals, the resources they bring and the extent to which they are integrated in Norwegian working life and society (NOU 2011: 7).

The statement above illustrates the Norwegian position on immigration, which overall can be summarized in two main points: 1) immigration can have both positive and negative consequences and 2) immigration must be evaluated on the background of its effect on the welfare state. The NOU (2017: 3) highlights that Norway historically has been a relatively homogeneous country, both ethnically and culturally, and states that “gender equality and social equality have become essential pillars for achieving support and legitimacy in Norwegian politics since the establishment of welfare institutions”. While the Swedish discourse largely highlighted positive effects of immigration, the Norwegian discussion is more ambivalent. This was stable in Norway during the period 2010–2018 and is illustrated in the three reports (NOU 2010: 7, NOU 2011: 7, and NOU 2017: 2). The report “Diversity and Coping – Multilingual Children, Youth and Adolescents in the Education System” (NOU 2010: 7) suggests a whole range of measures, and the weight is put on the responsibility of the education system. The report emphasizes the value of multi-language and cultural competence in the labour market. Even though the report highlights certain challenges faced by people with a minority language, it overall draws an optimistic picture. It concludes that many multilingual children succeed within the education system (NOU 2010: 7, p. 11). The report “Better Integration – Goals, Strategies, Measures” (NOU 2011: 14) states that immigrants are relatively well integrated in the labour market and a relatively high proportion of Norwegians born to immigrant parents attain higher education. At the same time, it is highlighted that problems with integration need to be solved. The NOU (2013: 9), dealing with future challenges for the police, addresses the situation whereby immigrants from specific countries are heavily overrepresented in the crime statistics. In comparison, statistics treating crimes carried out by immigrants are not presented in any of the Swedish documents. Negative consequences of immigration can be illustrated by the following quote from the report “Integration and Trust” (NOU 2017: 17):

The majority have reason to be concerned about the erosion of egalitarian values due to society’s increasing cultural heterogeneity. These types of issues spark a great deal of engagement in Norwegian society and, in recent years, that debate has been characterized by conflict, often with strong public disagreements.

Even if pessimistic concerns were more prevalent during the later reports, the main tendency throughout the period was a combination of pessimism and optimism.

## Differences and similarities between Sweden and Norway

One important distinction between Sweden and Norway is that the Swedish reports highlight immigration as a positive contribution to the Swedish welfare state, while in Norway, it is seen as something that *potentially* can be positive but still challenges welfare sustainability. Problems related to integration in the Swedish reports are attributed to failings from the Swedish society and the majority population. In the Norwegian reports, on the other hand, the role of the majority society is not a topic of discussion. There is also a concern for discrimination and racism among Swedes, characterized as xenophobia (SOU 2012: 74, p. 29). Although the Swedish reports generally had a positive outlook on immigration, they after the refugee crisis focussed more on the challenges. This can especially be observed in the SOU (2017: 12), with an evaluation of the handling of the refugee situation in Sweden in 2015, by mapping out the chronology of the events, and analysing the governments' and the municipalities' responsibility and readiness beforehand. Even if the report problematizes immigration, the focus is more on the Swedish handling of the situation, suggesting different measures on how to improve the reception of the newly arrivals. Even if there has been a dramatic shift in the public discussion in Sweden after the refugee crisis and the politics tilted from a liberal towards a more restrictive line in the refugee policy, this shift was not so prevalent in these reports. Although it could be argued that this is somewhat in line with the established political parties in Sweden that have been avoidant when it comes to discussing difficult sides of immigration and integration. In the Norwegian reports however, problems with integration are regarded more as a natural consequence of immigration, especially prevalent in the reports "Welfare and Migration" (NOU 2011: 14) and "Integration and Trust" (NOU 2017: 2). These two reports are known as the "Brochmann reports". The first report from 2011 evaluated the connection between international migration and the sustainability of the welfare state. Right after the refugee crisis in 2015, the government appointed a committee that evaluated the consequences of a large increase in refugees. The mandate of the second Brochmann report (NOU 2017: 2) was a follow up of the previous report. The first report was highly controversial, largely because it calculated the costs of immigration, while the second report gained less public attention even if this one also calculated costs. The first report concluded that the economic consequences of migration in general depend on the type of new arrivals, the resources they bring, and the extent to which they are integrated in the Norwegian working life and society. The second report calculated the costs more in detail, depending on the land groups the immigrants originated from. The overall conclusion was that immigrants from what was defined as land group 1 (Western Europe and North-America) and land group 2 (EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe) were the most economically beneficent. Even if the second report sparked some public debate on the validity and methodology of how the calculations were estimated, it gained less public attention on this issue compared to the discussions following the first report. One obvious reason for the lower public attention might be that the use of calculations had gradually become a more "naturalized" part of the Norwegian immigration debate. Another aspect worth noting is that after the first Brochmann report in 2011, it has been an increasing

concern over whether the welfare state can handle large immigration of low-skilled labour. This concern was shared by many important actors and political parties. In Sweden, in comparison, it was more commonly argued that immigration is gainful. Although in Norway, this was a more common argument before the first Brochmann report, while afterward, this was seldom mentioned. One may assume that the report may have influenced the public debate on this issue. Two different governments with different political colours appointed the two committees, namely, the left-wing government in 2011 and the centre/right-wing in 2017. The mandates of these two reports were similar as they both were asked to analyse the long-term consequences of migration on the future of the welfare state. When comparing the two countries, the main conclusion was that Sweden had a more resource-oriented focus compared to Norway, although they both considered the consequences of immigration and the challenges related to the integration process. Both countries tended to frame immigration and integration in the light of a welfare context, although the framing was quite different. Reports in both countries recommend that more resources should be used on public measures. In contrast to Swedish reports, Norwegian reports emphasized that large immigration is difficult to combine with generous welfare benefit arrangements. One response discussed is a general restriction on welfare and longer waiting periods for immigrants to gain access to welfare benefits (NOU 2011: 7 and NOU 2017: 2, respectively). Swedish reports, on the other hand, conclude that immigration is a necessary supposition for the long-term economic survival of the welfare state. The main reason given is that immigrants fill an important need for jobs and contribute to maintain the size of the public sector. Another important difference is on the cost aspect of immigration. While Norwegian reports calculate costs and problems related to high expenses stemming from immigration, the Swedish reports conclude that immigration overall is economically beneficial and do not try to make an overall calculation of costs. Finally, one may add that the commissions in Sweden and Norway have been asked to perform different tasks over the 8-year period, and the differences in mandates may explain variations in framing and conclusions.

To what extent are policy differences driven by differences in framing and do differences in framing reflect differences in policies? What are the political consequences of these differences? Although research is often used to legitimate political choices and prioritizations, the road from research-based reports to politics can be complicated. Accordingly, it may be difficult to “measure” to what extent it is a link between the framing observed in official documents and actual policy in these two countries. One could analyse such committees as a prolonged arm of politicians, appointed and governed by the government. Consequently, one could expect that the premises and conclusions of these reports may depend on the political colour of the government that orders these reports. Another interpretation is that the committees represent the government’s attempt to gather expert knowledge as an essential foundation for the shaping of policies and that the researchers are neutral to any politicized conclusion. A more thorough answer to these empirical questions would require an analysis of how the committee members are appointed and whether the members are chosen based on ideological/normative standpoints.

For example, the difference in how calculations are used may lead to a legitimization of a more liberal stand either on immigration or on the opposite increased restriction. In the debate in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, one argument that was often made was that it was not *how many* but *who* that arrives. For example, the Norwegian Prime minister Erna Solberg argued that the refugee flow would cost around 40–50 billions.<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

Governmental reports often attract a great deal of public attention and may influence public debate as well as policy solutions. Even if the conclusions in the documents do not automatically translate into practical policy, they are often important since they influence the political agenda and the public discussion. In many aspects, Norway and Sweden are two similar countries; they are neighbours, they have large and generous welfare states, they have a knowledge-intensive job market, and they are culturally relatively similar. Yet, the reports reveal that there are some distinct differences in the discussion of immigration and integration. While both countries consider the welfare state as an important framework when these issues are considered, the conclusions vary substantially. Norwegian reports are more problem oriented compared to the Swedish reports. One could argue that Sweden has reason to be more sceptical due to specific problems related to immigration. In this sense, the Norway's more problem-based orientation, with a larger focus on difficulties related to certain issues such as low employment and conflicting values between majority/minority, etc., might also be interpreted as more willingness to cope with challenges that need to be dealt with. Another interpretation of Sweden's more optimistic outlook could be due to its membership of the EU, its international orientation, and "perceived obligation" to view migration as a resource rather than a problem.

Even if there are many common issues that are evaluated in both countries, the emphasis is quite different. A little simplified, one might conclude that Norway sees immigration and integration as something that the society is able to deal with, depending on resources within the social services as well as the numbers of immigrants. Sweden also considers the success of immigration and integration as dependent on the reception system and social services but places more weight on the responsibility of the Swedish society as a whole. Some findings are in line with Brochmann & Hagelund's study from 2011, where there is still a tendency in Sweden to blame racism and discrimination for the failings of integration, while Norwegian reports focus more on public institutions. There is a stronger concern for how immigration may lead to increased conflict between the host population and the immigrants, especially in the Norwegian reports. Furthermore, it is pointed out that this may challenge the foundation and legitimacy of the welfare state. One might conclude that the opposite pattern is prevalent in the Swedish reports. There is an overall positive outlook in Sweden on cultural diversity, and immigrants are considered as a resource rather than a burden for the welfare state.

These reports represent one of the main sources of legitimation of government-led policy and provide a broad picture of important discourses on immigration and integration. Discussions on immigration and integration in such documents can arguably be normative, and they can certainly have policy implications. As such, they provide a valuable insight into the foundation of policy formulation. Even if Sweden and Norway are similar in many aspects, this study reveals that at the official level, there are some striking differences in the framing of issues related to immigration and integration.

## Note

1. <https://www.nettavisen.no/politikk/erna-solberg---flyktningestrommen-vil-kostet-norge-40-50-mrd-kroner/3423146564.html>.

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