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IMMIGRATION COUNTRY NORWAY – DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND POLITICAL CONCEPTS

Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes / Johann C. Fuhrmann

Per capita income, education levels, life expectancy: for many years Norway has been the number one country in United Nations development studies.¹ In the latest Human Development Report 2010 Norway was once again top of the list. And with its second place in the recent study by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Norway is also seen as one of the leading countries for gender equality.² With such positive social factors in its favour it is hardly surprising that immigration numbers into Norway have been climbing significantly in recent years – for many migrants Norway is the land of their dreams.

Migration and integration are global social phenomena: today there are an estimated 200 million migrants worldwide, a fraction of whom – more than half a million – live in Norway. The “Campaign for Expulsion”, started by the Swiss People’s Party, the debate over the deportation of Roma and Sinti peoples in France, the success of Geert Wilders and the liberal-right Party for Freedom in the Netherlands and the latest debates in Germany on integration underline the fact that immigration is now a permanent feature on the European political agenda.

Experiences with immigration and the way in which it is handled differ from country to country. In this respect,

1 | Cf. United Nations 2010, *Human Development Index*, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2010_EN_Complete.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011).

2 | Cf. World Economic Forum 2010, *The Gender Gap Report*, <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2010.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2011).

the example of Norway seems especially remarkable. The number of immigrants in Norway has risen dramatically in a short space of time: since 1970 the total has risen nearly tenfold. What is also unusual is the high proportion of refugees among these immigrants. At the beginning of 2010 3.1 per cent of the Norwegian population had a refugee background. At the same time, the latest election successes by the Progress Party (FrP), show that immigration has now also become a part of the political agenda. What trends are we seeing? How do you become a Norwegian? And how is the increase in immigration reflected in Norwegian politics?

THE REVERSAL OF HISTORY: FROM EMIGRATION TO IMMIGRATION

A hundred years ago the big issue was emigration out of Norway, not immigration into it. At the beginning of the 19th century it was estimated that a million Norwegians had already left their Scandinavian homes to move to the United States. The desire to buy fertile agricultural land and an active campaign by the Americans to attract immigrants were deciding factors during this migration period. But as with the passengers on the Mayflower, religious freedom also played its part, at least initially: like many migrants, Cleng Peerson, a Norwegian-American pioneer, actively tried to persuade his fellow-countrymen to move to America. Together with Knud Olsen, Peerson travelled to America in 1821 on behalf of a Quaker religious community in Stavanger in order to look into immigration possibilities. Handbooks and periodicals were produced to try to persuade other Norwegians to make the journey. Probably the most famous of these publications was Ole Rynning's "Sandfaerdige Beretning om Amerika" (True Account of America), which appeared in Norway in 1838 and gave an idealised account of the life of exiled Norwegians in America.

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The call for new migrants fell on receptive ears in Norway at this time: the economic situation there was getting worse, agricultural land was becoming more and more scarce and the introduction of new technology into agriculture meant there were now too many agricultural workers. The

political situation in the USA made this country seem even more attractive for immigrants, with the Homestead Act of 1863 allowing every person who was at least 21 years old to settle and work a piece of land (up to 160 acres). Many Norwegian immigrants into the USA were particularly attracted to Minnesota and North Dakota. This wave of emigration reached its high point in the 1860s when ten to fifteen per cent of the population of Norway moved out. It wasn't until after the end of the Great Depression that the number of emigrants finally tailed off.

By exploiting its gas and oil reserves Norway has seen enormous economic growth in a relatively short space of time. It has grown from one of the poorest western European countries, with an economy built primarily on shipping, fishing, agriculture and forestry, into one of the richest countries in the World. Today the private service sector accounts for 35 per cent of mainland GDP in Norway.

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For a long time Norway was seen as having a relatively homogenous ethnic and religious society. A high birth-rate and large numbers of immigrants led to the population of Norway more than doubling between 1900 and 2010, growing from 2.21 million to 4.9 million.

While there were only 59,000 immigrants living in Norway in 1970³, this number has increased nearly tenfold to over 550,000 within the space of a few decades. Today eleven per cent of the population is either an immigrant or has an immigrant background. Thirty five per cent of immigrants living in Norway now have Norwegian citizenship.

Norway has experienced specific influxes of immigrants due to war and displacement, including Jews from eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and refugees from Hungary in the 1950s. However, as with many other European countries, the real growth in immigrant numbers began in the 60s and 70s. It was mostly migrant workers from Asia, and from Pakistan in particular, who came to Norway. This wave of immigration continued into the 1970s and as a result people with a Pakistani immigrant background now represent the largest non-European

3 | Cf. Vebjørn Aalandslid, "A Comparison of the Labour Market Integration of Immigrants and Refugees in Canada and Norway", *Statistics Norway Reports 2009/31*, 30.

immigrant group in the country. Today over 30,000 people with Pakistani roots live in Norway. However, with around 45,000 people or 0.9 per cent of the population it is the Poles who represent the largest immigrant group overall. Since the European Union expanded eastwards in 2004 the number of Polish immigrants has risen significantly. Manual and skilled workers are particularly drawn to Norway as wages are significantly higher than in their homeland. More and more of these workers are choosing to move to Norway and take up Norwegian citizenship. Other large groups of immigrants come from Sweden (approx. 29,000), Iraq (approx. 25,000), Somalia (approx. 24,000), Germany (approx. 21,000) and Vietnam (approx. 20,000).

The capital has a particularly multi-cultural society. According to Statistics Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå) 160,500 people in Oslo have an immigrant background. Out of a population of 587,000 this amounts to 27 per cent. There is also a high percentage of people with an immigrant background in Drammen (22 per cent), Lørenskog (19 per cent) and Skedsmo (18 per cent). Approximately 15 per cent or more live in Stavanger, Askim, As, Træna, Rælingen, Moos and Bærum. In 2009 Oslo had the highest net immigration (6,200) followed by Rogaland and Hordaland (4,200 each) and Akershus (3,600).

Norway is a member of the Schengen Area which allows the free movement of people within the countries known as the Schengen countries. Norway is also a signatory country of the Dublin Regulation which regulates asylum applications within signatory countries at the European level. Of non-Scandinavian immigrants between 1990 and 2008, 24 per cent were refugees, 24 per cent were migrant workers and 11 per cent moved to get educational qualifications.⁴

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4 | Cf. *Statistics Norway 2010*, Immigration and immigrant, http://ssb.no/innvandring_en (accessed January 10, 2011).

CURRENT TRENDS

In 2009 there were 65,200 new immigrants and 26,550 emigrants. The net immigration figure of 38,650 was below that of the previous year but was still the third highest ever recorded.⁵ Once again Poles accounted for the largest group of new immigrants (10,500), although the actual number of Polish immigrants was significantly down on the previous year (13,000), followed by Swedes (6,000) and immigrants from Lithuania (3,200). Twice as many immigrants came from Estonia as in the previous year (1,100). There were also fewer Germans moving to Norway than before: only 2,800 compared to 4,300 the previous year. The number of refugees from Eritrea (1,700) and Afghanistan (1,400) was double that of 2008. The number of immigrants from Africa stood at approx. 3,000 per year at the turn of the millennium, went up to 4,000 and reached 5,150 in 2009. The number of immigrants from Asia fluctuated between 6,000 and 9,000 for a number of years and reached 10,300 in 2008 and 11,100 in 2009. Immigration from North and South America remained at around 1,500 to 2,000 over the last twenty years but rose slightly in 2008 and 2009 to 2,400.

As there was a fall in demand for workers in autumn 2008 and early 2009 as a result of the financial crisis, fewer work permits were issued to immigrants from the European Economic Area, according to the OECD.⁶ The number of work permits issued to skilled workers from developing countries was also reduced. In May 2009 Norway revoked the Transitional Arrangements which it had agreed with the eight central and eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004. The biggest number of skilled workers from outside the European Economic Area came from India, followed by Russia, China, the USA and the Philippines.

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5 | Cf. *Statistics Norway 2010*, High immigration and emigration 2009, May 6, 2010, http://ssb.no/english/subjects/02/02/20/innvutv_en (accessed January 10, 2011).

6 | Cf. OECD 2010, "Recent changes in migration movements and policies", <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/6/17/45629432.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2011).

Alongside the high number of immigrants, 2009 also saw a large number of people leaving the country. 26,550 people left Norway, of whom 18,400 were foreigners. According to Statistics Norway this represented the largest number of foreign immigrants to leave Norway ever recorded, 3,200 more than the previous year and 6,000 more on average than over the previous twenty years. The trend towards higher emigration and lower immigration of Poles and Germans began towards the end of 2008, at the start of the financial crisis, and continued strongly in the early part of 2009. For the first time the Poles were the largest group to emigrate (3,600), followed by Swedes (3,100). The financial crisis and economic factors in general were the biggest influence on people's decision to emigrate. For Norwegians themselves there were other factors in addition to moving for work that also played a role (for instance moving abroad to study).

The total number of asylum seekers within the OECD as a whole has risen since 2006. In 2008 the USA was the most important host country with 39,400 asylum seekers being allowed in, followed by France, Canada, the United Kingdom and Italy, where the total number of asylum seekers accepted exceeded 30,000.⁷ However, based on the size of their populations, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland were the most popular host countries. The number of people seeking asylum in Norway has grown significantly and reached almost 14,500 in 2008. Preliminary estimates for 2009 suggest that more than 17,200 applications were made, despite the reduction in the number of applicants from Iraq. The majority of applications for asylum in 2009 came from people from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia. In July 2009 the government introduced measures to bring Norway's asylum laws into line with those of other European countries. The aim is to reduce the number of asylum seekers who don't actually need any protection and to bring down the current number of immigrants, which is currently relatively high compared to other EU countries.

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7 | Cf. OECD 2010, "International Migration Outlook – SOPEMI 2010", 20.

HOW DO YOU BECOME A NORWEGIAN?

According to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (Utlendingsdirektoratet/UDI) the following conditions need to be met to qualify for Norwegian citizenship:

- Proven or established identity
- Minimum 12 years old (and agreement of parents prior to 18th birthday)
- Place of residence in Norway and with intention to maintain this residence
- Fulfilment of the requirements for the issuing of a permanent residency permit (people with a work or residency permit in accordance with EWR/EFTA regulations are exempted)
- A total of 7 years residency in Norway in the previous 10 years.
- Of good moral standing
- Loss or relinquishment of previous citizenship⁸

Unlike in the USA, being born in Norway is not enough to become Norwegian. It is also necessary for one of the parents to have Norwegian citizenship. Since September 1, 2006 it is no longer necessary for the father of a child to be married to the mother. Since 2006 children under the age of 18 who have been adopted by Norwegian parents have automatically been given Norwegian citizenship. Since September 1, 2008 it has been necessary to demonstrate sufficient command of the language, something which may be achieved by taking a three-hundred-hour language course.

In 2009 citizenship was conferred on 11,400 foreigners. The biggest group of new citizens came from Somalia (1,700), followed by former citizens of Iraq (1,270) and Afghanistan (860). Around half of those given citizenship came from Asia. The second biggest group were the Africans with 25 per cent. Citizens of other European countries made up 21 per cent of those who were given Norwegian citizenship in 2009. Since 1977 approx. 225,000 people have been

8 | Cf. Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, "Citizenship", April 15, 2010, http://udi.no/Global/upload/Publikasjoner/FaktaArk/Faktaark_Statsborgerskap_Citizenship_EN.pdf (accessed January 10, 2011).

given citizenship, of whom more than 70 per cent are of European origin.

On January 1, 2010 a new immigration law came into effect. Separate work and residency permits were replaced with a single residency permit which incorporates a general work permit. The new law also introduced new criteria for families to join existing immigrants in the country. These include strict requirements on proof of income (financial support) and a prerequisite of four years work experience and/or education in Norway. In the case of family immigration there is a fundamental requirement for the person already living in Norway to prove they have sufficient income during the year prior to the arrival of the rest of the family. In addition it must be shown that an appropriate level of income will also be available in the following year. A new rule was introduced whereby the person already living in Norway is not allowed to claim any social benefits during the year prior to the family's arrival. However, there are some exceptions to the experience requirements, especially for family members from the European Economic Area and for migrant workers. People from the European Economic Area (with the exception of Romania and Bulgaria) since January 1, 2010 do not need either a residency or work permit, they only need to register upon their arrival in Norway (for instance with the police) and obtain an open-ended registration certificate.

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MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION AS POLITICAL ISSUES

Integration and migration issues are getting more and more media coverage these days, especially in relation to the large number of refugees that Norway has accepted in recent years. Before the new immigration law of January 1, 2010 came into force, further measures were introduced designed in part to protect the country's own workers, but also to protect the migrants themselves. In order to limit the exploitation of foreign workers and to protect Norwegian workers, Norway introduced new measures in 2008 to counter social dumping. These included an increase in inspections together with sanctions for infringements, stricter recruitment laws and the introduction of ID cards for workers in the construction sector. At the same time,

an action plan aimed at combating poverty and promoting participation in the employment market was set in motion. Measures to help the victims of human trafficking were also introduced. Victims of human trafficking who are prepared to act as witnesses in court receive certificates of exemption. The aim of these measures is to stop illegal immigration into Norway. Since September 2009 foreigners who return to developing countries of their own free-will receive special support. At the same time the country continues to try to attract highly-qualified people from other countries. It is now possible for qualified foreigners to apply for a stay of up to one year in Norway to learn Norwegian or to obtain further qualifications. At the same time as they are studying they can also undertake part-time work.

The Progress Party (FrP) enjoyed considerable success in the elections to the Norwegian Parliament (*Storting*) which were held on September 14, 2009 with their demands for a limit on immigration and the expulsion of foreign criminals. With 22.9 per cent of the vote, the FrP was the second biggest faction. This serves to underline the fact that immigration has now become an important issue among the public. The latest OECD report on migration quotes several studies that suggest that 70 per cent of the Norwegian people would like to see stricter controls on and/or reduced levels of immigration. This figure of 70 per cent puts Norway at the top of the statistics in the report alongside Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.⁹ Other statistics suggest that there is only a small majority in favour of stricter immigration

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controls.¹⁰ However, even in this survey, 36 per cent of those questioned see immigrants as a potential source of social problems. Many communities and small villages are reluctant to accept any more refugees, claiming that it is no longer possible to guarantee a reasonable proportion of foreigners relative to the number of local people. The FrP has to a certain extent taken a populist stance in the debate by, for example, encouraging members of parliament not to accept any more refugees in their constituencies.

9 | Cf. OECD 2010, n. 7, 118.

10 | Cf. *Statistics Norway 2010*, "Appreciate immigrants' contribution to working life", http://ssb.no/english/subjects/00/01/30/innvhold_en (accessed December 13, 2010).

The new immigration law that came into effect in January 2010, together with the other new measures enacted, shows that the red-red coalition government under Social Democrat Jens Stoltenberg has taken the immigration issue to heart. It is almost certain that the political measures introduced by the government are aimed at reducing the influence of the FrP. It seems obvious that the government does not want to leave the issue of immigration in the hands of the FrP, who might then enjoy even greater electoral success. The new legislation is designed to limit immigration and to deport immigrants who do not have residency permits. In 2010

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a large number of illegal immigrants were deported. By mid-September 4,042 people had already been expelled from Norway. On September 11 a group of 71 people were flown back to Serbia under police escort.¹¹ Stoltenberg expressed his hope that this spectacular forced expulsion would lead to more illegal immigrants leaving the country of their own free will. Just as effective was the introduction of a 48-hour rule for asylum seekers from certain countries, including Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. People from these countries are interviewed and then expelled by the police if there is no evidence that they need protection. The effect of this new rule was that by mid-September 2010 Sweden had accepted 4,000 asylum seekers from Serbia while Norway had only taken in 178.

For most people from non-European countries the road to the Norwegian "paradise" has become generally longer and rockier. Norwegians are significantly more open to migrants from European countries than they are to people coming from developing countries. This is partly because the latter group tends to include asylum seekers who are not so well-educated and who often do not take up employment. However, there is a significant difference between income levels of Norwegians and western immigrants on the one hand and non-western immigrants on the other. 15 per cent of immigrants from Africa were unemployed in the third quarter of 2010, while the figure was only 3.6 per cent

11 | Cf. Rolleiv Solholm, "More illegal immigrants expelled," *The Norway Post*, September 12, 2010, in: <http://norwaypost.no/news/more-illegal-immigrants-expelled.html> (accessed December 13, 2010).

for western Europeans.¹² The OECD report on migration described the situation of many foreign workers in Norway as difficult: compared to local Norwegians they are over twice as likely to be unemployed. In August 2010 7.9 per cent of immigrants were unemployed while only 2.3 per cent of the rest of the population were without work.¹³ This discrepancy shows that Norway cannot be held up as a perfect example of successful immigration, despite its high standard of living. The reality of the uneven distribution of wealth in Norway is mirrored by the domestic situation of many non-western immigrants. In 2008 17 per cent of them lived in homes of less than 50 m² – the figure for Norwegians was 4 per cent. More than half of non-western immigrants lived in households of more than two people in which not everybody had their own room. The *Høyre* party put forward several proposals how to avoid discrimination and encourage participation in the job market. At

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their annual conference in May 2010 there was support for a proposal to introduce new regulations on the job application process. In order to reduce potential disadvantages for applicants whose name might suggest an immigrant background, they are considering the idea of making job applications anonymous, so there would be no name or photo included.¹⁴ The debate over reducing immigration numbers has been fuelled recently by the high proportion of immigrants appearing in crime statistics and the fact that some schools in big cities (especially in Oslo) have more foreign students than Norwegian ones.

Conflicts that are not addressed can only become worse. In this respect it is good that the immigration issue is now being debated in Norway. It is important that this debate is carried out objectively. Warnings by the FrP that Norway is threatened by Islamization do not reflect reality. Only one immigrant in three comes from a predominantly

12 | Cf. *Statistics Norway 2010*, "Still growth in immigrant unemployment," November 4, 2010, http://ssb.no/english/subjects/06/03/innvarbl_en (accessed December 13, 2010).

13 | Ibid.

14 | Cf. Fiona Weber-Steinhaus and Andreas M. Klein, "Erna Solberg als Vorsitzende von Høyre bestätigt", *KAS-Länderbericht*, May 11, 2010, in: http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_19599-1522-1-30.pdf (accessed December 22, 2010).

Islamic country, as shown in statistics from the Norwegian Christian Intercultural Association and Statistics Norway.¹⁵ Immigration policies have become a permanent part of the political agenda and it is highly likely that these issues will play an important role in the elections in 2013. On the immigration issue, *Høyre* is adopting a liberal-conservative stance. So far all conservative parties have ruled out any cooperation with the FrP. If *Høyre* are not able to get the FrP to move away from their extreme right, populist position, it is unlikely that they will be able to work together at government level in the future. In any case, if it came to a multi-party coalition, it is more than questionable whether it would be possible to achieve a political consensus between potential coalition partners like the Christian Democratic Party (KrF), the Liberal Party (Venstre) and the FrP. The polemical debate in France has highlighted the risks that can arise when the migration issue is used as a political football. It remains to be hoped that discussions in Norway develop into a serious debate to which *Høyre* and the Christian Democratic Party can make constructive contributions.

It has so far not been possible to achieve a comprehensive harmonisation of immigration policies within the European Union or the Schengen Area: quotas, targeted immigration policies, differing legislation according to employment groups, large-scale or only minimal legalisation – all of these things are going on within Europe without any underlying agreement between the various countries and based upon each country's individual needs, the prevailing political mood or economic constraints. The majority of Schengen countries are tending towards making job-based migration easier but are making it more difficult to qualify for asylum or for families to join existing immigrants. As we have seen, this is also the case in Norway, although it has to be said that, until now, the country has accepted more than its fair share of asylum seekers. Obviously it is important and necessary to have measures in place to control immigration, but exaggerated

Obviously it is important and necessary to have measures in place to control immigration, but exaggerated security policies can lead to an increase in illegal immigration.

15 | Cf. *Statistics Norway 2009*, "Members of religious and life stance communities outside the Church of Norway 2006-2009," http://ssb.no/english/subjects/07/02/10/trosamf_en/arkiv/tab-2009-12-09-02-en (accessed January 10, 2011).

security policies can in fact lead to an increase in illegal immigration. Norway is not being invaded by immigrants, but there is a significant gap between the superficial discussions on the topic that have so far taken place and reality. In Germany, where the government has recently introduced measures to recognise foreign qualifications, the lack of skilled workers cost the economy fifteen billion euros in 2009 alone, according to the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology. Further serious debate on these issues is required – a debate which should ideally be Europe-wide.