

State Assisted Integration: Refugee Integration Policies in Scandinavian Welfare States: the Swedish and Norwegian Experience

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This paper sets out to provide an analysis of refugee integration policies in Sweden and Norway, by means of comparative analysis. There is a particular focus on the ideological foundations of the Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies, and the main programmes drawn on by the countries' authorities in order to integrate refugees. Further, the focus is widened to identify and analyse the changes, disparities and ambiguities in the Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies. The paper also seeks to examine how their experience can help in understanding the limitations of extensive state assisted integration measures. It is maintained here that these Scandinavian countries have developed extensive state sponsored integration programmes of a magnitude which is unique in a European context and elsewhere, and that housing and employment assistance are the two major pillars in both Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies. The findings suggest that Sweden and Norway have undergone similar experiences in respect of the challenges and long term outcomes of refugee integration policy-making. Although based on the principle of a strong welfare state, which provides extensive resettlement and integration assistance to refugees, refugee integration policies in Sweden and Norway have not succeeded in equalizing the initial inequalities between refugees and the rest of the population.

Keywords: Refugee integration, housing, employment assistance, Sweden, Norway

Introduction

In international debates on whether welfare societies have sufficient capacity to juggle the effects of ambitious refugee policies alongside a public outcry for a fairer ‘burden sharing’ approach amongst the wealthiest nations, the Scandinavian countries are usually referred to as an example of generous refugee, immigration and integration policies. In the 1990s, it was the Scandinavian countries that awarded permanent protection and settlement rights to refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (a total of 90,000), with two-thirds of these refugees settling in Sweden.¹ The most recent example of the Swedish liberal immigration policy is the city of Södertälje, located 30 kilometres south of Stockholm with an indigenous population of 80,000, which recently became world famous for having accepted more refugees from Iraq than the USA and Canada put together. The city’s mayor was even invited to testify before the USA Congress on the Iraqi refugee crisis hearing. ‘They asked how they could help and I told them they need to welcome more Iraqis to the USA’, was his modest advice to the American Congress, as reported in a newspaper interview (*Aftonbladet* 2008).

Liberalism in refugee admission policy as illustrated above, in combination with generous refugee integration programmes, and tolerant attitudes and espousal of cultural diversity at the political level have been further pointed out as distinguishing hallmarks of the Scandinavian approach to dealing with the effects of forced migration (Castles and Miller 1998, 2009). It is often assumed that the Scandinavian approach to refugee integration is partly a product of the welfare regime or welfare tradition to which Sweden and Norway belong (Esping-Andersen 1990; Sainsbury 2006). But can we really talk about one, single, specific and particularly tolerant Scandinavian refugee integration policy? What lessons can be learned about refugee integration policy through an empirical and analytical comparative ‘deep-dive’ into some ‘units of the model’, that is, comparing particular policy approaches of certain Scandinavian countries?

Obviously, a concept as important as that of integration, and the patchwork of features it designates, needs to be closely scrutinized in the context of its practical operational domains. Therefore, the aim of this article is firstly to identify the main tools and strategies used by the Swedish and Norwegian authorities in order to integrate refugees into different domains of the receiving host society. Here, we focus primarily on policies related to the residential and economic integration of refugees because, as will be shown, housing and employment assistance are the two major pillars of Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies. A further aim is to identify some critical points concerning similarities and differences in practice between these two countries, and the advantages and disadvantages attached to their respective refugee integration policies. In the last ten years both authors have been involved in numerous projects which evaluated and studied different aspects of Swedish and Norwegian integration and refugee policies (Bunar 1998,

2005, 2008; Valenta 2007, 2008; Valenta and Berg 2003). Drawing on broad aspects of our previous research, and other Swedish, Norwegian and international research on migration and refugee integration, as well as reviewing a large number of national policy documents regulating the field of migration and refugee integration, we argue in this article that Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies are not entirely without problems and ambiguities.

The article is made up of three interrelated parts. In the first part, various perspectives are presented on the concept of integration with a brief discussion on some of the theoretical foundations. The purpose of the literature review is to clarify guidelines in terms of the analytical approach. In the second part, the main principles of Swedish and Norwegian integration policies are presented, before undertaking an analysis of the changes, differences and ambiguities in their refugee integration policies. In the third part, the focus is gradually widened to identify and analyse the achievements and limitations of the major measures employed by Sweden and Norway to integrate refugees. The first sections of this article focus on economic and residential integration of refugees who are granted permanent protection in Norway and Sweden. Towards the end of the article, a section comparing the approach to these refugees, and to asylum seekers and those given temporary protection, shows that people who immediately upon arrival, are given access to employment, housing, education and language training, achieve a greater degree of integration.

Perspectives on Integration of Immigrants and Refugees

Contemporary refugee integration policies in advanced western democracies are clearly influenced by concepts, theories and empirical findings which have been produced and developed by sociologists and other social scientists since the beginning of the last century (see amongst others: Park 1928; Durkheim 1933; Gordon 1964). Conceptualization of the integration processes in the literature often comprises categories used for reflecting on and gauging the achieved level of integration within society's structures, both by individuals and groups. One of the earliest examples is to be found in Durkheim's (1933) classical sociological position where concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity were applied to understand the relationship between divisions of labour, social bonds, and the maintenance of a functional society, especially in the wake of social change.

Although theories of general integration processes still generate valuable insights, it was in fact through a series of refugee and immigration studies that the concept of integration gained theoretical and analytical momentum (Park 1928; Marshall 1950; Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993). The focus of contemporary scientific, empirical inquiry—spanning the early urbanization of American cities through to the dilemmas faced by modern liberal societies when absorbing refugees and immigrants into their welfare

structures—is the interplay between the cultural and structural dimensions in the process of acquiring civil, political and social citizenship rights (Marshall 1950). Individuals, minority and majority groups, associations and organizations as well as formal structures of the host society such as education, politics and the labour market are all actors in this field.

In his classic study Robert Park (1928) also urges recognition of the complex pattern of psychological, cultural, economical and political occurrences unfolding in the encounters between minority and majority, institutions of the host society and those of minorities. Several other studies on inter-ethnic relations have, in an even more explicit way, deconstructed the concept of integration into several sub-elements (Gordon 1964; Portes and Zhou 1993; Reinsch 2001; Ager and Strang 2004a). Researchers often divide integration into cultural integration, residential integration, economic integration and social integration of immigrants and refugees. According to Portes and Zhou (1993), these sub-processes of migrant integration rest upon the context of reception which includes three elements: the host government's policies toward immigrants (which range from hostile and indifferent to generous and highly supportive policies); society's attitudes and prejudices about immigrants; and the qualities inherent in the immigrant community itself. It is possible to argue that all these factors also influence the integration of refugees. However, the government's specific policies toward refugees (for example: reception/settlement policies, integration/welfare assistance, etc.), which are the focus of this article are obviously important factors (Korac, 2001; Franz 2005; Sainsbury 2006; Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

Perspectives on Residential and Economic Integration

In contemporary studies (Crow and Allan 1994; Mikkelsen 2001; Valenta 2008), residential integration is often associated with a scattered pattern of immigrants and refugees in areas dominated by indigenous locals. Mechanisms behind the processes of residential integration and segregation have been widely discussed (Wacquant and Wilson 1989; Kuusela 1993; Crow and Allan 1994; Mikkelsen 2001). Studies typically focus on residential segregation when it is seen, amongst other things, as a consequence of i) economic marginalization (Wacquant and Wilson 1989), ii) pragmatic short-term policy (Kuusela 1993); iii) discrimination (Karn and Philips 1998; Ross and Turner 2005) and iv) voluntary self-segregation (Wirth 1988; Valenta 2008). Amongst other concerns, this article will explore the two following questions: What are the main principles of Swedish and Norwegian refugee settlement policy? Has there been an attempt to counteract any of the above processes by the Norwegian and/or Swedish authorities and, if so, in what way?

Definitions and explanations of economic integration also vary, but the majority of studies on the economic integration of immigrants associate the concept with the wages, occupational distribution and the degree of

immigrants' participation in the labour market of the receiving country. Inequalities between indigenous locals and immigrants are sometimes explained by differences in human capital between newcomers and native born individuals. These kinds of explanations are usually based on human capital theories. We can also find theories that explain economic inequalities between newcomers and the hosts by referring to certain structural properties (for example, the different features of the labour markets that operate in different receiving countries). One of these theories is the segmented market theory, also known as the theory of dual-labour markets (Niesing 1993). The third set of explanations of economic inequalities between immigrants and native-born individuals refer to different kinds of discrimination. From several 'discrimination oriented' investigations, we can cite a number of Scandinavian studies that refer to formal or institutionalized discrimination (that is a result of judicial barriers created by the authorities), discriminatory employment practices, and studies that focus on perceived discrimination and immigrants' reactions to discrimination (Rogstad 2000; Craig 2007). The following questions will be explored in this article, in respect of refugees' economic integration: In what ways do the Norwegian and Swedish authorities try to enhance the economic integration of refugees? Do the authorities opt to reduce refugee marginalization through increasing refugees' human capital or by other means (e.g. positive action and quotas), and what are the limitations of their policies?

In recent times, the work of Ager and Strang (2004a, 2004b, 2008) has provoked a great deal of discussion. In short, they have, in accordance with traditional research on integration, launched their own typology on how integration can be defined and in relation to what parameters its achievements should be gauged. Ager and Strang's (2004a) conceptual framework consists of four domains, each one containing several policy indicators (ten in total). Thus, the domain 'Means and Markers' contains employment, housing, education and health. The domain 'Social connections', which draws on the work of Putnam (1993) and his operationalization of the social capital concept, consists of social bridges with members of other communities, social bonds within a refugee's own community, and social links with the institutions of the host society (Putnam 1993, 2000). The domain 'Facilitators' includes language and cultural knowledge, and safety and stability. Finally, the domain 'Foundation' consists of the indicator 'rights and citizenship' (Ager and Strang 2004a).

This brief, targeted treatment of the literature on integration has provided several guidelines on how to approach our analysis. The focus of this article will now examine three key dimensions of the Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies. Firstly, we explore the hallmark principles of the two countries' integration policies. Secondly, we focus on the integration of refugees in the labour market. Thirdly, we discuss and analyse the two countries' resettlement assistance programmes and housing policies. During our analysis, several other dimensions proposed by Ager and Strang (2004a) will

be scrutinized, including Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies on the facilitator indicator ‘language and cultural knowledge’ and the foundation indicator ‘rights and citizenship’.

Main Principles of Integration Policies in Sweden and Norway

Following the Second World War, Swedish and Norwegian welfare policies attempted to facilitate integration between various social strata and the institutions of the emerging welfare state. Emphasis was placed on general welfare actions aimed at encompassing all citizens. The labour immigration of the 1960s and the refugee and family reunion immigration of recent decades have increasingly diversified the previously ethnically homogeneous Swedish and Norwegian populations. At the same time that general welfare policies came to embrace the immigrant population, and hence draw them into the general integration processes, the responsible authorities also recognized that particular minority groups had particular needs. To meet these needs ‘integration policies’ (in various guises) have been formulated and implemented from the 1970s, targeted at the immigrant population.

Both in Sweden and Norway, prior to the 1970s, there were virtually no integration policies or officially defined ambitions on how to develop good ethnic relations in the country. Today, many believe that, ideologically, this period represented an assimilation approach (Westin 2004). It was assumed that immigrants would eventually adopt the cultural traits of the majority and, since they were already granted equality in basic rights, there was no need to develop a particular policy. This belief reflected the high degree of reliance on, and faith in, general welfare policy. But as many observers have noted (SOU 1996:55) the assimilation strategy was actually never formally adopted as the country’s official policy. There was simply no policy at all.

In 1975, a new immigrant policy was adopted in Sweden based on three hallmark principles: equity (the same rights as the indigenous population); freedom of choice by the individual (whether someone wishes to adopt the Swedish culture or not); and cooperation, meaning the importance of, as Ager and Strang (2004a) put it, social bridges and social links. According to some researchers (Westin 2004) this transition was remarkable, as Sweden, in terms of immigrant integration policy, went from assimilation to multiculturalism practically overnight. It was not only the increasing number of immigrants and demands for the recognition of their cultural particularities that triggered this turn, but also the effort by the ruling social democrats to clearly define Swedish society politically as inclusive, by contrast with the system of excluding guest-workers adopted in many other European countries (*ibid.*). However, at the beginning of the 1990s segregation in housing, and increasing levels of unemployment that primarily affected immigrants and young people, bringing with it stigmatization of vulnerable big-city areas and their institutions, prompted a number of more or less extended social programmes aimed at promoting integration. These programmes and their underlying ideology

constituted key elements for shaping up a new welfare policy with an ethnic dimension. Two government documents were particularly important. The first document (Governmental proposal, 1997/98:16) laid down the general outline for a new integration policy, marking a move from multiculturalism for immigrants to a cultural pluralism for everyone. Even if the intention was, at that time, to present integration as a matter for the whole of society, integration issues have remained tightly connected to immigration and immigrants (Södergran 2000; Dahlstedt 2005). The second document (Governmental proposal, 1997/98:165) laid down the guiding principles for a new urban policy aiming at abolishing social and ethnic segregation in big-city regions and striving for equal standards of living for all residents, irrespective of their origin and gender (p. 31). A sum of €400 million was invested in 24 of the most socially deprived neighbourhoods in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö in order to promote integration (Bunar 2005).

In 1974, a White Paper was presented to the Norwegian parliament and proposed what could be considered the Norwegian version of Sweden's 'optional inclusion policy' (Haagensen 1994; Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008). This states that the decision on whether or not to adopt the majority culture is up to individual choice (OECD 2009). In the years that followed, integration policy focused primarily on the housing sector, providing a special grant to support the city of Oslo and other communities with large immigrant populations to build up infrastructures for integration (e.g. immigrant organizations, language courses, mother tongue education). In the 1990s, Norway further developed its integration policy, with an increased focus on economic integration and anti-discrimination. This was undertaken through the application of several policy documents. Perhaps the most important here are: i) the Governmental proposal *on refugee policy* (Stortingsmelding 17: 1994/5) and ii) the Governmental proposal *on immigration and multicultural Norway* (Stortingsmelding 17: 1996/7). In these two policy documents the Norwegian authorities focused primarily on parity between immigrants and native Norwegians in terms of social and economic rights, participation, duties and opportunities. However, unlike Sweden, Norway only briefly, and never seriously, adopted the hallmark principle of freedom of choice. As will be shown, another difference in the integration policies of these two countries is Norway's recent adoption of a stronger element of coercion in its policy instruments, which may impinge upon paths of integration and repatriation for certain groups of refugees (Djuve 2003; Kavli 2008; Valenta 2008). Omission of the free choice principle is perhaps one of the factors that made it easier for the Norwegian authorities to include a stronger element of coercion in their introduction programme for refugees and housing/settlement policy. However, in exploring the differences between Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies, we also have to take into account recent developments in the political representation of openly anti-immigration parties in the Swedish and Norwegian parliaments. Although analysis of political parties does not fall within the remit of this article, we cannot

neglect the probability that differences in refugee policies between the two countries should also be seen in the light of recent political developments in Norway (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; Oesch 2008; Brochman and Kjeldstadli 2008). As Brochman and Kjeldstadli (2008) imply in their descriptions of political developments at the end of the 1990s, the rise of populist right wing parties in Norway has influenced the well-established, social democratic oriented Labour Party. In the words of the authors:

Consequently, from the end of the 1980s, the government came under crossfire between a continuously more belligerent anti-immigration front, and a critical centre-left front which asserted that the Labour Party was violating human rights. In any event, in advance of a changeover in leadership in 1997, a split developed in the Gro Harlem Bruntland Government: Both access control and asylum policy were tightened to a degree that engaged the attention of the High Commissioner for Refugees; yet, at the same time, the government urged the public ever more strongly towards tolerance and openness towards new citizens (Brochman and Kjeldstadli 2008: 294).

In spite of many similarities there are crucial differences between Norway and Sweden when it comes to public debate on migration and integration and political representation of openly anti-immigration parties in the parliaments. Sweden has had no populist right wing parties in its parliament since the apex of New Democracy from 1991 to 1994. Conversely, in Norway the far-right Progress Party has grown drastically since the late 1990s and achieved a position as the country's second largest political party. The Progress Party, a 'sister party' to the anti-immigration oriented Danish People's Party, advocates a much more restrictive refugee policy and the use of coercion in integration and repatriation policy. The Progress Party has never managed to seize governmental power but, as exemplified above, it has become a serious competitor to the Labour Party. The Progress Party exerts pressure on sitting governments, both directly and indirectly, to adopt more restrictive/coercive tones in the implementation of refugee policy.

Means and Markers: Employment

In Sweden and Norway, all permanently settled refugees have traditionally received extensive, state sponsored integration assistance, visible in two main areas. The first was related to accommodation and residential integration, whilst the second focused on refugees' integration into the labour market. However, several Scandinavian studies have indicated that immigrants and refugees in Sweden and Norway have significantly lower standards of living than the rest of population (SOU 1995:76; Djuve and Kavli 2000; OECD 2007). Studies have found that unemployment levels are three times higher amongst refugees and immigrants than in the case of indigenous Norwegians and Swedes, and that refugees are over-represented in low income/low status occupations (Blom and Henriksen 2008). These findings are not exclusive to

the Scandinavian countries, as Sweden and Norway were experiencing challenges similar to those facing most other western receiving countries of large groups of refugees and immigrants (ECRI 2004, 2009; OECD 2009). However, a key difference was the heightened extent of ambition and expectation by the authorities in Sweden and Norway in respect of integration of refugees (Kavli 2008). The reliance on general welfare policy, generous economic assistance, and extensive state sponsored language training provided to refugees, produced an expectation that Scandinavia's highly developed public system would equalize out any initial differences in employment levels (*ibid.*). However, critics of the system would argue that cash benefits produce a culture of passivity and dependence and that marginalization of certain groups of refugees would increase rather than decline (Wikan 1995; SOU 2006: 79). Both the Swedish and Norwegian authorities established extensive introduction programmes as a response to this criticism (Lund 2003; Kavli 2008). In order to facilitate the integration of refugees into the labour market the Swedish central authorities made certain recommendations to the municipalities in 1991 on how they should work with, and apply, the refugee introduction programmes, while Norway codified their introduction programmes in the Introduction Act (2003).

What are the general labour market outcomes of these programmes so far? The findings presented in recent studies are mixed and not entirely conclusive: on the one hand, evaluations of the introduction programmes show that a large percentage of participants started to work or study after completing the programme (IMDi 2008b). On the other hand, reports (ECRI 2004, 2009) still show significant differences between immigrants and the native population in all aspects of everyday life—from labour market participation and income, to housing quality, education, and health (ECRI 2004, 2009; OECD 2007, 2009; Blom and Henriksen 2008). An ECRI report on Norway summarizes the situation in the following way:

Persons of immigrant background are still lagging behind in vital areas. The unemployment rate among young people of immigrant background is reported to be twice that registered among the rest of the same age group, and a disproportionately high drop-out rate from secondary education is registered among students of immigrant background. Imbalances, although being slowly reduced, are furthermore to be found in the housing sector, with rates of homelessness six times higher among persons of immigrant background than in the population as a whole (ECRI 2009: 8).

In other words, the measures deployed to reduce inequalities are not sufficient, which has prompted discussions on how and what should be done in order to integrate refugees. Wrench (2007) distinguishes between different measures which may improve the inclusion of immigrants in the labour market. According to Wrench, some measures are consistent with a human capital interpretation of ethnic inequality such as those relating to the training of immigrants in order to improve their educational skills, and to help

them learn the language, culture and customs. Wrench maintains that the more ambitious measures also include equal opportunities policies, positive action and embracement of diversity management philosophy (Wrench 2007). Drawing from Wrench (2007), and several reports on integration policies in Sweden and Norway (ECRI 2004, 2009; OECD 2009), it could be argued that in Norway and Sweden the integration assistance is not primarily limited by the extent, quantity and length of programmes provided to refugees, but rather by the quality and scope of the facilitators of integration the two countries deploy in their work with refugees. Canada and the USA have a long tradition of using affirmative action in order to promote equal opportunity and ethnic diversity. These countries use proactive measures to reduce incidences of prevailing discrimination through use of quotas, selective systems and preferential treatment. Sweden and Norway, although very concerned about reducing inequalities between the ethnic majority and immigrants and refugees, have been reluctant to use the North American proactive model of affirmative measures in order to promote equal opportunity and ethnic diversity. The refugee integration policies of Sweden and Norway have, rather, focused on increasing refugees' human capital. Scandinavian countries (including Denmark) have primarily relied on making more and more extensive programmes related to training of newly arrived refugees and immigrants.

Indeed, the major lesson to be learned from the Scandinavian experience might be regarded as recognizing the limitations of 'Language and Cultural Knowledge' oriented facilitators. The more proactive measures to increase employment among immigrants and refugees are also recommended to Sweden and Norway by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI 2004, 2009). We must add that the Scandinavian authorities have recently started to acknowledge that human capital enhancing measures are not sufficient, if applied alone, to increase employment amongst immigrants and refugees. Thus, they have recently started to focus on moderate forms of positive action. For example, as ECRI (2009) reports, the Norwegian authorities are piloting a project in 12 government ministries and agencies, whereby applicants of immigrant background will be preferred for recruitment if they have qualifications corresponding to the best qualified applicant for a particular post (ECRI 2009: 7).

Recent Developments: Diverging Policies

Although sharing the same focus, the introduction programmes in Sweden and Norway are dissimilar in several ways. In Norway the introduction programme is tightly regulated. According to the Introduction Act (Lov 2003-07-04 nr. 80: Introduksjonsloven), all Norwegian municipalities which have received refugees have to set up introductory programmes. The Introduction Act requires compulsory attendance by newly arrived refugees in a full-time introduction programme which lasts for up to two years (IMDi 2008a: 37).

Over the duration of the programme, participants receive 300 hours' language tuition as well as information about Norwegian society. Individual assistance (job seeking, applying for education courses, etc.), and work placements are also important parts of the programme.² In Norway, those who fail to participate in the programme are penalized through withdrawal of cash benefits. Furthermore, lack of participation in the introduction programme has negative consequences for refugees' judicial status in Norway. According to Norwegian legislation, participation in the programme is a prerequisite both for permanent settlement and Norwegian citizenship. The requirement is that a refugee must take 300 hours' language tuition, which includes information about Norwegian society, and which is paid for by the authorities.

In Sweden, central government is responsible for financing the whole reception system in municipalities, and for making recommendations to local authorities about how they should work with refugees in the integration process. Central government also demands from all governmental institutions present in the municipalities (the unemployment office, the general social insurance office, etc.) that they participate in the integration efforts together with the local authorities. These terms are a part of the general agreement between the state and municipalities on refugee reception and integration processes. However, in order to receive certain elements of remuneration from the state, a municipality must draw up an individual introduction plan for every refugee, signed by the municipality representatives and the refugee (SOU 2008: 58). Language training courses, information on Swedish society, and short internships are often the main ingredients in these plans. However, in practice this individual plan is not compulsory. It is up to every Swedish municipality to decide whether and how to penalize a refugee who drops out, or only irregularly fulfils, the requirements of their individual plan. Some municipalities do reduce the level of economic support whilst others do not. According to some municipalities it is cheaper and more effective to simply keep paying the same amount of money, irrespective of whether or not a refugee participates, than to undertake a thorough investigation into every individual case that may only elicit a reduction of a few Euros (SOU 2008: 102).

In summary, the ways in which Norway and Sweden have calibrated their introductory programmes illustrate two essentially different approaches. Norway has chosen to impose more demands on all actors involved. The Norwegian requirements did indeed develop and intensify integration work with refugees in certain aspects, but only at the expense of other key principles. Imposed obligations can be seen as a revival of assimilation tendencies as well as a practice which undermines local democracy and municipal autonomy, which has a strong tradition in Scandinavian countries (Carrera 2006; Kavli 2008). Sweden has done the opposite, protecting these principles, but at the expense of a more comprehensive and consistent refugee integration policy. Due to the differences between the Swedish and Norwegian approaches, Norwegian efforts to increase refugee integration into the

labour market through extensive, free, state-sponsored programmes is of a much greater saturation density than in Sweden, since introduction programmes are more widespread in municipalities and a much higher proportion of refugees participate in programmes than in Sweden (Kavli 2008). However, coercive practices in integration policy are now being frequently proposed in Sweden, and it is not improbable that in the near future several of the requirements and preconditions that Norway has deployed will also be adopted by the Swedish authorities (SOU 2009:19).

Means and Markers: Housing

As already noted, refugees in Norway and Sweden can be resettled with the assistance of the public authorities. The resettlement of refugees and former asylum seekers who have been granted permanent protection and a residence permit is administered through cooperation between the central authorities and local municipalities. Local municipalities receive economic support from the central authorities which is designed to cover the costs of refugee housing and integration into the labour market. How has housing and settlement policy developed over time?

Attempts to Increase Scattered Patterns of Refugee Settlement

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s asylum seeking and family reunion were the main reasons for granting permanent residence and settlement in Sweden and Norway. This trend peaked during the first half of the 1990s. The wars in Bosnia and Somalia, and persecution in Kosovo, Iraq and Iran all resulted in thousands of refugees being accepted in both countries each year. A strong economy and a still expanding welfare state managed to absorb the newly arriving groups. But the increasing pressure on the refugee reception system prompted changes in the way the entire system was envisaged to function, involving negotiations between the central authorities and selected municipalities. In Sweden, the ‘whole Sweden strategy’ for refugee dispersal throughout the country was adopted in 1986/87, not primarily as the product of meticulous deliberations, but rather because the Migration Board was running out of places in the municipalities with which they held reception agreements (Westin 2004). According to this strategy refugees were sometimes sent to remote municipalities in the sparsely populated northern part of the country, which had no previous experience of refugee reception and integration. The municipality received a certain sum of money from the government to cover the initial integration costs up to two years and the refugees had little choice to decline the settlement area. However, as holders of permanent residence permits they could freely move to other municipalities if they could find an apartment on their own, which many eventually did. The governmental subsidies did not follow them and the municipality they moved to was

compelled by a completely different set of laws to provide refugees with social welfare and subsidies for the housing rent.³

In the 1990s the Norwegian authorities were also running out of places in large municipalities and they perceived the dispersal of refugees not only as a way to hamper concentration in metropolitan areas, but also as a strategy to accelerate integration and discourage the emergence of socially segregated urban ethnic communities (Brox 1997; Djuve and Kavli 2000; Valenta 2008).

What were the outcomes of Swedish and Norwegian dispersal policy? And how do such political practices relate to programmes designed to increase refugee labour market integration? The findings arising from recent studies are again mixed and not entirely conclusive. On the one hand, research shows that small and medium sized introduction programmes encompass the highest percentage of participants, over that of the larger programmes/municipalities (IMDi 2008a). On the other hand, research indicates that scattering of refugees may actually undermine the successful implementation of introduction programmes (OECD 2009). However, a substantial body of study also shows that refugees settled in remote areas most often tend to migrate away from such areas. Indeed, the general trend is that a large proportion of refugees migrate to urban areas (Djuve and Kavli 2000; Johansson and Rauhut 2007; Høydahl 2009). Some of the reasons cited in studies to explain secondary migration and the failure of rural areas to retain refugees are: lack of social integration, difficulties obtaining employment, a desire to live in multicultural urban environments, and wishing to live in the proximity of relatives, friends and well-established ethnic communities (Brox 1997; Djuve and Kavli 2000; Åslund 2005; Johansson and Rauhut 2007; Valenta 2007). Based on these results, some researchers have concluded that the countrywide strategies adopted in Sweden and Norway appear to have failed (Brox 1997).

Unlike Sweden, Norway never formally abandoned the countrywide strategy, but it has featured far less prominently in Norwegian political rhetoric since the late 1990s. However, active placement policies remain on the political agenda both in Sweden and Norway, and still lead to continuous authority assisted settlement of refugees with the aim of settling them outside areas with high concentrations of migrants (SOU 2003:75). According to current Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration/settlement policies, the authorities are required to provide housing, but can decide in which location refugees will be settled. However, the element of coercion is again less marked in Swedish policy implementation. The Swedish authorities introduced a 'self-resettlement' category, where refugees can manage their own settlement and receive a certain level of economic support (Statens Invandrarverk 1997; SOU 2003:75). However, in Norway, all refugees are still settled via 'controlled settlement' (Kavli 2008). Here, refugees are subject to severe restrictions in terms of the settlement options made available to them (Kavli 2008; Stortingsmelding 17: 2000/1). The refugees may decline the proposed location and settle in some other place, but then they may lose state sponsored housing assistance and other forms of integration assistance such as language

training, employment assistance and the economic support provided through introduction programmes. In other words, refugees may resettle wherever they want in Norway, but if they decline to be settled via ‘controlled settlement’ offered by the Norwegian authorities then they have to rely on their own resources and income.

Integration Policy and Return

In order to highlight how the rights of refugees can vary, the final section of this article considers how different types of integration assistance attached to refugees are a factor of the administrative categorizations adopted by the Swedish and Norwegian authorities, and the choice of category used by authorities to attach to a migrant or refugee. The integration and settlement programmes focused on above are offered primarily to refugees classified as ‘permanently settled’. However, certain types of state sponsored housing and integration assistance are also provided to refugees who qualify under the classification of ‘temporary protection’ or of ‘asylum seeker’.

Refugees with Temporary Protection

As already noted, in the 1990s Sweden and Norway received a large number of refugees from Bosnia, and later from Kosovo. As a response to these mass outflows Sweden and Norway, along with many other western European countries, gradually incorporated the concept of ‘temporary protection’ into their refugee policies (Koser and Black 1999; Valenta and Berg 2003).

As Koser and Black (1999) point out, while certain other refugee groups have received some form of temporary protection in European countries and North America, the Bosnian group was the first and by far the largest, until the Kosovo crisis in late 90s, that consistently has been received in this manner throughout the EU (Koser and Black 1999: 533). In most Scandinavian countries, refugees from Bosnia and later from Kosovo were granted collective ‘temporary protection’ and access to welfare systems, but it was taken that when the war ended they should either return to their native countries, or apply for asylum on an individual basis (Koser and Black 1999; Brekke 2001; Berg 2002).

It should be emphasized that Norway and Sweden initially adopted a different approach from each other on the question of a temporary protection regime (Koser and Black 1999; Berg 2002). Norway is not a member of the EU. Yet, Norway gave ‘temporary protection’ to Bosnian refugees, while Sweden, which at the time the Bosnian crisis was unfolding was also not a member of the EU, was initially more reluctant than Norway to adopt this measure. As Koser and Black point out: ‘In Sweden the majority of Bosnians were processed through the asylum procedure immediately upon arrival, and were never granted “temporary protection”’ (1999: 529). Although Sweden was the third largest receiver of Bosnian refugees in the EU, and one of the

largest receivers of Bosnian refugees in the world, the Swedish authorities generously issued permanent residence to the holders of Bosnian citizenship in 1993 (Koser and Black 1999; Berg 2002). Like many other European countries, Norway gradually moderated its policies toward Bosnian refugees who were granted temporary protection in the early 1990s, and eventually granted them permanent protection.

However, in respect of another large refugee group, from Kosovo, Norway and Sweden had a similar approach: initially, refugees were awarded temporary protection status, with the option to return to their home country when the war ended or to individually apply for asylum. Also in respect of integration policies toward refugees with 'temporary protection' status, refugee integration policies in Sweden and Norway demonstrate several things in common (Berg 2002). Refugees with temporary protection status were settled in municipalities, and received full integration assistance.

Integration assistance measures in Sweden and Norway have also been combined with extensive, state sponsored repatriation programmes (Valenta and Berg 2003). Known as the 'two-track policy', this practice was first introduced in Norway in the wake of the arrival of Bosnian refugees. The policy combined an active integration policy with a repatriation policy. The rationale here was that refugees should be prepared for life in Norway if the conditions for repatriation failed to materialize (Stortingsmelding 17. 94/95). Another argument was that active and well integrated refugees also would be better able to re-establish themselves in their home country in the event of repatriation (Brekke 2001, 2002; Berg 2002). The two-track policy initially combined full integration with voluntary return (in the case of the Bosnians), while in later versions of policy integration programmes operating in Sweden and Norway, full-time integration became combined with the forced return of refugees (in the case of refugees from Kosovo).

The Swedish and Norwegian experience with refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo teaches us that refugees with temporary protection status who are given access to employment, housing, education and language training immediately upon arrival, get a head start through entering the integration process at an early stage. In many other European countries, the same groups do not get such immediate access to 'Means and Markets' and 'Facilitators', which has hindered or delayed their integration, once accorded the right to settle permanently (Berg 2002; Korac 2003; Franz 2005). Korac (2001, 2003), for example, shows in her study on refugees from Balkan countries in Italy, that the lack of such assistance forced these groups to become self-reliant 'at the cost of entering a niche labour market from which it is very hard to move upwards on the economic and social ladder' (Korac 2003: 59).

Housing Policy and Work on Empowerment and Integration of Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers in Sweden are placed in collective reception facilities. Alternatively, they are granted economic compensation if they independently

arrange for their own accommodation. In Norway all asylum seekers are placed in reception facilities. To date, the Norwegian authorities have been reluctant to grant economic compensation to asylum seekers who arrange their own accommodation as is the case in Sweden (Brekke and Vevstad 2007).

Asylum seekers in both countries are provided with state sponsored extensive language training, information programmes, and work permits. According to the authorities, these facilitators of integration are deployed in order to empower asylum seekers and prepare them for life outside the reception facilities, wherever that might be—in the host country, their home country, or somewhere else (Valenta and Berg 2003; Brekke 2004a). Yet, these efforts sometimes come into conflict with regional authorities' implementation of restrictive asylum policies (Valenta 2004; Brekke 2004b). Brekke (2004b) studied the various impacts of national control policies on the arrival of asylum seekers to Scandinavia, and pointed out that the systems for reception of asylum seekers are responsible for implementing two contradictory policy tasks. One important task is to prepare residents for living in the new country. Another is to motivate residents not eligible for a residence permit to return to their home country (Brekke 2004a). Several studies also indicate that reception conditions are used as a tool to discourage new arrivals and provide motivation to leave the reception camp, as well as acting to discourage potential new asylum seekers from coming to Scandinavian countries (Brekke 2004a; Valenta 2004; Brekke and Vevstad 2007). This practice has been more accentuated in Norway than in Sweden. For example, in 2002, the number of arrivals to Norway reached a new record of 18,000 asylum seekers. In order to reduce the influx of asylum seekers the Norwegian authorities introduced restrictions on family reunification, and the right of asylum seekers to participate in Norwegian courses (Brekke 2004b). A few years after the imposition of this restriction, when the rate of influx had become low, the Norwegian authorities changed their policy, re-launching the language courses. Results based on data collected in reception centres in 'the years of return and deterrence' indicate that reduction in access to language training severely reduced reception conditions and undermined work with empowerment and integration of asylum seekers (Berg and Sveaass 2005). In summary, the discussion on ambivalent attitudes in respect of integration assistance versus return, and generous versus restrictive policies, has highlighted the greater preponderance of problems experienced by refugees with temporary protection status within Swedish and Norwegian asylum policies (Brekke 2004a; Berg and Sveaass 2005; Brekke and Vevstad 2007).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the concept of assisted integration in the context of two Scandinavian countries and their broader refugee policies. As a part of that effort, we have identified changes in political instruments,

as well as achievements, shortcomings, tensions and ambivalences in the two countries' refugee integration policies. Both countries have similar experience in respect of challenges and long term outcomes of refugee integration. Furthermore, both countries have followed similar political trajectories and also faced similar ambivalences in their work with refugee integration policies (a focus on increasing human capital vs. various forms of positive action), settlement policies (concentrated vs. dispersed settlement or government steered vs. individually decided with governmental help) and migration policies (integration vs. deterrence/return).

We have argued that although Sweden and Norway face similar challenges and have a similar focus on 'Means and Markers', and 'Facilitators' their practices differ in respect of several integration domains as set out by Ager and Strang (2004a). One such element is the level of coercion used by the authorities in order to steer the actions of refugees in the context of the economy and housing and, in particular, in relation to choices about settlement areas. Another difference between the two countries is visible in the dynamic relations between the policy of refugee integration and the policy of refugee repatriation deployed in each country. As we have shown in this article, despite these differences, refugee integration policies in Sweden and Norway are as clearly distinguishable from other countries as ever, both in an EU context and elsewhere.⁴ Swedish and Norwegian refugee integration policies appear clearly distinct from those refugee policies characterized by low degrees of welfare and an absence of integration assistance. Refugee policies in both countries also appear clearly distinct from policies in countries which deny large groups of refugees and asylum seekers any access to employment and integration assistance. At the same time, the experience of these two countries teaches us that extensive integration assistance has only a limited effect on equalizing the initial differences between refugees and the rest of the population. Differences between immigrants and the rest of the population in all aspects of everyday life are large, which should trigger discussions relating to the ambitions and focus of integration policies. This experience implies that policy makers need to revise their expectations. The Swedish and Norwegian cases offer a reminder that refugee integration and any subsequent upward social mobility are processes that take time to achieve, even in those countries which have invested tremendous energy in 'Facilitators' of integration. In addition, existing policy measures need to be questioned as to what can be done. It has been suggested here that their weakness is not the absence of sufficient housing assistance and training provided to refugees, as is the case in many other countries. The Swedish and Norwegian experience demonstrates that no matter how well developed housing assistance and training provided to refugees is, such measures cannot in isolation result in successful refugee integration. Therefore, if Sweden and Norway want to achieve their ambitious aims with respect to refugee integration, they need to extend their policy scope and, amongst other things, include the use of more proactive 'Facilitators'.

1. In 2008, almost 10 per cent of the population in Norway and 14 per cent of the population in Sweden was foreign born (IMDi 2008a; Statistics Sweden 2009). Over the last three decades, Scandinavian countries have received, and given protection and permanent settlement to, large groups of refugees and asylum seekers from all over the world. Since the middle of the 1990s 20,000–30,000 refugees have applied for asylum in Sweden every year and about 5,000–10,000 in Norway (IMDi 2008a; SOU 2009; Statistics Sweden 2009). The biggest groups include refugees from Iraq, Bosnia, Iran, Somalia, parts of Turkey and Afghanistan. Sweden is among the largest receiver of refugees from former Yugoslavia and Iraq in the world per capita and in absolute numbers.
2. The 300 hours are actually just a start. In Norway, the municipalities are obliged to offer up to 2,700 additional hours to those in need of further education (see OECD 2009: 51).
3. This strategy proved to be economically precarious, especially for municipalities in big-city areas, and was formally abandoned in 1994.
4. For comparisons between Scandinavian countries and situations in other countries see Koser and Black (1999); Mestheneos and Ioannidi (2002); Berg (2002); Carrera (2006); Sainsbury (2006); Brekke and Vevstad (2007); OECD (2007).

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