

Coordinating migration related statistics and analyses at Statistics Norway – bridging users and producers

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Abstract

Migration related statistics and analyses are in high demand by government agencies, the media and the public at large. Migration flows, stocks and integration measures such as participation in the labor force and in the educational system are continuously monitored. To meet the demand for relevant, updated and easily accessible information, Statistics Norway has a Coordinator of Migration Related Statistics and Analyses. The position is jointly financed with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security through a Framework Agreement. The Coordinator bridges users and producers of statistics, and serves as a contact point in a field that is otherwise fragmented between different departments at Statistics Norway. Annually, approximately 1 million Euros is funneled through the Coordinator and is earmarked for statistics and analyses on migration and integration. Statistics Norway has thus become the largest quantitative research institution on migration issues in Norway.

Keywords: migration, analyses, coordination, funding.

1. Introduction

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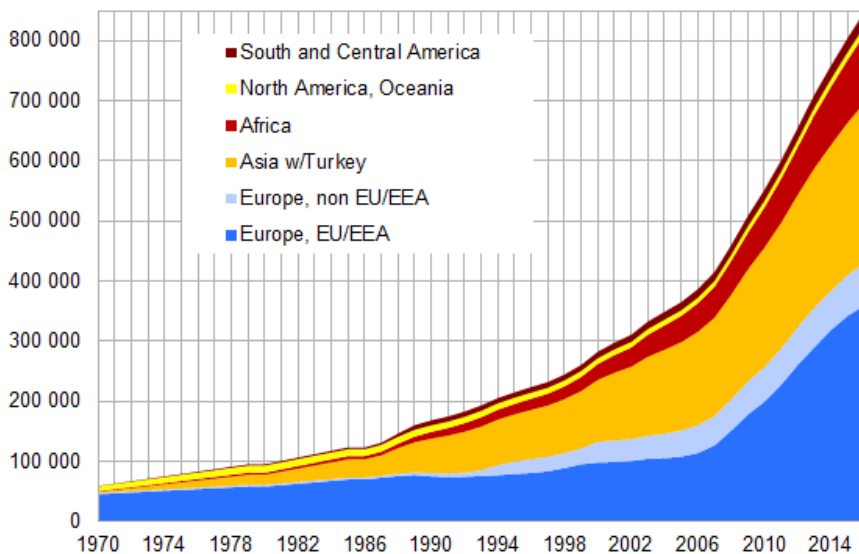
Norway. Annually, approximately 1 million Euros is funneled through the Coordinator and is earmarked for statistics and analyses on migration and integration. Statistics Norway has thus become the largest quantitative research institution on migration issues in Norway.

In this presentation we will describe the Norwegian “model” of organizing the migration field at the national statistical office, and discuss advantages and challenges of having a Framework Agreement with a government ministry. We will briefly present the main points in the Agreement and the role of the Coordinator, and give an outline of production and migration-related topics that are covered annually at Statistics Norway.

2. Immigration to Norway

As of 1 January 2016, approximately 848 000 persons resident in Norway were either immigrants (699 000) or born in Norway to two immigrant parents (150 000) (figure 1). These groups when combined make up 16 per cent of the population in Norway, and represent 223 different countries and autonomous regions. The largest groups of immigrants are from Poland, Lithuania and Somalia.

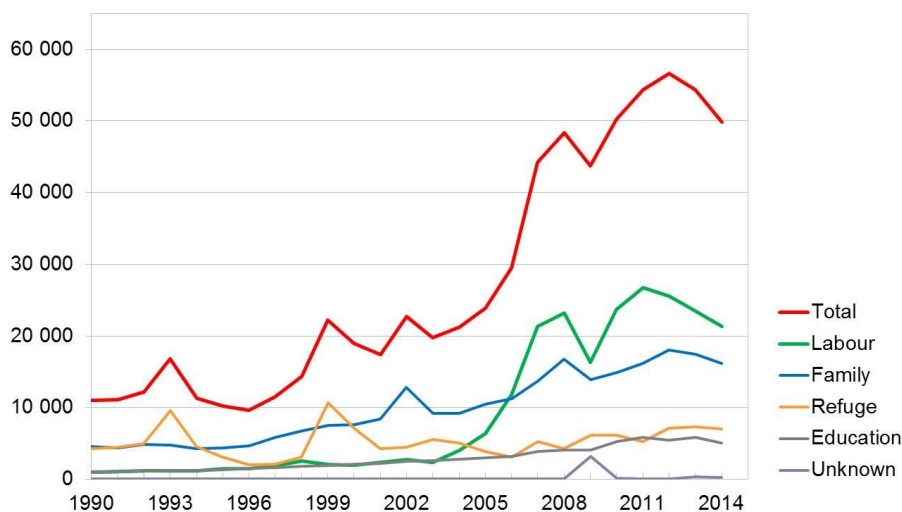
Fig. 1 Number of immigrants and Norwegian-born children of immigrants residing in Norway by parents’ region of origin. 1970-2016



Source: Statistics Norway

Since the EU enlargement in 2004, labour has been the most common reason for immigration to Norway, followed by family immigration (figure 2). Due to immigration, in particular labour immigration, the population in Norway has for several years had one of Europe's highest population growth rates at more than 1%.

Fig. 2 Number of immigrations by reason for immigration. Norway. 1990-2014



Source: Statistics Norway

The influx of asylum seekers in 2015 has also been felt in Norway, as a record breaking 31 000 sought asylum that year, making Norway the third largest asylum seeking country I Europe relative to population size, after Hungary and Sweden. At the start of 2015, before the recent surge in asylum seekers, there were 188 000 immigrants with a refugee background in Norway, mostly from Somalia, Iraq and Iran. They constitute 28 per cent of immigrants in Norway or 3.6 per cent of the total population.

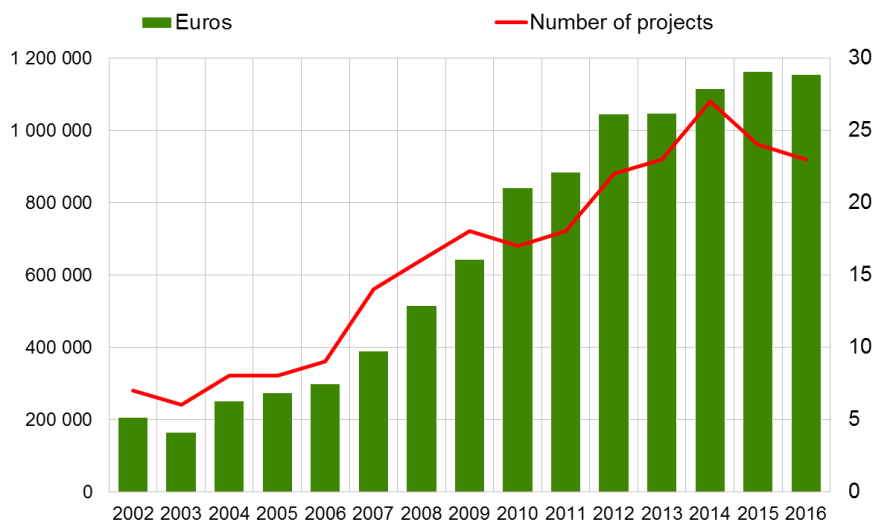
3. The Framework Agreement on migration related statistics and analyses

Statistics Norway has the role of providing the nation with independent, reliable, timely and accurate statistics and analyses on demographic, social and economic developments. That

includes immigration and statistically monitoring the integration and participation of immigrants in Norwegian society.

Since in 1997, Statistics Norway has had a Framework Agreement with the Ministry responsible for immigrant integration policy¹ that has ensured the continuous production and expansion of statistics and analyses on immigration and integration. The funding and the number of projects initiated have increased in line with increasing immigration and focus on integration issues in Norwegian society. For the last five years, more than one million Euros have funded approximately 23 projects each year (figure 3).

Fig. 3 Migration related projects funded through the Framework Agreement, in numbers and Euros, by year. Statistics Norway. 2002-2016



Source: Statistics Norway

Today, approximately two thirds of all immigration related analyses at Statistics Norway are funded through the Framework Agreement, while most of the regular official migration related statistics are funded by Statistics Norway itself. In 2015 Statistics Norway issued 45 official

¹ Currently the Ministry of Justice and Public Security

migration related statistics, 40 publications (mostly reports and articles) and were host to a total of 50 small and large ongoing projects on this topic.

Statistics Norway is thus the largest producer of migration and integration analyses, and the largest quantitative research institution on migration issues in Norway. This is made possible also through the existence and long time tradition of analytical activities and a research department within Statistics Norway². This sets Statistics Norway apart from most national statistical institutions, where research is not such an integral part of the agency. However, the Framework Agreement on migration related statistics and analyses is unique at Statistics Norway, and perhaps in all of Europe, in its scope.

1.1. The role of the Coordinator

The Framework Agreement is two-fold. In addition to funding research, it funds two thirds of a full-time Coordinator position at Statistics Norway. The migration field is interdisciplinary and involves more than ten different divisions³ and three departments at Statistics Norway. It has proven vital to have a Coordinator who facilitates communication across divisions, ensures certain common standards, and informs analysts about new projects and proposals across the agency.

The role of the Coordinator has developed greatly over the last few years, in response to increased interest in migration and integration related issues both within Statistics Norway and in society at large. The Coordinator annually coordinates new project proposals from Statistics Norway within the Framework Agreement, maintains an overview of existing research and

² www.ssb.no/en/

³ Division for population statistics, for health statistics, for social welfare statistics, for education statistics, for income and wage statistics, for labour market statistics, for public economics and demographic models, for macroeconomics, for social and demographic research, and for microeconomics.

matches new research needs with resources and experts at Statistics Norway. This is time consuming and requires insight and a position dedicated to this type of activity.

To strengthen the communication and knowledge base across divisions, the Coordinator has initiated monthly seminars with presentations of research, an internal newsletter, and an annual workshop for and by the experts working in the migration field at Statistics Norway. This is necessary in order to channel our knowledge and resources towards continuously improving our research and methods, and keeping up with developing needs in society.

The Coordinator for migration related statistics and analyses is also the main point of contact for the Ministry responsible for integration and its' underlying directorates. The Coordinator thus bridges users and producers of statistics, and serves as a contact point in an institution that is fragmented between different divisions and inherently challenging for users to navigate.

Communicating our vast knowledge, informing the public and decision-makers through talks and meetings, is a central part of the Coordinators tasks. Statistics Norway also organizes an open seminar every year on migration and integration related research; this year the topic was refugees and our research on participation in the labor force and in the educational system in Norway.

4. Advantages and challenges to having a Framework Agreement with a government ministry

It is essential that Statistics Norway remains independent and non-political in its research and production of statistics. Immigration and integration are particularly sensitive topics in our society. In order for Statistics Norway to be a trustworthy provider of facts our independence must be absolute.

It is pertinent to question if our independence is challenged when so much of our research on migration and integration related issues is funded from a government ministry. This is an important topic that we address regularly. However, most of the project proposals within the Framework Agreement are initiated by experts at Statistics Norway, not the Ministry. Projects

that are not given priority one year, may be resubmitted and granted another year. And throughout changing governments, the primary interests expressed by the ministry have remained fairly stable. The focus has all along been the monitoring and research that enhances our understanding of immigration patterns, labour force participation, educational activities, income discrepancies, voting participation and demographic behaviour such as family formation; across generations, over time and for different reasons for immigration (i.e. labour, refuge and family). The focus has been remarkably stable, which has enabled us to produce vast amounts of statistics and analyses over long periods of time. In fact, only about one third of the annual funding goes to new projects, while the rest is in essence earmarked for ongoing projects and well established monitoring of integration at an aggregate level.

Although the advantages to having a Framework Agreement on migration related statistics and analyses are many, and have resulted in an important knowledge base on which to base integration policies and debates, there are however, challenges that must be addressed. The Ministry prefers reports and research that is descriptive in nature and that is easily applicable in preparation for policy development. This is at the expense of more analytical and complex research that is not funded as often. As mentioned the Ministry also gives priority to ongoing monitoring, sometimes at the expense of new and more explorative proposals. In a final point, the Ministry has an inherent focus on particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society, while it is important for Statistics Norway to also give broader overviews and a synthesis of complex phenomena. The challenges mentioned here need not be a conflict of interest, but are issues we are aware of and need to continuously address.

5. Conclusion

The Framework Agreement on migration related statistics and analyses between Statistics Norway and the Ministry responsible for immigrant integration policy, is to my knowledge unique in its nature. It has ensured the ongoing production of much needed statistics and analyses on immigration and integration since the late 1990s. The Coordinator bridges users and producers of statistics, and serves as a contact point in an interdisciplinary field that is otherwise fragmented between different departments at Statistics Norway.