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**LONG-TERM INTEGRATION THROUGH LANGUAGE TRAINING IN NORDIC COUNTRIES**

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The integration of disadvantaged groups (those who have been granted residence as refugees, quota refugees and families in need of protection) into the labor market is of supreme interest in Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Thus, the prioritized task for Scandinavian scholars in recent years is to find the right balance between fast and sustainable integration i.e. integration plans should be realistic – low-skilled jobs may come first, but career paths should be offered for more sustainable integration.

The analysis of recent reports and evaluations has clearly demonstrated that the most advanced integration instruments for refugees in Europe have been developed exactly in the Nordic region. This typically consists of structured labor market training and support within programs that generally last between two and three years. Moreover, Denmark, Finland and Sweden are among the few OECD countries that have incorporated employment-related elements into their dispersal schemes for refugees. In Sweden, the so-called EBO law stipulates that refugees and asylum seekers can live wherever they like if they can arrange housing for themselves [1; 5].

In this region, there are also special RPL procedures (recognition of prior learning) for refugees with no documentary proof of their qualifications.

In Nordic countries, the labor market integration process starts from early competence mapping. It is now occurring at the asylum stage and is being determined as a good prospect of staying in the host country and making the labor market access easier for disadvantaged groups. This mapping primarily focuses on language and other relevant skills or experience that can be applied to labor practices and activities.

In the context of this issue, working papers have been published by the EU, the OECD and the Nordic authorities acknowledging the fact that an alternative efficient way to make sure that language courses consider the different needs of individual refugees is to make them modular. One way forward could be to focus on organizing language learning in consecutive modules with increasingly advanced goals. In addition to efforts to diversify the content of courses, flexible modes of delivery play an essential role in breaking down barriers and enabling different refugee groups – including those who work or who have family obligations. On-the-job language training is also an important component of bridging programs [6].

All Nordic countries are currently experimenting with new education models, trying to improve the link between language learning and employment. Sweden is among the Nordic countries that specifically addressed this in 2017 in a programme for refugee women [4; 5]. The Jobbsjansen qualification programme in Norway is aimed at immigrants (not the newly arrived) who are positioned far from the labour market. Female homemakers and women married to Norwegian citizens were a particular focus in 2016.

In Denmark, the introductory integration program offered is full time and combines language education, job-oriented guidance and upskilling and on-the-job training. Introductory schemes typically include employment-related services, such as vocational training, counselling and job search support, civic orientation and general adult education. Language training is generally the most important component [6; 7]. The refugee signs the integration contract with the municipality to which he or she has moved. The integration program (IGU) is practiced by the municipalities and job centers. It is full time and planned for a year at a time. The refugees are by definition assumed to be ready for the labor market as soon as they arrive or get residence permits.

One important element in the IGU process is the involvement of companies that are more focused on learning the Danish language. This was implemented in early June 2017 and is not yet fully completed. The company targets Danish education and is supposed to contain both general language education and entry into the Danish society and its values combined. Hence the more the company targets the language education objective, the faster and better will be the opportunities for employment.

Finnish authorities acknowledge the great importance for migrants of learning Finnish or Swedish in order to increase their chances for a successful entry to the labour market. Support with integration is provided through individualized integration plans and offers different tracks depending on the individual’s needs assessment [6]. The integration training for adult migrants includes several items: a) language instruction; b) work life and c) civic skills classes. The goal of language instruction is to achieve a certain level of CEFR by the end of the studies. The manner of language skills testing and evaluation differs from municipality to municipality [3].

Participation in the labor market and a good knowledge of the Norwegian language are considered key elements for integration into Norwegian society. Norwegian language training is provided as part of the country’s introductory program for humanitarian migrants. Courses are provided by municipal authorities and divided into three directions with different rates of progression, working methods and group sizes. Different directions suit different groups.

The only Nordic country, that is an exception here, is Sweden, with no time constraints on access to language courses. There are some indications that the requirements of language courses are, in some cases, inconsistent with the needs of the labor market. More targeted approaches which combine the development of language skills with other professional skills and on-the-job training, as well as modular courses, have demonstrated better results.

To sum everything up, the effective integration of refugees into the labor market in Scandinavian countries is a crucial issue and this involves many factors that influence refugees’ prospects of finding work. Validation of work experience and qualifications of refugees; language education combined with vocational training for faster integration into the labor market; and the role of civil society and informal networks in the integration process are among the first that have received greater attention in recent years.

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