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Refugee Resettlement in Small Cities

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Refugee Resettlement in the Nordic Region:

Effects of the 2015 'Migrant Crisis' and Parallels to the US

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Abstract

Our project considers the dynamics of refugee resettlement in small cities and towns in the US. As part of understanding the broader context of such processes, we also look at the global refugee regime – the numbers of refugees, forced migrants and asylum seekers on the move, acceptance rates in various countries within the international system, and the experiences of refugees in different countries of resettlement. The trend within the US over recent decades has been the placement of increasing numbers of refugees outside of the traditional 'gateway' or immigrant destination metropolitan centers such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, especially as the US resettlement program expanded during the Obama administration (Singer, Hardwick and Brettell, 2008). Yet refugee resettlement and immigration as a whole have faced a significant backlash before, during and since the 2016 Presidential election in the US, with particular scrutiny given to the numbers of refugees given sanctuary in the US and their countries of origin. In its first two years in office, the Trump administration has slashed the numbers of approved refugees to a third of their total under the previous regime (RPC, 2018). Such a backlash is not unique to the US; indeed, anti-immigrant sentiment, policies and practices have become common worldwide, including in many of the countries that have previously been an important part of the global refugee system. For many populist and right-wing political parties and movements in the Global North, nativism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant policies have been central to their policy platforms and their appeal. Even the Nordic countries, historically among the most liberal, welcoming democracies in the world, have not been immune to this trend (Greve et al., 2017).

In this report, we therefore explore the resettlement experiences of the Nordic countries – generally understood to be the Scandinavian nations of Sweden, Denmark and Norway as well as geographically proximate Finland [1]. The Nordic countries are similar in political ideals and systems to other Western liberal democracies; however, they also have a reputation for embodying more left-leaning political and social values including generous welfare, educational, and healthcare policies and fairly comprehensive social safety nets. Despite this perception and practice of a more liberal tradition, the Nordic countries have witnessed a rise in xenophobia and anti-migrant political movements in recent years influenced by the so-called migrant crisis in Europe and the response to this influx of migrant in domestic and international politics. In this report we explore the resettlement systems of these four nations in order to better understand some of the similarities and differences between them and the US.

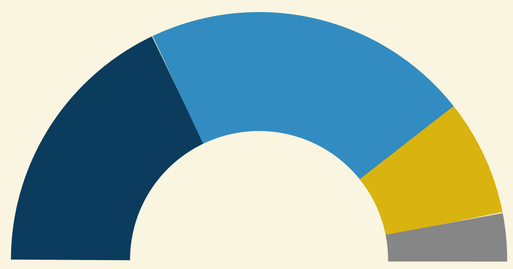
[1] Iceland is also often considered one of the Nordic countries but does not come into our examination in this report.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, the Nordic countries have become attractive sites for third-country refugee resettlement, primarily due to their strong social support systems extended to new arrivals (Valenta and Bunar, 2010). Historically, these have been relatively small but affluent countries, which have also been demographically rather homogenous. Modern migration to these countries occurred in several waves dating back to the establishment of the Nordic Labor Market in 1954, which allowed workers to move freely among—and increasingly into—these countries, leading to a spike in labor migration (Pettersen & Ostby, 2014). In-migration into the region became more complex by the 1970s – in 1973, Denmark joined the European Economic Community but at the same time the Nordic countries began to place restrictions on migrants from outside the Nordic zone in response to the oil crisis (Castles, 1986). In-migration slowly resumed throughout the next two decades but accelerated with the creation of the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty of 1993 and the accession of Finland and Sweden to the EU in 1995. There was a significant increase in immigration in the decades that followed, especially as the EU was extended to include a number of former Soviet bloc and Central European nations (Pettersen & Ostby, 2014). Those who came during this period included family members joining migrant workers who had previously settled in Nordic countries and refugees fleeing war and persecution in countries such as Chile, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, and Somalia (ibid). 2004 marked another wave of labor migration, largely from Poland and the Baltic States who were attracted to the Nordic countries' low unemployment rates and comprehensive social programs that offered the promise of strong integration support systems (ibid). The most recent large group of immigrants – and the focus of this report – has been a further influx of refugees, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as part of the larger migrant arrivals in Europe peaking in that has led to much political turmoil and upheaval throughout the region (Tanner, 2016). This period has marked a significant increase in numbers of both asylum claims and refugees officially resettled in each country and has led to a substantial political backlash as well as reductions and in some cases suspensions of the refugee programs in several of the Nordic Countries.

Given this context, our report examines several aspects of Nordic refugee and asylum systems. We begin by discussing the general context of recent resettlement in the region and the specific resettlement practices of the Nordic countries—both in terms of how they operate independently and how they work together as a region–as well providing an overview of the European migration crisis. We then more closely examine the structure of each country's resettlement program, including domestic actors that work with refugees after their initial resettlement, and how this most recent period of migration has impacted these programs and some of the publics' attitudes towards resettlement within the region.

Nordic Resettlement 2010-2018



(UNHCR, 2018d)

General Nordic Resettlement

Trends & Practices

Refugee numbers have been increasing worldwide for the better part of the last decade. The number of displaced (including officially recognized refugees, internally displaced populations, stateless persons and asylum seekers) was estimated by the UNHCR as 34.4 million in 2010 but by 2015 had drastically climbed to 59.5 million people and currently sits at nearly 69 million individuals (UNHCR, 2018b). The civil war in Syria, continued instability in other parts of the Middle East, turmoil in Northern and sub-Saharan Africa along with ethnic cleansing in Myanmar have contributed greatly to this spike in forced migration globally (UNHCR, 2017). There was at least initially an accompanying rise in refugee resettlement numbers in several of the countries that participate in the global refugee system; the plight of Syrian refugees in particular had originally motivated a great deal of sympathy and welcome in Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Germany (UNCHR, 2018b; Bose, Grigri, & Barrett, 2018). By 2015 however, immigration became a topic of debate all across the Western world, with fears of cultural change, economic and social impacts, and a rash of terrorist attacks by Islamic militant groups like ISIS stoking significant backlash against refugees and migrants worldwide. Many of the countries that have been traditionally involved and even leaders in third country resettlement began to scale down and, in some cases, suspend their programs.

The Nordic countries are emblematic of the global rise and decline in refugee resettlement numbers. These countries have long been seen as model resettlement locations and have been leaders in per capita resettlement. They have robust social safety programs, relatively high standards of living and comprehensive humanitarian protection policies (Tanner, 2016). Additionally, the Nordic countries have historically been refugee-friendly, offering refugees and asylum seekers healthcare, welfare, and educational services to aid in integration. In most cases, until recently, refugees and asylees were able to receive comprehensive medical exams paid for by the state and were entitled to the universal health care benefits and free education enjoyed by citizens of the country (ibid). Sweden in particular has a reputation for generous asylum and refugee policies, having attracted the highest number of asylum applications and refugees resettled of the Nordic countries with over 160,000 applications and nearly 1,600 refugees resettled in 2015 (ibid). An important draw for those coming to Sweden is a 2013 policy that offered immediate permanent residence to all asylum applicants from Syria. Moreover, the lengthy processing times for Nordic countries allowed refugees and asylum seekers to collect benefits and money throughout the period of adjudication until an official decision is rendered. Finland in particular offered large support stipends during processing time (ibid). It is generous policies such as these that placed Sweden, Norway, and Finland within the top five per capita refugee and asylum application receiving countries in the European Union in 2015 (Etzold, 2017).

In terms of resettlement, the countries collaborate on migration policy through the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council (consisting of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland). The goal of these entities is to organize resettlement and integration processes in a consistent manner and to share best practices in resettlement policy. As such, the country's resettlement program has some of the same basic contours (Honoré, 2003). First, the application stage is sorted into two different procedures: 1) dossier referrals, consisting of paperwork submitted by UNHCR to the destination country, and 2) selection missions, consisting of interviews conducted in the country of asylum. While Norway and Denmark have explicit protocols for emergency cases, the other countries in the Nordic Council include cases such as these in the ordinary structure of their resettlement program. In each country, annual resettlement quotas must be approved by Parliament. On an annual basis, Denmark approves 500 cases, while Finland approves 750-1000, and Norway 1500, although all three have been approving irregular amounts since 2014 in response to the global migration situation (ibid; UNCHR, 2018d). Sweden has historically approved the largest number of resettlements and has set their 2018 quota at 5000, well above its usual annual quota (Honoré, 2003; Migrationsverket, 2018).

Once accepted, travel arrangements are funded by the Nordic states in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (Honoré, 2003). Refugees are issued travel documentation by local embassies; for countries lacking an embassy in the destination country, the origin country's embassy in another Nordic country will take on this role. Once resettled, refugees are granted refugee status as outlined in Article 1A of the 1951 Convention, permitting them to work in the destination country (ibid). Rather than consolidating resettlement in a few cities, refugees are distributed among participating municipalities, who then receive funding from the state for each refugee taken in. This process allows refugees to be more evenly distributed across the country, rather than clustered in specific cities or even geographic regions. However, it can be argued that this process inhibits the development of ethnic enclaves or contact with previously resettled members of one's country of origin, thereby removing a sense of familiarity or community. In order to ease the process of resettlement, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council work together to ensure the presence of integration programs in each destination country (ibid). Though the specific facets of each program vary between states, they are predominantly centered on language and vocational training and cultural education initiatives. Among the major challenges across all four countries has been insufficient housing for the incoming refugee population. In Sweden and Finland, for example, refugees have been lodged in hotels, resorts, sports facilities, and barracks. Such accommodations are often located far from grocery stores and education centers, making it difficult for refugees to access vital resources (Daley, 2015). Eighty percent of Swedish municipalities face housing shortages; as improvised locations reached capacity, resettlement agencies were no longer able to offer refugees even a tent or place to sleep for the night (Rutten, 2017).Moreover, the Nordic countries lack a sufficient amount of low skilled jobs, leaving many of the newly arriving population unemployed and unable to provide for themselves and their family. This was especially problematic in Finland, as refugees received

only $100 each month and the country was already in the midst of an economic downturn that necessitated significant in government programs (Daley, 2015). As time passed, the Nordic countries were forced to consider a trade-off between helping the refugees who had already been resettled and helping those who remained behind in their countries of origin through various forms of foreign aid. In some cases, funding for resettlement programs was offset by cuts to foreign aid budgets, affecting programs meant to help prevent the exodus of forced migrants in the first place. Such tradeoffs were especially visible in Norway, which spent a substantial proportion of its foreign aid fund budget on domestic resettlement during the first year of the migrant crisis, while Sweden was similarly forced to cut their foreign aid budget by 30% to allocate more resources towards resettlement (Traub, 2016). As refugees continued to enter Nordic countries and resources continued to diminish, both the general population and political officials began to demand a change in policy, challenging the perception of this region as a model destination for migrants and refugees.

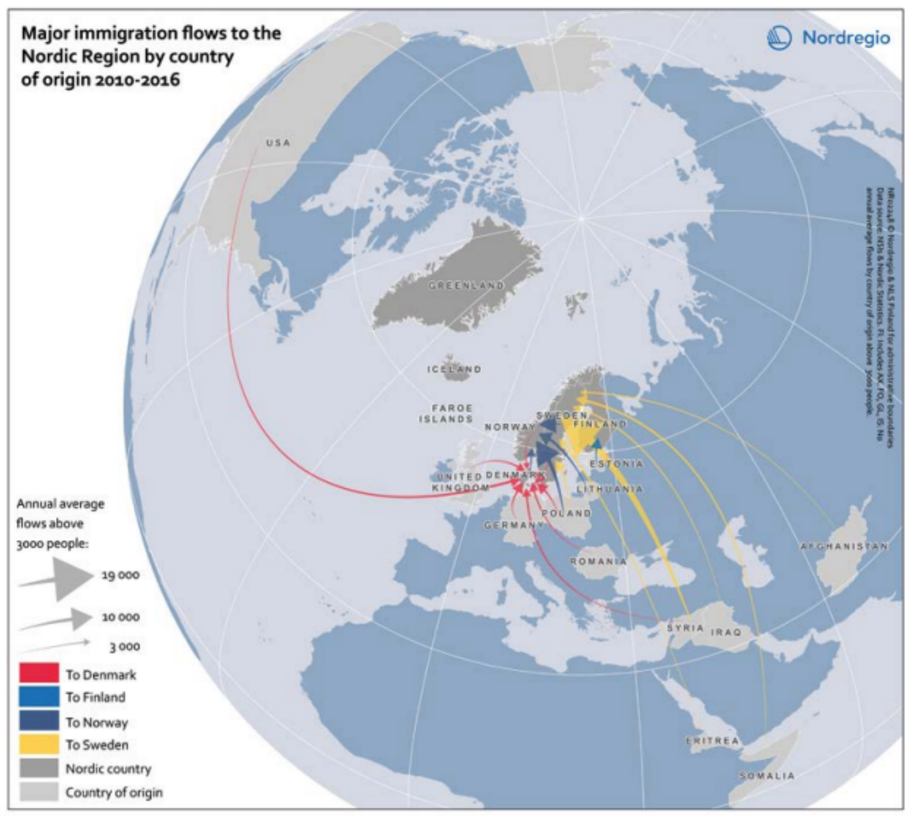


Figure 1.2 Major immigration flows to the Nordic Region by country of origin 2010-2016.

This map was taken from the Nordic Council of Ministers' "State of the Nordic Region 2018: Immigration and Integration Edition"

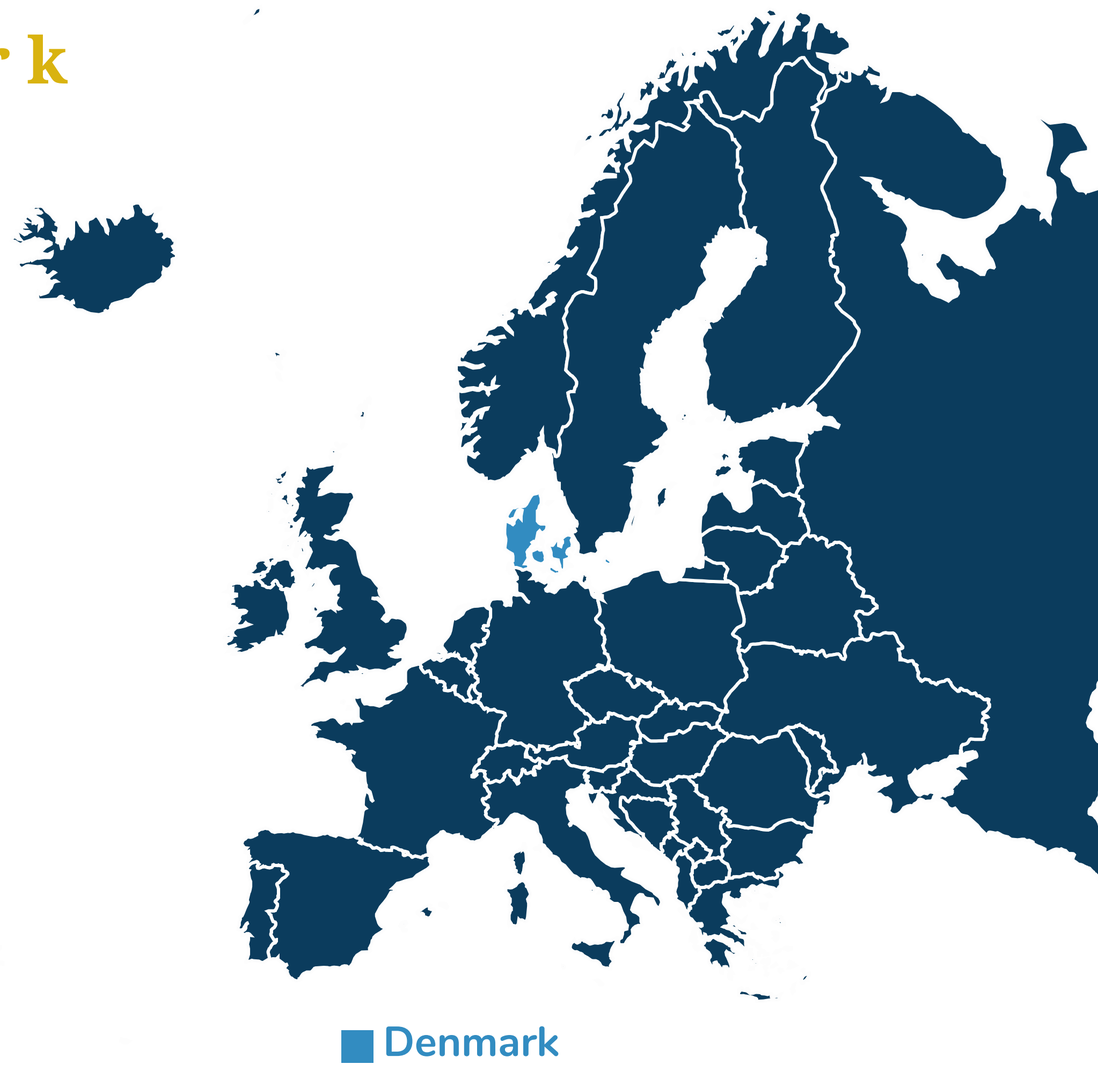
The Nordic Countries & the 'European Migration Crisis'

The onset of the European migrant crisis marks a significant shift in refugee policy for the Nordic countries, and especially in the European Union (EU) as a whole. In 2014-2015, at the height of the European migrant crisis, some 900,000 migrants fleeing persecution and conflict particularly from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq had arrived on European soil (Prickett, 2015). In response, the EU enacted several programs. First, many countries of origin were given financial assistance in order to address the root causes of the conflicts from which refugees were fleeing. In particular, the EU worked directly with Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal to provide in-country assistance and financial support (European Commission, 2017). Second, EU border policies were reformed in many areas, including among the Nordic countries and Germany to restrict the free movement of migrants across member states, with countries such as Macedonia, Hungary, and Slovenia even building border fences. In order to promote safety and prevent trafficking, EU presence at sea was tripled to increase its capacity for search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean and monitor criminal networks that are smuggling migrants across the see into Europe (ibid). Also, 1550 officers were deployed to the European Border and Coast guard in 2016 to manage the entirety of the EU's external borders. Hotspots, or satellite EU refugee and asylum processing centers, were established in Greece and Italy to help with screening, identification, registration, and information processes upon refugees' arrival in Europe (ibid). Furthermore, within the EU, refugees were relocated primarily from Greece and Italy, which were receiving a disproportionate number of refugee and asylees, to several of its other member states. By July 2017, approximately 24,000 had been relocated to 24 different EU states; however, the original goal was to relocate 160,000 during this time. In addition to the 160,000 projected, another 22,500 were planned for relocation as part of the EU's voluntary resettlement program (ibid). While such efforts have enabled a gradual management of the migrant crisis, there remains a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers living in camps, in transit, and appearing on European soil each week. In 2018, for example, more than 120,000 asylum-seekers are still estimated to have entered Europe via the Mediterranean region (UNHCR, 2018c)

Many who arrived in Europe sought to reach the Nordic countries, in large part due to their aforementioned reputation for being welcoming. Foremost among them was Sweden, the largest destination for Syrian migrants in particular. As of October 2015, Sweden was receiving more than 10,000 applications per week and was expected to take in approximately 190,000 refugees during that year alone (Traub, 2016). Finland faced a 10-fold increase from 2014, with more than 32,000 applications, while Norway saw more than 31,000 applications. Though Denmark received a comparatively lower number at 7,100 applications, the country was still 9th in the EU for number of refugees per capita (Tanner, 2016). With these asylum rates steadily increasing, the Nordic countries' liberal refugee policies became strained, as they did not have the financial means to support such a volume of migrants in the longer term. As migrants continued to enter their borders, the Nordic countries found their resources strained and support for far-right, nationalist political groups espousing anti-immigrant and especially anti-refugee sentiments growing. As a result, the governments in each country began to revise—and in many cases restrict—their refugee and asylum systems (Rutten, 2017).

Despite their history of welcoming attitudes and pride in their refugee program, the European migrant crisis resulted in a clear change in public sentiment in each of the Nordic countries. In each country, polls indicated that the general population was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the amount of resources, time, and effort going towards resettling refugees and felt as if their own well being, security, and national cultures were at risk. Populist parties began to outwardly articulate what at least a significant proportion of the general population was feeling, thereby leading to growing support for such parties (Mohdin, 2016; Reklev, 2016; Rosendahl, 2016; Zucchino, 2016;). This shift in both policy and public sentiment has effected Nordic resettlement, although to varying degrees between each state, and challenged the perception of this region as model destination for migrants and refugees alike. The following sections will overview in more detail each country's resettlement policies and integration strategies before examining how these programs have each been individually affected by the rise in populist, anti-immigrant political parties.

Country Overview: Denmark



Danish Resettlement

Beginning in 1979, Denmark adopted a refugee quota of approximately 500 individuals per year, for which the Minister of Justice and NGOs such as the Danish Immigration Service and the Danish Refugee Council allocates places. Such places are divided into four sub quotas (The Government of Denmark, 2011):

- **Geographical Category:** Approximately 395 refugees per year.
- **Emergency and Urgent Category:** Approximately 75 places reserved per year for those at immediate risk.
- **Medical Category:** Approximately 30 places reserved under the UNHCR Twenty-or-More program, which targets refugees with special medical needs.
- **Families Category:** Accepted on a dossier basis who are accompanying someone admitted into the country under the Twenty-or-More program; factored into the geographical quota.

In order to qualify for refugee status, the person must meet the standards set in the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status and the additional criteria set by the country's legislation. Resettlement takes place with the aid of the UNHCR. Denmark has instituted criteria pertaining to the integration process, including elements such as language and literacy requirements, educational and employment experience, motivation to integrate, and age. Such criteria are not applied to urgent cases. Processing time from submission to arrival usually consists of 5-6 months, though priority cases average 3 months (Hofverberg, 2016a).

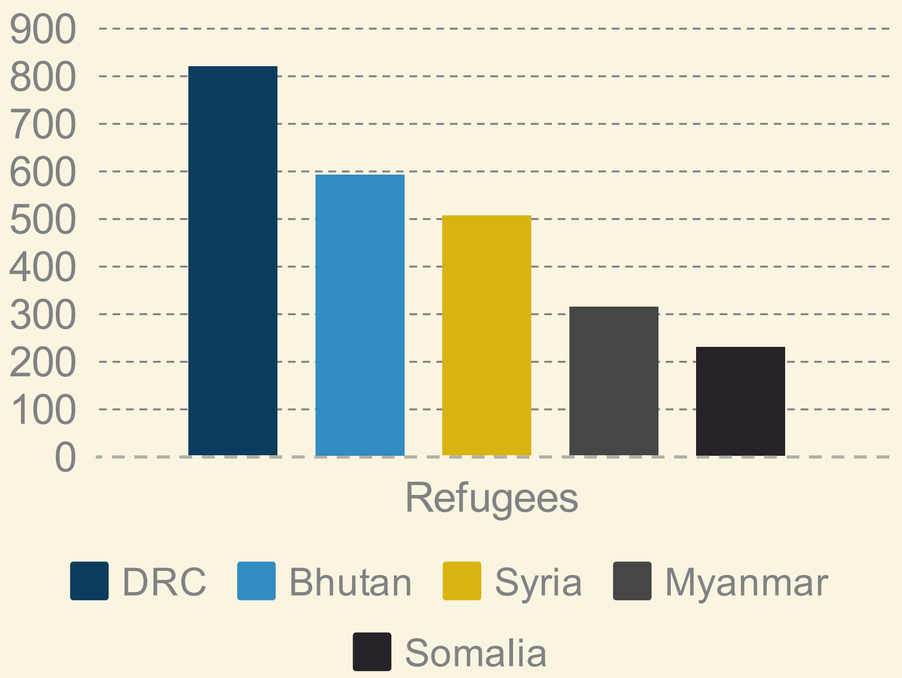
Integration Programs

According to the 1999 Integration Act, refugees and their families must undergo a mandatory integration process in order to receive welfare benefits (Larsen, 2011). This is a three-year program run by the municipality in which they are placed. Here, refugees are given courses on the Danish language, culture, history, societal life, and jobs location. Those aged 18-25 are required to apply to an education institution. In order to ensure benefits, refugees must sign an obligatory Contract of Integration and a Declaration of Integration and Active Citizenship (ibid).

Danish Refugee Council

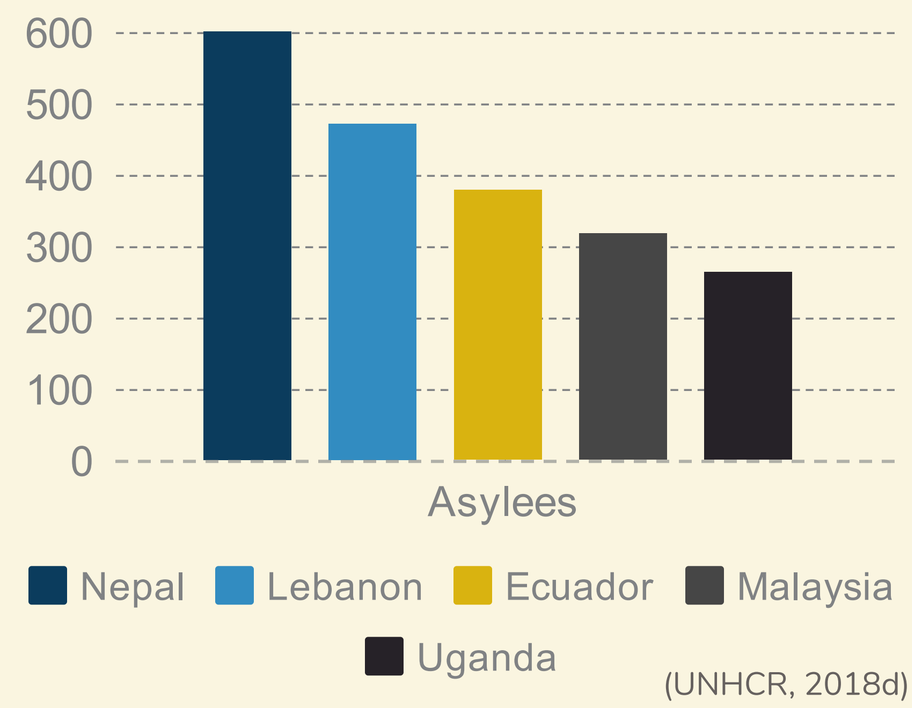
This organization consists of a team of experts that work with the UN to fill short-term vacancies in employment. Additionally, this organization works to better assist the UN system towards its goals for humanitarian development. Finally, the Danish Refugee Council has developed the 'Stand-by Roster' in an effort to help staffing arrangements within the UN in order to enhance is emergency response system. It has agreements with 8 UN agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Programme, the OCHA, the FAO, the UNDP, the UNFPA, and the UNRWA) along with the IOM. The primary sources of funding consist of the Danish development agency, Danida, and the UK Department for International Development (Danish Refugee Council, 2016).

Danish Resettlement 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin



(UNHCR, 2018d)

Danish Asylum 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin



(UNHCR, 2018d)

Country Overview: Denmark

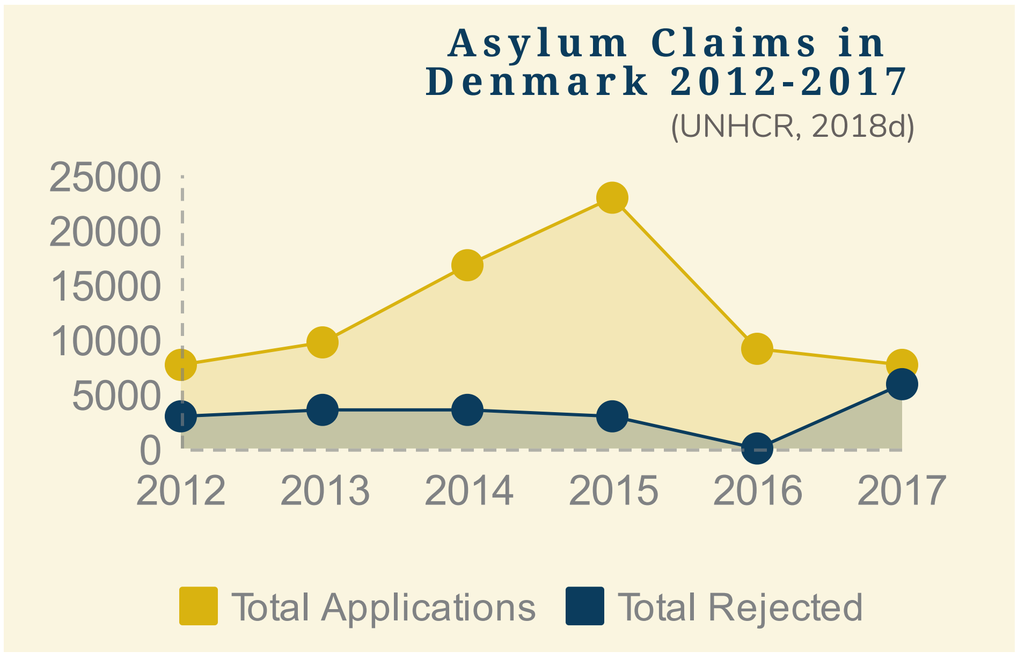
The Rise of Populist Parties and Public Discontent

As in its other Nordic counterparts, there is a strong attachment amongst the Danish population to their Danish identity and national culture. There is a clear sentiment amongst some Danish citizens and officials that refugees are not doing enough to adapt to their country's customs (Zucchino, 2016). Many citizens are disapproving in particular of the ethnic enclaves that refugees have formed, as these are often perceived to inhibit proper assimilation. Despite a law requiring a language assessment upon resettlement (of which 72% of migrants passed according to the Immigration Ministry), there are numerous complaints of refugees being slow to learn Danish (ibid). Moreover, the Culture Minister, Bertel Haarder, claimed that the lack of assimilation is due to the nature of their patriarchal societies that disapprove of women working and free speech. Rhetoric such as this, especially from high-ranking political officials, allowed the Danish People's Party to gain significant support in 2015. This party is currently the second largest in the Danish parliament (holding 37%) and is pushing for policies such as a 6-year ban on Muslim migrants entering the country (ibid). Nye Borgerlige ("The New Right") is another populist party led by Pernille Vermund that seeks stricter control on migrants, including a ban on headscarves and a plan to accept only refugees sent by the U.N. who already have a job. They are currently polling between 2-5% and aim to run in the 2019 election (Panagiotopoulos, 2017). Despite agreeing to a new 5-year funding agreement with UNHCR in 2017, Denmark suspended indefinitely their agreement with UNHCR to resettle 500 refugees per year, leading to no new arrivals in 2017 and 2018 and potentially leading the way for other countries to follow suit (Amnesty International, 2017; UNHCR, 2018a). Even prior to officially suspending the program in 2017, Danish resettlement had already been reduced to 74 individuals for 2016.

Changes in Policy

Since 1983, Denmark has continuously enacted changes to the Danish Aliens Act to make its policies more restrictive (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Malmvig, 2017). With comparatively lower refugee numbers than its other Nordic neighbors, Denmark has enacted a series of harsh policies with the aim of deterring incoming migrants. For those who are already resettled in the country, they receive approximately 50% of the benefits given in years prior, must wait three times as long before being able to apply for family reunification, must pass a difficult citizenship test (with a Danish language proficiency requirement) and face an extended waiting period before being granted permanent residency status (Daley, 2015). Those arriving as unaccompanied minors are subjected to "age-testing" of their bone density before being granted the benefits package for unaccompanied youth (Sharman, 2016). In order to deter future migrants, Denmark took out ads in Arabic newspapers to warn refugees not to come to their country (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Malmvig, 2017). More recently, the country passed legislation that allows officials to seize refugees' belongings that are worth greater than or equal to 10,000 Danish Kroner (approx. $1453) in an effort to help finance the welfare system (Damon & Hume, 2016). Although this law is rarely enforced, and there are exemptions for items of sentimental value, it has appeared to be an effective in dissuading people from coming to Denmark. Additionally, Denmark instituted temporary border controls with Germany and Sweden in order to curb future migrant flows (Mahoney, 2017).

The most recent policies proposed in Denmark targeting government labeled 'ghettos' are perhaps the most controversial yet. These 'ghettos' are where the majority of migrants are living–many placed there directly by the government–and cannot afford to move elsewhere. Among the proposed new laws, children beginning at one years old in these areas must attend at least 25 hours of day care per week, where they will learn the country's language and values, including religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas (Barry & Sorensen, 2018). Those who fail to comply are at risk of losing their benefits. 'Ghetto' parents may face prison time for sending their children back to their home countries for an extended time, described as "re-education trips". There are also laws that would impose harsher punishments for crimes committed in these neighborhoods, taking into consideration employment, education, and "non-Western" background into their sentencing (Barry & Sorensen, 2018). Even the left-wing opposition to the right-wing controlled government has supported many of these laws, which are expected to pass in parliament before the end of 2018 (O'Leary, 2018).



Country Overview: Sweden

Swedish Resettlement

Refugee resettlement in Sweden is largely directed by the Swedish Migration Board (SMB), a body that governs which refugees are admitted, provides the necessary documentation, and decides the location they will be sent. The 2018 quota is 5,000 individuals (Migrationsverket, 2018). Some logistical details, such as transportation and housing, are handled by IOM. The criteria for resettlement is governed by the Aliens Act of 2005 and largely applies to individuals who are facing a fear of persecution, harm, or death from their country of origin as a result of their race/ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, or religious/political beliefs. Sweden also allows a limited number of refugees to enter on the basis of health/medical reasons, but with the requirement that the treatment can only be found in Sweden. Each case submitted to the country is reviewed and approved by the Security Police (The Government of Sweden, 2011).

There are two methods of selection in the process: **Dossier** and **In-Country Selection** (The Swedish Government, 2011).

> **1. Dossier Selection:** a potential refugee must present identification documents and personal data including family details, linguistic skills, educational background and past working experience (if available). Submitted cases are reviewed by the SMB and the decision is made by an assigned case officer. Those accepted can only apply for travel documents and official recognition after they have arrived in the country (ibid).
>
> **2. In Country Selection:** arranged in cooperation between the Swedish embassy and the UNHCR using the Pre-Mission Questionnaire for Resettlement Interview Missions and the corresponding checklist (both supplied by the UNHCR). Applicants must clearly state and provide details about any relatives currently residing in Sweden. In order to make a decision, a series of interviews are conducted with applicants (ibid).

Both forms of resettlement are usually processed within 20 working days, while emergency cases are usually process in 5 working days through the dossier selection process (ibid).

Integration Programs

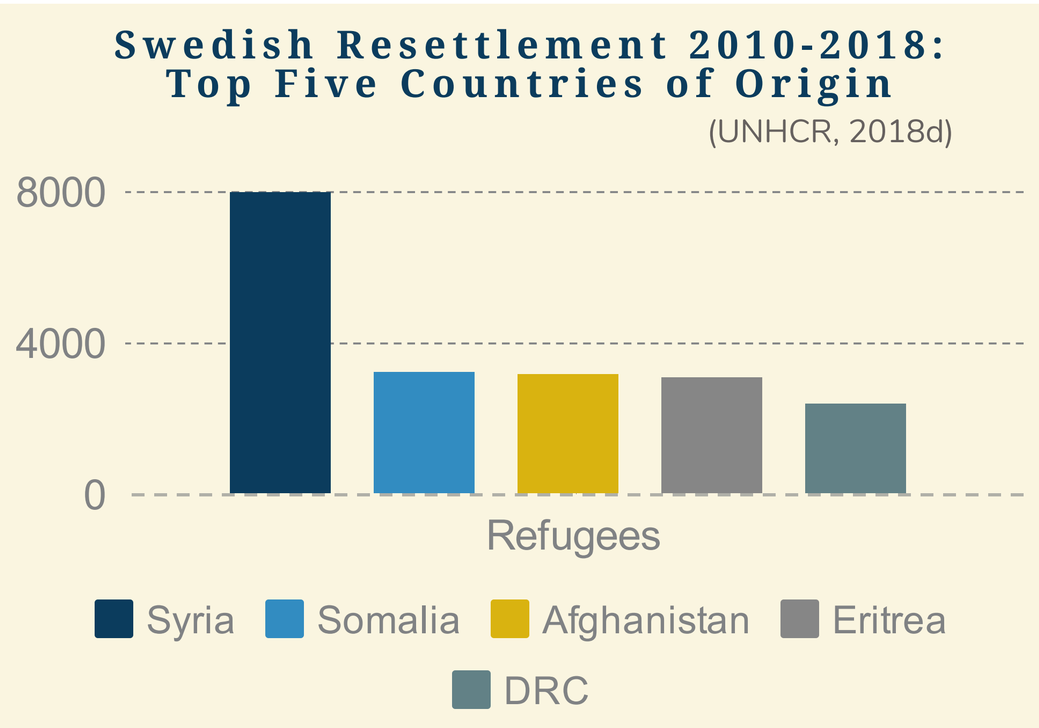
Refugees and migrants in Sweden must follow an introduction plan. Under this, refugees meet with a caseworker to create a plan for securing a job. Individuals must complete a series of activities including traineeships, validation of prior experience, and civic education about Swedish society. This process lasts approximately two years and is the equivalent to the commitment of a full-time job (County Administrative Boards of Sweden, 2018).

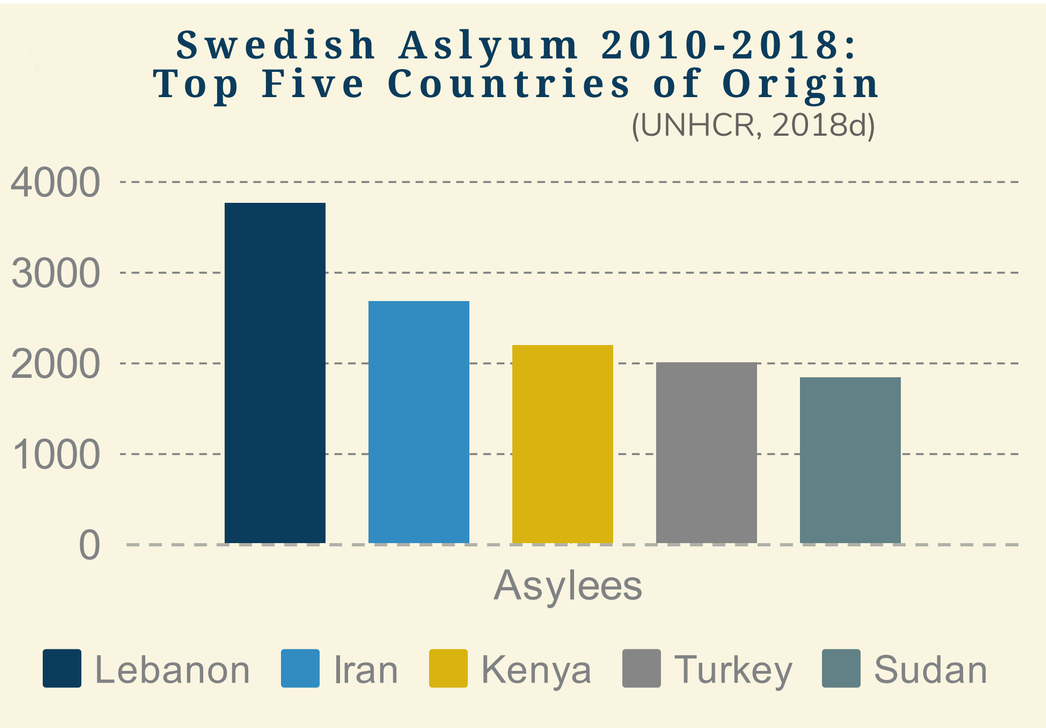
The Swedish Network of Refugee Support Groups

Formed in June 1988 to provide consultation and networks for asylum seekers in the country, FARR works to strengthen the right to asylum and secure better benefits for those resettled in Sweden. It consists of over 50 local groups, including asylum committees, caseworkers, and activist groups. All work is voluntary and members must pay dues in order to help finance its work (FARR, 2006).

Caritas Sweden

This organization began in 1946 with the aim of protecting the human rights of refugees within the country. Its work currently includes counseling and poverty alleviation. Currently, it is working to support local parishes that provide aid to refugees and victims of human trafficking. The organization also works internationally to fund projects for relief efforts. (Caritas Sweden, n.d.)

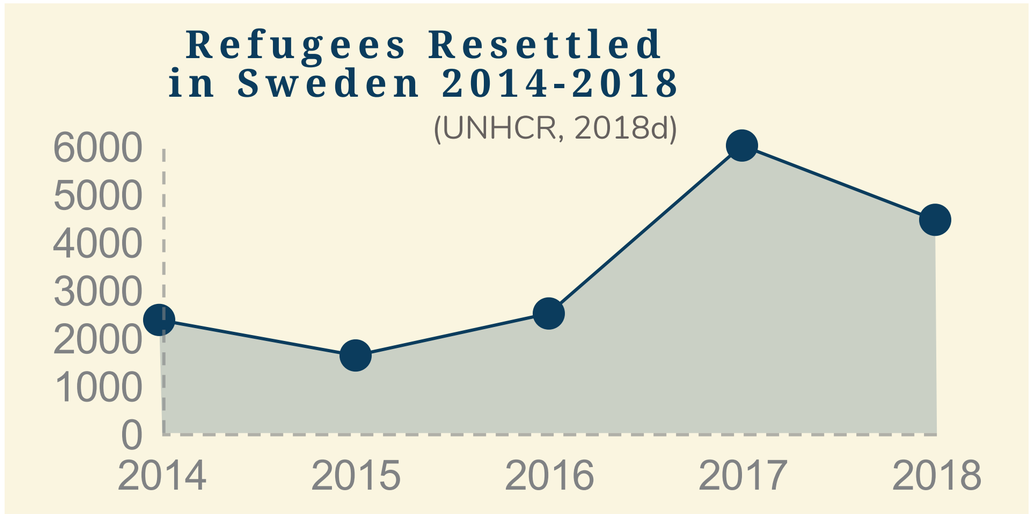




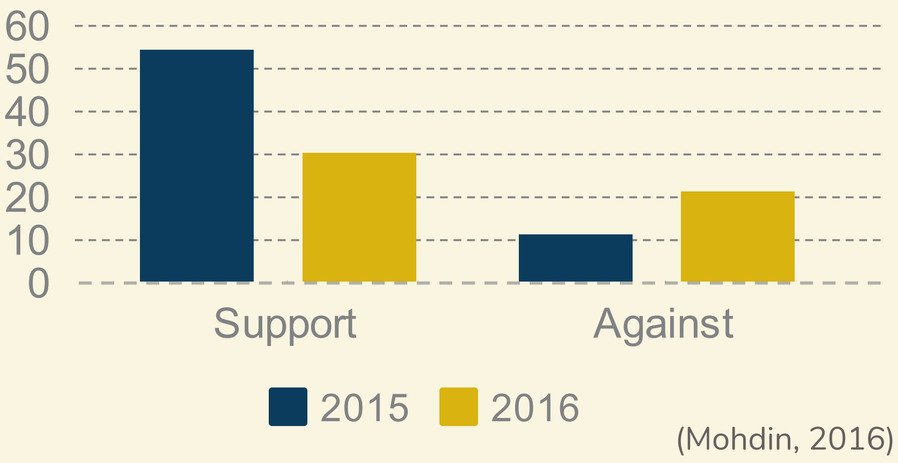
Country Overview: Sweden

The Rise of Populist Parties and Public Discontent

In Sweden, there has been an overall decrease in public support for asylum seekers and refugees in the country. From 2015 to 2016, the number of Swedish citizens who said they would definitely aid refugees decreased from 54% to 30%, while the number of citizens who claimed they would refuse to assist refugees doubled from 11% to 21% (Mohdin, 2016). Similarly, there was an overall decrease in support for the current government resettlement program, with the number of citizens believing the government should take in more refugees declining from 31% to 13% and the amount of those believing the government should take in fewer refugees nearly doubling from 34% to 60% (ibid). In the years following the height of the European migrant crisis, there has been a strong presence of anti-immigrant narratives within public discourse. Many citizens fear that refugees are isolated from Swedish life, as there are 186 remote residential areas where a significant portion of refugees are unable to access employment or education centers, making it difficult to integrate into Swedish culture (Traub, 2016). The narrative that refugees are able to access government services like healthcare and food supports that native-born citizens are not – a common if often controversial and incorrect claim advanced by anti-immigrant groups in many countries – has also taken root in Sweden. Of particular concern to some is the fact that while some 50% of refugees are currently employed in the country, 60% of total Swedish welfare payments are allocated to immigrants (ibid). Security concerns have also become an important factor shifting some citizens' views on refugees, especially following a rash of attacks throughout Europe. A distinct fear of refugees and the potential for further violence became a significant part of the public discourse, leaving many calling for extra security mechanisms to be implemented in Sweden. This fear sparked unrest and even attacks targeting refugees, as was the case in October 2015 when several arsonists attacked more than 12 refugee-housing complexes (Tanner, 2016).



Such narratives have left Swedish citizens feeling as if refugees are a burden, a threat, and have made some of them ultimately less welcoming. Such complaints are strongly reflected in the Sweden Democrats populist, anti-immigrant platform. This party capitalized on certain events such as the terrorist attacks in Paris and Cologne, the sexual offenses committed by migrants at a musical festival in 2014 in Germany, and the murder of a 22-year old refugee center employee in Sweden by a teenage asylum seeker to further push their anti-immigration agenda (Mohdin, 2016). In 2015, the Sweden Democrats emerged as an increasingly popular political force. They recently recorded their highest-ever election results in the September 2018 election with 17.6% of the votes; before 2010, they had not won a single seat (Duxbury, 2018; Kelly, 2018). Despite growing discontent with the refugees and asylum seekers across the country, Sweden expanded its program significantly in 2017 with 5,955 refugees resettled, and while not reaching those numbers (or their allocated quota for the year) still managed to resettle some 4,399 refugees in 2018, well above their previous average (UNHCR, 2018d).



(Mohdin, 2016)

Changes in Policy

The largest factor contributing to the high amount of refugees received by Sweden was their liberal policy of granting all Syrian refugees immediate, permanent citizenship, thereby allowing them to work and access benefits enjoyed by Swedish citizens (Tanner, 2016). However, the strain on resources and the continuous influx of high numbers of refugees led the country to revoke this policy in November of 2015 (Hofverberg, 2016b). Instead, approved applicants received temporary residential status (Tanner, 2016). Any family members reunited with such refugees would no longer receive social benefits. In December 2015, Sweden instituted a temporary program to check the documents of those reaching the border by train; those without proper identification documents were not granted entry (Traub, 2016). Moreover, the country implemented temporary border controls with Germany and Denmark in an effort to curb the flow of refugees entering Sweden via another country (Etzold, 2017). In January 2016, the Swedish Migration Agency was instructed to deport approximately half of the current applicants (80,000); the country would now only be accepting refugees who were cleared by the UN and arrived directly from Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (Traub, 2016). However, Sweden does not have a specific policy in place regarding how to deport stateless refugees. In some cases, those individuals could be sent to a country they have never been to as has been the issue with deportations from several countries, particularly for Afghan asylum-seekers travelling from Iran where they were never granted citizenship (ibid).

Country Overview: Norway

Norwegian Resettlement

Beginning in the 1980s Norway established a refugee resettlement quota of 1,620 individuals. Though the Immigration Act of 2008 provides general criteria for the resettlement process, there are not any specific laws in place for regulation (Westerby, Ngo-Diep, Hueck, & Phillmann, 2013). In order to be recognized, a refugee must meet conditions according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Additionally, Norway emphasizes the altruistic dimensions of the resettlement process, and enacts quotas such as 60% of those resettled being women and girls ('Women and Girls at Risk [WAR] Cases') (ibid).

In order to resettle refugees, the Norwegian Parliament works with the Ministry of Justice and Emergency Planning, the Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Information and suggestions are provided by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI). The UDI is ultimately responsible for final decisions. Refugees are selected accordingly (ibid):

- **870 per year via selections missions by UDI and IMDI**
- **250 based on dossier submissions from UNHCR**

The average time from selection to arrival is approximately 4.5 months and varies on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on emergency cases are made within 48 hours of application. All refugees admitted into the country receive a residence permit of three years, after which they may apply for permanent residency. Citizenship may be attained after having resided in the country for seven years (ibid).

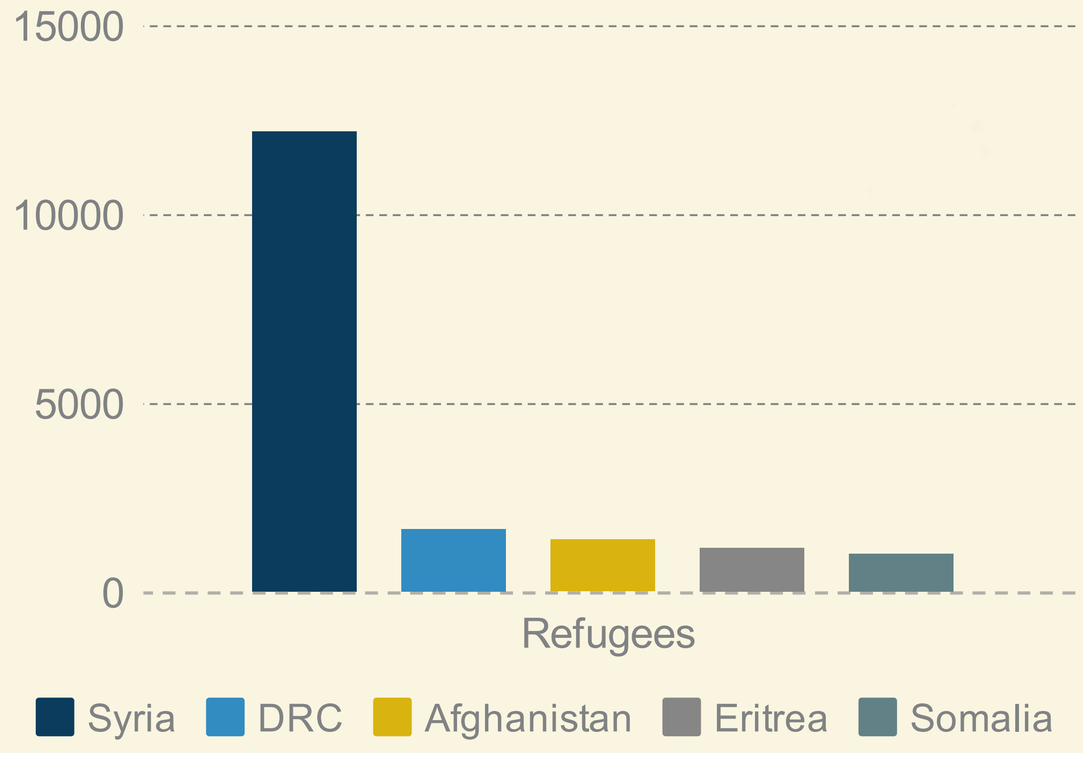
Integration Programs

The objective of integration in Norway is to prepare migrants for employment in a timely manner. The Introduction Program is funded by municipality grants and includes language trainings, education about Norwegian culture and society, and skill development necessary for entering the work force. The program is the equivalent of a full-time job and specific responsibilities and opportunities vary between municipalities (County Governor, n.d.)

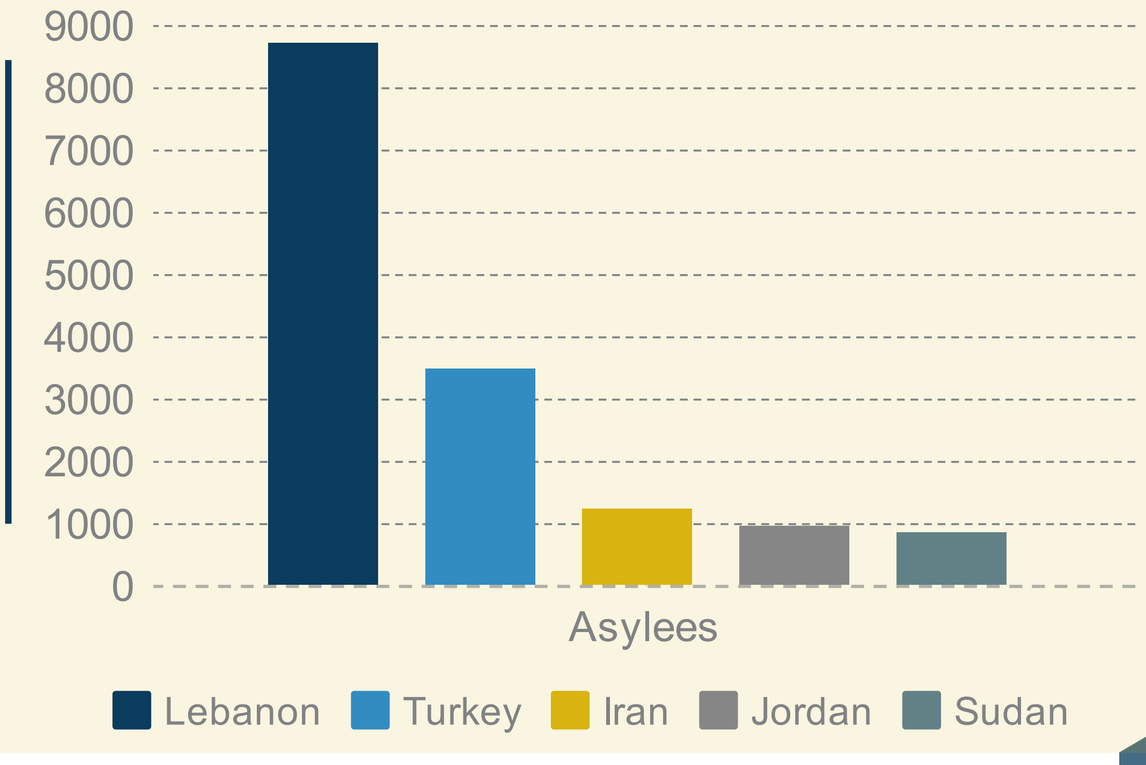
Norwegian Refugee Council

This humanitarian relief organization works toward protecting refugees and those fleeing from their country of origin. They work to reduce the negative consequences of conflict in 31 different countries by helping to manage refugee camps around the world and providing food, water, shelter, legal aid, and education (NRC, 2018).

Norwegian Resettlement 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin
(UNHCR, 2018d)



Norwegian Asylum 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin
(UNHCR, 2018d)

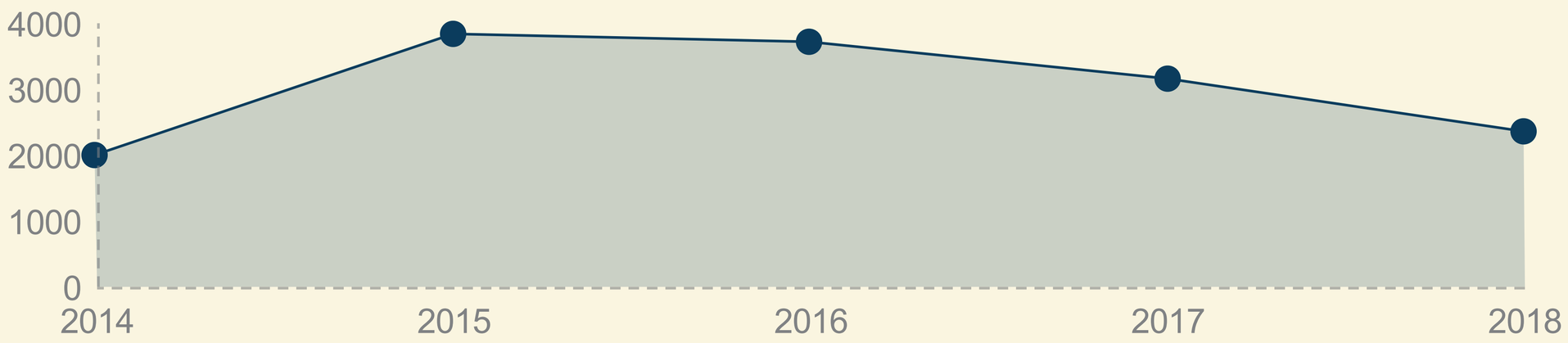


Country Overview: Norway

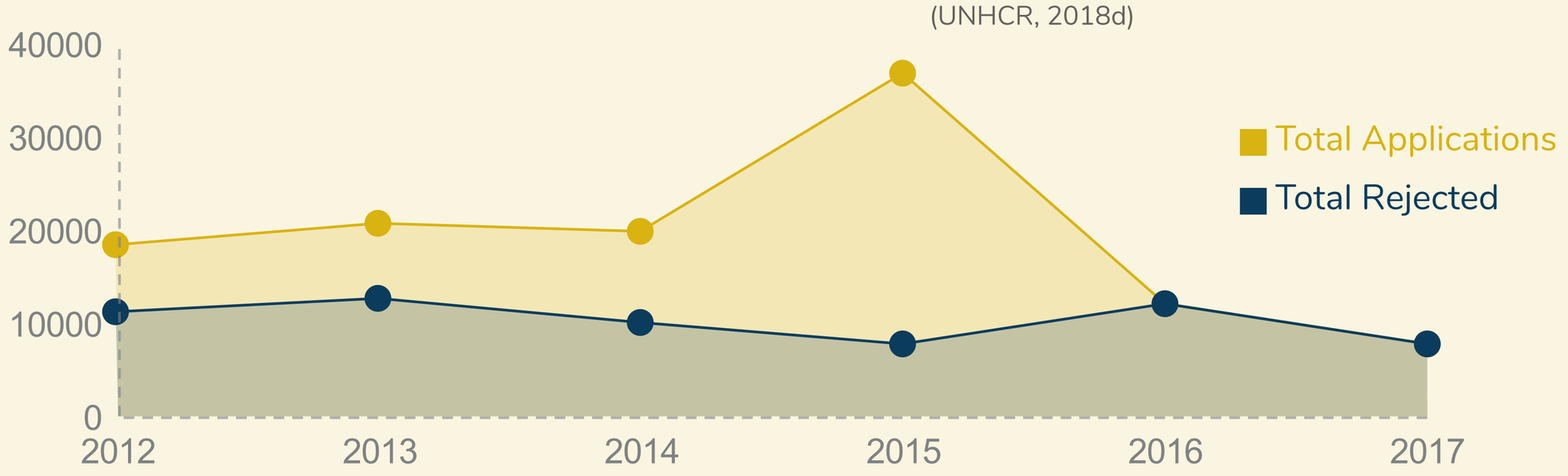
The Rise of Populist Parties and Public Discontent

The trends in public opinion amongst the general public in Norway follows a similar pattern as the two previous countries. In Norway, there is a perception amongst some that the welfare system is stretched beyond its current capacities and can no longer support its own native-born citizens. Some fear that Norwegian cultural values are under attack and argue that there is a need to uphold their national identities (Reklev, 2016). As such, Norway has also witnessed a significant rise in populist politics. On August 11, 2017, the Conservative Party and the populist Progress Party formed a coalition in Norway. This was a clear victory for the Progress Party, as the coalition possesses a combined 77 seats, making them the second largest in the Norwegian Parliament (Schultheis, 2017). Much like Sweden, however, Norway has continued its resettlement at an above average rate since 2015, although it has decreased annually from its 2015 peak of 3,806 to 2,336 for 2018 (UNHCR, 2018d). At the same time there has been a significant crackdown on asylum seekers and people who have entered the country illegally.

Refugees Resettled in Norway 2014-2018
(UNHCR, 2018d)



Asylum Claims in Norway 2014-2017
(UNHCR, 2018d)



Changes in Policy

Norway has implemented policies that both decrease the quality of life for refugees already resettled in the country and also deter those hoping to migrate there in the future. For those already within the country, benefits have been cut by 20%, the waiting period for permanent residency has increased from 3 years to 5 years, family reunification has been delayed to a 3-year waiting period, and refugees must provide for their families without additional aid from the government (Daley, 2015). In an effort to curb future flows, the Norwegian government has funded advertisements and documentaries in English, French, Tigrinya, Dari, and Pashto that convince refugees to remain in their country of origin (The Local, 2015). Identification checks were implemented at borders, reducing migration by 95%. Additionally, border controls were instituted with Sweden (Tanner, 2016). The country has also begun a series of deportations. With a significant number of refugees attempting to enter the country through Norway's border with Russia, the government passed legislation allowing migrants to be deported back to Russia, resulting in 13 migrants controversially deported in this manner (Mackay, 2015). Moreover, the country has implemented a strict policy prohibiting the acceptance of economic migrants. Norway will only accept those arriving from conflict zones and will deport all refugees who are considered to not be in need of immediate protection (Nelson, 2017).

Country Overview: Finland

Finnish Resettlement

Beginning in 1985, Finland established an annual quota of 1,050 refugees, confirmed each year by the state budget (Westerby et al, 2013). In order to qualify for refugee status, the person must meet the standards set in the 1951 Convention on Refugee Status and the additional criteria set by the country's legislation. Resettlement takes place with the aid of the UNHCR in accordance with the 2004 Finnish Aliens Act (ibid).

Selection takes place through a series of personal interviews conducted by the Ministry of Labor, the Directorate of Immigration, and, occasionally, the Security Police (ibid). Decisions are made within two months of this process. Upon resettlement, refugees are granted both refugee status and a residence permit. Important information concerning refugees is forwarded to the receiving municipalities and refugees must undergo a cultural orientation program in order to facilitate the integration process (ibid). Refugees and asylees are eligible for citizenship after five years of continued permanent residence in Finland and must speak either Finnish or Swedish (Hofverberg, 2016c).

Integration Programs

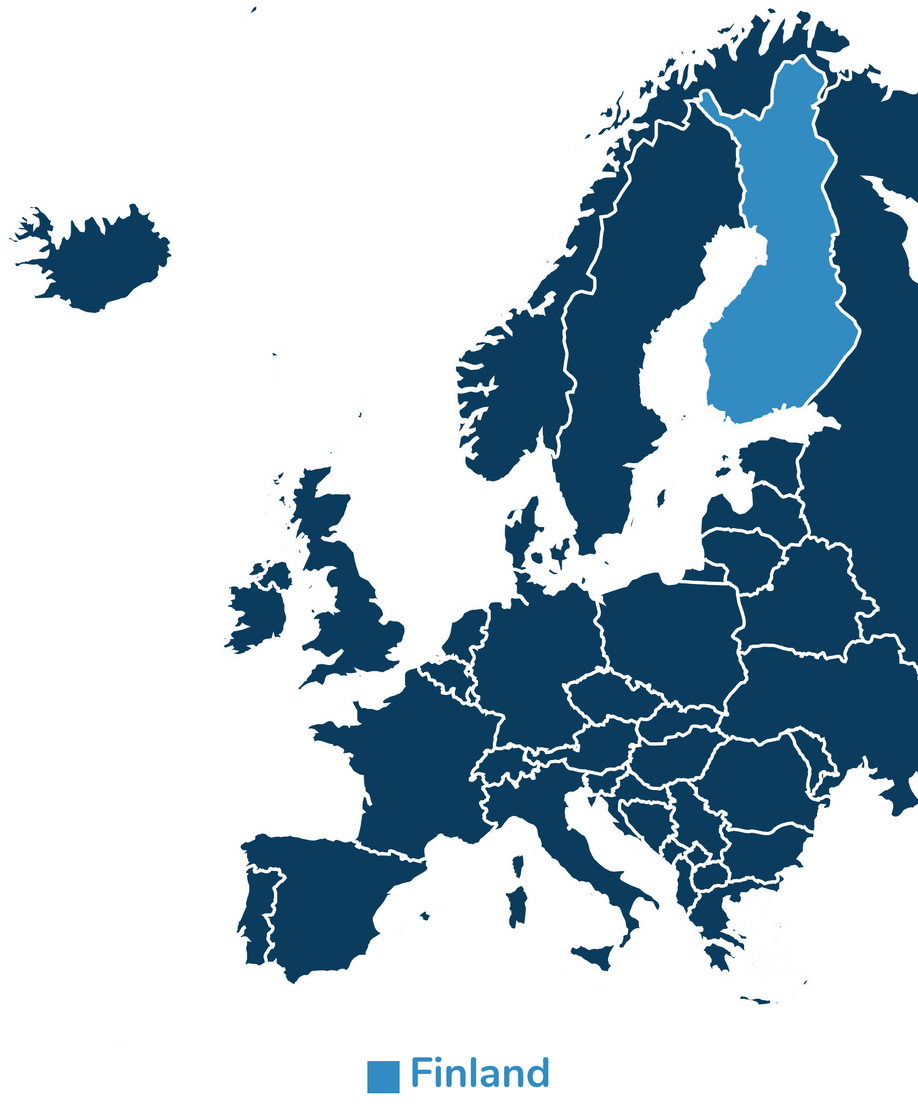
Upon arrival, migrants in Finland are given written information about Finish society and culture, their individual rights, and what services are available to them for aid. Individuals receive immigrant advisors from their municipalities that help give information about employment, education, and integration. Before receiving advisors, individuals must take an assessment to determine which kinds of services they will require (InfoFinland, 2018).

Finnish Refugee Council

This organization works to protect and improve the rights of refugees and immigrants in Finland. Abroad, FRC works to alleviate poverty and empower individuals through education. They educate adults on the subjects of health/hygiene, environmental protection, civic rights, and basic topics such as reading, writing and math. (Finnish Refugee Council, n.d.)

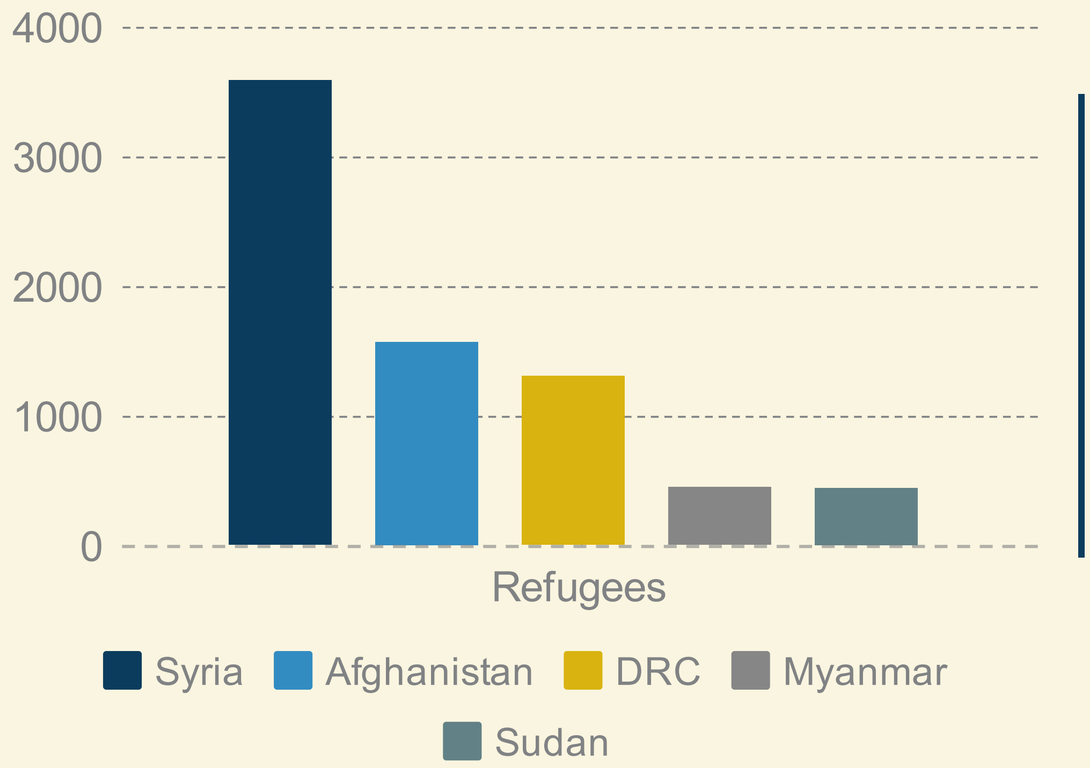
Refugee Advice Center

This organization provides legal assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in order to help them secure rights and benefits. They primarily focus on handling refugee complaints in courts and working with those in detention. (The Finnish Refugee Advice Center, n.d.)



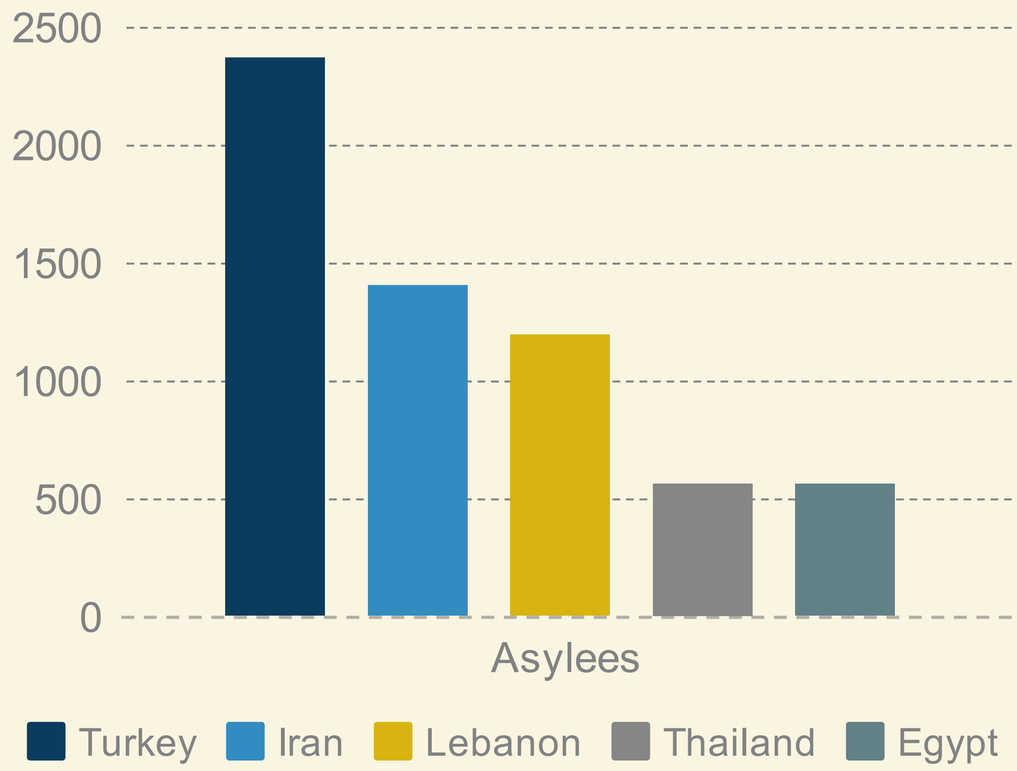
Finnish Resettlement 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin

(UNHCR, 2018d)



Finnish Asylum 2010-2018: Top Five Countries of Origin

(UNHCR, 2018d)



Country Overview: Finland

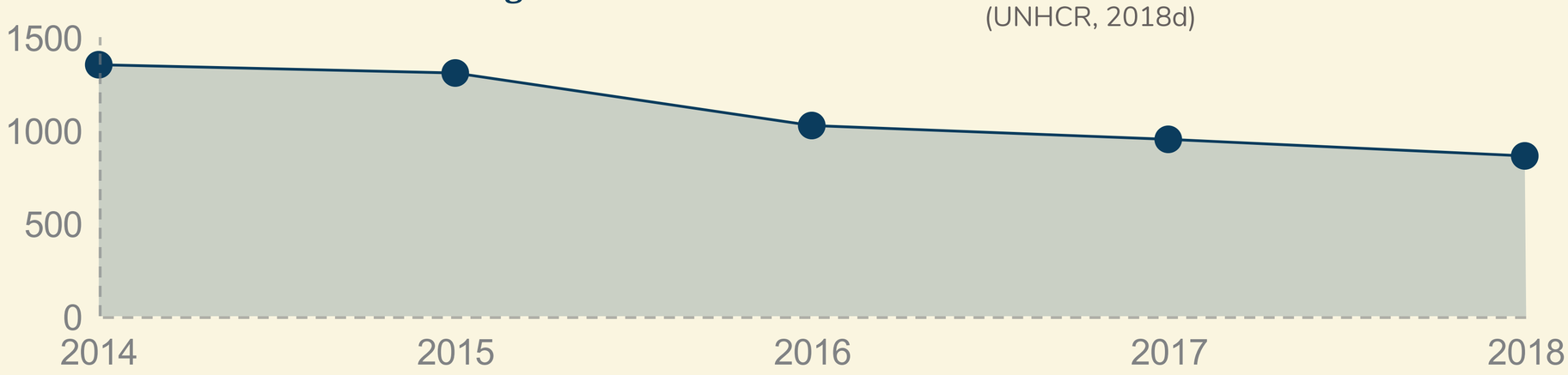
The Rise of Populist Parties and Public Discontent

As with its Nordic neighbors, public sentiment and politics in Finland have been transformed by the migrant crisis. In the midst of an economic downturn, many Finnish citizens are struggling economically. Some are unhappy with the amount of money they perceive the government to be spending on refugees, believing those resources could instead be put towards alleviating their own suffering and improving the economy (Daley, 2015). Anxieties regarding the loss of cultural values and the threat to national identity is as prevalent in Finland as in its Nordic counterparts (Reklev, 2016). In Finland too, there has been a growth in populist politics. The True Finns and the New Alternative (both anti-immigrant parties) currently hold just under 20% of all seats in the Finnish Parliament, giving them substantial power (Forsell, 2016). The Finnish Security Intelligence Service reports that there has been an increase in both threats of terrorism and anti-immigrant hate crimes since the 2015 influx of asylees (SUPO, 2017). The rise in anti-resettlement sentiment throughout the country has coincided with a reduction in Finland's resettlement program, where it reached a low of 847 individuals for 2018 after resettling at least 1,000 refugees annually between 2014 and 2016 (UNHCR, 2018d).

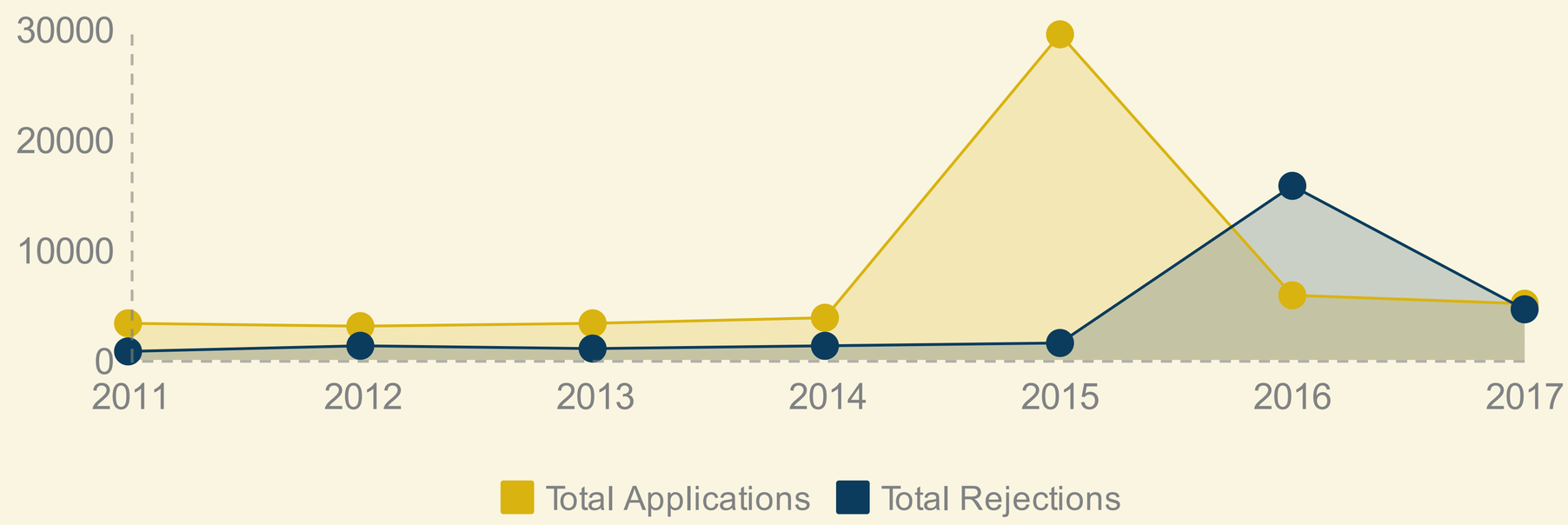
Changes in Policy

Similar to Denmark and Norway, Finland issued Arabic news releases detailing new, stricter policy decisions in an effort to deter future migrants. Additionally, Finland has tightened its qualifications for asylum for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia, which have been declared 'safe countries' by the Finnish government (Rosendahl, 2016). For Iraqi asylum seekers, coming from a certain region in Iraq is no longer enough to qualify for asylum, and each decision was made on a case-by-case basis in the years after 2015 (Hofverberg, 2016c). The government was pursuing negotiations with these countries in order to increase deportations, although no agreements have been reached as Iraq has refused to accept anyone but voluntary returns (Tanner, 2016; Yle, 2018). As of October 2018, Finland has suspended all deportations to Iraq and Afghanistan until they review the security situation in each country and their asylum policies for Iraqi and Afghani asylum-seekers (Yle, 2018). As a result, 77% of Iraqis applying for asylum in Finland were denied in 2016. Due to stricter reviews of asylum applications and disappointing conditions upon arriving in Finland thousands of Iraqis have voluntarily left the country (Forsell, 2016).

Refugees Resettled in Finland 2014-2018
(UNHCR, 2018d)



Asylum Claims in Finland 2014-2018
(UNHCR, 2018d)



Conclusion

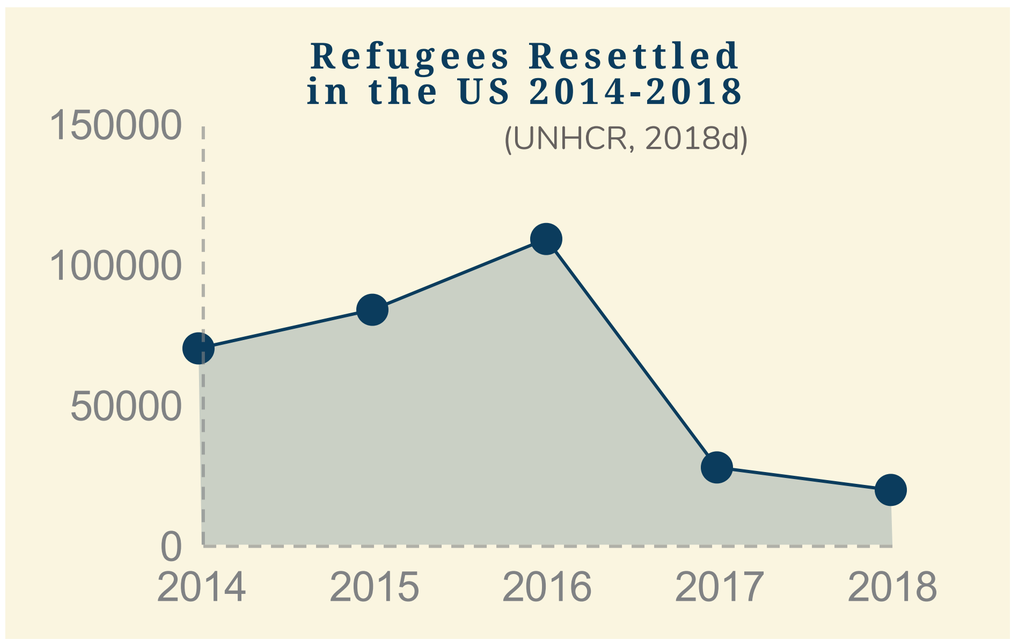
Nordic Regional Overview

Overall there has been a marked shift in Nordic resettlement policy in recent years. The Nordic countries have a history of being traditionally welcoming to newcomers, both in terms of the numbers they take in and the benefits they provide. Yet the influx of migrants over the dramatically increased numbers from especially 2014 onwards placed a considerable strain on each country's ability to continue their historically liberal resettlement practices. As public discontent rose and populist parties gradually gained political traction, Nordic governments began to enact strict policy changes that ultimately created adverse effects for refugees currently resettled in these countries as well as those hoping to gain asylum status or family reunification in the future. The recent policy shifts and rise of public and political discontent in the Nordic countries have culminated in significant hardships for those already resettled and those hoping to migrate in the future. Thus, even in supposedly liberal bastions like the Nordic countries, the overall trend towards rising xenophobia, populist nationalism, and anti-immigrant sentiments have taken hold. Public opinion and especially public anxieties regarding rapidly shifting circumstances play an increasingly important role in resettlement policy-making decisions.

Parallels & Distinctions with the US

Although the Nordic countries are leaders in resettlement on a per capita basis, (particularly Sweden and Norway) and are often perceived as model resettlement destinations, it is the US that has until recently operated the largest resettlement program in the world in nominal terms (Bose & Grigri, 2018). Much like the Nordic countries the United States witnessed a significant rise in anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rhetoric, both among the general public and in public policy. Prior to 2016 and the assumption of power by the Trump administration, there was already growing backlash to the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), especially following the 2015 Paris attacks, and as the Obama administration was expanding the program with the goal to accommodate 110,000 in 2017. During the 2016 US Presidential campaign, then-candidate Trump and a number of other politicians articulated increasingly anti-refugee positions (ibid).

Within the first months of his administration, President Trump translated such views into action, including a ban on arrivals from several Muslim majority nations as well as an immediate suspension and review of the USRAP, all in the name of national security (585 U.S., 2018). While these so-called 'travel bans' were initially challenged successfully in court in the months to follow, they were eventually upheld in a modified form, while the resettlement program has been deeply slashed over the past two years (Bose and Grigri, 2018). While the USRAP and the government and non-profit agencies administering the program had planned on expanding in 2017 and beyond, what occurred was the opposite. The program ended up resettling little more than 25,000 people – less than 25% of 2016 numbers (UNHCR, 2018d). In the fall of 2017, when the USRAP approval numbers for 2018 were released, the total admissions capacity had been slashed drastically from 110,000 to a record low of 45,000 – by far the lowest since the inception of the program in 1980 (Federal Register, 2017). Even with the 45,000-projected capacity, the US only successfully resettled fewer than 19,000 refugees in 2018, the lowest by a significant margin since the inception of the program in 1980 (UNHCR, 2018d). For FY2019, the USRAP has a ceiling of 30,000 admissions – the lowest approved cap since the program started (Federal Register, 2018). The USRAP remains tenuous heading into 2019, as the federal government has slashed funding for resettlement programs to accompany the decline in numbers.



There are interesting parallels and distinctions between the changes in such policies and trends in the US and Nordic countries. For example, while the proposed ban on all Muslim immigrants by the Danish People's Party in 2015 failed to gain any significant support, the intent behind the proposal is similar to the so-called 'Muslim Travel Ban' in the US, which has been ultimately successful despite court challenges. Proponents of these kinds of policies suggest that they are focused on security concerns and specific countries while critics argue that travel bans like these are based on religious backgrounds and bigoted assumptions. It is hard not to view restrictive policies such as this as something other than xenophobic (or more specifically Islamophobic) when many of the most vocal proponents emphasize supposed threats posed by Islamic immigrants to national cultures and identities as well as national security. These sets of concerns are not always identical and it is worth noting that despite similar trends in popular support moving toward the right of the political spectrum–especially groups calling for stricter policies on refugees and migrants–the narratives behind these trends are not always synonymous.

The differing narratives can, at least in part, be

Conclusion

Parallels & Distinctions with the US continued...

attributed to different experiences with refugees and migration, as well as cultural differences. For the USRAP, there had been a more gradual increase in its capacity over the past decade, but its geographic distance from the countries of out-migration led to a different sensibility regarding those arriving and in what numbers. In Europe, the issue was a different one – not as much an increase in refugees who had been screened and approved while in camps far away, but rather arriving in thousands on their doorstep seeking asylum (a closer parallel to this experience in the US has been the arrival of Central American asylum seekers, though in far smaller numbers than at the peak of the European migrant crisis). No resettlement or asylum program was prepared for this kind of rapid influx, and resources and programs were inevitably strained, as was the case in the Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Norway. The US, on the other hand, was spared this sort of pressure given its geographic distance from the areas of conflict forcing so many people into Europe. Yet, the United States cut its resettlement program more than any of the Nordic countries, except for Denmark which has suspended its program. Finland, Norway, and Sweden all continue to operate their resettlement programs at their average or above average rate despite crackdowns on asylum policy and rising populist political parties, while the US has slashed it program by nearly a third since 2016, largely in the name of national security.

Whereas the Nordic countries are particularly proud of their national culture and societal norms, the United States celebrates and emphasizes multiculturalism (at least in name). It makes sense then that anti-immigration movements in the Nordic region focus on the threat to their culture, and harsh policies, particularly in Denmark, are disproportionately targeting Muslim migrants who are often seen as both incapable and unwilling in many cases to assimilate into their new countries' cultures. In the US, however, the most popular argument against refugees is that they are a grave threat to our national security, despite being the most vetted groups of immigrants to enter the country, and only three refugees of the more than 3 million (and nearly 900,000 since 9/11) resettled since the program's inception have been convicted of terrorism-related charges, all of them for overseas activities (Newland, 2015; Bose & Grigri, 2018). No matter the differences within these narratives, the noticeable trend toward nationalism and far-right political parties with roots grounded in anti-Islam stereotypes and xenophobia among the public is difficult to ignore.

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