**The pros and cons of having comprehensive framework agreement on migration related statistics and analyses at Statistics Norway (SN)**

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# Abstract

There is a great demand for statistics on immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, immigration, refugees and integration. Immigration policy is a key area of the political parties’ policies, as well as State governance and public debate in general. The statistics on immigrants are also of great importance in research particularly within demographics and other social sciences. Many migration-related analyses are funded by a comprehensive framework agreement between The Ministry of Education and Research and Statistics Norway (SN), making SN the largest producer of migration and integration analyses, and the largest quantitative research institution in migration issues in Norway. This agreement is unique at SN, and perhaps in all of Europe, in its scope. This paper aims to evaluate the pros and cons of this agreement, and to describe the role of the Coordinator of Migration Related Statistics and Analyses in Statistics Norway which is financed through the agreement. The Coordinator connects producers and users of statistics. The picture of migration is often fragmented, our users need more comprehensive approach to better understand the dynamics and mechanisms of migration and integration. Investing in the development in the knowledge of immigrant-related issues is important, in a more cross sectional and cross-statistical way. But it is relevant 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.

**Keywords:** migration, coordination, analyses, framework agreement

# Introduction

Migration related statistics and analyses are in high demand by government agencies, the media and the public at large. There are several reasons why it is important to have knowledge of the immigrants’ situation in Norway. Lack of knowledge can give rise to unfounded opinions and false presumptions in public debates on immigration issues, and grater knowledge of the immigrants’ background and living conditions can bring about a greater understanding between immigrants and other Norwegians. A solid base of knowledge is also important information for politicians when making important decisions that are of concern to immigrants and integration. The aim of the integration policy in Norway is to provide incentives and opportunities for participation in the workforce and in community life. Migration flows, stocks and integration measures such as participation in the labor force and in the educational system are continuously monitored. Annually, approximately 1,2 million Euros is 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.

# Immigrants and immigrations

To understand why the politicians are willing to fund such an agreement with Statistics Norway, it is important to understand the changes that has happened within the Norwegian society since the 1970s. With 5,3 million inhabitants, Norway is a small country on a global scale, but we have one of the fastest growing populations in Europe, according to figures from Eurostat- the statistical office of the European Union. Norway’s demography is characterized by the fact that we are a relatively small country with a large share with no immigrant background. However, the diversity is steadily widening along with the increasing immigration. At the beginning of 1970, there were 59 000 immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents or 1.5 per cent of the Norwegian population. At the beginning of 2019, these groups had risen to 944 000 persons or 17.7 per cent of the population.

Figure 1. Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents 1970-2019

Source: Statistics Norway

The ethnic and cultural diversity in Norway is greater now than ever before. Equally diverse are the reasons for persons born in other countries embarking on the long or short journey to Norway with hopes of living and working here. Their children, with their multi-cultural backgrounds, will also gradually make their mark on the country. The annual immigration flows have varied over time. Due to immigration, in particular labour immigration after the EU enlargement in 2004, the population in Norway has for several years had one of the Europe’s highest population growth rates.

Figure 2: Immigrations, by reason for immigration

Source: Statistics Norway

Figure 2 shows immigrations of non-Nordic citizens between 1990 and 2019 by reason for immigration. There were some marked fluctuations during the period, mainly due to increased numbers of refugees caused by war and conflicts in different corners of the world. In 2005, there were more labour immigrants than refugees for the first time. 2006 was a crossing point, with labour immigration and family immigration at about the same level. After 2006, labour immigration dominated the migration picture until last year. The large influx of refugees into Europe in the autumn of 2015 brought many refugees from Syria to Norway. More refugees came to Norway in 2016 than labour immigrants. Family immigration has remained stable over the last three years, with around 16 500 immigrations yearly. Fewer immigrated for family reasons in 2018. Labour immigration increased again in 2018 after falling every year since a peak in 2011 of nearly 27 000 labour immigrants.

# 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. This includes immigration and statistically monitoring the integration and participation of immigrants in Norwegian society. Since in 1997 the Ministry responsible for immigrant integration policy has chosen to fund the Framework agreement that has ensured the continuous production and expansion of statistics and analyses on immigration and integration. The purpose of the agreement is to develop immigrant-related statistics, strengthen the work done with analyses and dissemination, and fund the coordinator’s position. The aim is to produce more statistics on migration to Norway and immigrant living conditions, and developing them, thus contributing to development of knowledge in the field.

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 ten million NOK (one million Euros) have funded approximately 23 projects each year (figure 3). Many immigrant-related statistics and analyses in Statistics Norway are funded by this framework agreement.

Figure 3: Migration related projects funded through the Framework Agreement, in numbers and NOK, by year. Statistics Norway, 2002-2019

Source: Statistics Norway

Today, approximately 60 per cent 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 2018 Statistics Norway issued 59 official migration related statistics and 66 publications (reports, statistical articles, discussion papers and news). 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 a long tradition of analytical activities and a research department within Statistics Norway. 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.

The framework agreement was renewed in 2016 for the period 2017–2021. During the 10-years period 2009–2019, the amount has been 117 million kroner in total (approximately 12 million euros). The yearly amount has been rising quite steadily and in 2019 was higher than ever before.

# 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. This is an important benefit of the scope of the agreement. The migration field is interdisciplinary and involves several divisions in 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 is a contact person for The Ministry and other users of migration and immigrant- related statistics from Statistics Norway. The Coordinator annually coordinates new project proposals from Statistics Norway within the Framework Agreement, maintains an overview of existing research and 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. 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.

To strengthen the communication and knowledge base across divisions, the Coordinator has initiated monthly seminars with presentations of research, 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. Statistics Norway also organizes an open seminar every year on migration and integration related research. The seminar is an important arena for theme-related discussions, advisory, learning and knowledge exchange. The coordinator regularly discusses internally the role of the Statistics Norway in the media and society: how to handle inquiries, how different statements are used, the role as a provider of factual knowledge and as interpreters of the statistics.

The coordinator is also responsible for dissemination of immigrant statistics to the general public by giving talks, lectures and participating in different kind of forums regarding immigrant statistics. The framework agreement includes two months of work to use in this area.

# Advantages and challenges

It is essential that Statistics Norway remains independent and non-political in its research and production of statistics. This means that Statistics Norway decides itself what to publish, as well as when and how publication takes place. Immigration and integration are particularly sensitive topics in our society.

It is relevant 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.

Thus, Statistics Norway is in real competition with other institutions that do the same kind of analyses. According to the agreement, the Ministry is committed to financing a coordinator for 8 months, but the funding of the projects is not set up in advance for the period 2017-2021. They are decided on an annual basis. The yearly amounts depend on the number of projects and how much finances there is available. The amount has been stable over the last years, but may also change.

# 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 connects 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.