



## Who becomes a citizen, and what happens next? Naturalization in Denmark, Norway and Sweden

The Scandinavian countries have different rules for how immigrants can become new citizens. A Delmi report by Pieter Bevelander, Jonas Helgertz, Bernt Bratsberg and Anna Tegunimataka, analyses which factors in Denmark, Norway and Sweden—as well as in the migrants' home countries—affect the acquisition of citizenship (naturalization). The authors also investigate whether naturalization has any effect on labor market integration among foreign-born persons residing in the Scandinavian countries.

### Background

Immigration to Scandinavia since the end of the Second World War has, to different degrees, changed those countries' demographic composition.

In 2012, nearly 15 percent of Sweden's population was born abroad. In Norway, the

corresponding figure was 11 percent, and in Denmark 8 percent.

Owing to significant differences in the legislation of the Scandinavian countries, however, foreign citizens were met with markedly different rules and procedures for acquisition of citizenship in the destination country.

## Objective and issues

The aim of this report is to study two separate but related issues regarding naturalization in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Firstly, the question is asked: what makes foreign-born persons become citizens in a new country? Here, we study the degree to which people receive citizenship and the significance of contextual factors in the country of origin and the destination country for individuals' willingness to naturalize. Secondly, the question is asked whether acquisition of the new citizenship affects the labor market integration of foreign-born persons.

## Results

The general pattern in all Scandinavian countries is that people from the Nordic countries and Western Europe have a relatively low tendency to become naturalized, while persons from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe have a much higher degree of naturalization. Foreign-born persons from Latin America place somewhere in the middle.

At the same time, there are clear differences among Denmark, Norway and Sweden. A higher degree of naturalization is observed in Sweden for persons from all country of origin groups than what is observed in Norway and Denmark. With the exception of foreign-born persons from Western Europe and the Nordic countries, migrants in Norway undergo naturalization more often than in Denmark.

The report also shows that differences in the levels of economic development of the country of origin and the destination country are linked to people's willingness to seek citizenship in the new country. If a migrant comes from a country with a lower economic level of development relative to that of the destination country, the likelihood is generally higher that the individual acquires citizenship in Sweden, Norway, or Denmark.

In relation to political and civil rights, the analysis shows largely expected results. Persons from less free countries, according to data from Freedom House, apply for citizenship to a greater degree than others. For Sweden, this connection is less clear – something that to a certain extent is linked to the data material used. The general

pattern, however, is that individuals who migrate from countries with a greater degree of political and civil rights are less willing to naturalize than individuals from countries that are less free.

For Sweden, the results show that migrants whose home countries allow dual citizenship are more likely to naturalize. This has not been observed in Norway and Denmark. In addition, the results show that legislation permitting dual citizenship, which was enacted in Sweden in 2001, has had a positive effect on immigrants' degree of naturalization.

The second part of the report investigates the question of whether acquisition of citizenship has any effects on foreign-born persons' labor market integration. The analysis of the effects of citizenship on employment and incomes shows that it is primarily among people from countries generally marked by worse labor market integration that a link between naturalization and better integration on the labor market can be observed. Naturalized individuals from these countries are clearly better integrated on the labor market than those who do not naturalize. It is, however, only in a few cases where an improved outcome on the labor market can be

directly linked to the time of naturalization. Thus there is reason to interpret these results with a certain level of caution.

## Conclusion and policy relevance

What do the results mean, in a broader perspective? Firstly, the differences in degree of naturalization between the countries are, to a certain extent, linked to differences regarding regulations.

Denmark has a restrictive policy for granting citizenship, with tougher requirements on knowledge of both language and society, as well as a certain degree of economic independence. A clearly lower degree of naturalization has also been observed in the country among foreign-born persons from regions outside of Western Europe. Norway and Sweden have more liberal rules than Denmark. Sweden is the most liberal, among other reasons because it permits dual citizenship. Norway and Sweden also have clearly higher degrees of naturalization for foreign-born persons from Asia, Africa and Latin America compared to Denmark.

Secondly, the study confirms that conditions in the country of origin influence the desire to

become a citizen in the new country. Foreign-born persons from countries with a lower level of development than Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are more willing to apply for citizenship.

The third and final point deals with the effects of naturalization on people's integration into the labor market. Generally, acquisition of destination country citizenship can positively affect the individual's situation on the labor market. On the one hand, the new citizenship can send a signal to potential employers that the person intends to stay in the new country over the longer term. On the other hand, there are also a number of jobs in the Nordic labor markets (not least pertaining to defense and national security) for which citizenship is a requirement. In certain cases a new citizenship – with a new passport – can additionally make people's travel, both private and work-related,

easier. Naturalization should thus be able to provide a positive effect on immigrants' connection to the labor market. The study has relevance for political and other public discussions on citizenship legislation and its effects in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Over the last few decades, the proportion of foreign-born persons has continually increased while the legislation on citizenship has gone in different directions. Comparative analyses of countries' various policy frameworks is therefore of great importance in order to ascertain what consequences they have, especially for integration.

Who



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