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Unlocking Potential Effective Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Children

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Unlocking Potential – Effective Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Children

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Útdráttur – Summary in Icelandic

Norræna tengslanetið fyrir nýkomna nemendur, í samstarfi við mennta- og barnamálaráðuneytið á Íslandi, skipulagði ráðstefnuna *Lykillinn að möguleikum: Árangursríkar aðferðir til stuðnings börnum innflytjenda* (e. Unlocking Potential: Effective Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Children). Ráðstefnan fór fram 7. desember 2023 í Reykjavík, Íslandi, og leiddi saman norræna stefnumótendur, fræðafólk og fulltrúa stofnana til að efla samstarf og veita innsýn í hvernig bæta megi náms- og félagslegan árangur nýkominna barna innflytjenda og flóttafólks. Meðal þátttakenda voru sérfræðingar og fulltrúar frá þeim ráðuneytum sem verkefnið heyrir undir í Danmörku, Finnlandi, Íslandi, Noregi og Svíþjóð. Ráðstefnan var mikilvægur hluti af formennsku Íslands í Norrænu ráðherranefndinni árið 2023 og með henni var skapaður vettvangur til að byggja upp fagleg tengsl og ræða stefnur og aðferðir á Norðurlöndunum.

Á ráðstefnunni var boðið upp á erindi og umræður til að stuðla að samstarfi og þróun nýrra hugmynda. Þá voru jafnframt dregnar fram fjölbreyttar nálganir og áskoranir sem fylgja því að bjóða nýkomin börn innflytjenda og flóttafólks velkomin í norræn skólakerfi, með áherslu á að byggja á þeim auðlindum sem þau búa yfir. Meginþemum sem voru rædd snerust um tungumálakennslu, félagslega þátttöku, sálrænan stuðning, og mikilvægi þess að taka tillit til fjölbreytilegra þarfa barna innflytjenda í norrænum skólum. Stór áskorun er misjöfn móttaka og stuðningur milli svæða, oft háð stærð og fjármagni sveitarfélaga. Koma úkraínskra barna hefur varpað ljósi á skort á undirbúningi kennara, sérstaklega í kennslu á öðru tungumáli og veitingu sálfélagslegs stuðnings. Margir kennarar hafa ekki fengið nægilega þjálfun til að takast á við kennslu barna í fjöltyngdu námsumhverfi eða að vinna með börnum sem hafa orðið fyrir áföllum. Þetta á ekki síst við í dreifbýli og á þeim svæðum þar sem minna fjármagn er sett í málaflokkinn. Menningarmunur, fordómar og samskiptaerfiðleikar skapa einnig áskoranir, þar sem margar nýjar fjölskyldur eiga erfitt með að skilja menntakerfið vegna skorts á upplýsingum á eigin tungumáli. Virk þýðingaþjónusta og jafnræði milli allra innflytjendahópa eru nauðsynleg. Árangursríkar aðferðir fela í sér t.d. vel skipulagðar móttökuvíðræður með tulkum og sjónrænum stuðningi, sem nýttar eru í Finnlandi og Noregi, ásamt tvítyngdum menningarmiðlurum sem mynda brú milli skóla og fjölskyldna. Í Svíþjóð eru kennarar sem starfa sem brúarsmiðir á milli skóla og fjölskyldna fjármagnaðir af ríkinu, og lögboðin notkun á netþýðingum er til staðar. Noregur hefur einnig þróað námskeið um áfallamiðaða menntun, bæði á staðnum og á netinu.

Bætt kennaramenntun er talin mikilvægur þáttur í að bæta stuðning við nemendur með fjölmenningarlegan og fjöltyngdan bakgrunn. Ráðstefnugestir lögðu áherslu á mikilvægi aukins norræns samstarfs og miðlunar upplýsinga til

að bæta móttöku og menntun innflytjenda. Helstu niðurstöður ráðstefnunnar eru nauðsyn þess að styrkja kennaramenntun og starfsþróun bæta stuðningskerfi og fylgjast með fjármögnun stjórnvalda. Norrænt samstarf og samráð voru nefnd sem lykill að áframhaldandi umbótum í þessu mikilvæga málefni.



1. Introduction

Conference host: Vilhelm Neto

7 December 2023

Gamla bíó, Reykjavík

Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Children

Government of Iceland. Ministry of Education and Children.

The Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Students, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Children in Iceland, organised a conference titled *Unlocking Potential: Effective Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Children*. This one-day event, which was held on 7 December 2023 in Reykjavík, Iceland, brought together Nordic policymakers to enhance collaboration and share insights on improving educational and social outcomes for newly arrived immigrant children. The conference was a key event under Iceland's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2023, aligning with the broader goals of enhancing Nordic cooperation to create a green, competitive and socially sustainable region.

The conference served as a platform for Nordic policymakers to build professional networks as well as discuss policies and practices from across the region. It focused on the reception and integration of immigrant children, highlighting evidence-based approaches and current practices to support these students in language acquisition, inclusion, psychosocial support and active participation. The participants, including national experts and representatives from relevant ministries and authorities from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, discussed the opportunities and challenges they face in supporting immigrant children. The conference programme included presentations, discussions and networking opportunities, aiming to foster cooperation and generate new ideas for policy development.

1.1 The Expected Output and Impact of the Conference

The conference *Unlocking Potential: Effective Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Children* was organised to align with the broader Nordic ambition to enhance regional cooperation for a greener, more competitive and socially sustainable Nordic Region. The primary aim of the conference was to bring together Nordic policymakers and practitioners to build a common vision, strengthen professional networks and enhance collaboration in supporting newly arrived immigrant children. The event served as a platform for sharing insights into the current research, policies and practices across Nordic countries, focusing on strengthening the systems that receive immigrant children, equipping professionals with the necessary skills and developing competencies within schools to provide effective psychosocial support, particularly for refugee students. The key topics included strategies for second

language acquisition, inclusion of students with foreign backgrounds and psychosocial support for refugee learners at the national and municipal levels. The conference also emphasised the importance of listening to youth, incorporating input from delegates and policymakers as well as showcasing good practices and evidence-based approaches to foster the active participation and inclusion of immigrant children.

The planned outcomes of the conference include improved policies and practices that support the integration of students with foreign backgrounds, enhanced psychosocial support frameworks and long-term improvements in the educational systems and support services for migrant and refugee learners in the Nordic countries. These improvements aim to promote better inclusion and the well-being of these students in their host societies. In addition, the conference sought to map out the next steps for developing a Nordic-level toolbox of educational resources and training programmes for professionals as well as equipping them with the necessary competencies to support migrant and refugee students effectively. By fostering personal connections and strengthening networks among professionals, the conference aimed to facilitate ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing, ultimately leading the Nordic countries to be a model for investing in immigrant children and helping them realise their full potential. The output of the conference, the Conference Report, builds on the input from the youth from the Nordic countries, the input from delegates and policymakers and the summary of current practices and best-case practices from researchers.

1.2 The Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Students

The Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Students is a collaborative initiative involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Its primary aim is to support the education and integration of newly arrived students and migrant learners in compulsory and upper secondary education across the Nordic region. The network provides a platform for sharing, exchanging and disseminating information on the challenges and best practices in migrant education, enabling participants to gain insights into the experiences of other countries. It also facilitates comparisons of policy developments and programmes, fostering new ideas for policy evolution and encouraging cooperation on specific educational topics.

The network is an informal platform that maintains connections with other relevant Nordic networks, while also discussing European projects related to migrant education, such as those within the OECD and EU thematic working groups. Participation in the network includes national experts at an administrative level from relevant ministries and authorities responsible for newly arrived students and migrant education. Each member country sends between one to four representatives. Occasionally, other invited experts from ministries, authorities or academic institutions may participate.

The network organises physical meetings lasting one to two days up to once a year, complemented by web meetings as needed. Responsibility for arranging these meetings rotates among the member countries, with the hosting country covering the meeting expenses and aiming to apply for additional funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers. All members are involved in planning the network's activities, with overarching themes and relevant topics developed collaboratively. Representatives share updates and information from their respective countries at each meeting, and the hosting member prepares a summary in English afterwards. The working languages of the network are the Nordic languages and English.

The key participants include the Danish Ministry of Children and Education; the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, along with the Finnish National Agency for Education; the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture; the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training; and the Swedish National Agency for Education. Through these collaborative efforts, the Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Students aims to strengthen educational systems, support the inclusion of immigrant students and enhance the overall well-being of newly arrived learners across the Nordic region.

1.3 Conference theme and aims

The conference highlighted various approaches and challenges in integrating newly arrived immigrant children into Nordic educational systems, emphasising their potential as future human capital. Erna Kristín Blöndal noted the demographic changes in the Nordic countries due to increased immigration, stressing the importance of equitable education and the benefits of investing in newly arrived children, who face multiple social, linguistic and educational challenges.

The key themes discussed by the conference speakers centre around the integration and education of newly arrived immigrant children and youth in Nordic countries. The presentations collectively emphasised:

- 1. Inclusion and Equity:** The speakers consistently stressed the need for inclusive education that provides equal opportunities to all students regardless of their linguistic or cultural backgrounds. This includes advocating for the rights of newly arrived children to access quality education, maintain their mother tongues and participate fully in society. There was also a focus on creating supportive school environments that affirm students' identities, fostering a sense of belonging and challenging systemic inequalities.
- 2. Trauma-Informed Care and Psychosocial Support:** Recognising that many newly arrived children come from traumatic backgrounds, speakers emphasised trauma-informed care as a critical component of education. The key elements include ensuring safety, fostering positive

relationships and helping children develop coping strategies. The importance of equipping teachers and school staff with the skills to understand and respond to trauma was underscored as a means to support the mental health and well-being of these students.

3. **Second Language Acquisition:** A recurring theme is the importance of effective language teaching strategies to support newly arrived students in acquiring the host country's language. Various models, such as bilingual education, separate introductory classes and hybrid models, were explored to find the best fit for different contexts. The need for linguistically responsive pedagogy, which values and utilises students' entire linguistic repertoire, was also highlighted as crucial in supporting multilingual learners.
4. **Community and Family Engagement:** Several presentations highlighted the role of community-driven initiatives and family engagement in supporting newly arrived students. Effective integration strategies involve collaboration between schools, communities and families, fostering resilience and providing holistic support that extends beyond academics.
5. **Challenges and Systemic Barriers:** The conference also addressed the challenges faced by newly arrived students, including navigating the education system, language barriers, cultural adjustment and socio-economic disparities. There was a call for evidence-based practices, improved data collection and ongoing research to better understand and address these challenges as well as the need for dedicated leadership and professional development to empower educators.
6. **Policy and Practice Development:** Finally, the theme of developing and implementing inclusive education policies was prominent. The need for systematic approaches, clearer guidelines and consistent support at the policy level was highlighted to ensure that educational practices are aligned with the needs of diverse student populations. This includes supporting teachers through professional development and creating frameworks that value multilingualism and cultural diversity.

Overall, the key themes emphasised a holistic, inclusive and responsive approach to the education and integration of newly arrived immigrant children with a strong focus on language acquisition, psychosocial support and systemic improvements in educational practices and policies.

Presenters from the Nordic countries presented their recent research, projects and local and national policies. Elisabet Nord from Save the Children Sweden introduced the *Three Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care* – safety, connections and coping strategies – to support children who have experienced trauma. This approach is designed to create a safe environment, foster trust and help children develop adaptive coping mechanisms, with ongoing support through training and collaboration in schools. Berit Lødding, from Norway, discussed

models for integrating newly arrived students, including direct placement in mainstream classes, separate introductory classes and hybrid models that combine both. She emphasised the need for evidence-based improvements, dedicated school leadership and an inclusive school environment. Mohammad Omar advocated for community-driven initiatives, such as the *Back to Basics* and *Building Bridges* projects, which combine education, sports and social support to aid newly arrived families in integrating and building resilience. A study from Iceland presented by Renata Emilsson Pesková and Anna Katrín Eiríksdóttir explored family language policies, highlighting the opportunities and challenges in supporting multilingualism among immigrant families. Key recommendations included providing clearer guidelines for policy implementation and professional development for educators. Mette Vedsgaard Christensen and Line Møller Daugaard from Denmark focused on the transitions of newly arrived youth into vocational education, stressing the importance of language-sensitive teaching and the need for ongoing Danish language support beyond lower secondary education. Marit Lunde from Norway outlined the work with online bilingual teaching to support academic progress while students learn Norwegian. She also described support structures for teachers, such as digital resources, national networks and professional development. Jenni Alisaari, from Finland, emphasised the importance of linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy, advocating for inclusive school environments that value all languages and identities as well as for teacher training in multilingual and culturally responsive practices. Kaisa Kepsu introduced a review of language teaching practices in Nordic countries, highlighting the importance of evidence-based knowledge and the upcoming study on language learning policies for children from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The study aims to assess what works best in supporting language acquisition in basic education across the region.

In Chapter two, the conference talks are summarised, and their key takeaways and recommendations are highlighted. In a similar manner, in Chapter three, the discussions are summarised, and their key takeaways and recommendations are stated. In Chapter four, an overall summary and the key messages from the conference are presented.

2. Summaries of the conference talks

2.1 Newly arrived youth – The human capital of the future

Erna Kristín Blöndal, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Children – Iceland

Erna Kristín Blöndal welcomed the audience on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Children of Iceland. She discussed how the population in the Nordic countries continues to grow thanks to immigration. Iceland has the largest increase in population of the Nordic countries. Newly arrived children are a large part of the newly arrived population. They are very diverse groups often coming from war zones and less developed areas and countries. Many children have serious trauma that they bring with them. It is not the children's choice to come and they are faced with multiple challenges, including social, linguistic and educational challenges. The intersection of many factors can lead to deep disadvantages and have consequences for generational problems. Children have rights to education, to learn the language of society and to maintain their mother tongues. They have the right to enjoy equal opportunities, have access to education and participate in the society. The empowerment of the newly arrived children is the priority. The investment in the reception of newly arrived children is the best investment. Helping them prosper in the Nordic societies has also been linked to economic benefits of the receiving societies.



2.2 The three pillars of trauma-informed care

Elisabet Nord from Save the Children – Sweden

The presentation by Elisabet Nord from Save the Children Sweden outlined trauma-informed care, a research-based approach based on Howard Bath's extensive review of trauma in children. This approach aimed to equip adults in a child's life with essential knowledge about trauma, helping them understand and respond to the needs of vulnerable children. The approach was centred on the *Three Pillars of Trauma-Informed Care*: safety, positive relationships and coping strategies. These pillars guided adults to create a supportive environment that fostered healing and recovery for traumatised children.

The first pillar, safety, involved establishing a sense of safety and protection, which was crucial for children who had experienced trauma. This required creating environments where children felt secure, both physically and emotionally, as exemplified by Amin's case, where classroom adjustments reduced his anxiety. The second pillar, connections, emphasised the importance of building positive, secure relationships and recognising that trauma could impair a child's ability to trust and form connections. Teachers were encouraged to be consistent, open and reliable to help children rebuild trust. The third pillar, coping, focused on helping children develop adaptive coping strategies to manage their emotions and impulses. In Amin's story, for instance, adjusting to the classroom environment helped him better handle stress without resorting to aggression.

Since 2015, Save the Children, in collaboration with the Swedish National Agency of Education, had trained over 160 preschools and schools on trauma-informed care. The professional development programme for schools included a structured four-step plan spread over one term (half a year), starting with a kickoff meeting and concluding with a sustainability plan for continued practice. The training began with a two-day course on the Three Pillars, followed by hands-on implementation, teacher training on managing compassion fatigue and continuous support through TMO ambassadors. Regular consultations used tools like the iceberg model to help teachers understand the underlying needs and trauma of their students, encouraging behavioural change and improving learning outcomes.

The programme highlighted that understanding and addressing trauma could significantly change how educators responded to challenging behaviours, fostering a supportive environment where children felt safe, connected and capable of positive coping.

2.3 Training models for newly arrived pupils on language acquisition, development in the subjects, social inclusion and well-being

Berit Lødding from the Nordic Institute for Studies of Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) – Norway

The presentation addressed the challenges that newly arrived immigrant children and youth faced in Nordic countries, particularly in Norway, including learning a new language, keeping up with academics, building social connections and sometimes coping with trauma. The focus was on exploring various introductory models in Norwegian schools and understanding what worked best for these students.

In Norway, the existing models included direct placement in mainstream classes, which was often preferred for facilitating social integration, language acquisition and academic progress. However, this model had its limitations, as mere classroom sharing did not ensure social inclusion or language proficiency, and newly arrived students could become invisible in large classes. Another model involved separate introductory classes, which offered a safer and more tailored environment for second language learning and personal adjustment but could create a “separate school within the school” with lower academic expectations and a heterogeneous student group. Successful schools often used hybrid models, blending mainstream placement with targeted support in “welcome classes” for intensive Norwegian tutoring. Effective implementation involved bilingual teachers, dedicated school leadership and the integration of newly arrived students into the broader school community.

From the Norwegian experience, general recommendations for Nordic countries included evidence-based improvements with a need for both qualitative and quantitative studies to better understand the effectiveness of different models, consistent student assessments and better data collection. School-level factors for success included dedicated school leadership, skilled and competent teachers (including bilingual assistants) as well as the flexible use of models that catered to individual needs. An inclusive school environment where all students were valued equally was essential, involving a commitment to inclusion at all levels and ensuring that newly arrived students were active members of the school community. Effective schools did not simply adopt generic best practices; they engaged in an ongoing, collective process of developing inclusive and supportive environments tailored to their specific context.

Overall, the presentation emphasised that the improvements in the education of newly arrived immigrant children required localised, collaborative efforts, qualified teaching staff and dedicated school leadership to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The work of Berit Lødding and colleagues is now accessible in the interim report from the project *Research on training*

programmes for newly arrived pupils: Norwegian learning, professional development and new friends – is it possible at the same time?(Nor. Norskinnlæring, faglig utvikling og nye venner – er det mulig på samme tid? Delrapport fra prosjektet Forskning på opplæringstilbud til nyankomne elever)¹

2.4 Back to basics: Understanding and supporting newly arrived families

Mohammad Omar – Youth worker and inclusion expert

Mohammad Omar, drawing from his own experience as a 14-year-old immigrant from Somalia to Sweden, discusses how to create supportive environments for newly arrived children in the Nordic countries. His approach is rooted in practical experience working with youth and immigrant families, emphasising community-driven initiatives that integrate education, sports and social awareness.

One successful initiative highlighted is the *Back to Basics* project, which targets children from underprivileged areas through sports, education and awareness programmes. This local-based initiative has gained the support of multiple stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of grassroots solutions for integrating newly arrived families. The programme includes quality education, extracurricular activities and after-school sessions, such as homework help, skills learning and mentorship.

Omar also emphasised the *Building Bridges* initiative, which aims to create a strong community and reinforce family structures, thus fostering resilience in children. This initiative works by linking newly arrived families with local and governmental departments, promoting an inclusive society with shared goals. Overall, the key message is that a holistic, community-based approach involving education, extracurricular activities and mentorship is essential to support newly arrived children and help them thrive in their new environment.



¹ [Norskinnlæring, faglig utvikling og nye venner – er det mulig på samme tid? Delrapport fra prosjektet Forskning på opplæringstilbud til nyankomne elever \(unit.no\)](#)

2.5 Language policies and practices of diverse immigrant families in Iceland: Opportunities and challenges

Renata Emilsson Pesková, Anna Katrín Eiríksdóttir and Kriselle Lou Suson Jónsdóttir – Iceland

The research explored the family language policies among the diverse immigrant families in Iceland, focusing on how these policies affected children's education and their interactions with schools and heritage language communities. The family language policy defined the language practices, beliefs about languages and language management within families (Spolsky, 2004).

For principals and policymakers, there are opportunities in the growing interest in multicultural education and inclusion, with new policies supporting diversity and emphasising resilience, knowledge and equality. However, the challenges include the need for clearer guidelines and systematic approaches in the implementation of language and education policies, along with addressing significant differences between urban and rural areas in terms of resources and support.

Teachers were generally dedicated to supporting their students' diverse needs and showed goodwill in fostering an inclusive environment. Yet, they often felt inadequately prepared to address the needs of multilingual students, indicating a need for additional training, support and collaboration.

Families valued their children's linguistic repertoire and engaged in varied practices to support language development, including fostering both heritage and Icelandic languages. Their family language policies were diverse and dynamic, reflecting the changing needs of the children, and parents often needed guidance and support to effectively raise multilingual children.

Children actively participated in shaping their family's language policies and could benefit from a rich language and literacy environment at home. Respect and a sense of belonging were crucial for their integration. However, balancing heritage language with the community language was complex, especially because resources and support varied widely between communities.

The key takeaways from the research were that the effective implementation of education and language policies required systematic approaches, accessible guidelines and widespread awareness among educators and families. Providing professional development for teachers and guidance for parents was essential to support the multilingual development of children. The rich linguistic environments of immigrant families were seen as valuable assets that could enhance multicultural education and inclusive practices in schools.

2.6 Newly arrived youth in Denmark – Experiences from recent research

Mette Vedsgaard Christensen, Line Møller Daugaard – Denmark

The presentation examined the experiences of newly arrived youth aged 15-20 who entered the Danish education system, focusing on their transition from reception classes in lower secondary school to vocational education and training (VET). The group was diverse, with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds, educational experiences and life circumstances. This transition was particularly challenging as it required adaptation to new educational spaces and expectations.

The reception classes provided foundational instruction in Danish, maths and social sciences, along with workshop participation at production schools. However, the adjustment from reception classes to mainstream education, such as VET, had been disorienting for many students. Although VET was a key focus in Denmark's educational policy due to the need for skilled workers, newly arrived youth often struggled with the language demands and navigating different types of upper secondary programmes. Their aspirations and life dreams frequently shifted during this transition, requiring clarity on educational pathways and realistic goal setting.

The research projects had some key takeaways. The language practices in reception classes highlighted the varied linguistic challenges newly arrived students faced across different educational settings, including lower secondary and production schools. The Moving On! educational model in Aarhus underscored the importance of understanding newcomer perspectives and experiences to enhance educational models tailored to their needs. The focus on educational Danish in VET emphasised the importance of linguistically sensitive teaching practices, such as highlighting key vocabulary, promoting oral communication, integrating subject-specific texts and using pedagogical translanguaging. These approaches helped bridge the gap between reception classes and VET courses, offering a richer language learning environment.

The recommendations suggested that providing insights into various upper secondary programmes was crucial for newly arrived students. VET's practically oriented learning environments could be beneficial if language-sensitive teaching was prioritised. Teachers were advised to make sustained didactic efforts to support language learning and address systemic barriers. There was also an urgent need to extend Danish as a second language support beyond lower secondary education to aid students in their continued educational journey. These measures could help create a more inclusive and supportive educational pathway for newly arrived youth, ensuring better integration and success in the Danish education system.

2.7 Enhancing education for newly arrived students through online bilingual teaching and competence building

Marit Lunde, The National Centre for Multicultural Education – Norway

The talk outlined some of the measures at the national level in Norway to improve education for immigrant youth. Lunde talked about bilingual subject teaching online: Flexible education. This bilingual education involved the teaching of subjects like mathematics, science and basic English in both Norwegian and the student's mother tongue (or another known language), facilitated by bilingual teachers using the standard curriculum. Its goal was to support academic progress while the students were still learning Norwegian.

Flexible education provides online bilingual instruction through a digital platform with bilingual course content and weekly real-time teaching sessions. It catered to pupils needing bilingual instruction in the languages Somali, Arabic, Tigrinya and Ukrainian, covering subjects like English, Norwegian, mathematics and science. As of 2023, 580 pupils across 180 schools had participated in this programme.

Strategies for supporting teachers were also addressed. National networks fostered collaboration and knowledge exchange between municipalities, school owners and educational services. In 2023, new networks had been introduced, specifically for bilingual teachers, teachers of newly arrived pupils and resource persons in preschools. Competence development focused on enhancing teacher skills in cultural diversity, using multilingualism as a resource, and providing specific tools for language enhancement and teaching newcomers. A guide for bilingual education provided a structured approach, including tools such as checklists, emphasising continuous planning, teaching and evaluation. Furthermore, multilingual resources, such as those available on NAFO's webpage at <https://nafo.oslomet.no> included tools such as Bildetema, Lexin, morsmål.no, skolekassa.no, multilingual stories and other materials to support diverse linguistic needs. These initiatives aimed to ensure quality education for immigrant youth by equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources to support bilingual and culturally responsive teaching.

2.8 Linguistically and culturally responsive education as a support for multilingual learners

Jenni Alisaari – Finland

The presentation highlighted how linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy could support multilingual learners (MLLs) and reviewed recent research findings from Finland on these approaches. Linguistically responsive pedagogy, as defined by Lucas and Villegas in 2011, focused on various aspects. It emphasised orientations such as sociolinguistic consciousness, which involved understanding the links between language, culture and identity, and the socio-political aspects of language use. It also underscored the value of linguistic diversity, appreciating multilingualism as an asset and the inclination to advocate for MLLs by promoting equitable educational opportunities.

The knowledge and skills required for teachers were also highlighted, including understanding MLLs' language backgrounds and proficiencies, identifying the language demands of classroom tasks and applying principles of language learning, such as scaffolding and differentiated instruction. Culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy emphasised acknowledging and valuing diversity while challenging inequalities and fostering pluralism. It also focused on developing school cultures that affirmed students' identities, enhanced their sense of belonging and engaged them in meaningful literacy practices.

For teachers, the key takeaways included adopting a linguistically responsive environment where all adults modelled responsible language use, scaffolding instruction at the macro and micro levels to accommodate MLLs' language proficiency and using students' entire linguistic repertoires to support learning. Promoting language-aware practices and integrating principles of safe and inclusive learning environments were also essential.

For schools, the takeaways focused on fostering inclusive school cultures that valued all languages and identities, encouraging the use of multilingual pedagogies that respected and utilised students' first languages as resources for learning and integration as well as addressing power dynamics while challenging language hierarchies within the school context.

For policymakers, the presentation stressed the importance of promoting professional development focused on linguistic and cultural responsiveness, as many teachers lacked training in these areas. It also emphasised the need to develop and implement educational policies that supported multilingualism and challenged monolingual norms as well as support research and initiatives that advocated for linguistic human rights and the use of multiple languages as valuable educational resources.

The challenges identified included teachers often shifting responsibility for language support, viewing linguistic diversity as a burden and engaging in

superficial language-aware practices. The textbooks and curricula were seen as reinforcing language hierarchies and monolingual norms, negatively impacting MLLs' learning and sense of belonging. Furthermore, the children of immigrants faced additional barriers, such as lower academic proficiency, a decreased sense of belonging and increased truancy. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts to enhance teacher training, adapt educational practices and develop inclusive policies that embrace and support linguistic and cultural diversity.

2.9 Introduction to a new review of the research findings on language teaching in Nordic countries

Kaisa Kepsu, Nordic Welfare Centre

The Nordic Council of Ministers initiated a new cooperation programme in 2016 in response to the increased influx of refugees into the Nordic countries. The primary aim of the project is to foster cooperation and facilitate the exchange of knowledge on the effective and ineffective approaches to refugee integration. Its broader goal is to establish shared Nordic expertise to support national integration efforts by developing new evidence-based knowledge, identifying promising practices and exchanging experiences. The project also seeks to disseminate this knowledge through various channels, including the website integrationnorden.org, publications, seminars, conferences, meetings, expert groups and expert networks. The website provides examples of successful integration practices from across the Nordic countries. Moreover, the Nordic Migrant Expert Forum, which is an advisory body of the Nordic Welfare Centre, has published policy recommendations which are available on the centre's website. The project focuses on several themes, including labour market integration and employment of immigrants, integration policies for refugees and language learning for newly arrived youth.

An upcoming project, which is set to begin in 2024, will focus on second language acquisition among children with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study aims to examine the policies, teaching methods and practices used in the Nordic countries to support these children in learning Nordic languages. It will assess what strategies have been successful and which have fallen short of expectations along with a focus on basic education (grades 1-9).

A previous project conducted by the Nordic Council of Ministers, titled *Coming of Age in Exile (CAGE)*, investigated the experiences of young refugees in Nordic welfare societies. The results revealed that children and youth with refugee backgrounds tend to have lower educational outcomes, lower participation in the labour market and higher rates of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) youth. In addition, they face a greater risk of ill-health, particularly among males, compared to native youth.

The current research project will explore several key questions related to second language acquisition in basic education. These include the following. What policies and methods are used in the Nordic countries to support language acquisition of the local Nordic languages? Which approaches are the most effective and for which groups? What are the experiences and formats of introductory classes, including considerations of group size and duration? How are children's language skills assessed and what are the requirements for school completion? How are individual support needs monitored? Is language learning integrated across all subjects in the curriculum and how is this achieved? Finally, what is the role of the mother tongue in language acquisition? The next steps for this project include finalising the project plan, identifying researchers and conducting the report (February-June 2024). The publication is planned for fall 2024 followed by its dissemination. Further information can be found at integrationnorden.org.



3. Discussions

3.1 Pathways to Inclusion: A panel of researchers

Hlín Sæþórsdóttir, senior adviser at the Ministry of Education and Children, moderated the discussion.

The discussants were:

- **Berit Lødding – Research Professor at Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education**
- **Jenni Alisaari – Senior Researcher, Finland**
- **Renata Emilsson Pesková – Assistant Professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland, Iceland**
- **Anna Katrín Eiríksdóttir – PhD Candidate at the School of Education, University of Iceland**

The discussants identified several key themes for the long-term social and academic integration of newly arrived youth. One major point was the need for a collaborative approach among stakeholders. Teachers, school administrators, policymakers and families must be actively involved in discussions and decision-making processes regarding the integration of these youths. This collaboration is essential to identifying effective solutions and leveraging each group's strengths. Another crucial factor was enhancing teacher competence and support. Teacher education is pivotal for the successful integration of newly arrived youth, but it is often hindered by a lack of funding, substitute teachers and time constraints. Teachers need time and resources for professional development with a focus on multicultural and multilingual education. Their competencies in these areas play a critical role in fostering inclusive environments and recognising the strengths which students bring through their home languages.

The discussants also stressed the importance of bridging the gap between policy and practice. While policies and best practices exist, the real challenge lies in implementing them effectively. Systematic work across all levels—society, school leadership and teachers—is necessary to ensure that action plans are actively executed. The importance of multilingualism was another key theme. Active promotion of multilingualism should be prioritised, avoiding an overemphasis on the majority language at the expense of linguistic diversity. Supporting students in maintaining their home languages is crucial for their identity, well-being and academic success.

Holistic and differentiated approaches were also seen as essential, given the diverse needs of newly arrived youth. A one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. The solutions must account for the various backgrounds, ages, personalities and interests. Engaging and empowering parents was another point raised. Teachers and school representatives should proactively reach out to parents,

ask questions and involve them in their children's education. Communication should be tailored to each family's cultural background. Stereotypes should be avoided.

Support for integration must extend beyond the classroom. Informal language learning opportunities in sports and extracurricular activities can aid in the integration process, but adult facilitators need to mediate these connections, as peer responsibility is limited. In their reflections on the key takeaways from the conference talks, the discussants highlighted several recommendations. These included promoting active multilingualism by encouraging the use of multiple languages in educational settings, developing teacher competence by investing in teacher education and providing time for professional development as well as fostering collaboration across Nordic countries to share best practices.

The discussants also stressed the importance of focusing on implementation, ensuring that policies are actionable and effectively carried out across schools and communities. Empowering families was another key recommendation, recognising the crucial role parents play in their children's education and integration. A holistic and inclusive approach was also emphasised, encouraging an intersectional perspective that considers all aspects of a student's identity. Lastly, the expansion of mediator programmes, especially in language and literacy centres, was seen as necessary to make these services more accessible across regions, particularly in Iceland.

These recommendations underscored the importance of systemic, inclusive and collaborative strategies to support the long-term social and academic integration of newly arrived youth in the Nordic countries.

3.2 What do youth with a migrant background want Nordic policymakers to know? Findings from the Nordic Youth Month

Hlín Sæþórsdóttir, senior adviser at the Ministry of Education and Children, moderated the discussion. The discussants were: **Omar Ricardo Rondon, Helga Júlía Bjarnadóttir and Stefán Örn, Ingvarsson Olsen, youth representatives, members of SAMFÉS and Youth Work Iceland.**

Racism, xenophobia and discrimination were identified as prominent issues in Sweden and Denmark, contributing to a lack of opportunities for migrants. In Iceland and Finland, there was a sense that governments were not effectively utilising their resources to promote inclusion, with efforts perceived as insufficient or misdirected. Migrants were often expected to adapt quickly to the new culture, language and lifestyle without reciprocal efforts to educate locals about migrant cultures. This one-sided approach created barriers that persisted, as adaptation was seen as the sole responsibility of the migrants.

Language barriers were a significant challenge, particularly for older youths who struggled to achieve fluency in Nordic languages. The current language

education practices were deemed inadequate, with some instruction occurring in third languages, such as Icelandic being taught in English, thereby complicating learning for those who did not speak English. In addition, limited access to youth work and sports hindered participation in activities that could facilitate non-verbal communication and integration. Government grants did not fully cover the costs of these activities, making them inaccessible to vulnerable groups like refugees.

Efforts aimed at supporting migrants sometimes excluded locals, fostering segregation rather than true inclusion. Family integration was also a critical challenge, with not enough resources or efforts dedicated to educating the entire family about the local culture and language. Activities often conflicted with work or school schedules, limiting adults' ability to integrate, which in turn affected the youth they were raising.

To address these issues, several suggestions were made for schools and policymakers. Cultural exchange and education could be enhanced by implementing more frequent cultural days in schools and leisure activities to celebrate and learn about various cultures. Authentic multicultural exchanges should be promoted by introducing local communities to new foods, music and the festivities of migrants. Improving language education was also recommended with an emphasis on enhancing support for language learning across all educational levels and monitoring progress effectively. Schools should recruit and provide competitive opportunities for teachers with foreign backgrounds who could teach in students' mother tongues, reducing reliance on third languages.

Support for youth work and sports was another key area with recommendations to increase financial aid and grants for vulnerable groups to afford extracurricular activities. Expanding the variety of youth clubs and leisure activities was suggested as well as extending opening hours for sports and leisure facilities. Inclusive activities for all were encouraged with programmes designed to include migrants and locals, promoting integration rather than segregation. Investments should be redirected towards initiatives that would benefit the entire community, not just the targeted groups.

Finally, family life and integration support needed to be strengthened. Family-focused integration programmes should be developed to align with work and school schedules, and education should be provided for the entire family about the local culture and language. Ensuring that adults could fully participate in society would support their children's adaptation as well. These recommendations aimed to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for newly arrived youth and their families in the Nordic countries, emphasising the need for balanced integration efforts that engaged both newcomers and local communities.

3.3 From arriving to belonging: A panel of practitioners and youth representatives

Hlín Sæþórsdóttir, senior adviser at the Ministry of Education and Children, moderated the discussion.

The discussants were:

- **Elisabet Nord – Licensed Psychotherapist and trainer at Save the Children, Sweden**
- **Helga Júlía Bjarnadóttir – Youth Council Member of SAMFÉS (Youth Work Iceland) and student, Iceland**
- **Marit Lunde – Director of the National Centre of Multicultural Education, Norway**
- **Mohammad Omar – Youth Worker & Inclusion Expert, Sweden**
- **Omar Ricardo Rondon, Youth Worker at Fjörheimar Youth Club & Supervisor of Reykjanes Art Workshop and the Arts Club, Iceland**

The discussant reported on their main takeaways from previous talks and discussions, emphasising several key points. They stressed the importance of including the voices of newly arrived youth and their families, understanding the needs behind behaviours and adopting a trauma-informed, holistic perspective. Engaging families through outreach programmes was seen as essential, recognising that families often used each other as reference points.

Building trust with the authorities, social workers and institutions was vital for fostering this engagement, with interpreters and clear communication playing a critical role in ensuring that families felt informed and supported.

The approach to inclusion over segregation was stressed, as excessive segregation could lead to negative outcomes like gang behaviour and criminalisation. Instead, efforts should focus on inclusion from the beginning to prevent these issues. Investing in languages and technologies was another recommendation, with a call to fund programmes in languages beyond English and explore technologies that made school languages more accessible and appealing. Maintaining mother tongues in media was also considered important.



The implementation of trauma-informed approaches with limited resources can be addressed through several strategies. In Sweden, collaborative models between Save the Children and schools offered a pathway where schools could apply for training on trauma-informed approaches with the costs covered by the Swedish Education Agency. Proactive trauma prevention was emphasised as essential with a focus on providing opportunities for growth and development to newly arrived youth as a means of preventing trauma. Schools and youth centres were encouraged to prioritise prevention rather than only addressing trauma after it occurred. Furthermore, mandatory professional development for teachers and youth workers was deemed crucial, ensuring they had the skills to handle trauma effectively in classrooms.

In preparing classrooms to welcome newly arrived students, building relationships was highlighted as a key factor. Simple gestures, such as learning a few words in the students' mother tongues, could greatly improve relationships and ease communication. The importance of representation was also noted, with the presence of teachers or staff members who shared similar backgrounds or languages serving as powerful role models for newly arrived students, showing them that success was achievable.

The need for diverse staff representation was also highlighted, suggesting that employing more teachers and staff of foreign origin could help newly arrived youth and families relate better and build trust. The idea of bilingual teachers, as seen in Norway, was proposed as a model that could be expanded to other Nordic countries. Finally, the discussants emphasised the importance of collaborative and flexible approaches, noting that there was no single solution. Education systems needed to be adaptable to cater to the diverse needs of newly arrived families, focusing on integration rather than separation.

Nordic countries were encouraged to recognise the talent among the newly arrived youth and provide them with the tools and opportunities to contribute, which is similar to Venezuela's past approach. Finally, the creation of a sense of belonging was discussed, emphasising that belonging was about knowing others and being known, using and developing your skills and receiving opportunities. Integrating aspects of the new culture while retaining your own was key to fostering a sense of belonging in the new society. These key points highlight the importance of inclusive, flexible and proactive strategies in integrating newly arrived youth into Nordic societies with a focus on collaboration, representation and trauma-informed practices.

3.4 Group discussion on the reception of new students in the Nordic countries

The objectives of the group discussions were to make the participants feel like they have gotten to know each other professionally on a deeper level as well as to collect data for Conference Report and Nordic Network for Newly Arrived students. The discussions at the conference focused on the practical challenges and opportunities in supporting immigrant children in Nordic schools. The output was documented by a note taker at each table. The key themes identified by the participants included challenges in reception and integration, teacher preparedness and inspiring practices.

The participants explored common issues, such as the need for better teacher preparation, cultural competency and psychosocial support for students. The lack of uniformity in support services across different municipalities and schools was also a point of discussion. A critical challenge identified was the variability in teachers' readiness to support second language learners and provide the necessary psychosocial support. In



some countries, there was a significant gap in the professional development opportunities for teachers, affecting the quality of support that students received. The participants also shared successful initiatives from their respective countries, such as Sweden's comprehensive support structures, including mother tongue assistance and partial reception classes that combine both mainstream and specialised education. Furthermore, the conference highlighted the importance of listening to immigrant voices and involving families in the educational process. The discussions stressed the value of a whole-community approach, where schools serve as community hubs and extend learning opportunities beyond traditional school hours.

4. Conclusions

The integration of newly arrived migrant children into Nordic education systems presents numerous challenges and opportunities. A significant issue that was identified is the variation in reception and support services across regions, which is often influenced by the size and resources of municipalities. The influx of Ukrainian children has highlighted the gaps in teacher preparedness, particularly in teaching second languages and providing psychosocial support. Many teachers lack the necessary training to handle trauma and multilingual classrooms, especially in rural or less resourced areas. Moreover, there is an uneven distribution of resources and expertise with larger cities being generally better equipped compared to smaller municipalities.

A major challenge is overcoming the cultural differences, prejudices and communication barriers. For instance, many immigrant families struggle with navigating education systems due to inadequate information in their mother tongues. The need for effective translation services and equal treatment of all immigrant groups, including newer arrivals like Ukrainians, is critical. There is also concern over the integration process's length and the need for more rapid and effective measures to ensure children can continue their education without significant delays.

Promising practices include structured welcome meetings that use interpreters and visual aids, as seen in Finland and Norway, and bilingual cultural mediators who help bridge the gap between schools and families. In Sweden, government-funded programmes employ qualified teachers as “bridge makers” between schools and families, and online translation services are mandated by law. In addition, Norway's development of courses on trauma-informed education, accessible on-site and online, represents an inspiring approach to teacher training. The integration of technology and digital learning tools is seen as a potential area for further exploration and enhancement.

The participants at the conference highlighted the importance of systemic changes, including more specialisation within teacher education to equip all educators for multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Networking and learning from the practices of other countries were identified as valuable strategies with a call for increased Nordic cooperation and information sharing to improve immigrant reception and education.

The key takeaways from the conference include the need for policymakers to address the gaps in teacher training, support systems and the monitoring of government funding for preparatory education. It was also noted that international cooperation could play a vital role in policy development, drawing on successful initiatives from other regions. A crucial recommendation for policymakers is to enhance regulations around preparatory education,

including setting limits on class sizes and ensuring the consistent use of resources.

The practical next steps for delegates involve fostering ongoing collaboration and networking beyond the conference, advocating for inclusive policies that involve immigrants in decision-making and emphasising the importance of viewing multiculturalism as a valuable resource rather than a challenge. There is a collective call for continued dialogue with suggestions for annual conferences to maintain momentum and share progress in addressing these complex issues.

The conference generated actionable insights and fostered ongoing collaboration among Nordic policymakers to enhance the support systems for immigrant children. Key conclusions include:

- 1. Need for Standardised yet Flexible Policies:** There was a need for more standardised policies across the Nordic region to ensure that all immigrant children receive adequate support, regardless of where they are settled. This included setting clear guidelines for reception classes, psychosocial support and teacher training requirements.
- 2. Strengthening Teacher Training:** A significant takeaway was the necessity of enhancing teacher education and professional development to better equip educators in supporting second language acquisition and addressing the psychosocial needs of immigrant students.
- 3. Building on Success Stories:** The participants were encouraged to focus on successful practices and to expand on them. Highlighting and learning from schools that have effectively integrated immigrant students was a priority.
- 4. Collaboration Beyond the Conference:** To sustain the momentum, the conference explored ways to maintain and strengthen the professional networks established during the event. Regular follow-ups, additional workshops and possibly annual conferences were considered to keep the dialogue and collaboration ongoing.

The conference findings, including the summaries of discussions, good practices and policy recommendations, which are included in this Conference Report provide a resource for continued improvement in the support of immigrant children in Nordic schools. The ultimate goal of the conference was to foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that enables all students, regardless of their background, to thrive and achieve their full potential. With this conference, the Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers was concluded. The work of the Nordic Network for Newly Arrived Students will be continued in the coming years under the rotating presidency of the Nordic countries.

