

DENMARK, NORWAY, SWEDEN, FINLAND

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The territory and its borders

Sweden, Denmark, and Norway were separate kingdoms in the early medieval period. Finland had been conquered and brought under the Swedish crown from the 12th to the 14th century. During the Kalmar union (1388–97 to 1523) all four countries were more or less united. The early modern history of Sweden is one of the rise and fall of a great power. Sweden split from the Kalmar union and started an expansion that led to the so-called great power period in Swedish history. The first wave of expansion crossed the Baltic Sea; between 1561 and 1620 Sweden swallowed the Kexholm province that is present-day North Estonia, Ingria, and Livonia. In the 17th century Riga was actually the largest Swedish town. The second wave of expansion was directed toward Denmark-Norway: in 1645 and 1658–60 Sweden conquered Gotland, Jämtland, and Härjedalen, then Scania, Halland, Blekinge, and Bohuslän. The third wave secured German territories, from Vorpommern to Bremen-Verden.¹

This status as an important European power ended with the Great Nordic War 1700–21, when Sweden lost southern Karelia, most of its German, and all of its Baltic territories. During the War of Finland in 1808–9 Russia conquered the whole of Finland including the Åland Islands. This loss was somewhat compensated, as Norway was separated from Denmark after the Napoleonic wars and given to Sweden in 1814. Norway, however, was never integrated into the Swedish realm; two separate and internally sovereign states joined in a personal union under the Swedish king.

Among these border movements particularly the mid-17th century incorporation of Scania in present-day Southern Sweden took its time and was only accomplished in 1721. In the 18th and first half of the 19th century the Swedish state pursued a strict “Swedification” policy, particularly through the control of churches and schools, a policy that was in conflict with the peace treaties guaranteeing that Scania could keep her laws. The ban on books in Danish in Scania was only lifted in 1857. In the long run, the incorporation, at least from the state’s perspective, was successful, as notions of a Danish Scania disappeared in the 19th century.

The Swedish conquest of Estonia in 1561, preceded by previous Swedish migration, left a legacy. Estonian Swedes

kept to themselves as a distinct minority for a long time. In the late 19th century they were roused into a kind of national awakening partly by Swedish cultural missionaries, partly by the czarist Russification project. Some hundred Estonian Swedes fled to Sweden in the 19th century to avoid being conscripted in the Russian army. In the 1920s some 8,000 people with Swedish roots still lived in Estonia; the majority migrated to Sweden during World War II.²

Orthodox Ingrians and a group called Votians inhabited Ingria, the territory in the vicinity of Petersburg. After the conquest of Ingria by Sweden in 1617, a conscious policy of immigration resulted in Lutheran Finns constituting three-quarters of the population in the late 17th century. The Russians recaptured the area in the early 18th century. In 1917, 140,000 speakers of Finnish still lived in Ingria; flight to Finland, forced collectivization, and relocations in the Stalin period decimated their numbers.

From a territorial point of view the history of modern Denmark is one of contraction. Territories were ceded to Sweden, as already mentioned, and there were conflicts over the status of Schleswig and Holstein. From 1773 until 1864, both were under Danish rule; until 1806 Holstein was part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, and between 1815 and 1864 it was part of the German Confederation. Schleswig, by contrast, remained until 1864 a Danish fief. After the German-Danish war of 1864 and the Prussian-Austrian war of 1866, both duchies were reunited as the Prussian province Schleswig Holstein.

After the end of the Danish-Norwegian personal union with the Peace of Kiel in 1814, Denmark kept its sovereignty over Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. In 1944, Iceland broke away, in 1948 the Faroe Islands were granted autonomy, and in 1979 Greenland was granted home rule. As these islands have been fairly homogeneous in ethnic terms (Inuit and Danish in the Greenland case) and with little modern immigration until quite recently, they will not be treated any further in this overview.

After the Swedish-Norwegian personal union of 1814, the borders of Norway did not change. In 1905 the formal link to Sweden was loosened. In the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, and Finland there were no strict borders until the 19th century and in these frontier regions several groups

¹ Swedish Troops on the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea in the early modern period.

² Estonian and Latvian refugees in Sweden after World War II.

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interacted and competed. From a historical point of view these areas may be viewed as Sami territories, where since the medieval period increasing numbers of migrants from Southern Scandinavia settled.³ Finland emerged in 1809 as a separate unit, when Sweden ceded it to Czarist Russia. The former Swedish Finland, the county of Kexholm, and the county of Viborg (1812) merged into a separate grand duchy with far-reaching autonomy and the Russian emperor as duke.

Immigration in the era of mercantilism in the 17th and 18th centuries

Both Sweden and Denmark of the 17th and 18th centuries developed into multilingual, multireligious, and multiethnic empires. Underlying this policy was a mercantilist notion. Emigration was considered as a loss, even forbidden; immigration of people with capital or skills was encouraged. The authorities followed an active recruitment policy. To persuade people to move, migrants were rewarded fairly well and most career migrants entered society at the upper rungs of the social scale. This competition for skill took place among all European states, so that northern Europe not only gained specialists but also lost them – for example, in the case of Finland, which witnessed the departure of specialists to Russia. Furthermore, Norway experienced the emigration of male sailors and female domestics to the Dutch Republic, especially from the region of Bergen and Kristiansand. This labor migration reached its highest point in the third quarter of the 17th century. Norwegian sailors even continued to come to Amsterdam until the mid-19th century.⁴

The recruitment of skilled laborers helped Sweden to play an increasing important role in European politics. Sweden developed into a “heavy” centralized state, with a high degree of taxation and an efficient army. During Sweden’s great power period, aristocrats from the new Baltic areas were included as functionaries in the administration and the army. Officers and mercenaries were recruited from several areas – in particular, these were Scots, Germans, and Baltic Germans. In the beginning of the 17th century, 45% of all high-ranking officers in the Swedish army were foreign born. Only a minority of them became permanent immigrants, although many were given land as part of their payment and several were elevated into the aristocracy. Because they owed their position primarily to the Swedish crown, foreigners were considered as particularly loyal and malleable. Apart from noblemen and mercenaries, other groups of immigrants were attracted as well in this mercantilist age, such as fortification engineers, artisans, merchants, bureaucrats, university professors, artists, and miners.

A similar import policy was pursued in Denmark. Initially there was a mercenary system and whole companies were

rented, but in the course of time soldiers were enrolled in the standing army and the Danish crown even lent them to other states as an auxiliary corps.⁵ From the late 16th to the early 19th century Danish entrepreneurs, backed by purposeful state policies, also attracted foreign artisans and skilled workers into various manufactures, albeit not always with great economic success. There were also chances for career mobility in trade and industry for subjects from the more peripheral parts of the realm, as was the case with Norwegians in the capital of Denmark (Copenhagen) and Finns in Stockholm. Furthermore, Danish and German civil servants from Oldenburg (which became Danish in 1667) migrated to Norway, which was relatively underdeveloped.

Career migrants played an important role in the peripheral economy of Norway and helped to span the know-how gap to the more advanced regions in Sweden and Denmark. Several new economic branches rose to importance in the 17th and 18th centuries, such as export of planks and beams, shipping, mining, and glass works. Saxony, for instance, was the prime recruiting area for technical experts in mining.⁶ Commercial expertise and knowledge of trade networks was also needed. The middlemen between Norway and Europe – originally Danes, Germans, Scots, or Dutch – often started as traders and in the end became the new Norwegian mercantilist bourgeoisie. The new upper classes had a foreign background and over time they became naturalized Norwegians.

In the 17th and 18th centuries geographic or ethnic origin did not play a decisive role in Scandinavia for a person’s position in society. During the great power period in the 17th century, seventeen languages were spoken in the Swedish realm. At *Riddarhuset*, the assembly of aristocrats, German and Dutch were spoken along with Swedish. Language was primarily a practical means for communication, not an identity marker. German was the language of command in the Danish army until 1772–3. In the cosmopolitan upper class in both countries, Germans were the dominant element, whereas the most outstanding ministers in Denmark came from various German states. In reaction to this foreign competition the old Swedish nobility tried to monopolize the highest ranking commissions. In 1776 the so-called *infödsret* (the right of the inborn) was introduced in Denmark: only those who were born in the country could hold office in the upper ranks of the state administration. This decree, directed against the strong German influence, was exceptional in Europe but did not express any modern nationalism, since Norwegians and German-speaking subjects from the duchies were included as well.

In religious matters the Swedish power state followed the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*. Catholicism, Calvinism, and Anabaptism were deemed unwanted, particularly from about 1650. These religions and Orthodox Christianity were outright forbidden by a church law in 1686. Orthodox

³ Kvens and Torne-Finns in Norway and Sweden since the 18th century.

⁴ German sailors in the Dutch merchant marine from the early 17th to the end of the 19th century.

⁵ Scottish soldiers in Europe in the early modern period.

⁶ Central and western European miners and smelters in Sweden and Denmark-Norway from the 16th to the 18th century.

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Karelians under Swedish reign fled eastward by tens of thousands during the 17th century. The church and the “modernizing” secular elements in the state apparatus were at odds: this principle of religious uniformity could not be upheld in relation to foreigners, who were allowed to practice their religion in private, but not to congregate openly. Jews were to be evicted according to a law from 1658. This anti-Judaism did not imply any anti-Semitic biological notions; Jews could be baptized and were allowed into society. In 1775 Jews were accepted and allowed to practice their religion openly; the so-called Jew statute (1782) allotted them a fixed, but restricted, place in society. Between 1838 and 1870 almost all obstacles to equal citizenship were removed.

Initially Denmark-Norway was just as strict as Sweden, in tune with the Evangelical-Lutheran church ordinance of the reformation 1536–7, even more severely underlined in 1555. The state, however, in 1682 decided to follow the principle of free towns. Glückstadt outside Hamburg, Altona, Frederiksstad in southern Schleswig, Fredericia in Denmark and Frederikstad in Norway were open to people from all religions. Religious freedom was a way to entice people to come to these new towns. Jews, Catholics, Calvinists, Reformed, Mennonites, Socians, and Quakers found asylum.⁷ A Moravian Brethren congregation was permitted to set up the small community of Christiansfeld, which has lasted until the present day.⁸ An edict from 1685 opened Denmark to Reformed and Evangelicals and eased regulations on Catholics and Jews. In 1809, Jews were allowed in all parts of the country; in 1814, they obtained equal citizenship in Denmark. Oddly enough, the 1814 constitution of independent Norway, otherwise liberal and rather democratic, forbade Jews to enter the country, a ban that was only lifted in 1851.

Social class or status seems to have been an even more decisive factor than religion. Whereas Jews with capital were allowed, so-called beggar Jews were barred from entering Sweden in 1782. A similar distinction was drawn in Denmark where “Portuguese Jews” (Sephardim), often merchants, were allowed while “East Jews” (Ashkenazim) were suspected of barter trade and begging and therefore barred.⁹ Another group suspected of being a burden were the Gypsies. A Swedish decree in 1637 prescribed that the men were to be killed without trial, the children and women immediately evicted. However, this harsh legislation was not enforced in an even manner. A third group that was sometimes marginalized was the “Forest Finns,” slash-and-burn farmers from Savolax in Finland who settled in the forests of the southern border areas between Sweden and Norway, on the Swedish side from the late 16th and early 17th century; in Norway somewhat later.¹⁰

Two groups shed light on the preconditions preserving their ethnic identity: the Walloons in Sweden and the

Dutch at Amager outside Copenhagen. The Dutch were peasants, originally brought in 1521 to secure homeland food specialities to the Dutch-born queen. The community kept itself more than 300 years, with a measure of internal self-governance. In 1759 the first marriage outside the group took place; Dutch was used in sermons until 1811 and spoken well into the 19th century; customary practices and dress lasted even longer.

The Walloons were brought from the surroundings of Liège in present-day Belgium and Sedan in France in the first part of the 17th century. They were specialists in ironwork and charcoal production, lived in rather secluded communities, and were subject to a jurisdiction peculiar to the ironworks. They kept to their Calvinist pastors, passed on the trade from father to son, and were highly endogamous. Half a century later most had adopted Swedish as their primary language, but identification as Walloons – or better, as Walloon ironworkers – was still evident.

In their case, ethnicity and profession are hard to distinguish. One important point rises from the history of the Dutch and the Walloons: several characteristics that may be pinned on the group itself, such as trade, language, and customs, may help to explain their continued existence as a group. Still the relation to the surrounding society seems to have been most important and in both cases state policy mattered. Since the privileges bestowed on them by the state might be lost if their peculiarities disappeared, the state policy highly stimulated the drawing of ethnic borders.

Nation building the Nordic way

In northern Europe the Napoleonic wars dissolved two middle-sized European multinational empires, from which five nation-states emerged during the 19th century. Despite significant differences, the common traits were important enough to speak of a Nordic type of state. In all states there were dominant majority populations and Lutheran state churches that secured a link between religion and the concept of nationality. Besides, the peasants had been legally free in Norway, Sweden, and Finland since the Middle Ages, whereas in Denmark serfdom was abolished in 1788. The *folk*, the people, were regarded as the core of the nation, in particular the peasantry. Another common trait was early democratic features. In Sweden and Finland the peasants had been represented in the Diet since the 15th century, and their participation did not diminish after 1809, when new constitutions were introduced in both countries. Finland, as an independent grand duchy within the Russian Empire, got its own Diet and government. Also the new Norwegian constitution from 1814 secured broad political participation. In Denmark a modern national state came into being after 1849, with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The peasantry became a major political player especially after the defeat of Prussia and Austria in 1864.

What conditions for immigration did this Nordic, Lutheran, popular, democratic, and cultural nationalism

⁷ Huguenots in Europe since the 16th century; Dutch Calvinist refugees in Europe since the early modern period.

⁸ Moravian brethren in Europe since the early modern period.

⁹ Sephardim in Europe in the early modern period.

¹⁰ Forest Finns in Sweden and Norway since the late 16th century.

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create? One might have expected skepticism of foreigners, but this is not reflected in the nature of citizenship. Although the concept of nation was related to history and language, both elements of “ethnic nationalism,” Norwegian citizenship rested on the concept of *ius soli*, a territorial principle, from 1814 to 1888, when a new law underlined *ius sanguinis*, the principle of descent. The citizenship law of 1924 and its successors have upheld mixed principles. The other countries followed similar paths. At the same time there was an increasing expectation that newcomers should assimilate, “become Norwegian” or Danish, particularly in the second half of the 19th century.

In Denmark the 19th century was dominated by the German question. The population of Schleswig and Holstein was neither linguistically homogeneous nor neatly settled in clear-cut monolingual communities. Before the 19th century identities were fluid and malleable. Still, there was either a German or a Danish dominance in most areas, along with the minority along the west coast speaking the Frisian language. After the defeat in 1864 of the Prussian army, most Danes accepted a redefined version of the nation, more contracted and more inward looking. Denmark cultivated a self-image as a “small state.” Still, within parts of the Danish-speaking population in Schleswig and in Danish nationalist circles, the idea of reclaiming the lost was kept alive after 1864. The northern part of Schleswig was rejoined with Denmark in 1920 after a referendum in which 91% of the voters participated. Some Danes suggested that southern Schleswig should be reincluded in Denmark after 1945, but the overwhelming majority refuted this “southern Schleswig-imperialism,” both in 1920 and 1945.

Norway, ceded from Denmark to Sweden in 1814, joined a union under the Swedish king but was a separate and internally sovereign state; thus it is proper to speak of Swedish immigrants in Norway and vice versa in the 19th century. Norwegian nationalism was on the whole democratic, politically linked to liberal circles, the *Venstre* (national-democratic) party, which corresponded to a more egalitarian social structure in which the peasant movements were a major political actor. Claims have been made that this equality and relative homogeneity disposed Norwegians to be less open to cultural or ethnic differences. This, however, is not convincing since the labor movement that emerged in the 1880s was definitely more egalitarian and more internationalist than the other parties. A more plausible explanation is that the relatively short history as a reemerged independent nation created a more intense nationalism in Norway than in Sweden. Thus the policy of “Norwegianification” toward the Sami and the Kvæns – immigrants from Finland in northern Norway – was more aimed at forced assimilation than its Swedish equivalent.¹¹ Especially the peasantry supported the ideal of an ethnic homogeneous Norwegian population: when Parliament lifted the ban on the admission of Jews in 1851, peasant representatives were the most important opponents.

¹¹ Kvæns and Torne-Finns in Norway and Sweden since the 18th century.

Finland-Swedes, Swedish-speaking Finns, descendants of immigrants who had settled before 1300, numbered 16% in 1750, 14% in 1865, and about 10% in 1930. They should, however, not be considered a national minority since they were not in any subaltern position in Finnish society. This duality is shown in present-day terminology: a Finlander is a citizen of Finland; a Finn is someone who uses Finnish as his mother tongue. Many Finland-Swedes lived as fishermen or peasants in northern Ostrobothnia, in the Åland archipelago and the southern coastal areas from Turku (Åbo) to Helsinki. In the capital Helsinki they formed a comparatively large part of the urban elite. Swedish was used as the official language. In the Finnish national movement, which grew stronger from the 1860s, both Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns participated. From 1863 Finnish was gradually introduced as an official language along with Swedish, to reach full equality in 1902; bilingualism was frequent and there was a high mobility between the language communities. In fact, some of the most ardent *Fennomanian* (Finnish nationalist) spokesmen were recruited from the Swedish-speaking educated class. The Swedish-speaking population of the Åland Islands strove for unification with Sweden, manifested in a self-staged referendum in 1917. But they received no support in the League of Nations and neither was Sweden willing to intervene. So they had to settle with a rather generous agreement of internal self-rule within the Finnish state in 1922, an autonomy that was expanded and confirmed in 1951 and 1992.

Since 1809 Finland was in practice a sovereign state with its own institutions and distinct nationality, able to resist the impact of the stern unification policy (in Finland seen as Russification) pursued from the 1890s. In 1917 Finland obtained external independence as one of the successor states to the Romanoff Empire. Some 33,500 Finns, Ingrians, and Karelians fled Russia, most of them in 1922. Karelia was included in Finland and nationalist academic and military circles dreamed of uniting Russian (or Eastern) Karelia with Finland as well. During the military advances in 1918–20 and once more in the middle years of World War II, it turned out that the Russian Karelians did not support this patriotism. As a result of the German-Finnish military defeat in 1944, 400,000 inhabitants of the Viborg county, about 10% of the population, moved to southern and central Finland. Statements on the remarkably low number of immigrants in contemporary Finland usually do not take into account this huge transfer and resettlement of migrants.

Labor migration and transatlantic emigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries

During the period of industrialization, skilled migrants were needed to introduce new technology and to train local workers. However, the typical migrant in this period was a labor migrant. Swedish industrial capitalism expanded spectacularly in the 20th century, but between 1860 and 1920 Swedish boys and girls from marginal agrarian areas migrated to farms, construction works, factories, and private households in the

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more rapidly growing economies of Denmark and Norway. Both were called “the poor man’s America.”

The real America loomed on the horizon. There had been international migration from the north earlier, such as the thousands of sailors and maids who went from Norway to the Netherlands (especially Amsterdam) in the early modern period. Still, this movement was dwarfed by the 2.5 millions emigrants who left the Nordic countries in the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The Nordic countries contributed 5% of the total European emigration, while the population consisted of only 3% of the total European population. Among those who left before 1915 there were 1.1 million Swedes, 750,000 Norwegians, 300,000 Danes, and 300,000 Finns. The emigration rates of Sweden were above the European average, but were modest compared to Norwegian rates. From the 1850s to the 1890s the emigration intensity of Norway was second only to Ireland. From 1879 to 1893 as much as 77% of the natural increase of the population was absorbed by emigration. The Scandinavian countries belonged to the so-called old emigration countries; the most intense periods of emigration were 1866–73, 1879–93 (a peak in 1882), and to a lesser degree 1901–5. A majority settled in agrarian areas. In Finland, two-thirds of the emigration took place after the turn of the century, with a peak in 1902. Coming relatively late, the Finns entered wage labor in mining and forestry work. A new wave of emigrants left in the 1920s.

Swedes and Norwegians went mainly to the USA. Canada became an alternative from the turn of the century, particularly after the USA closed its gates in the 1920s. The USA was also the primary destination for Danes, but to Danes, Latin America, in particular Argentina, Australia, and Africa were important receiving areas as well.

These mass emigrations had effects on other forms of migration. First, the sheer magnitude tended to dwarf other forms of migration, both in the eyes of contemporary society and later historians. However, significant numbers actually moved into or within the Nordic or European countries. In the period 1868–1920, 60,000 to 80,000 Swedes went to Germany.¹² Emigrants from Norway between 1856 and 1900 numbered 528,000, including 20,000 Norwegians who went to Sweden. Immigration in the same period has been calculated at 130,000. Among the Nordic countries Norway received most of the immigrants, primarily Swedes and Finns. Besides, there were considerable internal population movements from countryside to towns, in Norway also from the inland to the coast and from the south to the north, which offered opportunities in fishery. “Northern Norway is our America,” the saying went; similar utterances might have been made in Sweden. With a large emigration and immigration in the 19th century, Norway differed from France, for example, mainly a country of immigration, or from Ireland and Italy, which primarily exported their population.

¹² Swedish labor migrants in Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Second, mass emigration could effect immigration – for instance through substitution of labor power. Thus in Scania there was both a high level of emigration and immigration. Such a theory, however, cannot be sustained generally because the most active emigration areas, both in Sweden and in Norway, were not areas of immigration. Neither were the immigration areas in Norway (Kvæns in the north, Swedes along the Oslofjord, and several nationalities in the capital) typical sending areas. However, there probably was an indirect link. The departure of half a million Norwegians before 1900, and 750,000 before 1915, did influence the labor market. Norway became a seller’s market, thereby providing the structural precondition for the “liberating phase of capitalism” from the 1860s. Workers could shed social subordination by moving, and those who stayed could make a better bargain. Compared to working conditions in Sweden, wages in Norway were higher and labor conditions were deemed as more free, reasons mentioned for immigration by Swedish workers at the time.¹³

At the ideological level a somewhat peculiar notion developed around 1900. While emigration in the early decades was considered to relieve the country from a burden, rising labor costs also led to lamenting those who left the country. Commentators claimed that the most able, “the flower of the youth,” went abroad; migration was portrayed as a loss of blood. The Swedes organized a huge official inquiry into emigration in 1911, Norway a more modest one in 1912. In all Nordic countries, societies were set up to reduce emigration or to maintain contacts with those who left: in Norway in 1907 and 1909, Sweden in 1907, Finland in 1911, and Denmark 1920. The paradoxical idea spread that while the best elements within the native population left, those who came from abroad belonged to the dregs of society. The Norwegian emigration inquiry put it succinctly: “Our nation cannot afford to be split by emigration and infected by immigration.” Norwegian Americans who kept their mother tongue in the USA were praised, while Kvæns in Norway who kept their language were frowned upon as possible Trojan horses.

Emigration also resulted in return migration. In Europe as a whole an estimated 4 million returned between 1880 and 1931, 3 million between 1908 and 1923. The inclination to return varied: according to US statistics, Jews were least inclined to go back (5%), whereas as many as 89% of Bulgarians, Serbs, and Montenegrins returned. Among Scandinavians, 22% returned, on a par with other north and west European countries. Between 1875 and 1930, 178,000 Swedes (18%) came back from the USA; 155,000 Norwegians (19%) returned before 1940.¹⁴ The majority of Swedes and Norwegians went back to rural areas and several of these invested in land. Return migrants brought back money, technical innovations, particular objects, and new habits

¹³ Swedish labor migrants in Denmark and Norway in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

¹⁴ Swedish return migrants from the USA, 1875–1930.

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and ways of thinking. Migrant laborers in the southern and southwestern part of Norway imported US culture to such a degree that one may speak of Americanized areas.

Refugees and other immigrants from World War I until the 1950s

The 19th-century movements of labor migrants continued into the 20th century, to culminate before or during World War I. Immigrant Polish, Galician, and to a lesser extent Ukrainian women worked as seasonal beet pickers in south-eastern Scania and the southeastern parts of Denmark. Swedish workers, including navvies, still went to Norway and Denmark. To a large extent there was a south Scandinavian labor market and to some extent there was a parallel circumpolar market, consisting of Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, and to some extent Sami and Russians. The bulk of immigration to Norway was spontaneous, that is, not organized by companies or government agencies. Only east European agricultural workers were brought to Sweden and Denmark by recruiting agents who organized the tour and supervised the work. Private employment offices recruited Swedes to Denmark.

Denmark passed an immigration law in 1875, Norway in 1901. Both were primarily intended as a supplement to national poor laws, as instruments for evicting people who were considered a burden to the municipal budgets. Still, the Nordic states implemented fairly liberal immigration policies until World War I. A mixture of social unrest, political agitation, and espionage led the governments to introduce visas, registers, surveillance of foreigners, and central immigration authorities.

In all countries, but especially in Finland which gained its independence from Russia only on 6 December 1917, Russian refugees stayed on after 1918. In the years 1919 to 1923 tens of thousands of “Vienna children” were brought to the Scandinavian countries to keep or regain their health through nourishing summer stays in private homes, a humanitarian effort repeated at later occasions during World War II and its aftermath. The restrictive immigration regime and administration constructed during World War I were never fully dismantled, even though the visa restrictions were partly abolished. In fact, the core of the present legislation dates back to these years.

When new groups fled from Germany after 1933, there was an already developed system to handle the refugees. “Political” refugees were allowed more readily than Jews in all Nordic countries.¹⁵ In 1940 there were 3,200 German-speaking Jewish refugees in Sweden, 2,300 in Denmark, and 840 in Norway after a peak of 1,000 in 1938. Relative to the population, the Danes admitted the greatest number. The Swedes were most restrictive in their immigration policies,

¹⁵ Political and intellectual refugees from Nazi Germany and from German-occupied Europe, 1933–1945; Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and from German-occupied Europe since 1933.

the Danes most lenient. During World War II, Sweden became a refuge for Finnish children, Finns, Norwegians, Estonians, Danes, Swedish-speaking Estonians, and Germans, to mention the larger groups, totaling some 180,000 in December 1944. One particular group became highly contentious after the war: 146 Estonians who had served with the Germans were extradited to the Soviet Union in 1945–6.¹⁶

During and after the war Swedish authorities pursued a conscious employment policy. Baltic and Polish refugees, several directly from the work and concentration camps were trained and hired as labor power, in forestry and agriculture and particularly in the commercial beet production in Scania where there was a lack of labor power. On a smaller scale this was also the case in Norway, which admitted a group of “displaced persons” (DPs), mostly Polish Jews.¹⁷ Population movements created by the war included English women who married, for instance, Norwegian sailors or soldiers.¹⁸ Cold war refugees in the Nordic countries were mainly Hungarians, Czechoslovakians, and Poles. In the anticommunist climate, the East Europeans were initially favored by their image as freedom seekers. Still, there were frictions and mundane problems similar to those experienced by other immigrant groups.

Labor migrations after the World War II

A common labor market in the Nordic countries was established in 1954. Citizens of the four states were free to enter the other countries without passports, free to take up residence and work, and to enjoy mutual rights to social benefits.

The Swedish economy was the most dynamic, as Sweden was now a leading industrial nation. There was an internal pool of labor power in the primary sector, created by structural rationalization in agriculture. Still there was a need for labor, so Sweden turned to Europe to look for workers to sustain its rapid economic growth and changed into a country of immigration. The most important countries supplying workers were Finland, Yugoslavia, and Greece. Finns came in numbers equal to the old transatlantic mass migration. Due to language differences and to lower standards of living in parts of Finland, Finnish-speaking Finns resembled other “foreign workers.” In 1975, at the end of the period of labor migration, 45% of all foreign born were Finns, 10% were Yugoslavs, 8% Danes, 7% Norwegians, and well above 4% were Greeks and Germans.¹⁹

The Swedish policy was characterized by its conscious efforts to recruit, by an active state and by union participation, particularly from 1947 to 1972. Sweden had no colonial past it could rely on, like Great Britain or France, and developed a system similar to the German one. Immediately

¹⁶ Estonian and Latvian refugees in Sweden after World War II.

¹⁷ Displaced persons (DPs) in Europe since the end of World War II.

¹⁸ British war brides in Norway since the end of World War II.

¹⁹ Yugoslav labor migrants in western, central, and northern Europe since the end of World War II; Greek labor migrants in western, central, and northern Europe after 1950: the examples of Germany and the Netherlands.