



Nordic Migration Research at a Crossroads

EDITORIAL

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As we conclude our tenure as editors of the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, we find ourselves reflecting on what makes Nordic migration scholarship distinctive and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead for the next generation of researchers in this vital field.

THE NORDIC CONTRIBUTION: WELFARE STATES AS LIVING LABORATORIES

The Nordic countries have offered migration scholars something rare: a natural laboratory for understanding how migration intersects with robust welfare systems, strong labor market institutions, and distinctive integration philosophies. Our region's commitment to universalist social policies, gender equality, and relatively high levels of social trust has generated questions that reverberate far beyond the region. How do generous welfare provisions affect migration patterns and integration outcomes? What happens when egalitarian ideals meet increasing diversity? Can universalist systems adapt to accommodate differences without abandoning their core principles?

From the beginning, this journal has been committed to placing the Nordic region in a global context rather than treating it as an isolated case. We have actively sought comparative approaches that examine how Nordic approaches differ from and resemble migration governance elsewhere, as well as research on migration corridors and processes that extend far beyond Nordic borders but offer insights relevant to our regional context. The Nordic perspective is valuable not because it is exceptional, but because it illustrates broader questions about migration, belonging, and social solidarity that societies worldwide must confront.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abdelhady D, Irastorza N.
Nordic Migration Research
at a Crossroads. *Nordic
Journal of Migration
Research*. 2025; 15(4):
10, 1–5. DOI: [https://doi.org/
10.33134/njmr.1228](https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.1228)

During our editorship, we have been privileged to publish research that grapples with these questions in nuanced ways; studies examining everything from labor market segregation and educational outcomes to political participation and transnational family practices, both within and beyond the Nordic countries. Nordic researchers have been particularly adept at combining granular register data with qualitative depth, producing work that is both empirically rigorous and humanistically rich, while scholars from other regions have helped situate Nordic developments within broader global patterns.

The Nordic perspective has also contributed critical insights into the negotiation between multicultural recognition and civic integration—a debate that has played out differently here than in countries with longer histories of immigration or different welfare regimes. Our authors have documented how Nordic countries navigate the tension between cultural preservation and societal cohesion, offering lessons—both cautionary and aspirational—for migration-receiving countries worldwide.

CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION: COMPLEXITY IN AN ERA OF FLUX

Yet, as we hand over the editorial reins, we recognize that the field faces formidable challenges. Climate change is already reshaping global migration patterns in ways that will only intensify. The Nordic region itself, once perceived as peripheral to major migration flows, may find itself at the center of new mobility dynamics as Arctic regions become increasingly accessible and habitable. How will Nordic societies, built on specific historical and demographic foundations, adapt to these new realities?

The political landscape has shifted dramatically, even during our relatively brief tenure. The rise of anti-immigration politics, the mainstreaming of restrictionist discourse, and the erosion of asylum protections across Europe have created new research imperatives. What is perhaps most troubling is how the rightward shift in migration policy has become intertwined with the broader neoliberalization of the Nordic welfare state. Migrants have become convenient scapegoats for welfare retrenchment, with politicians pointing to immigration as a threat to social cohesion and welfare sustainability even as cuts to social services, health care, education, and labor protections affect all residents, regardless of migration background.

This represents a dangerous sleight of hand: structural problems created by neoliberal reforms are blamed on migration, deflecting attention from how marketization, privatization, and austerity are eroding the very universalism that once defined Nordic societies. Migrants experience these changes most acutely, facing longer paths to permanent residency, reduced access to language training, and increased precarity, but the dismantling of universal provision ultimately harms everyone. The discourse of ‘welfare chauvinism’ obscures how the welfare state is being restructured in ways that undermine solidarity across all social groups.

Migration scholars must grapple with how to study and respond to these interconnected dynamics: the securitization and weaponization of migration in political debate, the instrumentalization of migration concerns to justify broader welfare retrenchment, and the ways restrictionist policies create new forms of precarity and inequality. This requires maintaining the analytical distance and rigor that characterizes good scholarship while recognizing that research does not take place in a political vacuum.

Methodologically, the field faces its own evolution. The digitalization of both migration processes and research tools opens new possibilities ranging from studying online

diaspora networks to analyzing administrative and big data at unprecedented scales. However, it also raises thorny questions about privacy, surveillance, and the ethics of big data in migration research. How do we harness these tools responsibly?

THE IMPERATIVE OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Throughout our editorship, we have been struck by how migration research demands interdisciplinary thinking. Migration is simultaneously an economic phenomenon, a legal process, a political issue, a social experience, and a deeply personal journey. No single disciplinary lens can capture its full complexity independently.

Some of the most exciting work we have published has emerged at disciplinary boundaries. An example of this is the article ‘Practises and Processes of Symbolic Reproduction of Racial, Ethnic and National Boundaries in Low-Waged Workplaces’ by [Rye, Andersson, and O'Reilly \(2023\)](#), which brings together disparate literature in the fields of migration studies, labor economics, race and ethnic studies, and social boundary theory. Yet, genuine interdisciplinarity remains challenging. Disciplines have different vocabularies, methodological standards, and epistemological assumptions. Peer review across disciplinary lines can be fraught, and junior scholars who work at these boundaries often face professional risks.

We believe journals like ours have a responsibility to actively foster interdisciplinary dialogue. This means not just accepting papers from multiple disciplines but creating spaces where different disciplinary traditions can genuinely speak to one another. It means recruiting editorial board members and reviewers with diverse backgrounds and being open to and willing to educate ourselves about unfamiliar methodologies and theoretical traditions.

The Nordic context, with its smaller academic communities and traditions of collaboration, may be particularly well-suited to this kind of interdisciplinary work. We believe that the long-established tradition of International Migration and Ethnic Relations study programs at Nordic universities has contributed to an increasing interdisciplinarity in migration scholarship in the region. We hope future editors will continue to push these boundaries, and we are confident that our successors will bring precisely the intellectual breadth and vision needed to advance this agenda.

LESSONS FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Editing a scholarly journal is humbling and emotional work. Every submission represents months or years of labor: fieldwork conducted under difficult conditions, data painstakingly gathered and analyzed, and arguments carefully crafted and revised. Our primary responsibility has been stewardship of this labor, ensuring that good work finds its audience while maintaining the standards that give scholarly publication meaning.

We have learned that peer review, for all its imperfections, remains essential to the scholarly enterprise. The best reviewers do more than identify flaws; they engage generously with authors’ ideas, offering constructive pathways forward even when recommending rejection. We have been continually impressed by the dedication of our reviewers, who perform this invisible labor without recognition or compensation, motivated simply by commitment to the field.

We have also learned the importance of editorial courage, which means being willing to publish work that challenges conventional wisdom or dominant narratives, even when it generates controversy. Migration research takes place in a politically charged environment, and we have tried to ensure that the journal remains a space for rigorous, evidence-based scholarship rather than a vehicle for any particular political agenda. At the same time, we have recognized that all research is situated and that claims of pure objectivity can themselves serve political purposes. Critical scholarship that interrogates power relations, exposes structural inequalities, and centers marginalized voices is not ‘biased’ but rather essential to understanding migration in all its dimensions.

Perhaps most importantly, we have learned about the human dimension of scholarly publishing. Behind every submission is a person—often an early career researcher, sometimes someone working in precarious conditions, and frequently someone whose first language is not English. We have tried to treat every author with respect and to provide feedback that is critical but constructive, recognizing that rejection, however necessary, is always disappointing.

GRATITUDE AND LOOKING FORWARD

None of our work would have been possible without the extraordinary community that has sustained this journal. We are deeply grateful to our truly committed team of associate editors and book review editors, who have shouldered significant reviewing burdens, and to our managing editors, whose dedicated work has made the publication of the journal possible. Our reviewers, too numerous to name but essential to everything we do, have given generously of their time and expertise. Our authors have entrusted us with their work and engaged patiently with the revision process. Our publisher, as well as the Nordic Migration Network, has provided crucial support and infrastructure. Without our loyal readership, the journal would not have a reason to exist.

We are also grateful to our predecessor editors, who established this journal’s reputation for excellence and created the foundation on which we have built. And we are confident that our successors will take the journal to new heights, navigating the challenges ahead with wisdom and vision. The incoming editorial team brings fresh perspectives, deep expertise, and a commitment to the values that have made this journal a vital forum for migration scholarship. We eagerly anticipate the contributions they will steward into print.

Migration will remain one of the defining issues of our time, shaping economies, politics, societies, and individual lives in profound ways. The Nordic region, despite its relatively small size, will continue to offer important insights into how societies can navigate the opportunities and tensions that migration brings. We are honored to have played a small role in advancing this crucial scholarly conversation, and we look forward to watching the field and this journal continue to evolve in the years ahead.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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*Nordic Journal of
Migration Research*

DOI: 10.33134/njmr.1228

REFERENCE

Rye, J.F., Andersson, M., and O'Reilly, K. 2023. 'Practises and processes of symbolic reproduction of racial, ethnic and national boundaries in low-waged workplaces'. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 13(2), p. 1. Available at: <https://journal-njmr.org/articles/10.33134/njmr.677>.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Abdelhady D, Irastorza N. Nordic Migration Research at a Crossroads. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*. 2025; 15(4): 10, 1–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.1228>

Submitted: 6 March 2026

Accepted: 6 March 2026

Published: 2 April 2026

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