



# Public library services for migrants in national government policies across eight European countries: a comparative analysis

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This study is the first to explore how public library services for migrants are prioritised in national government policies across eight European countries: Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

**Method.** Using a comparative case study approach, the study analyses national library and immigration policy documents from the 1970s to the present, with qualitative content analysis identifying key themes and policy developments.

**Analysis.** The research examines policy trends, recurring themes and country-specific differences, focusing on library services for migrants in national policies.

**Results.** The study highlights variations in how library services are incorporated into national migration policies, and how library services for migrants are included in national library policies. Influencing factors include economic migration, humanitarian crises and policy shifts. Finland, Norway and Sweden have comprehensive national policies, while Denmark and Iceland have largely relied on local initiatives, and Hungary, Germany and Poland offer limited guidance.

**Conclusion.** This paper lays the groundwork for future research, suggesting in-depth case studies to examine national challenges and the alignment between national policies and local practices.

## Introduction

As global migration reshapes societies, public libraries are adapting to meet the needs of increasingly diverse populations. With their mandate for universal access and service, libraries are positioned to address the complex needs of migrant communities through language programmes, cultural activities, digital inclusion and the promotion of social cohesion. Research on library services for immigrants and refugees has grown in recent years, highlighting their role in advancing integration and inclusion (Kosciejew, 2019; Grossman et al., 2022)

Pilerot (2018) shows how the 2015 European humanitarian crisis transformed library services in Sweden, introducing challenges like linguistic diversity and specialised programmes. Similarly, Martzoukou and Burnett (2018) identify language learning as a key factor in meeting Syrian refugees' information needs in Scotland, improving social participation and wellbeing. Johnston (2018) evidences how conversation-based programmes can support integration in multiethnic communities.

Lloyd's (2015) theory of information resilience underscores libraries' role in refugee resettlement by supporting information literacy and access to critical resources. Libraries help build social capital among migrants, as shown by Vårheim's (2014a, 2014b) research linking trust in libraries to generalised trust. These findings align with broader evidence that intergroup contact reduces prejudice (Pettigrew et al., 2011; Johnston, 2019).

Recent research on Hungarian and Polish libraries reveals that their response to Ukrainian refugees following the Russian invasion was shaped by limited guidance from national-level authorities, relying on grassroots initiatives and internal motivation (Johnston et al., 2024). Preliminary findings from interviews with librarians in Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden suggest that national-level policies and legal frameworks have limited influence on library practices in this area (Mierzecka et al., 2025). These findings raise questions about the existence, content and effectiveness of national policies in addressing the needs of refugee and migrant populations.

However, there is limited research on how policies regarding library services for migrants have been promoted and prioritised by national governments. Searches in Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science produced no relevant results. While the IFLA *guidelines for library services to displaced persons* (Gerasimidou, 2022) emphasise support for migrants, they do not discuss national policies. Understanding the relevant policy frameworks is critical given Europe's integration challenges, where migrants face double the risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2022), and rising populist radical right politics fuel anti-migrant sentiment, shaping policies and attitudes (Mudde, 2019; Ivaldi and Zankina, 2024).

## Research questions

This study is a comparative analysis concerning how library services for migrants are promoted and prioritised in national library and immigration policies, considering factors such as migration volume, recent migration history and policy restrictiveness. It explores national-level policies pertaining public library services for migrants across eight European countries: Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Sweden, addressing the following questions:

- What library services for migrants have been prioritised in these countries?
- How have national policies on library services for migrants evolved since the 1970s?
- What similarities and differences exist in national policies across the eight countries?

Given the limited research in this area, the study aims to describe and compare the status of national library policies and establish a foundation for further inquiry.

### European migration trends and integration policies

European migration since the 1950s can be divided into several distinct postwar periods, using both observable patterns and political response as a basis for segmentation. It has transformed the demography of many Western European countries, changing Europe from a continent of emigration to immigration. In the 1950s and 1960s Western European countries began to recruit *guest workers* throughout Southern Europe, North Africa and Turkey to alleviate labour shortages created by postwar economic reconstruction and recovery (De Haas et al., 2020). As a result, the number of foreign (non-national) residents in Europe increased from approximately four million to ten million between the 1950s and 1970s (Bettin and Cela, 2014). Many European nations also experienced substantial immigration from former colonies.

The 1973-74 oil crisis was a critical juncture in European migration and immigration policy. Western European countries suspended labour recruitment programmes and moved to more restrictive immigration policies (Castles, 1986). Migration did not cease completely but resumed via family unification channels, asylum-seeking particularly from Eastern Europe and Latin-America, and via irregular entry points (Castles and Miller, 2009). During the 1980s, there was an influx of asylum seekers fleeing wars in Iran and Afghanistan and many African countries. The collapse of the Iron Curtain around 1990 led to a migration surge from Eastern to Western Europe, while the Yugoslav wars (1991-2001) triggered large refugee movements (De Haas et al., 2020). The enlargement of the European Union (EU) towards the east and the Schengen Agreement effective from 1995 increased labour mobility (Bello, 2022; Döll, 2024; Fries-Tersch et al., 2021). The 2010s witnessed, until then, the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II, driven by conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (Fries-Tersch et al., 2021). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 triggered new challenges for the 2020s, as millions fled their homes as refugees. This started the fastest-growing and largest humanitarian crisis in European postwar history, with millions of Ukrainians fleeing to Poland and Romania, and more distant neighbouring countries such as Germany and the Nordic-Baltic countries (UNCHR, 2024).

These migration trends have led to major changes in European integration policies. Earlier policies marked a tension between assimilation and multiculturalism but have largely been superseded by more systematic integration programmes focusing on language learning, civic education and anti-discrimination. Still, national models and policy divergences exist, and these frequently mirror national and local responses to current crises (Hagelund, 2020; Joppke, 2007; Solano et al., 2024). Local governments and community groups, in addition to national governments, have important roles in integration programmes, with localised '*integration policies for refugees and asylum seekers varying widely across European nations*' (Wolffhardt et al., 2019, p. 33).

The high number of refugees during the 2015 crisis and the Ukrainian war led the EU, its member states, and the affiliated European Economic Area (EEA) countries to reconsider their migration and integration policies. In 2022, the European Union implemented the *Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees* (European Council, 2022). This regulation establishes an EU-wide framework for providing temporary and collective protection, and avoids the need for individual asylum applications, which reduces pressure on national asylum systems. In addition, national governments have changed their policies. For instance, countries bordering Ukraine have created reception centres and made their administrative procedures more efficient to handle the arrival of refugees (UNCHR, 2024). Also, the European Commission's *Action plan for integration and inclusion (2021-2027)* outlines integration strategies for education, employment, healthcare, and housing (European Commission, 2020).

## Method and data

This study adopts a comparative case study research design to examine how national library and immigration policies have addressed the needs of migrant populations across the selected countries. Focusing on national library policy documents and relevant parts of immigration policies, a comprehensive analysis of the historical development and the contemporary status of library service policies for migrants is conducted. The qualitative content analysis covers documents from the 1970s to the present, allowing for an in-depth exploration of policy variations and their influence on library policies. Document analysis is used for exploring existing policies, and to gain knowledge into the priorities and historical development of policies (Bowen, 2009; Dalglish et al., 2020; Wesley, 2014). By reviewing relevant library and immigration policy documents, this study aims to identify patterns, themes and changes over time. Data are national library policy documents and immigration policy documents identified from each country, with a focus on how specific library services for migrants have been prioritised. Secondary data was gathered from academic research, other government reports and publications from library associations.

The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) are included because of their well-developed public library systems, history of progressive social policies and considerable experience with immigration in recent decades. Poland and Hungary are included as latecomer immigration countries, with less established institutions and policies regarding services for migrants and opens for examining the early phases of library services policy development. The recent arrival of Ukrainian refugees in these countries adds a timely dimension to the study. Germany's experience with large-scale migration, especially during the 2015 humanitarian crisis, and having a federal government, can provide unique insights into library service policies' role in integration and social cohesion. Comparing the three types of migration policy regimes, this study aims to create knowledge about the present status and development of library service policies for migrants.

The countries studied differ regarding their migration histories and migration policies. Consequently, each country collects specific migrant statistics which are not easily comparable. Furthermore, their policy and strategy documents are developed at different levels of government with the involvement of different actors. These circumstances and the lack of former research calls for an explorative case study approach (Yin, 2014).

## Findings: library service policies for migrants in eight European countries

This section contains country case studies of the eight selected countries, describing and analysing the contemporary status and historical development of national-level library service policies for migrants.

### Denmark

In 1985, migrants and their descendants made up 3.3 per cent of the population, increasing to 16 per cent for migrants and 4 per cent for descendants by 2024 (Statistics Denmark, 2024). In the latter half of the 1960s, the first *guest workers* arrived in Denmark from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia, and the first initiative emerged to establish a collection of literature for guest workers, motivated by a desire to ensure equal library services for all. With increasing migration and diversity among migrants, the Danish National Library Authority proposed in 1975 that a state-funded collection for migrants be established. With the revision of the library law in 1983, this collection became a reality, and migrant users were equated to Danish citizens, which meant new responsibilities for public libraries regarding outreach work towards immigrants and refugees (Dahlkild and Bille Larsen, 2021).

Denmark's 1998 integration law aimed to ensure equitable participation of newcomers across political, economic, professional, social, religious and cultural dimensions, supported by a municipality-led three-year introductory programme. Simultaneously, the measures aimed to help newcomers achieve self-sufficiency and understand the fundamental values and norms of Danish society (Danske love).

The transfer of integration work to municipalities meant that the integration of migrants also became a local library task, albeit not mandated by legislation. Where migrants had previously been viewed in a library context as representatives of other cultures needing access to literature in their native languages, they were now seen as individuals who needed help to become part of Danish society (Dahlkild and Bille Larsen, 2021). This led the Danish Library Association to work intensively for several years to raise politicians' awareness of the significant role that libraries played in the integration of migrants. The Danish Library Association's efforts to define libraries' roles were particularly evident after the Danish government launched the so-called *Ghetto plan* in 2018: 'One Denmark without parallel societies – No ghettos by 2030' (Regeringen, 2018), which did not designate a role for libraries. This was despite the fact that over the past decades, a wide range of integration initiatives had been developed in libraries – work that intensified with the influx of refugees over the past decade, especially Syria and Ukraine.

### Finland

The share of people with foreign backgrounds in Finland has grown from under 1 per cent in 1990 to approximately 10 per cent in 2024, comprising 10.19 per cent of the population (Statistics Finland, 2024).

The *Aliens Act*, enacted in 1983 without a dedicated immigration programme, was followed by the first *Act on the Promotion of Immigrants* in 1999, which was updated in 2023. Over time, these acts have expanded from provisions such as adult education and job training to include comprehensive measures, including integration programmes, literacy education, native language instruction and training in social, cultural and life-management skills. Finnish or Swedish language instruction has remained across all versions (Kotouttamislaki 493/1999; 1215/2005; 1386/2010). Asylum policies have tightened to align with stricter European standards (Tuominen and Välimäki, 2021).

Since 1928, public libraries in Finland have been regulated by Public Library Acts, with the core principle that library use and borrowing are free. The latest act emphasises promoting equal access to education, culture and information, fostering active citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression, all rooted in community, pluralism and cultural diversity (Kirjastolaki 904/1998; 1492/2016).

The Council of Public Libraries (YKN) is a coordinating body for public libraries forming national strategies and policies. It has, since 2011, developed strategies emphasising equality and universal access to library services, regardless of background. Migrants are mentioned in terms of embracing diversity, with libraries as meeting places for different cultures, where migrant needs should be considered. The strategies stress the importance of diverse collections and visibility for various social and cultural groups (YKN, n.d. a; n.d. b). They promote flexible service models to meet diverse needs while ensuring equitable access across geographical and cultural divides (YKN, n.d. c).

While these strategies do not list specific services for migrants, public libraries in Finland offer initiatives such as guided tours, advisory services, language instruction, story hours in multiple languages, study clubs and collaborative cafés to foster interaction between immigrants and the local population (Baghbani et al., 2016).

### Germany

As of 2023, 16 million (19 per cent) of German residents are immigrants and 5 million (6 per cent) are descendants of immigrants, while 3.2 million are seeking refuge or asylum. The main countries



of origin for foreign citizens in Germany today are Turkey, Ukraine, Syria, Romania and Poland (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024a; 2024b).

Immigration to West Germany began in the mid-1950s with workforce recruitment agreements with countries like Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal and Yugoslavia (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2020). East Germany had similar agreements with Cuba, Vietnam and Angola (Berlinghoff, 2018). Another significant wave followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, bringing 3.1 million *Spätaussiedler* (late repatriates) to Germany (Geißler, 2014). Migration within the EU has increased since the 1990s and refugees from conflict zones, including Lebanon, the Balkans, Syria and Ukraine, have also sought refuge in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024b).

Despite these movements, the German federal state did not formally recognise immigration as a permanent reality until the late 1990s, leading to a '*lack of policies and perspectives on migration, integration, and minorities*' (Geißler, 2014). The first immigration act was passed in 2005 (Zuwanderungsgesetz, 2004), followed by the skilled labour immigration act in 2019 (Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz, 2019), both including integration measures. However, libraries are not mentioned in these or other migration and integration policies.

In 2022, 60 per cent of full-time public libraries offered services for migrants, such as native language collections, German language learning programmes and specialised offerings (Wimmer, 2023). Despite this, library services for migrants have played a marginal role in national policy papers from 1971 to 2022 (mostly issued by library associations) and in the nine state-level library acts, with the exception of the report from the organisation of German municipalities, the Municipal Joint Office for Administrative Management (KGSt)'s *KGSt-Gutachten Öffentliche Bibliothek* (KGSt, 1973, pp. 60–61).

Conceptual work on library services for migrants has primarily come from the library profession. The terminology used reflects libraries' evolving roles: from *social library work* in the 1970s to *intercultural* or *multicultural* library work in the 1980s, *social inclusion* in the 1990s, and more recently, *inclusive library services* and *diversity in library work* aimed at promoting equity and openness within a diverse society.

## Hungary

In Hungary, the proportion of citizens with a foreign background is very low, and most immigrants are of Hungarian cultural and linguistic heritage. The first significant influx of refugees came from Romania (1988–1990) driven by the ethnic conflicts during the Ceausescu regime, and from Serbia (after 1991) driven by the war (Gödri, 2005). By 2002, over 90 per cent of immigrants were from neighbouring countries, with 75 per cent having Hungarian ethnic backgrounds (Gödri, 2005).

Hungary's EU membership (2004) and entry into the Schengen Zone (2007) significantly changed the volume and composition of its immigrant population. The number of Hungarians from neighbouring countries decreased, while immigration from third countries rose. In 2003, 19,365 immigrants were registered, 89 per cent from Europe, 8 per cent from Asia, 2 per cent from America, and 1 per cent from Africa. By 2023, immigration had tripled to 61,347, with 39 per cent from Europe, 55 per cent from Asia, and 3 per cent each from America and Africa (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2024).

Despite these shifts, the share of migrants with non-European backgrounds remains especially low, and most migrants still have Hungarian ethnic roots. Consequently, migrant integration is not as important for Hungarian public libraries as in other European countries. The municipal library system in Budapest, particularly a branch located in its most multicultural district, addresses the current needs of the migrant population through tailored collection development and programming (Johnston et al., 2024).

Hungary's 1997 *Library Act* and subsequent strategic planning documents do not include support for migrants as a central library task (Skaliczki, 2011). Budapest's Foreign Language Library, established in 1956, originally focused on Russian-language materials but expanded in 1978 to include foreign-language literature from around the world. With a collection exceeding 600,000 documents, it serves foreign-language communities and national and ethnic minorities through nineteen county libraries.

During the 2022 Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, some libraries near the border and in larger cities participated in support activities organised by local municipalities or the government. However, these efforts did not develop into permanent library services (Johnston et al., 2024).

### Iceland

Immigration to Iceland has risen significantly since the late 1990s, with foreign citizens making up 18 per cent of the population by mid-2023. While this shift has boosted the economy, challenges remain in migrant integration, particularly in language training, skills recognition and public-sector employment (Koutsogeorgopoulou, 2023).

The *Libraries Act of Iceland* (2013) supports equal access to knowledge, diverse perspectives and lifelong learning, fostering inclusion and democracy. However, the national policy framework for public library services for migrants remains limited.

Library services for migrants in Reykjavík are outlined in two key documents. *Open counselling for immigrants* (2016) advocates for a *one stop shop* to help migrants access city services and suggests mobile units circulating among libraries, schools and heritage institutions (Mannréttindaskrifstofa Reykjavíkur, 2016). *Refugees and applicants for international protection with Reykjavík City Services* (2023) promotes language courses and activation programmes through libraries and the Icelandic Red Cross, which provides psychosocial support and language training, such as the *Talk together* programme (Reykjavíkurborg, 2023; Rauði krossinn á Íslandi, n.d.).

Other cities, like Akureyri, have developed relevant policies. The *Municipality of Akureyri's multicultural strategy* (2010) emphasises using schools as bridges and ensuring foreign-language materials in libraries (Akureyrarbær, 2010). The *Akureyri library policy 2023–2025* promotes active migrant participation (Amtsbókasafnið á Akureyri, n.d.).

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (2023) published *The Green Paper on the Matters of Immigrants and Refugees*. While libraries were not explicitly mentioned, the document included goals aligned with library services, such as improving access to information and educational opportunities for migrants. Building on this, the Ministry's 2024 white paper *A Society for Everyone* outlines long-term integration goals: (1) promoting migrant participation, (2) ensuring accessible services for all, and (3) expanding access to Icelandic language learning. Again, libraries are not directly referenced (Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2024).

### Norway

The development of public library services for migrants in Norway reflects increasing immigration since the early 1970s, alongside changes in national immigration and library policies. In 1970, migrants constituted 1.5 per cent of the population, and by 2024, first-generation migrants made up 16.8 per cent, with second-generation migrants at 4.0 per cent (Statistics Norway, 2024).

Initially, policies focused on cultural preservation, with libraries providing multilingual materials to help migrants maintain ties to their home countries. Over time, this multicultural approach was complemented by a focus on social integration, including Norwegian language learning, social inclusion and civic engagement programmes. In the 1970s and 1980s, public library migrant services primarily involved providing books, newspapers and other materials in migrants' native languages (Ministry of Local Government and Labour, 1974; 1980; Ministry of Church Affairs and

Education, 1974). In 1991, a government report recommended expanding libraries as social meeting places for refugees and immigrants, marking a policy shift toward viewing libraries as community centres for social and cultural integration (Ministry of Culture, 1991, p. 85).

In 2003, a cultural policy white paper called for more resources and the development of new library services for migrants. It proposed that circulating multilingual print materials was no longer sufficient, recommending better use of information technology, national digital services and libraries as meeting places (Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs, 2003). Another white paper emphasised strengthening libraries as contributors to inclusion, integration and cultural diversity, including Norwegian language acquisition and computer classes (Ministry of Culture, 2009, p. 25, 145). In the 2010s, the focus on social inclusion and community engagement grew stronger, with libraries also working with other local government organisations providing migrant services, and voluntary organisations in offering computer training, reading programmes, language cafés, women's groups, writing workshops and reading circles (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2016). The *Borrow a citizen* programme highlighted how libraries could foster social interaction between immigrants and residents, promoting mutual understanding and reducing social isolation (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2016, p. 78).

## Poland

Polish immigration statistics reflect only those with permanent residence permits, resulting in relatively low overall immigration numbers – 7,000 until 2004 and 16,707 in 2023 (Statistics Poland, 2023a). However, in 2023, nearly one million Ukrainian residents were under temporary protection in Poland (Statistics Poland, 2023b).

Poland lacked a formal national migration policy until 2024 when the government introduced the immigration strategy *Regaining control. Ensuring security. A comprehensive and responsible migration strategy for Poland for 2025–2030* (Rule of Law, 2024). This strategy addresses hybrid attacks from Russian and Belarusian authorities on Poland's eastern border and imposes restrictions on refugees, particularly those crossing unauthorised.

State and local strategic documents largely delegate migrant social integration to NGOs (e.g., Ministerstwo Funduszy i Rozwoju Regionalnego, 2017). There is no legislation specifying public libraries' roles in migrant integration, and the topic is rarely mentioned in provincial library strategies – only four out of eighteen mention free library services for newcomers (DBP, n.d.; JCK, 2021; WiMBP, n.d. a; WiMBP, n.d. b). The National Library of Poland and the National Library Council have not issued recommendations on migrant services, even during the February 2022 humanitarian crisis.

Despite the lack of national policies, Polish libraries support migrant needs, mainly through NGO cooperation and experience. For example, Gdańsk's municipal library's strategy for 2021–2030 aims to expand social services for all residents, including migrants (JCK, 2021, pp. 12–13). These services include Polish language courses in partnership with UNICEF and support for foreigners through the *On one side* project with the Gdansk City Office (JCK, 2022; 2023).

The Information Society Development Foundation (ISDF) is a key organisation working with libraries. In 2022–2023, their *Library for all. Different. Equal. Important* project, aimed at integrating young refugees, involved thousands of Polish libraries. The ISDF provided training to librarians to adapt activities to local community needs (ISDF, 2024).

## Sweden

During the 1950s and 1960s, labour immigration to Sweden was significant, but since the 1970s, refugee immigration has dominated. In 2023, over 2 million people were foreign-born, which is 20 per cent of the population (Statistics Sweden, 2024).



Initially based on assimilation, Sweden's immigration policy shifted to integration in 1975 (Swedish Government Bill 1975:26), focusing on immigrants' equal rights to social welfare linked to labour market participation. It adopted a multicultural objective, allowing migrant groups to maintain their native language, culture and ties to their homeland (Borevi, 2014). The current policy goal is to ensure equal rights, obligations and opportunities for everyone, regardless of ethnic or cultural background (Swedish Government Bill 2008/09:01, 3.3).

In the 1970s, public libraries began purchasing literature in major migrant languages as part of the multicultural integration policy. The 1984/85 Government Bill on literature and public libraries marked the first comprehensive initiative focused on library services for immigrants (Swedish Arts Council, 1986).

Both the first (1996:1596) and second (2013:801) Library Acts emphasise libraries' role in addressing migrants' needs in terms of book purchases and digital services (Swedish Library Act, 1996:1596; 2013:801). Libraries became key in providing civic information, especially during the 2015–2016 humanitarian crisis, organising activities like language cafés (Pilerot, 2018).

Public libraries are the responsibility of municipalities. However, since the early 2000s, the state has increased its control to ensure more equitable services across geographical, social and ethnic lines. A 2004 addition to the Library Act required local and regional library plans detailing how they would meet these goals. In 2022, a national library strategy emphasised libraries' role in societal and democratic development (Rydbeck, 2024).

Sweden's refugee and integration policies have been generous, but since 2022, with the rise of an anti-immigrant populist party, immigration policy is undergoing significant changes. The impact on public libraries remains uncertain.

## Comparative analysis

### Evolution of migrant library service policies

The development of public library services for migrants across the eight European countries studied reflects broader changes in national policies regarding migration and integration. In the 1970s, library services for migrants were mostly about providing books and materials in migrants' native languages, with a focus on multiculturalism and the preservation of migrant cultures. Over time, the focus has altered towards social integration, with an emphasis on language learning, digital inclusion and active participation in society. Factors driving these policy changes included increasing economic migration, humanitarian crises (e.g., the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, the Syrian humanitarian crisis in 2015), and also political shifts towards more restrictive immigration policies.

### Themes and priorities

Recurring themes in the promotion and prioritisation of public library services for migrants within national policies include multilingual collections, language learning support, digital inclusion and cultural competence. All of the eight countries provide multilingual materials to help immigrants maintain cultural ties and ease their integration process. This theme was particularly strong in the early phases of migrant library services policy in the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting a multicultural approach that aimed to respect and preserve cultural diversity.

Although there is huge variation in country practices, there is an emphasis on facilitating language acquisition in most countries, either through formal language courses, language cafés or similar services. Language learning has been seen as a critical factor in migrant integration, and libraries have played an important role in providing accessible language education. National policies also encompass events, storytelling and community engagement activities to foster a sense of belonging and social cohesion (e.g., in Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway). These

activities often serve as bridges between migrant communities and the larger population, promoting mutual understanding and reducing social isolation. Digital services became a focus especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, with initiatives aimed at supporting digital literacy and information access for migrants. Digital inclusion has become increasingly important as more services move online, and libraries have stepped in to address digital inequality among migrant populations. Libraries have served as safe spaces where cultural and linguistic barriers could be addressed. They are also facilitating integration through social interaction, information access and language learning, although the inclusion of library services in national policies varies.

### Differences in policy approaches

The promotion of library services for migrants varies significantly across the eight countries, influenced by country-specific sociopolitical and institutional contexts. The Nordic countries have a long history of developed welfare states based on universal services along with well-established public library systems that have supported an inclusive approach to migrant services. Libraries are operating under local government initiatives but are committed to national integration goals. The turn from multiculturalism to integration-focused policies is evident, but libraries have continued to emphasise cultural preservation along with social integration. In Germany, as a federal republic, public library services for migrants vary significantly between regions. Federal government and state government guidance is limited, and coordination efforts are up to library associations and municipalities. This decentralised approach results in inconsistencies, with some regions offering extensive services and others providing limited support. Hungary and Poland have not historically prioritised library services for migrants. In Hungary, integration efforts have been minimal because of the predominantly ethnic Hungarian migration, while in Poland, responses have been reactive to current crises, such as the influx of Ukrainian refugees. Both countries have implemented restrictive integration policies, which are reflected in the limited library services for migrants. The focus has been on addressing immediate needs rather than fostering long-term integration, and libraries lack the resources and policy backing needed to provide comprehensive support.

In the Nordic countries, there is relative alignment between national integration policies and library services policy, with varying degrees of formalisation between levels of government. In Norway, library services to migrants are explicitly mentioned in national immigration policy and in national library policies. Additionally, the Norwegian National Library regularly produces national strategies mentioning services to migrants. Sweden has the most hands-on national library legislation and policies towards the municipalities and municipal public libraries (e.g., the elaborate Swedish national requirements regarding municipal library plans). Finnish immigration policies mention services typically provided by libraries for migrants, though they do not explicitly reference libraries or library services. Conversely, national public library strategies outline a wide range of services for migrants but do not explicitly frame them in the context of immigrants. In Denmark and Iceland, municipal library services for migrants also show compliance with national goals and general legislation on integration, but without explicit national library or immigration policy mandates. Notably, Iceland's municipal-level policy framework for library services for migrants has evolved over the past five to ten years, with a new national integration policy recently introduced. Overall, despite variation in the Nordic national library policy frameworks, public libraries have become relevant players in the migrant integration processes in the five countries.

German federal and state government library service policies are practically non-existent, with German Library Association policy development initiatives and local library policies and programming driving services for migrants. In Hungary and Poland, the role of public libraries in integration is not supported by national policies. Most initiatives rely on local government or NGO interventions, and the restrictive national stances on immigration limit the potential for libraries to engage in comprehensive migrant integration activities.

## Discussion

The findings of this study have several implications for national governments and library institutions. First, there is a need for greater coordination between national library policies and immigration policies to ensure that public library services effectively support migrant integration. National governments should acknowledge the role of public libraries as relevant actors in integration strategies and provide adequate funding and policy support to facilitate this role. Libraries, in turn, should adapt their services to migration trends, digital inclusion needs and cultural diversity by offering targeted programmes such as language learning, digital literacy and community-building activities. While not discussed in this paper, this study of national library services policy also has the potential to contribute to theories of institutional development and policy development. The research highlights how abrupt changes in historical migration patterns and sociopolitical contexts have shaped the evolution of library services for migrants towards integration-focused services on the one hand, while on the other hand, the basic multicultural policy trait inherent in traditional multilingual library services still persists.

## Conclusion

This study has analysed how library services for migrants have been promoted and prioritised within the national library and immigration policies across eight European countries from the 1970s until today. The research underscores considerable differences in the development of these policies, influenced by factors including economic migration, humanitarian crises and political change. While some countries have developed comprehensive national policies that integrate public library services with the general integration policy and strategies, others rely on local-level initiatives with more or less national guidance.

The study gives insights into the integration of library services for migrants within national policy frameworks. It points to the importance of coordinating library and immigration policies to better support migrant integration and sheds light on the role of libraries as relevant actors in promoting integration. The findings also contribute to the fields of library science and public policy development by offering a comparative analysis of library service policies for migrants across different national contexts, providing potential theoretical contributions to policy development and institutional development.

Future research needs more in-depth case studies of individual countries to explore the specific challenges in developing national library service policies toward migrants. This includes longitudinal studies to assess the impact of library service policies on migrant integration over time while focusing on the realities and priorities of municipal and regional library systems. This points to the need for studies of the lack of alignment between national library service policies and municipal library practices as found in Mierzecka et al. (2025).

Policymakers and library professionals can draw several insights from this study to improve the coordination and promotion of library services within national policy frameworks. National governments could provide clear policy guidance and support for libraries as part of wider migrant integration strategies. By developing more collaboration between national policymakers, municipalities and public library systems, library services can be more effectively used to support migrant integration and contribute to social cohesion.

While this study focuses on public library services for migrants in the light of national government policies across eight European countries, the findings have implications that can inform policies and practices in non-European contexts as well. This includes, for example, identifying gaps or areas for improvement in public library policies for migrants, and indicating best practices (e.g., language support programmes, cultural integration activities and access to information resources), and learning from how European public libraries respond to humanitarian crises, such as sudden influxes of refugees, to prepare and manage similar situations.

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