

Family ties are the most important reason for permanent immigration to Norway. The number of family immigrants remained high in 2004, even though fewer were granted permits for reunification with refugees after the rules were tightened in 2003.



From reunification to immigration

The term family reunification, traditionally used when speaking about family-related immigration, does not cover all residence permits granted on the basis of family relationships. More often than reunification, the aim is to establish a family life. The UDI has therefore chosen to use the term family immigration as a collective term for family reunification and family establishment. This term is also used in the new Immigration Act proposed in 2004.

One of five marriages is with a foreign national

Statistics Norway's (SSB) most recent marriage statistics (marriages entered into in 2003) show that as many as 22 per cent of marriages entered into that year were between a person living in Norway and a person resident abroad. A total of 3450 men residing in Norway married foreign women, while 1750 women married foreign men. Women from Thailand (700 women), Russia (400 women) and the Philippines (270 women) who married men with a Norwegian background constituted the largest groups in these statistics.

More permits granted in 2004

In 2004, 12 800 permits were granted to persons applying for family immigration, compared with 10 500 in 2003. A total of 57 per cent of the permits were granted to spouses, cohabitants or partners, while 40 per cent were granted to children. Only 3 per cent were granted to other family members. As in Statistics Norway's marriage statistics, the trend is that those who arrive in Norway because of family immigration are reunited with Norwegian nationals. The ten countries from which the greatest number of applicants arrived last year are largely the same as in 2003 (figures for 2003 in brackets).

Thailand	1099	(780)
Iraq	909	(940)
Russia	742	(797)
Somalia	689	(652)
Germany	563	(401)
Pakistan	496	(518)
UK	453	(330)
Philippines	437	(396)
USA	423	(322)
Tyrey	418	(445)

Shorter case processing times

A central aim for the UDI in 2004 was to reduce the case processing times for all types of residence cases, not least for applications for family immigration. The Residence Department was allocated new resources, and great effort was put into developing efficient case processing procedures. New procedures were introduced to give priority to the processing of applications from children without caregivers in their country of origin. During the course of the year we processed over 3000 more applications for family immigration than the number of new applications received. Many applications are now processed considerably more quickly than previously, but a substantial number of old and complicated cases can still take a long time to process.



"We met when we were both working in a bar in Madrid. It only took a few months for us both to realise that we perhaps wanted to be more than friends."

"Well, I knew that right away! I tried hard to charm you for months, and I think all of Madrid noticed before it finally worked on you ... You can be a bit dense at times," David laughs.

Following about two years together in Spain, they decided to move to Norway. They have now lived in Norway for a year, have just bought a new flat in Grünerløkka, and are looking forward to moving in. David attends a Norwegian language course and works evenings in a bar. As soon as he learns enough Norwegian he hopes to find another job, preferably in sales.

"I know learning Norwegian is important. It's not always easy. Most Norwegians speak English so well that even if I try, we often end up speaking English anyway," David says.

"At least you have more Norwegian now than when you came a year ago! I think you're doing really well, and you have the sweetest English accent in the world," says Kristine.

"Fortunately the distance to England is not so great, so we travel there quite a lot to visit family and friends. David's parents have already been here four or five times, and enjoy being here a lot."

From 1 December 2004 we expanded from two to three divisions processing applications for family immigration. Even though the number of persons processing applications for family immigration has not risen, we expect that increased specialization will lead to greater efficiency. We are continuously working to develop more efficient procedures that will ensure that uncomplicated cases can be processed quickly and flexibly.

Efforts to combat abuse of the rules

In addition to ensuring a quick and flexible assessment of whether a person satisfies the requirements for being granted a family immigration permit, the Directorate of Immigration must combat abuse of the rules. Balancing efficiency and thoroughness is a daily challenge for the UDI's staff.

Abuse generally involves giving incorrect information about family relationships. Every year the immigration authorities uncover several cases where Norwegian citizens only marry a foreign national to obtain a residence permit for the person in question. As the right to family life is the foundation for the rules on family immigration, a pro forma marriage does not confer the right to a residence permit.

A forced marriage is a marriage that has been entered into against the free will of one or both parties. The challenge facing the UDI in such cases is often to distinguish between forced marriages and arranged marriages. While a forced marriage is punishable pursuant to section 222 of the Norwegian Penal Code, arranged marriages are fully legal. If a marriage has been entered into by force, an application for family immigration will be rejected.

Both pro forma marriages and forced marriages can be difficult to detect, and working with this type of case requires substantial resources



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"My working day consists of reviewing and processing applications for family immigration, answering questions from users and discussing professional issues with my colleagues. Some of my time is also spent guiding and training new colleagues. I have great respect for my job because it involves people and the fate of individuals. Working for the UDI is exciting. The Residence Department was recently restructured to make case processing more efficient. One of the consequences was that I was given additional countries to work with, and that is interesting and challenging. I have to study these new areas while striking a balance between efficiency and quality. It is also rewarding to make active use of my knowledge in my work. I speak French and Arabic, and that is useful in case processing. I also know something about the countries I process applications from, and that often proves very useful