



English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2020:03

Skills mapping and career guidance for recently arrived refugees

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Municipalities, IMDi and other agencies that need to help refugees integrate into the Norwegian labour market are calling for more systematic and accessible knowledge on the skills that recently arrived refugees bring with them. The refugees, for their part, want to know about their prospects for employment and how these can be achieved. On assignment from Skills Norway and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, Fafo and Agenda Kaupang have studied two measures that are designed to address these needs: skills mapping of refugees prior to settlement, and skills mapping and career guidance for refugees after settlement.

The report is based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The information provided to municipalities about the refugees' skills prior to settlement was examined with the aid of a web survey to all 204 municipalities and city districts that settled more than ten refugees in the period 1 January 2018 – 31 July 2019. The pilot scheme for career guidance for settled refugees was examined through case studies of four career centres and four municipalities that participated in the pilot scheme in 2019. We used document studies, observations of mapping and guidance sessions and a total of 33 qualitative interviews with staff and participants to explore the practical implementation of the skills mapping and career guidance and the interim experience gained.

Skills mapping of refugees prior to settlement

In 2016, Skills Norway was charged with establishing a digital solution that refugees could use to self-register their education and skills while living in reception centres and waiting to be settled in a municipality. This solution, called 'Kompass', has been in regular use since June 2018. In the period from July 2017 to 1 January 2019, around 1300 persons, i.e. approximately 36 per cent of all residents in reception centres in this period, registered their skills in Kompass. The objective of Kompass is to provide municipalities and other agencies involved in integration with a basis for design of programmes and services for each refugee, for example in the form of further qualification training (IMDi, 2018). The goal is for each individual to receive better adapted services and a faster transition to education and employment.

Our web survey among the municipalities shows that they are concerned with obtaining a broad range of information about the refugees whom they will settle. Language skills in the mother tongue, formal training and wishes for further training or work are deemed particularly essential. As of today, however, the muni-

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cipalities obtain very different amounts of information about the refugees that are to be settled. The mapping that accompanies refugees from the integration reception centre is ranked highest, whereas the information that accompanies resettlement refugees and refugees from regular reception centres is ranked lower, and the mapping of those who arrive on the family reunification scheme receives the lowest scores. The quality of the information also varies considerably.

Approximately one-half of the municipalities in the survey report to have settled refugees from reception centres where they have registered their skills through Kompass, and they have been asked to respond to our questions with this in mind. The other municipalities have been asked the same set of questions and have responded based on their experience from other sources of information about the refugees' skills. Our main impression is that for refugees who have been settled from a reception centre, the municipalities have obtained information on formal education and training and previous work experience. Information on what the refugees want in terms of work, education and training scores somewhat lower. Most municipalities find that the information they receive about the refugees provides only a partial impression of their skills. On these questions, there is little variation in the responses from municipalities with and without experience of Kompass respectively.

Furthermore, we have asked whether the information that the municipalities receive about the refugees who arrive from reception centres helps them gain entry more quickly into better adapted and more targeted training programmes. The survey supports the conclusion that timely and good-quality information on the refugees' skills can improve the effectiveness of the training provided during the introduction programme. Municipalities that have had access to the refugees' self-registered information on skills in Kompass report somewhat more frequently than others that the mapping prior to settlement has had a positive effect on the enrolment in and content of Norwegian language training. As regards the enrolment in other types of training, no such effect can be discerned in our data.

The survey indicates that early mapping of the refugees' skills may help raise the quality of the introduction programme. Approximately one-half of the municipalities that participated in the study respond that the mapping 'to a great extent' or 'to some extent' helped make the Norwegian language training more work-oriented, more training-oriented and better adapted to the participant's requirements for language training. Approximately six out of ten municipalities believe that those training efforts that were unrelated to learning Norwegian were both better adapted to the participants' wishes for work and further training and to the participants' qualifications for entering education programmes and work-related training. Municipalities that have had access to self-registered skills information in Kompass for refugees whom they have settled take a more

positive view of the mapping information they have received when compared to other municipalities.

On the other hand, our study shows that there is a considerable improvement potential in the mapping procedures undertaken, in Kompas as well as elsewhere. A large proportion of the municipalities that responded to our survey report that the information they received about the refugees' skills did not lead to faster entry into Norwegian language courses (47%) or other types of training (35%). Only very few municipalities report that the information provides a very good picture of the refugees' skills. The municipalities report that the best information accompanies refugees who are settled from integration reception centres, as well as some information about formal training and previous work experience for refugees who are settled from regular reception centres or arrive as resettlement refugees. Those who arrive under the family reunification scheme are not screened anywhere before settlement and the municipalities receive least information about this group.

The municipalities that we have visited, report that they routinely map all refugees themselves after settlement. In this, they draw on self-registered information from Kompas or other types of mapping, but they do not consider these sources of information as an adequate basis for making decisions regarding the objectives and content of the introduction programme. Certain aspects of the participants' experience, capacity and motivation can be difficult to ascertain, and gaining insight into such aspects of the participants is conditional on a personal relationship. The participants' qualifications for answering the questions on the mapping form may also vary in accordance with their individual situation, their experience with and understanding of Norwegian structures and expectations, and the amount of help they have had in completing the form. The mapping can thus be regarded as a process, whereby the application of general mapping tools prior to settlement may help provide a better basis, but not a final answer.

Piloting of skills mapping and career guidance for refugees in the resettlement and family reunification schemes after settlement in a municipality

Four career centres operated by the counties of Østfold, Troms, Hedmark and Akershus and 13 municipalities that have settled refugees have undertaken a pilot trial of skills mapping and career guidance for refugees in the autumn of 2019. Equivalent career guidance has previously been pilot tested among residents in integration reception centres and some regular reception centres. The target group for the 2019 pilot included refugees in the resettlement and family reunification schemes. Normally, these groups are directly settled in a municipality without a preceding stay in a reception centre. The career guidance was

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to be based on the skills mapping in Kompass and undertaken in the municipality where the refugees were resident. The objective of providing this group with a career guidance option at an early stage was to better enable each individual to make informed choices, thereby enabling them to enter employment more quickly in order to provide for themselves and their family. The ambition is also that the pilot scheme will help accelerate the target group's entry into individually adapted qualification training in the introduction programme.

The pilot shows that there can be multiple approaches to providing a career guidance option to settled refugees, and the four participating career centres have chosen two main strategies. The first strategy involves implementation of the career guidance process in approximately the same manner as for other users, with no extra provisions for skills transfer to the municipality that will follow up the refugees later. The second strategy focuses on skills transfer to the municipalities before, during and after the provision of the guidance itself. Those two career centres that have chosen this strategy have organised the career guidance process in two different ways: one centre has trained the programme advisors and undertaken the guidance of the participants with a programme advisor from the municipality present, while the other centre has chosen to license the programme advisors in the municipalities to provide career guidance to the participants themselves.

Fewer refugees arrived in Norway under the resettlement and family reunification schemes in 2019 than was expected. The career guidance option was therefore extended also to other recently arrived refugees, including those who had spent more than three months in the country. In the pilot, the career guidance provided should draw on the mapping of the refugees' skills in Kompass. Many municipalities and career centres report major problems in accessing Kompass, and combined with delays in the settlement process this has caused delays and changes in the implementation of the pilot in many locations. Other municipalities report positive experiences from accessing and completion of Kompass. As in previous evaluations, we also find that some refugees manage to handle this on their own, while others need assistance from someone in the local administration or other participants.

Those who are charged with providing the career guidance call for more information on the refugees' situation and qualifications than Kompass can provide. Information about refugees is today spread out across different systems and levels. Some municipalities have addressed this problem by establishing extra interfaces between the career centre and the local administration, in addition to the exchange of information through Kompass or other mapping tools. Moreover, the pilot shows that good collaboration and a clear distribution of roles between the career centres and the municipalities are key to producing multi-agency synergies for the benefit of the participants. There is considerable variability in

how collaboration on career guidance has been organised. The project nevertheless shows that previous experience of collaboration, a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities, and appropriate meeting grounds and arenas are positive factors.

The report also addresses user experiences and explores the ways in which skills mapping and career guidance impact on local qualification programmes for various groups of participants. Our findings indicate that starting the career guidance process at an early stage of the introduction programme may benefit the efforts to establish an individual plan for each participant. The guidance methodology and the career advisors' knowledge of training programmes and possible career choices may lend helpful support to the development of individual plans. Career guidance also helps trigger a process of reflection in the participant, and this is considered important for the ability to define appropriate future goals. However, early initiation of career guidance should not be confused with its speedy implementation. Career guidance, which has been tested here in a variety of forms, is a process that unfolds over time, using different topics and techniques depending on the progress and prerequisites of the participants.

User experiences so far indicate that it is easier to extract goals and measures from the career guidance for participants who have more pre-existing education, stronger language skills and some understanding of the Norwegian context. The latter two factors increase with time of residence. Participants who possess fewer such resources, as well as those who face challenges in terms of health or family matters in Norway or elsewhere, may encounter greater problems in benefiting from career guidance and making informed and targeted career choices shortly after becoming settled in Norway. However, as shown by our study, these people may also benefit from career guidance by being made aware of their opportunities in Norway and engaging in self-reflection over their resources and wishes. The career advisors who have participated in the pilot are generally concerned that career guidance for refugees must be provided in multiple rounds to enable the participant to develop the required career skills.

Recommendations

There is much to indicate that appropriate mapping of the refugees' skills and targeted career guidance may constitute a key element in establishing effective and appropriate training options for recently arrived refugees. On the other hand, it should be noted that good information on the refugees' skills and career opportunities will not lead to any better outcomes in the transition to further education or paid work unless this is followed up with more resources for good-quality training options. With this caveat, Fafo and Agenda Kaupang have the following recommendations for the further efforts by the authorities when it comes to skills mapping and career guidance for recently arrived refugees:

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- The authorities should seek to improve the Kompass self-registration portal and increase its use and access to it, thus to ensure that career advisors and municipalities that settle refugees are provided with equally sound information about all participants in the introduction programme. Recently arrived refugees have varying preconditions for completing mapping forms and assessing their own skills in a Norwegian context. Because this affects the quality of the information, the users should have greater access to help in completing the form than is the case today.
- To increase the users' confidence in the information from the mapping, IMDi as operator of the solution should engage in a systematic user dialogue with the users of Kompass.
- The mapping work should continue to be regarded as a process, where the use of general mapping tools before settlement can provide a basis, but not a blueprint. Any legal amendments that impinge on the mapping and design of an individual plan should permit the participants to contribute to the design and amendments of goals and content in the introduction programme on a continuous basis.
- Career guidance should also be offered as a process that may ideally start at an early stage (upon or prior to settlement), but needs to be followed up at regular intervals. Should career guidance be introduced as a right and an obligation prior to the start of the introduction programme, we recommend that career centres and local administrations collaborate on providing follow-up services.
- The career guidance should be sufficiently flexible to cater to refugees with a variety of characteristics and qualifications. For some, it will be make sense to start early, prior to or immediately after settlement, whereas others may derive more benefit from this service at a later time. If career guidance is introduced as a right and duty by law, the authorities should consider clarifying the content of the counselling which today appears very different in the various pilots. The organization of the cooperation between the career centres and the municipalities should also take into account the different geography of the regions.
- There is a need for a clear distribution of responsibilities and appropriate structures for information exchange prior to and after the career guidance period between the various agencies involved (municipalities, adult education institutions, the Labour and Welfare Administration and the career centres) to ensure a satisfactory flow of information and application of the skills mapping and career guidance. These solutions must observe privacy concerns for the refugees.

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- The career centres should work to transfer relevant competency to municipalities that can strengthen their work with regards to guidance and individual adaptation of the participants' introduction programme.