

# Summary

In 2021, in connection with the new Integration Act, a number of standardised elements were established for the introduction programme for recently arrived refugees. These are formulated as integration policy recommendations for course content that can or will be incorporated into the programme for individual participants. This standardisation is intended to help local authorities plan targeted, differentiated qualification pathways for participants with varying aptitudes and goals. The ambition is to reduce the quality gap between local authorities and raise the standard of the introduction programme provision. This is the second report in Fafo's real-time evaluation of standardised elements, and here we address the following three questions:

1. To what extent have local authorities introduced standardised elements and how have these been implemented?
2. Which actors are involved, and how well do they work together?
3. What factors impact on local authorities' capability to adopt the standardised elements?

## **Fast pace of change in integration efforts**

Historically, integration efforts have undergone rapid change necessitating restructuring both nationally and locally. Three factors are particularly significant: the number of refugees settled in Norway, the needs of settled refugees, and government guidelines for local settlement and integration efforts. Since the introduction of the Integration Act, the need for settlement has shifted from a record low to a record high in a very short space of time. Consequently, after initially downscaling the integration apparatus, local authorities then had to quickly upscale it. Refugee settlement is a new area for many local authorities. During the period in question, the government tightened its grip on the reins and introduced several requirements for local authorities' implementation of the introduction programme. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both the need for settlement and the pace of change in legislation and recommendations have evolved rapidly. The temporary status of refugees from Ukraine also introduces an element of uncertainty that can affect the dimensioning, planning and implementation of local integration efforts.

## **Where can implementation fail?**

In the transition from adopted policy to local practice, a range of obstacles can arise. We discuss five different ways that the implementation of standardised elements can potentially fail:

1. Governance failure is where the failure to implement policies can be linked to how effectively the government manages implementation through hard or soft regulation.
2. Capacity failure is a failure in implementation that is due to a lack of resources to carry out the necessary work and can occur at multiple levels in the governance chain.

3. Coordination failure occurs when actors who are supposed to work together or coordinate their efforts to realise political ambitions fail to do so.
4. Market failure occurs when employers do not accept a (sufficient) number of refugees in practice or do not give refugees access to the labour market.
5. Actor failure occurs when those who are supposed to implement the policy fail to do so because they disagree with the perception of the problem and/or the specific measures to be implemented.

### **Data and methods in the report**

1. Data from Norway's National Introduction Register (NIR) provide information about the content of the introduction programme for all participants from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2023. The data were used to analyse the content of around 3000 participants who had completed the programme as of 30 June 2023.
2. Managers from municipal adult learning centres and municipal refugee services have responded to questions about the design and organisation of Norwegian language training and the introduction programme. The survey was sent to all relevant potential participants and was completed by 75% of adult learning centres and 62 % of refugee services.
3. Adult learning centre and refugee service staff, partners and employers in six different municipalities took part in qualitative interviews, which were held at various points in time. The interviews covered the implementation of the five standardised elements, as well as local authorities' framework for the reception of newly arrived refugees and the introduction programme provision. The local authorities had varying experiences with the reception of refugees and different capabilities for adopting national recommendations.

### **High expectations – varying capabilities**

Considerable efforts have been made by the local authorities in the reception of a record number of refugees over the past two years. However, the vast amount of settled refugees also necessitates prioritisation. If we cannot do everything, what is most important? We find some major differences in the degree of implementation based on the local authorities' settlement volume and settlement experience. Although the solution given in the Resource Centre's guidelines and recommendations is based on available knowledge of good practices associated with each standardised element, a significant proportion of local authorities lack the capacity and resources needed to implement the solution. Consequently, some elements are omitted, and the Resource Centre does not currently provide any guidance on what should be prioritised.

Refugees have the right to participate in a targeted, individually tailored introduction programme. Local authorities' expectations for what they should achieve with the introduction programme are similar, but they have very different framework conditions and thus also different capabilities for meeting these expectations.

A large network of actors requires coordination. The pressure on local authority capacity makes this difficult and also challenges established cooperation routines.

Meanwhile, local authorities face the same challenges resulting from the large influx of refugees: almost 50 % of employees in almost half of the refugee services are new to the job, and the local authorities report having 'scoured the market' for suitably qualified staff, with several experiencing a high staff turnover.

### **Work Placement, Fast Track and employment orientation**

Two of the standardised elements in particular require the labour market and employers to play a role in the training and integration efforts: Work Placement and Fast Track, including the variant tailored to refugees with collective temporary protection, Flexible Fast Track. Less than half of the participants in the introduction programme (44%) were registered as having completed at least one employment-oriented component of the programme. The number of hours dedicated to employment orientation in the programme varies, but for most, it constitutes a small proportion. Work Placement with a focus on entering the labour market, Jobseeker Courses and Employment are the three most common employment-oriented components of the introduction programme. There are several reasons why not all participants are offered employment orientation. Examples of capacity failure, coordination failure, market failure and actor failure can all be seen in the survey responses and were also observed in visits to local authorities.

The likelihood of being registered as having participated in the employment-oriented component is linked to individual characteristics, but also the characteristics of the municipality. The likelihood is higher for men, young people and participants from Ukraine, and lower for participants in municipalities with low settlement volumes. Participants in municipalities where the introduction programme is organised by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) are less likely to receive employment orientation, and those who do are offered fewer hours than others on average. Local labour market conditions do not seem to impact on *whether participants receive* employment orientation or not, but they do affect *how many hours* of employment orientation they receive.

The challenges adult learning centres face in providing individually tailored programmes are particularly linked to capacity and resources. Some challenges relate to the wide-ranging aptitudes in the class and the lack of capacity to provide intensive or adequate instruction. Online Norwegian language training is available in almost 40% of the adult learning centres and evening classes in 31%. Teacher-supported Norwegian language training in the workplace – an initiative aimed at supporting an early introduction to work placement – is only available in one of four adult learning centres. Teacher shortages are described as a challenge in more than half of the adult learning centres.

Between 2021 and 2023, cooperation declined between actors with regard to employment-oriented and education-oriented elements in the introduction programme. Qualitative interviews point to three explanations for the reduced cooperation: a) changes in the composition of participants mean that programmes are now often shorter and there is less time to establish cooperation for individual participants, b) the settlement volume has increased, putting pressure on the capacity for cooperation, and c) the goal of the fastest possible transition to work has shifted the focus away from the cooperation partners who are primarily used in the education-oriented pathways.

The local cooperation between the refugee service and NAV varies considerably. In a *sequential* model, NAV is only involved after the participant has completed the introduction programme. In an *integrated* model, organisational responsibility for the introduction programme rests with NAV, and in the *coordinated* models, there are different forms and degrees of cooperation and levels of formalisation. Each cooperation model has its own challenges and opportunities. However, there seems to be a universal challenge with implementing labour market initiatives under the auspices of NAV at an early stage of the participants' integration pathway.

The cooperation with employers is important for the employment-oriented component of the introduction programme, and it is normally the refugee service that contacts employers and finds work placements. To expedite this work, it is important to understand the employers' *motivation* for accepting refugees, which *qualities* they value in those they accept, and what contribution they *expect* the local authority to make during the process. Interviews with employers suggest that motivation is linked to the demand for labour, but also to social responsibility and the reputation of the organisation. Employers expect refugees to have a certain level of proficiency in Norwegian, as well as motivation, a willingness to learn and, depending on the placement, formal qualifications. Employers primarily expect information, availability, predictability and flexibility from the local authority.

### **Coping with Life in a New Country – a high level of ambition is challenging in practice**

The ambition of the element Coping with Life in a New Country lies in its title: to foster participants' motivation and coping skills in their encounter with a new country and new expectations, as well as to raise awareness of their own skills and encourage them to put these into use. This element is mandatory for all participants, except those with temporary collective protection. The course consists of two parts: part 1 on migration, health and diversity, and part 2 on career skills, which includes employment and education. It is recommended that a variety of topics are presented and discussed over a minimum of 25 hours.

Seven out of ten local authorities report offering courses in coping skills. The others mostly report that a course is being planned. Those in charge of the introduction programme are relatively certain that coping skills courses are worthwhile in terms of the aim of the programme. However, their enthusiasm seems somewhat conditional. According to the NIR, which admittedly may be subject to under-reporting, only a minority of participants who are entitled to and have an obligation to take coping skills courses are recorded as having completed such a course in the programme. This may be because the group we have data for started the programme immediately after the coping skills course became mandatory. However, participants for whom this course is mandatory and participants from Ukraine (for whom it is not mandatory) are both recorded as having completed more course hours than the minimum requirement.

Cooperation with other municipal services on course provision varies considerably: the more refugees a local authority accepts, the more extensive the cooperation. The case study shows that cooperation is not always apparent between those who develop

coping skills courses, those working to provide social studies courses in adult learning centres and those working with career guidance. Consequently, there is a risk that coping skills courses overlap with other courses in the introduction programme, such as social studies, parental guidance or career guidance, which we describe as a *coordination failure*.

Comparisons of local authorities show a highly varied course provision in terms of organisation and content. We interpret this as a result of the guidance covering a large number of recommended topics, which requires local choices to be made. The extensive course content, combined with a relatively large number of participants who may require simultaneous interpretation into various languages, is conducive to an informational, one-way approach to teaching, making it difficult to achieve the ambition of dialogue. This can be characterised as a *governance failure*; national authorities have extensive and partly conflicting ambitions that are challenging to address locally. Participants' experiences of the course will be an important topic in the third interim report for this research project.

### **Parental support in the tension between dialogue and information**

Guidance Programmes for Parents is a mandatory part of the introduction programme for all participants who have children under the age of 18 or become parents while participating in the programme. This is a result of a significant focus being placed on the negative parenting practices within the immigrant population over several decades: negative social control, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Research also highlights the challenges of being a parent in a country that is very different from the one a parent grows up in. Eight out of ten local authorities report that they provide courses in parental guidance in the introduction programme. The vast majority of these use their own certified counsellors. These include the International Child Development Programme (ICDP), which is a parenting programme that aligns with national authorities' course recommendations. Its aim is to strengthen parents' focus on the care of their child and to better equip them to understand their child's perspective and see the world from *that* standpoint. This also increases the potential for enriched relationships, shared experiences and regulation, according to interviews we conducted with parent counsellors who use the programme. Recounted experiences indicated that when the emphasis is on practical exercises, dialogue and discussion, this breaks down the scepticism that parents often have about receiving guidance. This builds trust and makes it possible to raise the subject of and discuss challenging issues when faced with Norwegian welfare systems and culture. However, putting in place a parenting programme of this nature takes time. Many of those who organise and provide parental guidance locally are therefore concerned, as national authorities have now devised an alternative programme: parenting courses adapted for a large influx of refugees. This is a result of capacity issues due to the large number of participants and time constraints due to many Ukrainian participants only spending a short time in the introduction programme. There is concern that new regulations and recommendations that legitimise parenting courses of only four hours in total will result in a one-way informational course on how to be a parent in Norway as opposed to parental guidance based on dialogue. We describe this as a potential *governance failure*, whereby a programme believed to be beneficial by

those providing it is replaced by something else due to concerns about *capacity failure*. This may lead to *actor failure*, as those tasked with implementing parental guidance courses may themselves lose faith in the programme. It is therefore important to investigate how parenting courses adapted for a large influx of refugees are implemented and how parents themselves evaluate different types of parental guidance and courses.

### **Digital Skills**

Digital skills training aims to better equip newly arrived refugees to participate in the digitally-driven aspects of Norwegian society and the highly digitalised labour market. According to the Resource Centre, the target group consists of participants with 'a need for digital skills training'. Just under five per cent of participants are registered as having participated in such a course during their programme period. We assume that this low percentage is because many participants are now considered to be outside the target group and because local authorities now offer digital skills training as a part of other courses, for example in Norwegian language training, rather than as a separate training module. Just over 30% of local authorities and almost 60% of adult learning centres provide access to online courses.

The implementation of digital skills courses has been characterised by changes in the composition of participants, the view on who needs such training, and local authorities' *capacity challenges* in relation to material and personnel.

The learning resources in digital skills have largely been aimed at participants with limited digital skills. Elements of *governance failure* are evident when the local authorities call for more detailed descriptions of how digital skills courses can be tailored for participants who already have basic practical digital skills but need an introduction to how they can apply these skills in Norway. Consideration should be given to developing guidance resources that are also tailored to participants who have basic digital skills but lack knowledge of Norway's digital systems. This could alleviate capacity challenges by saving local authorities the effort of developing such resources themselves and increase the likelihood of digital skills courses being offered to a larger group of participants.

Indirect digital skills training can also take place through other training on digital platforms. Adult learning centres already offer some online courses, and there are plans to expand this provision nationally. A prerequisite for this is the establishment of digital infrastructure both at the training sites and among the participants so that they can take advantage of the provision.

### **A recipe for success?**

We studied local authorities' implementation of introduction programmes in a highly pressured period for all actors. Local authorities have varying experiences with integration work, different settlement patterns, different local framework conditions and very different capabilities for adopting the partly mandated, partly recommended methods. This has a bearing on whether they have adopted the standardised elements and, if so, how they have done this. In the report's eighth and final chapter, we synthesise our findings and discuss the local authorities' implementation in light of the five types of



failure. Based on this, we provide two overarching recommendations and two warnings. First, the recommendations:

We find that local authorities' capabilities for adhering to the recommended solution for a successful introduction programme vary. A significant number lack capacity and resources. Consequently, some elements are omitted, and national authorities provide few recommendations or guidelines for what should be prioritised in such cases. We recommend providing guidance on what is most important, taking into account the very different capabilities of the local authorities.

The large number of refugees from Ukraine and the considerable national pressure for them to quickly enter the labour force have led to a major focus on short, employment-oriented introduction programmes. However, many participants do not have the aptitude to complete short programmes and therefore require longer introduction pathways. Effective facilitation for these participants is crucial but can be easily deprioritised when the majority need a short programme. Our recommendation is to help maintain a focus on developing good-quality programmes for those with longer pathways.

Now on to the warnings. Some resettled refugees have or develop health problems. The experience in the front line indicates that rapid progression is challenging for this group. Work and activity can be beneficial to health, but not for everyone, not all the time, and not in relation to all types of activity. Additionally, parents must take care of children with temporary and uncertain future prospects who are adapting to conditions in a new country. In the front line, there is concern that participants are exhausting their right to Norwegian language training and the introduction programme without fully benefitting from the offer.

Uncertainty about how long Ukrainian refugees will stay in Norway presents several challenges for the integration efforts: dimensioning of local authorities' refugee reception and integration apparatus, finding the right balance between pace and quality for individual participants, and determining what scope there is to meet participants' individual needs. These are not new dilemmas for frontline staff, but they are brought to the forefront when faced with a record number of refugees. The solutions chosen will impact on the refugees' further integration.