

Summary

In September 2006 the first “class” of introductory programme participants completed the programme. It was then three years since the programme was introduced as a voluntary scheme for Norwegian municipalities – and two years since it was made compulsory for all. The aim of the Introduction Act is to promote the integration of newly arrived refugees in Norwegian society. The Act provides newcomers with a basic income support – introduction benefits – which is conditional on participation in an active training scheme. Furthermore, it is intended to constitute a legal framework for municipal integration activities, as well as strengthening the legal rights of individual participants.

Participants in the introductory programme are entitled to an introduction benefit that is equivalent to twice the basic amount from the National Insurance Scheme (2G). These benefits are conditional on active participation in an individually adapted training programme. The training involves full-time activity over a period of up to two years, with a possible one-year extension. In the first phase, participants’ existing competencies and training needs should be mapped. This mapping constitutes, in consultation with the participant, the basis for the development of an individual plan for each participant. The training shall provide participants with basic skills in Norwegian language, fundamental insights in Norwegian social life and prepare for future participation in the labour market.

This evaluation consists of two main parts – an implementation study and an effect study. The aim of the implementation study is to survey whether and to what extent the requirements and recommendations in the Introduction Act are being followed by the municipalities, and to search for the factors that influence whether crucial policy tools are being used or not. The effect study looks at the situation for those who have now quit or completed the introductory programme. To what extent have they moved on to education and employment? Are different categories of participants characterised by different types of adaptations to the labour market? And, can we see an effect on participants’ employment also when we compare with those who have not participated in the introductory programme?

Both qualitative and quantitative data are being used. The effect study applies participant data from various administrative registries. The implementation study is based on quantitative data from a web-survey of municipal mid-level management and programme coordinators, and on data from qualitative interviews with management, programme coordinators, teachers and participants in eight different municipalities.

Municipal implementation of the introductory programme

The main impression given by the implementation study is that the main elements in the Introductory Act to a large extent have been implemented by the municipalities involved. However, the formal implementation of key instruments does not by necessity imply that the quality of implementation is high, nor the absence of future challenges.

Most participants do start, their training within 3 months after settlement in a municipality, as stipulated by the Act. Significant numbers, however, do experience temporary delays in the programme, most often due to childbirth, illness, lack of labour market measures or lack of appropriate childcare.

The introduction benefit was intended to make participants independent of the social assistance system, but most municipalities still pay supplementary social assistance to some of their participants. 25 per cent of municipalities report that they have “many” participants who rely of supplementary social assistance. Variations in municipal practices with respect to what they pay in addition to introduction benefits, as well as for supplementary social assistance, in practice means that the introduction benefit has less of a flat rate character than the formal main principles suggest.

The grand majority of participants are being mapped, and they have an individual action plan. The quality of these plans varies, and only a minority of the programme coordinators think that most participants have a sense of “ownership” to their plans. The programme coordinators still feel that individual plans are useful in the work they do, but there is also a considerable need for further training in how to use this kind of methodology.

Most municipalities offer their participants a full-time programme, but filling up the required number of hours has little value in itself unless they are filled by something meaningful. There is still a distance to go before participants in all parts of the country have access to good and appropriate training. A number of municipalities lack a sufficient repertoire of training measures to be able to offer real individual adaptation. Small municipalities with few participants have particular challenges in this respect. Illiterates, academics and persons without primary school education are among the categories that risk receiving a poorly tailored programme if they are being settled in the “wrong” place. It is positive that 80 per cent of the municipalities offer Norwegian language classes specifically for participants with very little prior schooling, but appropriate work place-ments for this category are still lacking in many municipalities. Only 40 per cent of the municipalities surveyed could offer classes specifically targeted at participants with higher education.

The Introduction Act has contributed to new methods in municipal work with newly arrived refugees. The requirements of full-time programmes and work orientated training have in many municipalities been met by considerable efforts to fill the programme with other types of training than conventional language classes. Language apprenticeships – with varying degrees of supervision – are being used widely, while the use of other types of work orientated training such as work placements and trade-specific language courses are used less often.

The study has uncovered relatively big problems with respect to participants' access to secondary, particularly vocational, education. While adults' rights to secondary education are nationally regulated, counties seem to practice the rules differently, and there is uncertainty among staff over what entitlements participants really have. Furthermore, there are shortcomings in the county-level supply of educational services for this group.

Most municipalities have participants with special needs which make it hard to adapt the program appropriately to individual needs and preferences. Such needs are typically related to little educational background/illiteracy, large and complex health issues, traumas related to the refugee experience and care responsibilities. While great will to tailor programmes to such needs are being expressed, a lack of access to good treatment, child care, adapted language training and appropriate work placements mean that such tailoring often will not happen in practice. When 69 per cent of the programme coordinators report that they have participants who have less than 37,5 hours a week (homework included), there is reason to believe that participants with such complicating circumstances in reality are offered “unofficial” part-time programmes when appropriate training and treatment facilities are lacking.

Many programme coordinators stress that it is positive that the Introduction Act has involved more women in an active training programmes. Nevertheless, lack of child care delays and impedes progression for female participants in many municipalities. Experience also indicates that women are overrepresented in some of the categories where appropriate measures for individual adaptation are lacking, such as participants with little educational background and/or extensive care responsibilities.

Organisation and competences

The Introduction Act has enhanced the level of central governance of municipalities' introductory work. At the same time there is still considerable space for the municipalities to make their own strategic choices and priorities within the framework set up by the Act.

The most usual institutional arrangement for the introductory work is, as before, to have a specialised refugee- or introductory centre. However, the part played by municipi-

pal centres for adult education is growing, and by the start of 2007 22 per cent of municipalities had organised their introductory work within the framework of adult education.

Most municipalities have chosen an organisational solution for the programme coordinators which implies a high degree of specialisation with respect to the target group (newly arrived refugees and immigrants), but low degree of specialisation with respect to the aspects of participants' lives they are responsible for. The most widespread solution is that each participant has his/her own contact person, and that each such contact person has a general responsibility for all sides of the participant's introduction. Such a model constitutes a good starting point for establishing close relationships between participants and programme coordinators. At the same time it is a vulnerable model in at least two ways. Firstly, it requires coordinators in possession of a broad set of skills to be able to adapt programmes for participants with different backgrounds and needs. This can be a labour-intensive model, particularly demanding in a situation where there are few limits as to how many participants each coordinator can be responsible for. Secondly, the model is unfortunate in situations where conflict emerge between participant and coordinator, or when participants are exposed to incompetent coordinators, because of the limited scope clients have for exit from such relations.

Nearly half of the programme coordinators experience their work load as too large. Those who are responsible for more than 20 participants and have a general responsibility for each participant's introduction, are particularly exposed. Many also emphasise additional tasks such as following up users outside of the programme, for example participants' family members. Many also stress the additional work that follows from understaffing in situations where staff are on sick leave or when vacant positions are held open, often for longer periods.

Further training for staff has been a priority during the establishment of the introductory programme. Most programme coordinators have participated in courses or conferences, but nearly 70 per cent still feel that they lack skills. Supervising skills, role definition and skills related to the legal interpretation of the Act are top of the list of required competencies. It can also be worthwhile to consider the competence requirements among important collaborative partners, such as teachers, NAV- and health personnel.

The municipalities depend on collaboration with other actors in order to compose a high-quality introductory programme. Municipalities above a certain minimum level of refugee settlement tend to collaborate more broadly than others, but most municipalities do report that the most relevant collaborative relations are in place. However, few municipalities report that they have established extensive collaborative relations with relevant providers of health services. Only 36 per cent of programme coordinators think they have appropriate access to treatment for traumatised participants. Considering that more than 90 per cent of mid-level managers say that they have participants who suffer

from psychiatric illnesses, or are traumatised, and who need treatment, this is problematic.

Variations in implementation

The municipalities have, as noted, to a high extent implemented the formal requirements of the Introductory Act. Still, the qualitative interviews have revealed a number of variations in how municipalities have implemented essential policy tools, that are only partially covered by the quantitative surveys. We have, in chapter four, addressed in greater detail three such tools where municipal variations also, to some extent, can be read out of the quantitative data, and where previous research has suggested a link between implementation and participants' transition to work and education. These are: the breadth of the municipalities' repertoire of training measures, close follow-up of participants and user involvement.

Most of the managers surveyed feel that there is political will in the municipality to give priority to the introductory work, but so far only 3 of 4 municipalities have formulated specific performance measures. Strong leadership has been emphasised as a success factor by Danish evaluations, and the formulation of specific performance measures can be one relevant factor to measure in this respect. This study indicates that there is a correlation between the existence of such performance measures and many other aspects of municipal introductory work. Data suggest that municipalities which have formulated specific performance measures for the introductory work, also have established a broader and more mixed repertoire of training measures than others; that they to a higher extent supervise participants while in language apprenticeships (work placements) and in relation to deductions in the introduction benefits; and that they to a higher extent have developed formal procedures for the formulation and revision of individual action plans.

Municipalities which have chosen a model where programme coordinators have a general responsibility for participants' introduction, also have a lower probability of providing supervision at language apprenticeships (work placements) and a higher probability that more than half of participants have not received a work-orientated training measure during their time in the programme. The significance of ensuring that programme coordinators have enough time and capacity to do their work, is also confirmed by the fact that participants from such municipalities statistically had a lower probability than others of being employed. Still, it is important to note that even if this model of general responsibility seems to enhance the risk of a poorer outcome, such a model can probably produce good results if the total work load is limited and programme coordinators have access to appropriate training and support.

There are no clear connections between the institutional location of the programme in the municipalities and the implementation of the programme. There is however a tendency that municipalities which have located the programme in a refugee- or introduction centre follow their participants up more closely than within other institutional models. On the other hand, variations in institutional location seem to mean little for the procedures established for follow-up of illegitimate absences or for revisions of individual action plans. The very volume of the municipalities' introductory work seems to matter more for the establishment of such routines – the more people settled, the higher is the need for formal procedures. Somewhat more surprising is the finding that municipalities which have located the programme in a refugee- or introduction centre, to a higher extent than others have offered less than 50 per cent of participants work-orientated training measures within the programme period.

User involvement was lifted up as a separate topic, partly in order to investigate whether there are certain institutional solutions which facilitate such involvement better than others. However, the degree of user involvement seems to be affected more by the individual programme coordinators and their experiences, capacities and attitudes, than by how the municipalities have organised the introductory work.

What happened to the participants?

In the two years after the introductory programme was made compulsory for all municipalities, more than 4000 participants have completed the programme – 2400 men and 1600 women.

The degree of completion varies between groups and between municipalities

A majority (73 per cent) of the participants who were registered out of the introductory programme during the first two years it was compulsory, have completed the programme in the sense that they have left because of an offer of work or ordinary education, or because they have finished the time allocated to programme participation. The remaining have quit either because they have moved to a different municipality (10 per cent), because of illness or because they have been granted a leave of absence (9 per cent), or absence (5 per cent). However, while the completion rate is relatively high, there are also important differences between those who complete and those who quit.

Women and men use the allocated time in the programme to the same extent, but men leave more often than women due to a job offer. In other words, women quit the programme more often than men. 32 per cent of former female participants are registered as quits, compared to 19 per cent of the male ex-participants. The most common reason for women quitting the programme is illness or leave of absence. It is reasonable

to assume that a part of these women will return to the programme when their leave of absence is finished.

To what extent and how participants leave the programme are not only connected to characteristics of the participants themselves, but also properties related to the municipality in which they have been settled. Exits from the programme prior to completion of allocated time are, not surprisingly, more widespread in regions where the demand for labour is high. We also find a higher exit rate due to job offers in municipalities with a high proportion of inhabitants of a non-western immigrant background. A number of programme participants have moved during the programme period; as expected, this happens to a higher extent in the least central parts of the country. The labour market in the region participants move away from seems to be of less significance, indicating that there are other aspects of living centrally, than the labour market, that appeals. Finally, we find that participants in municipalities with long experience from running introductory programmes and where the programme is institutionally located in a refugee- or introduction centre, complete the programme to a higher extent than others, primarily because they use all the time allocated.

After the programme – what do former participants do?

The majority of those who completed the programme in the period between 01.09.2004 and 01.09.2006 were, in November 2006, either in work and/or in ordinary education. Of all participants who left (both those who completed and those who quit) the introductory programme in the period, nearly 60 per cent was in work and/or education in November 2006. An additional 15 per cent were registered in NAV, either as ordinary job seekers or participating in a labour market measure. 1 of 5 former participants had started ordinary education – women as much as men. There are still noticeable differences between groups. Women were employed to a significantly lower degree than men after leaving the programme. Nearly 4 of 10 women were neither employed, in education, in a labour market measure nor registered as job seekers at the time of evaluation.

A large proportion of the former participants still have a relatively loose connection to the labour market. Of all who have found wage work in the period, only a half is in a full-time position, and even among former participants with full-time jobs 10 per cent received supplementary social assistance in the same month as being registered as doing full-time work. Nearly 40 per cent work so-called “short part-time”, 1-19 hours a week. Also in this sense women have a weaker connection to the labour market than men – only 34 per cent of employed women had full-time positions and nearly a half works short part-time. This has obvious consequences for their ability to support themselves and their families on wage work alone. At the same time, while the proportion in work does not increase within the period of time that we have analysed, the proportion who gain a full-time position does increase over time. In this sense their relation to the labour market seems to be strengthened over time.

The reasons behind leaving the programme and labour market status at the time of evaluation are closely linked. Of those who left the programme to take up work, a large majority – of both men and women – are still in work. Among male participants almost 7 of 10 movers and 5 of 10 absentees, were in work at the time of evaluation. Far fewer women in these categories were employed – less than 3 of 10 movers and 2 of 10 absentees. The lowest rate of labour market activity is found among those who have left the programme due to illness or leave of absence.

What affects the participants' adaptation to the labour market?

The introductory programme is set up to improve newcomers' qualifications in a way that will ease their entry into the Norwegian labour market and social life. Nevertheless, participants will have characteristics which affect the extent to which they are orientated towards the labour market, and the extent to which they are conceived as attractive and relevant by employers. Some participants will, statistically, have a shorter way to the labour market than others. Finally, also the labour market situation, nationally but also regionally, can make it easier or harder to find work.

We have done a number of multivariate analyses in order to control for as many as possible of these factors within the constraints set by available data. This means that when we look at the effect of a personal characteristic, for example gender, we hold the effect of other relevant properties stable. The effect of the programme is analysed by comparing a selection of former participants with a similar group of newly arrived refugees who were settled prior to the Introduction Act.

The measurable effect of participation in the introductory programme differ for men and women. Programme participation has a positive effect on men's probability of being in work and/or education at the time of evaluation. Female participants have in general a lower transition rate to work and/or education than men, and the effect of programme participation is not statistically significant. We can also see that a number of factors related to family and family phases affect men and women's transition to work differently.

Among women the probability of being in work is reduced for those who have children under the age of 7 years or live in households with more than one child. This does not apply to men. Married men, on the contrary, has a higher probability of being in work compared to unmarried men, which can be interpreted as a stronger orientation towards the labour market due to a sense of responsibility for providing for the family (or plans to apply for family reunification).

We also find another indication of the importance of family and care for women's participation in and benefit from the programme. Among women, in contrast to men, the age group 40-49 years have a higher probability of being employed than the reference category of women aged 30-39 years. It is reasonable to assume that this is related

to family phases and the fact that women of this age to a higher degree than younger women have completed the phase of child birth and care for young children. They are thus in a freer position to orientate themselves towards the labour market.

We also find that the unemployment rate, the employment rate and the proportion of non-western immigrants employed in the economic region where a woman live, do not affect her work probability in the way it does for men.

However, there are some correlations that seem to be the same for men and for women. Family migrants have a lower probability of being in work or education than refugees (asylum, humanitarian grounds, resettlement refugees) both among men and women.

Both for men and women, persons from Somalia have a lower probability of being in work at the time of reference than the reference category (persons from Iraq) and persons from Russia, Iran and Serbia have a higher probability. In addition, men from Afghanistan have a higher probability of being in work than men from Iraq.

The analyses we have done are to a high degree limited by the data which were available at the time of evaluation. Even though Norway has more information available about the refugee- and immigrant population than most other countries, access to data on education, health and certain other potentially important factors, is limited. Most serious is the risk of a positive selection of participants into the programme – that those who have participated are systematically different from non-participants in a (non-measurable) way which will increase participants' probability of being employed at the time of reference. It is also difficult to establish a good comparison group since the programme is compulsory for everyone in the target group. Finally, the evaluation was completed a short time after programme completion. Thus there is a number of questions that we so far have not been able neither to illuminate nor answer.

Further challenges

In the final chapter we address the challenges that, in our opinion, still remain after two years of working with the introductory programme. These challenges and our suggestions for further action are briefly summarised below.

1. Programme content

Unsurprisingly, it is challenging to create an individually tailored programme for all participants. Nevertheless, this is crucial for participants' motivation but also for ethical reasons – when participants are required by law to invest considerable time in programme participation they are entitled to receive something worthwhile in return. The most important input factors in this respect are the local repertoires of training meas-

ures and the individual programme coordinators' creativity and ability to find solutions. We also think it is important to plan settlement with a view to the locally available training measures. A certain continuity and volume in the local introductory work are also important factors. It is crucial to collaborate well with neighbouring municipalities, civil society, local businesses and labour market services, but also the municipalities' own efforts to create work orientated training measures must be continued.

2. Further education

The way into the Norwegian education system can be hard to find both for bureaucrats and participants. Refugees' entitlements and possibilities are felt to be unclear and the adult education opportunities limited. Solutions should probably be concerned with strategic settlement of people with higher education or plans about further education into municipalities where such opportunities exist. Furthermore, the local bureaucrats need better access to specialised knowledge about educational opportunities.

3. Women – the qualification, work and family balance

It is still a challenge to facilitate for full and steady participation in qualification programmes for women. Pregnancies, child births and care for young children have consequences for women's entry into the programme, for their progression and for later labour market status. Relevant measures include access to flexible child care arrangements, active follow-up of participants who are on maternity leave, and better access to suitable work placements.

4. Health issues

The municipalities struggle to adapt the programme to participants with health problems. Greater efforts must be directed into establishing relations to the local health services to make it easier to find appropriate treatment. It would also be useful to develop specific goals for societal participation, so that the effect of programme participation can be addressed and evaluated also for those newcomers who do not reach the aim of work and education within 2-3 years.

5. Introduction benefits – flat rate for all?

Most municipalities report that they have participants who are dependent on supplementary social assistance. There are also local variations with respect to which additional costs that are being covered by the local authorities. In practice this means that the income situation of programme participants vary a great deal more than what the principle of a flat rate benefit seems to suggest.

6. Individual plans – for the participants or for the bureaucracies?

Most participants have individual plans, but the quality is variable. Programme coordinators' competencies in this kind of work need to be strengthened.

7. User involvement – when is it important and how should disagreements be handled?

Many ideas coexist on what user involvement is and where the limits of users' co-determination should be drawn. Accordingly there are also different practices with respect to user involvement, with variations both between municipalities and between programme coordinators in the same municipality. This is also a field where it is crucial to strengthen programme coordinators' competencies. Specific courses can be useful, but we also recommend that local routines are established, for example as internal seminars where programme coordinators can exchange and discuss experiences and cases.

8. The programme coordinator – generalist and specialist

The programme coordinators are generally positive to the introductory programme, but their work situation is often pressed. The combination of wide responsibilities and few formal restrictions on the work load, is probably an important reason that one half feels that their work load is too heavy. The municipalities should to a greater degree define and limit the programme coordinators' responsibilities, for example by introducing maximum limits as to how many participants each programme coordinator is responsible for. It can also be advisable to promote some degree of specialisation.

9. Still remaining questions

There is still a need to know more about how the programme works for women, and about how former participants' labour market careers develop over time. We have seen that a high proportion of former participants have found work, but we do not know if they have found or will find work which is in line with the qualifications and experiences they have. We also see a high degree of part-time work, and with respect to economic independence it will be important to see whether these persons will move on to full-time employment. Finally, we have not addressed the participants' own evaluations of the programmes they have been offered, and this should be an obvious topic for further research.