

Fafo-report 491

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"They want the same"

**Co-operation between the municipalities and the Employment Office
with regard to the Introductory Programme**

English Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to chart experiences of co-operation between the municipalities and the Employment Office with regard to the Introductory Programme and to study the influence laws and directives have had on co-operation. Charting covers the co-operating units' evaluations of the general co-operative climate and of each others working methods, competence and capacity. These evaluations are then compared with the descriptions of the concrete tasks, which the departments are carrying out in conjunction with the Introductory Programme. Disagreements over the role of the Employment Office, at what point the Employment Office should intervene and how much Norwegian a participant ought to know before the Employment Office is responsible for offering services have all provided grounds for a great deal of frustration in the attempts to work together on the Introductory programme. Have these disagreements become less, and in that case, can any improvements be traced back to the law and the directive?

Chapter 2 - How does co-operation work?

Directive P-6/2003 on co-operation between the municipalities and the local Employment Office on the Introductory Programme for new arrivals gives the municipalities the responsibility for setting up and co-ordinating the work and emphasises that the Employment Office has a central role in the development and implementation of the Introductory Programme. The directive highlights a number of tasks for each of the departments, and requires the individual municipalities and the local Employment Office to draw up written co-operation contracts. The departments are therefore required to co-operate, but have still a long way to go until the individual municipalities and the local Employment Offices agree on how they should work together.

In the description of how the municipal refugee agencies and the Employment Office have organised their work, we have drawn a distinction between co-operation, coordination and division of work. About half the municipalities and the local Employment Offices have organized their work with the Introductory Programme in a way that can be classified as co-operation, in that they direct and coordinate competence and resources from both units towards the same participants at the same time. Amongst these municipalities there is considerable variation with regard to the length of the period of co-operation regarding the individual participant: some have long term co-operation where the local Employment Office is involved from early on in drawing up the individual plans. Others have a one-off triangular agreement where the participant is "transferred" from the refugee agency to the Employment Office.

A large majority of both municipal refugee agencies and the local Employment Offices say they are satisfied with the general co-operation on the programme. With regard to concrete tasks, which the refugee agencies and the local Employment Office are to carry out, there is considerable dissatisfaction regarding both the extent to which the tasks are carried out and the way in which the work is carried out. Just four out of ten Employment Offices obtain information from the municipal refugee agencies that they consider of major use in the Employment Offices' work. Only a third of the municipali-

ties feel that the local Employment Office carries out central tasks such as finding work placements for participants and following up participants on work placements.

The local Employment Offices themselves have a completely different evaluation of the extent to which they carry out these and other tasks. Over 80 percent of the local Employment Offices say that they find work placements and follow up participants on work-placements. This large deviation indicates (amongst other things) that there is a lack of communication between the refugee agencies and the local Employment Office.

The local Employment Offices appear to have little involvement with individual participants before they are considered to be ready for work experience or other opportunities offered by the local Employment Offices. In many cases this is to do with the local Employment Office's priorities but it is also a consequence of the lack of information from the refugee agencies to the local Employment Office. When individual plans are not sent, or there are no meetings to discuss these, the local Employment Office is precluded from getting involved at an early stage.

63 per cent of the municipal refugee agencies feel that they have a major influence on the decision of whether a participant is ready for work placement and other measures offered by the local Employment Office. Nonetheless, the disagreement between the departments about when a participant is ready for such measures, is a main source of problems in co-operation (or vice versa): While only 17 per cent of the municipalities replied that they were generally dissatisfied with the local Employment Office, a total of 65 per cent of municipalities who are often in disagreement with the local Employment Office over whether or not the individual participants are ready for work placement or other measures offered by the Employment Office, are dissatisfied with the co-operation in general.

A central question in this type of evaluation is obviously evaluating whether the existing forms of co-operation correspond with the requirements in the directive. Since the directive does not offer a detailed description of how municipalities and the local Employment Offices are to work together, it is hardly feasible to highlight examples of forms of working together which conflict with the requirements in the directive – with the exception of the lack of written co-operation agreements (co-operation agreements are the subject of the next chapter). The directive is more concrete when it comes to *division of work* between the co-operating units, and here there are clear indications that several municipalities and Employment Offices have some way to go before they are able to meet the requirements in the directive. In the case of the municipalities, the development of written action plans and disseminating these to the local Employment Office is not always in accordance with the requirements. With regard to the local Employment Office, many of the tasks that are described in the directive are intended for participants who are regarded as ready for work placement or other qualifying or clarifying measures, which come under the auspices of the local Employment Office. The combination of many participants not yet being sufficiently advanced in their qualifying programme and the local Employment Office and the municipal refugee agencies still having differing ideas with regard to when participants are ready for measures offered by the local Employment Office, mean that many local Employment Offices still have relatively few participants who are active users. As we shall see later on, the lack of resources within the Employment Offices is also an important explanation for this.

It is not obvious how the directive's statement that the local Employment Office should have an important role in "designing and implementing" the introductory programme should be interpreted, but it is reasonable to assume that the intention is that the Employment Office should contribute its expertise both in general and in individual cases, even before the participants are ready to undertake work experience and other opportunities offered by the Employment Office. So far, in the majority of places, the local Employment Office has a somewhat limited role in the design and implementation of the introductory programme. Nonetheless, both the refugee agencies and the local Employment Offices are largely satisfied with the general co-operation. One explanation for this may be that there is no great desire for closer co-operation, but the positive evaluation is probably also the result of the co-operation – despite its limitations – being seen as considerably better after the law and directive came into effect. We will come back to this in the next chapter, where written co-operation agreements are the main theme.

Chapter 3: The significance of laws and directives for co-operative working

The law on Introductory Programmes and directive P-6/2003 have acted as a catalyst to setting up or developing contact between the refugee agencies and the Employment Office in municipalities where the departmental work is not functioning well already. The law and the directive are used by municipal intermediate leaders to set themes and priorities for refugee work in their own departments.

Three months after the law on Introductory Courses came into force (and one year and three months after it came into effect) between 42 and 49 of the 150 municipalities still lacked obligatory written co-operation agreements. Municipalities without such agreements are characterised by little or unstable refugee populations.

Co-operation agreements can be divided into two categories – detailed agreements which go beyond the directive or make the formulation of the directive more concrete, and those which we call "copied agreements", which are close to the content and formulation of the directive. Survey data on the content of the agreements indicate that the local Employment Office's tasks which are not mentioned in the directive and which do not pass the services to the participants directly, are enshrined in the agreements to a lesser extent

In municipalities where the agreement is followed up at the leadership level, the respondents' evaluation is that the co-operation with the local Employment Office is clearly more positive than in municipalities where the leadership is not seen as being involved.

A co-operative agreement increases the chances of the parties evaluating the co-operation as good, and around half of respondents in both departments feel that the agreement has contributed to a better co-operative working relationship. However - also in municipalities that do not have agreements a majority of respondents feel that co-operation works well. This goes for respondents in both departments and moderates the impression of the significance of the co-operative agreements. Even so, the more of the Employment Office's tasks (questions were asked about 7 issues) which were regulated in the agreement, the higher the proportion in both departments which feel that

the agreement has improved co-operation and which regards co-operation as a whole as good.

The refugee agencies' information work in relation to the Employment Office is more comprehensive and is regarded as more useful in municipalities where co-operation agreements exist. This gives reason to believe that the directive's specifications regarding these aspects of the municipality's responsibilities towards the Employment Office has led to better movement of information.

The Employment Office's input to participants in the introductory programme appears to be less in municipalities where the actual tasks are not specified in the agreements. Nonetheless, what is most striking is that the differences in the Employment Office's input appear to be governed only to a limited degree by whether a co-operation agreement exists or not. This finding points in the direction of conditions other than written agreements, which determine the tasks which the Employment Office carries out for the refugee agencies and the participants in the introductory programme.

Chapter 4: Framework conditions for co-operation between departments

The framework within which co-operation between the local Employment Office and the refugee agency is to be designed and implemented, affects characteristics of the co-operation and indirectly via this the results of the co-operation. Literature on co-operation and respondents reports on the challenges they encounter in their everyday work form the basis for formulating four main types of framework conditions which in different ways affect the way in which departments co-operate, to what extent and in what way:

- *Cultural and attitude related frameworks:* A department culture can be expressed in common terminology, common values and a common view of targets and tools for example in integration work. This can create barriers with other departments and make co-operation difficult.
- *Structural frameworks:* Whether a municipality has an easy or a difficult integration task (with regard to characteristics of the refugee population and the local employment market) can affect the extent to which the Employment Office and the refugee agencies work together and on what.
- *Formal frameworks:* Firstly the Employment Office and the refugee agencies have different legislation, somewhat different targets (and target groups) and different ways of ensuring quality and effectiveness. Secondly, lack of resources, particularly in the Employment Office is seen as a limiting factor for both the content and the organisation of the co-operative work.
- *Physical frameworks:* Information moves more easily and to a greater degree within an organisation than between organisations. Small municipalities may thus have better conditions for exchanging information than larger municipalities, depending to some extent on the size of the Employment Office with which they are to cooperate.

Several of the framework conditions within which co-operation occurs are difficult to affect locally. The survey is not designed to chart or to measure the significance of

these frameworks. They are brought in to help in understanding variations in co-operative working relationships beyond the effect that the law and directive have.

Many of the barriers to cross-department co-operation that different framework conditions can create are nonetheless reduced by the co-operating departments through different forms of barrier-reducing tools. Table 4.1 shows a summary of these tools with comments on the advantages and disadvantages/challenges.

Chapter 5: What has been achieved through co-operation?

In Chapter 1, we put forward three hypotheses on how the directive and the working agreements might have a positive influence on achieving goals in the introduction work: by clarifying the division of work, by contributing to increased co-ordination and through contributing to a more uniform understanding of the work, for example through competence transfer between the departments.

Clarifying the division of work is important for two reasons: to prevent duplication of work and to ensure that tasks do not end up in a no-man's-land between two departments. The co-operative agreements have clearly contributed to the division of work being clearer than before, even though some uncertainty remains. In this way there is good reason to believe that the agreements have had a positive effect on co-operation. However, we find signs that major challenges remain when it comes to ensuring that important tasks are actually carried out. When the local Employment Office is responsible for finding and following up participants on work experience, this work can be deprioritised by the municipal refugee agencies. At the same time, lack of resources and disagreement about the time when participants are ready mean that the Employment Office often does not offer work experience or other measures – at least not at the time when the municipal refugee agency requires this. There is little reason to believe that the employment office is doing this less than previously, but there are signs which indicate that individual municipalities have reduced their earlier emphasis on arranging work placements because this ought now to be the task of the Employment Office.

When it comes to co-ordination across the departments, the individual qualification plans and inter-disciplinary teams are important tools. It is therefore reason for concern that only 4 out of 10 local Employment Offices obtain information from the refugee offices about individual participants which is of any great use. Co-ordination across the levels can, however, also occur at the leadership level. As we saw in Chapter 3, 60% of the agreements are followed up at the leadership level, according to the municipal refugee agencies. As we have seen, leadership follow-up is of major significance for the departments' evaluation of the co-operation.

When it comes to evaluating the extent to which co-operation has led to a more unified understanding of the work methods, we have to rely on the qualitative interviews. There are few signs that the co-operation to date has led to a comprehensive transfer of competence. Nonetheless, there may still be reason to believe that more co-ordination and contact across the departments will contribute to a more unified understanding of the work methods. On the other hand, it is possible that the clearer distribution of work between the refugee agencies and the Employment Offices has had the unpredicted effect that the understanding of the task has become *less* unified, in that the municipality concentrates its efforts on language training and loses some of the focus on the labour

market, whereas the Employment Office focuses on employment and disregards the need for further language training.

Chapter 6: More regulation?

This evaluation shows that regulating co-operation between the municipal refugee agencies and the local Employment Office, through the law, the directive and co-operative agreements, has affected the work in the desired direction. It also shows that these forms of regulation of co-operation between governmental and municipal departments have their limitations. Other framework conditions for co-operation also have a major influence on co-operation and its results.

We find no basis for recommending comprehensive changes to the existing regulations. Co-operation has clearly become better, in spite of the fact that the law has only been effective for a short time. Nonetheless, much work remains to get the different elements of the introduction programme in place. The division of work between governmental and municipal sectors is in itself a barrier to co-ordination, and we believe it could be useful to try out alternative divisions of work in a limited number of municipalities, for example testing the consequences of giving the municipal refugee agencies the resources and tasks which currently fall to the Employment Office. We also believe that clarifying the municipalities' responsibility for putting participants' individual plans into writing and sending these to the Employment Office would be an advantage. Furthermore, we feel it would help if the directive specified more clearly what the local co-operative agreement would contain. In particular, it should be required that the co-operative agreements must specify in which way the Employment Office should contribute to the design and implementation of the introduction programmes *before* the participants are ready for the measures which come under the auspices of the Employment Office. Furthermore, we feel there is a need for a mediation and/or conflict resolution body.

With regard to the other framework conditions, the lack of resources in the Employment Office is a significant barrier to co-operation. Perhaps this problem could be reduced if it were made clear how many resources would be set aside for working with participants in the introduction programme.

We also find clear indications that the attitudes of the employees in the co-operating departments have a major influence on co-operation. Negative attitudes to the user group or to the competence in co-operating departments are characteristic of several of the municipalities where co-operation is particularly difficult. We believe that improving competence is the most important measure for fighting these problems. Joint competence improvement courses for the co-operating departments have proven particularly effective. However, this requires good preparatory work to find a programme for such measures which will be seen as relevant and which will engage both departments.

This evaluation was not intended to evaluate the quality of municipal teaching of Norwegian. Nonetheless, the work has provided a basis for highlighting poor progress in Norwegian as a significant challenge for qualification work. We have no basis to draw conclusions about the quality of the teaching of Norwegian, but we feel that this stands out as an important subject for further research.

There may also be reason to consider more carefully the realities of the employment market when resettling refugees. The local employment market in small municipalities cannot absorb an unlimited number of refugees, no matter how well the refugee agency and the local Employment Office work together.

We are not recommending comprehensive changes to the regulation of co-operation. This does not mean that the co-operation and the results thereof are uniformly good. The achievements must however be evaluated in light of the short period (3,5 months) that the Introductory Act had been compulsory when our data was collected. There is still considerable potential for improvement, which is illustrated by the quotation we have used in the report title “They may have the same goal”. This was one participant’s reply to the question on how the local Employment Office and the refugee agency work together, and he continued: “...but nothing happens”. He had been waiting a long time for the offer of a work placement.