

From social benefits to paid qualification

Findings from pilot projects with obligatory participation in introductory programmes for refugees

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This paper summarizes the findings of a study evaluating pilot projects in 16 Norwegian municipalities. These projects tested a set of methods for activities aimed at qualifying refugees. Central elements in the projects included the transition from social assistance to participation in paid qualification activities, organization of qualification activities to provide each refugee with one contact point in the social-assistance system, close follow-up of individual participants, the drawing up of individual qualification plans as the basis for the qualification programme and the use of work training at an early stage of the qualification programme. These projects were initiated by the Norwegian Parliament, and have been followed up by the Norwegian integration authorities, represented by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). The evaluation that forms the basis for this paper has been performed by the research foundation Institute for Applied Social Research (Forskningssstiftelsen Fafo) and was funded by the Integration Section of the UDI.

1 Towards a responsible qualification policy

Financial autonomy, self-reliance and participation in Norwegian society have been the most important goals of the Norwegian policy for the integration of refugees and immigrants during the last 30 years. However, over time it has been quite thoroughly documented that these groups are poorly integrated in the Norwegian labour market, and that many of them also have tenuous contact with ethnic Norwegians. The poor connections to the labour market result in comprehensive and long-lasting dependency on social benefits.

This situation has given rise to criticism of integration activities, but also to innovation in this area. The criticism that has been heard may be summarized in two main arguments. First, it is claimed that the Norwegian assistance system leads to clientification, i.e. that the assistance in itself contributes to making refugees less able to manage on their own. Second, the quality, continuity and intensity of the qualification programmes are not good enough.

In 1999 projects introduced new methods in the integration activities in 16 Norwegian municipalities. These projects were designed to address the shortcomings listed above. Continuity and intensity would be improved through the establishment of full-day programmes and closer cooperation between the various agencies participating in the qualification activities. The clientification aspects of the assistance system would be mitigated by introducing alternatives to social benefits as a source of income, and income would be tied to participation in qualification programmes. Some projects have also established a practice whereby participants would keep their own attendance records for participation in qualification programmes, and also be responsible for paying their own private bills. These measures are often called "empowering" measures. We believe that a better description is to say that the social-assistance system does not relieve refugees of the responsibility for their own life situation.

There is no reason to believe that persons who have been able to take care of themselves before arriving in Norway should suddenly lose this ability after their arrival. However, refugees are in an extreme life situation, and in particular need facilitated integration and qualification measures in a transition phase. A challenge facing the authorities is to design a responsible integration policy in the sense that the needs refugees have for assistance are satisfied without also to disempower them. Our title "Toward a responsible qualification policy" must not be understood to mean that qualification policies until now have been irresponsible. Qualifying newly arrived refugees for Norwegian working life is indeed a difficult and time-consuming endeavour. This field is also relatively new in Norway, and arriving at good work methods takes time. The title is rather intended to emphasize the fact that the new work methods are a step in the right direction, and that it is not necessarily the refugees who are at fault, even though the goal attainment in integration policies has been poor.

In this paper we shall summarize some central findings from the evaluation of the project activities, i.e. what methods work, the problems that have arisen during their implementation, and the ethical issues that are raised. In conclusion we shall present

some proposals for solving the problems that arise when implementing the methods, including some ethical concerns.

2 Background

The choice of measures in these projects was not random. They are based on experiences gained both in Norwegian municipalities and in other countries. Two years before the pilot projects were initiated the Norwegian authorities, in this case the former Ministry of Local Government and Labour, initiated a small pilot project aimed at collating experiences from obligatory qualification projects in other countries¹. Obligatory qualification in this case means that financial benefits are made contingent on participation in qualification activities. The project report concluded that obligatory participation in qualification activities alone is not sufficient to bring about speedy and good integration of refugees (Djuve and Pettersen, 1997), but rather that the positive effects are conditional on the measure being used in conjunction with other measures. The measures that were effective (beyond obligatory qualification) were summarized as follows:

- 1) Refugees have one contact point in the social-assistance system
- 2) The services offered are developed particularly for refugees and are not part of the regular welfare system
- 3) Frequent contact and follow-up with refugees
- 4) Qualification is tailor-made for each refugee's needs
- 5) The programme is operated by a multi-ethnic staff with special skills
- 6) The refugees are given the responsibility for their own qualification progress, e.g. by including them in the process of drawing up a plan for their own qualification and work career
- 7) The projects undertake job placement on their own, which is given high priority, with follow-up of refugees at the workplace
- 8) The importance of early contact with working life is emphasized, and participants take part in work training simultaneously with language training and other qualification measures
- 9) The connection between participation in qualification programmes and the payment of financial benefits must be shown consistently, clearly and understandably for the participants
- 10) The projects emphasize the accumulation of knowledge on what gives good integration.

¹ The report is based on experiences from Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA. Emphasis was given to finding at least one successful project in each of the countries. These projects were respectively Flyktningsprosjektet [The Refugee Project] in Söderköping, Sweden, Programme Integration Newcomers (the PIN project) in Rotterdam and Lutheran Integration of Refugees Service (LIRS) in Washington.

Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 can be found quite directly in the information on funding for the pilot projects provided by the authorities.

3 Research questions and method

Of the issues examined in this paper, the first is whether the methods tested in the projects are efficient with respect to providing participants with relevant qualifications for participation in working life and general society. This has been measured by checking language progress, examining the transition to working life and regular education, and studying the participants' own perceptions of whether the introductory programme has made it easier for them to find employment. Second, it is important to identify the most important bottlenecks impeding the implementation of the measures, and any initiatives to get around them. Third, we have considered ethical aspects of the use of the measures, for example whether the participants feel that they have been treated with respect. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used based on three data sets. Data set no. 1 consists of comprehensive interviews with 147 participants. Data set no. 2 consists of project reports containing information on 304 participants' skills and qualifications, and detailed information on the type of qualification measures each participant has participated in. Reporting was done on standardized forms that we designed. Data set no. 3 consists of qualitative interviews with project employees and the cooperating agencies. There were two rounds of interviews to capture changes while the project was in progress.

4 Good methods in the integration activities

The evaluation proved that a number of the measures that have been tested, or combinations of these, appear to yield positive effects on refugee integration careers (Djuve et al., 2001). We shall here reproduce the most important findings for each of the measures that have been tested.

The concept of good work methods in this context refers to two aspects. First, we are interested in the measures that have a positive effect on central aspects of the living conditions of refugees and immigrants, and second in how these measures are implemented. It may also be useful to discuss some examples of unsuccessful work methods so that others who wish to test the measures may avoid the worst pitfalls.

Alternative income provision/credible use of incentives

Both the participants and employees in the projects emphasize the positive importance of establishing the provision of an income as a genuine alternative to social benefits. Many

of the participants feel that receiving social benefits is a sign of failure, and they emphasize the motivating effect of earning money as opposed to being issued money.

The distinction between positive and negative financial incentives – punishment or reward – has generally proven to be eliminated in practice. Even though the project managers all agree in their depiction of the scheme, which rewards participants for participation, the participants are quite consistent in their feeling that they are being docked for absenteeism. This is regardless of whether the benefits basically are higher, equal to or lower than the norm for social benefits.

The greatest problem encountered by the projects involving alternative income provision was that alternatives to social benefits are basically taxable, and hence appreciably more expensive for the local authorities. If the relationship between a participant and the local authority must be considered as an employer-employee relationship, a number of rights will be triggered for the participants and along with a number of responsibilities for the local authority. This is probably why the solutions that were chosen in most pilot projects resembled social benefits quite closely, even though most of the involved parties agreed that this was less than optimal. Thus, in the evaluation it was difficult to trace the effect of alternative income provision, understood as clearly distinguished from social benefits. On the other hand, the threat of deductions for non-attendance, or wages according to performance and input, has been an element in 13 of the 16 pilot projects.

The effect on absence, participation in work and language progress

The absenteeism of participants from the qualification programme is greater in the three municipalities that do not offer credible incentives in the form of deductions from financial benefits. As only three municipalities practice deductions, we must nevertheless be careful in reaching any definitive conclusion on the impact of deductions. (There may be other reasons why the three projects have high absenteeism rates). Moreover, we do not find positive effects of deductions on the probability of gaining regular employment or improving Norwegian language skills. By withdrawing financial benefits it is apparently possible to reduce absenteeism, but this in itself is no guarantee that the participants will get more out of the qualification programme (at least not in the short term). Conversely, it is more likely that participants will find a paying job if they have been in a project that has combined the use of financial incentives with close follow-up. *Financial penalties alone are thus not sufficient to attain results. Only when financial incentives are combined with close follow-up do we find that this measure helps to make it easier for participants to find employment.*

Motivation subsidies, i.e. higher benefits than the norm for social benefits, do not appear to have any independent impact on absenteeism, employment or progress in learning the Norwegian language. However, the project managers believe that motivation subsidies make it easier to motivate for project participation.

Variations in implementation

For the threat of deduction to be *credible and appropriate*, participants must be familiar with and understand the provisions for absenteeism and also experience that

unacceptable absenteeism will be countered with financial penalties. Furthermore, the provisions must be *fair*, both in the sense that they are implemented in the same manner for all participants, and that they correspond (as far as possible) to the provisions that are in force in regular working life. In the projects we have seen examples of both a lack of credibility and perceived unfairness in the attempts to combine financial benefits with self-input.

Credibility is particularly undermined because of poor procedures for keeping attendance records. Under-reporting of absenteeism, particularly for Norwegian language instruction classes, has been a problem for some projects. Some instructors believe that it is not their task to keep or certify such records, and that such a control function is uncomfortable and may conflict with teaching considerations. If the use of incentives is to be credible, it is necessary to reach agreement with all those who take part in qualification activities on how absenteeism is to be reported and dealt with.

The legitimacy of the measure is eroded when a great deal of personal judgement is applied both when deciding what provisions should apply and when they should be initiated. Individual assessments of when participants are "able to comply with the provisions" is a particular problem as this leads to differential treatment, and participants in turn feel that the system is unfair. (If one participant is allowed to get away without any deduction, there is little reason to believe that another participant will accept a deduction for a similar absence without arguing against it and without feeling that s/he has been treated unfairly.)

One contact point and close follow-up

The pilot projects had to ensure that the introductory programmes were organized around one contact point for each participant, or possibly one contact person. The aim was to facilitate close and comprehensive follow-up of the participants.

Effects

All the projects have established *one contact point* for each refugee, and according to the project managers, this has proven to be positive. The refugees do not feel like powerless objects being bounced around the system like ping-pong balls, and the contact person gets to know much more about each of the refugees she or he is dealing with, which in turn makes it easier to provide assistance for an individually adapted qualification programme. The positive aspect of this approach is also reflected in the participants' relationship to the contact persons, who they generally describe as accessible and respectful.

When assessing what should be called *close follow-up*, we have attached importance to the fact that regular interviews have been held during the qualification programme, where any problems may be discussed and attempts can be made to resolve them, and where any acute problems that arise can be followed up. An example is how undocumented absenteeism should be followed up in person. Close follow-up, the measurement is that the project employees personally notify participants before any deductions are made in the financial benefits that are paid, has proven to increase the

probability both of participants finding employment and improving their Norwegian language skills. More comprehensive follow-up also has a positive effect on the participants' social networks in the form of increased membership in organizations. Depending somewhat on how rigidly we define the term, we find that elements of the close follow-up measure have a positive effect on all the three basic aspects of refugee living conditions that the integration activities aim to improve: Norwegian language skills, participation in the working world and social networks.

Variations in implementation

Most projects have interpreted the measure concerning one contact point to mean that each refugee should have one contact person. This solution is quite demanding of the skills of the employees. However, employee frustrations are lower in those cases where project management has allocated time for training/courses and for the exchange of personal experiences between contact persons, and in some cases also with persons involved in participant qualification from adult education institutions or at *Aetat*, the Norwegian labour exchange office. Nevertheless, this presents special challenges for small projects with one or two employees.

Close follow-up may be implemented in a number of ways, but our understanding comprises regular conversations between the participant and the contact person during the qualification programme, where any problems may be discussed and resolved, and where any undocumented absenteeism can be followed up on the personal level. This does *not* mean checking up on the participants' own documentation of absence, as practised in at least one municipality. Nor does this mean that the contact person assumes responsibility for the participant's qualification programme and general life situation. In such cases the result may be that participants grow dependent on the contact person and therefore are less well prepared for coping on their own. To prevent close follow-up from becoming a distorted image of the intention, it is thus important to not lose the balance between follow-up and invasion of privacy and between follow-up and taking over responsibility. Both violate one of the fundamental intentions behind the proposed introductory programme, to create a connection between the participant's own efforts and own life situation. Close follow-up should help to establish such a connection, not contribute to its removal.

Good follow-up is resource intensive. Some of the projects have a large number of participants per contact person. The consequence is often burned out and overworked employees and unsatisfactory follow-up.

Individual programme, user influence

A central idea behind user influence is that the qualification activity should be undertaken in collaboration between the participant and the project, not as an obligation forced on the participant. Participation in the design of individual qualification plans is an important element of user influence. All the projects report that they are drawing up individual qualification plans for the participants. However, only half of the participants are familiar with the fact that a separate action plan has been set up especially for them.

Based on samples we may conclude that the documents spoken of as qualification plans vary a great deal with regard to quality, not only from one project to another, but also within one and the same project.

Effect

The great variation in the design and use of individual qualification plans, not only among projects but also within each individual project (of a certain size), has made it very difficult to assess their effects. However, giving participants more responsibility for their own situation by allowing them to keep their own attendance records proves to increase the probability that participants will find employment.

We also find that the participants who have had a document (diploma, driving licence etc.) translated or approved during the project are more likely to find employment and pass a Norwegian language test. Needless to say, this may be related to the fact that such documents indicate that the participant has qualifications that are in demand in the labour market and that these qualifications can be documented, but this may also be an indication of sound work methods on the part of the project. One hypothesis is thus that the projects/project employees who try to find, translate and accredit participants' relevant documents, are operating a better qualification scheme than those who do not. This may also be an indication of good follow-up.²

Variations in implementation

It is our opinion that a qualification plan at a minimum must include the main objectives for the qualification, sub-goals for how to get there, time limits for the various aims, points in time for when to evaluate the plan, and clarification of who is responsible for implementing the various sub-goals. For the qualification plan to be an active instrument during the qualification, it must also at regular intervals be reviewed, enhanced, evaluated and reassessed.

Poor or imprecise guidelines for what an individual qualification plan should include have obviously been a problem for a number of the projects. The quality of the plans varies greatly from one project to another, but also within one and the same project. It is thus important to undertake skills development for all the employees, as well as ensuring that they all have approximately the same understanding of which work tasks must be given priority.

Many project employees have found it difficult to ensure that the participants themselves are actively taking part when the plan is drawn up. This applies in particular to participants with little schooling. However, we have also seen that participant involvement comes easier and faster if procedures are established for frequent revisions and evaluations of the plan. By basing revisions on participants taking an initiative themselves, or deciding that a natural turning point in the qualification programme has

² However, we have not used any transfer or accreditation of documents as an indicator of good follow-up in our analysis, as document processing actually depends on the participants having documents. Not everyone has such documents.

been reached, there is a very real risk that only the most resourceful participants can manage to have an active relationship to their own plan.

Full-day programme with work training/content requirements

Qualification activities for refugees and immigrants have often come under criticism for not being intensive enough. In particular, in some cases the Norwegian language instruction has been (and continues to be in many municipalities) stretched over extended periods of time, with few classes per week (Drøpping and Kavli 2001). To increase qualification intensity and thus improve progression and prevent passivity, full-day programmes have been planned for the pilot projects.

The effect of full-day programmes, work training and Norwegian language training

The projects have encountered major problems when it comes to arranging full-day programmes. Nor can we find any trend that suggests participants with full-day programmes have had better progression than others. This may be related to the fact that programme quality³ has varied widely. One of the reasons why some local authorities have spent more time than others on establishing full-day programmes may be that they set more rigid demands on *content* and *relevance* in the programme. The content of the qualification programme without a doubt impinges on the effect of the qualification. It is thus not quite obvious that full-day programmes, whose quality may vary, have greater impact on the integration career than programmes with a shorter school- and/or workweek, when the content has a higher quality.

Information regarding the content of individual qualification programmes is fairly incomplete from the pilot projects. We nevertheless find that there are at least a couple of unequivocal relationships between the content of the qualification programme and the integration career. The participants who have been in work training clearly exhibit a greater likelihood of finding employment. We also find, not very surprisingly, that the number of persons who have passed a Norwegian language test is higher among those who have had many Norwegian classes.

Variations in implementation

Some of the projects have used unsuitable work training. There are cases of work training that has had little relevance, neither for the participant's qualification plan nor for the opportunity to practice the Norwegian language, or even for gaining an insight into the rules of the game in Norwegian working life.

A number of the projects that have gained some success with finding relevant work training have benefited from close cooperation with *Aetat*. Others have established

³ "Programme quality" means that the individual components, such as Norwegian language instruction, work training and courses must have a certain standard as to instruction quality and teaching materials, and that these components must be an appropriate part of an individually adapted qualification plan. A course in the Norwegian language for seamstresses may thus mean poor quality of the qualification activity if the instructor cannot teach adequately and if the participant aims to become a tram driver.

relationships with persons with extensive networks in local working life, or used existing municipal programmes that have such networks.

The projects have largely interpreted "full-day programme with work training" to mean that the work training should continue for major parts of the qualification period. This may have had some restrictive effects on the individualization of the qualification programmes, and may also have rendered the work to find work training unnecessarily difficult.

Cooperation

The needs of recently arrived refugees and immigrants for qualification must basically be satisfied by the public programmes designed to serve the majority population. What this really means is that a number of agencies must cooperate if recent arrivals are to receive a unified and meaningful qualification programme. *Aetat* and the adult education programme are two of the most central cooperation partners for the pilot projects.

The effect of good cooperation

We find that in those municipalities where the cooperation between the project and *Aetat* is felt to be good by both parties, the refugees find employment more speedily. In these municipalities a larger proportion of participants also receive offers for work training, which in turn has a positive impact on their opportunities for finding employment. However, we do not find any effect of good cooperation with adult education with respect to the progression of the Norwegian language skills for refugees. On the other hand, we find that in those projects with some financial freedom to act, the Norwegian language skills of participants progress better. A number of these projects have used their financial freedom to buy additional instruction in the Norwegian language. One possible interpretation of this finding is thus that the projects resolve cooperation problems by bypassing their partner and purchasing services elsewhere, alternatively that the project covers additional expenses the adult education centre incurs from satisfying special wishes of the project.

Variations in implementation

Many of the projects feel that their cooperation with *Aetat* is not very good, and have encountered major problems finding relevant work training for everyone. A number of the projects have spent a great deal of time and resources on establishing a formalized cooperation agreement with *Aetat*. Some municipalities had such agreements initially, but experiences vary. It may be difficult to reach agreements that are sufficiently specific. The projects that have found most success in cooperating with *Aetat* have found a good "partner" inside *Aetat* who has been positive to the project's work methods. If this person moves on, there may be problems, and the cooperation agreement is not sufficiently specific to ensure that the cooperation can be continued in the same manner as previously.

A frequent source of disagreement between *Aetat* and the project or municipality is the decision on *when* during an individual participant's qualification programme *Aetat*

should step in with expertise and funding of work training. The disagreement often stems from the diffuse boundaries between language instruction, which is the responsibility of the local authorities, and work training, which comes under *Aetat*. Because the pilot projects aim to offer full-day qualification as quickly as possible, the dividing line between language training and work training may often be unclear.

Some projects have included both *Aetat* and adult education in so-called interdisciplinary teams, thus ensuring that *Aetat's* assessment of when the individual participant is ready for their programme is more flexible than it would have been if based only on language tests. Another solution is to aim for at least two work-training placements. The first one may have language training as its defined goal, while the other aims for work training and possibly the transition to regular employment. This solution is being tested in some municipalities. *Aetat* is then not involved in the language-training workplaces. The adult education programme is responsible for following up the students who are practising the Norwegian language, and for helping to bring the experiences gained by the students back to the classroom. The projects that have succeeded with this have succeeded in finding language-practice work places for all the participants on the same days of the week, thus allowing the instructors time for follow-up. Hence the students may also have a joint instruction programme on the days they spend at school. In those projects where block placement has not been feasible, there have been in part strong conflicts between the adult-education programme and the project, primarily because the educators have objected to the fact that students with work training fall behind the pace of others in the curriculum. Cooperation problems with the adult education programme have also stemmed from differences in opinion with respect to methods in the qualification activities, not least when it comes to assessing when participants are able to benefit from language and work training.

It is furthermore worth noting that the lack of offers from the adult education programme is not necessarily the result of the lack of will. The reimbursement schemes for adult education in some cases make it difficult for them to offer instruction that is extensive and differentiated enough. However, as mentioned above, a number of the local authorities have managed to come a long way in overcoming these problems.

Social network building and NGOs

There are few or no projects that fail to attempt to strengthen the social networks of participants on any level, either by providing regular leisure activities, funding such activities or by establishing special schemes, for example, big-brother/big-sister schemes or contact families. A common feature here is that giving priority to social network building is dependent on the other elements of the project functioning more or less well. The building of networks has not been among the measures given the highest priority. Moreover, many participants have actually declined offers for big-brother schemes. Further studies are required to establish the causes for this, and whether, for example, more active promotion of the advantages of this scheme would generate more interest in it.

The effect of measures

There are many ways of strengthening the social networks of refugees. We have studied the effect of organizing big-brother schemes or special leisure activities for participants, and the importance of actively promoting regular leisure activities in the municipality. In projects where the social networks of refugees have been given priority in this way, participants have often strengthened their social networks (measured in terms of an increased number of organization memberships) than in projects with no such priority. We nevertheless find no statistically clear effect on the probability of being employed or for having improved one's Norwegian language skills. This may be related to the fact that it is methodologically difficult to trace effects when so few have adopted the scheme, and that the time horizon of our study is too brief for us to measure effects that will only be visible after a longer period of time.

On the use of NGOs or individuals

The Government recommends that all municipalities that settle refugees should aim to establish big-brother schemes (Report to the Norwegian Parliament no. 17, 2000–2001), precisely to make it easier for them to establish a social network where they live. It is also important to develop good models for this activity, and to acquire more knowledge about both the effects it has and how refugees and big brothers perceive the scheme and its structure.

5 The importance of individual characteristics

In addition to the effects on the integration of refugees we find in the measures for the qualification projects, we also see substantial effects from individual characteristics of participants, particularly their education levels and gender. The goal of a good introductory programme is that it should be adapted to the individual. Thus the qualification programme should be adjusted to the needs of each participant so that those with high education as well as those with little education will be offered programmes they can benefit from.

Education levels

Those with high education clearly find it easier to learn the Norwegian language than those with less education. However, when it comes to finding employment, those with medium educations manage best. This may be because persons with education on the college or university level seek jobs that for various reasons are difficult for refugees to obtain. Persons with a high level of education usually prefer jobs that set high demands on Norwegian language skills and which require accreditation of their training. Moreover, it may be that refugees more often suffer from prejudices on the part of Norwegian employers when they seek employment outside the sectors where Norwegians are now accustomed to encountering immigrants.

It may be reasonable to expect that refugees who aim to find highly qualified employment spend more time on finding it than other refugees, as acquiring adequate Norwegian language skills takes time. Accreditation of education may also take time. (A related problem is that their education may often not be recognized, with the motivation problems this causes.) Hence it is not necessarily a sign of a lack of a clear goal that participants with high education find employment less than those with medium education *during the period we have studied*. Similarly it is not very realistic that participants with very little or no education should find employment just as quickly as those with more education. Some of the participants have been part of the projects for very brief periods of time, and to draw any conclusions regarding goal attainment in the longer term, we need to follow up participants over many years.

It is not very realistic to believe that introductory programmes will be able to eliminate the differences between participants with different education backgrounds. There is nevertheless reason to emphasize the special challenges project employees encounter when attempting to find good programmes for those with the least as well as those with the most education. Teaching illiterates places great demands on teachers, who must be creative both when it comes to their teaching skills and their teaching materials (largely developed by each teacher). This is a field where the need for the exchange of experience and knowledge accumulation is great. Even those with high education represent special challenges for the project employees, such as finding qualification programmes and job offers that are perceived as meaningful, and thus helping to prevent the sense of frustration that may develop due to the lack of accreditation schemes and rigid regulations. This could have the end result of stopping participants in their qualification progress.

Gender

Needless to say, the introductory programmes are for both men and women. Some of the projects have nevertheless found special challenges when it comes to the inclusion of women. Income schemes that reward participation by both spouses have been perceived as useful in the effort to get women to join. Overall, 40% of participants with qualification records are women. In view of the fact that during the final half of the 1990s there was an equal distribution of men and women in the refugee population, this gives a slight under-representation of women in the pilot projects. The variation from one project to the next is also great. Only ten percent of participants were women in one of the projects.

We find small variations among men and women who are *participants* in the projects, both with respect to the programmes they have been offered through pilot project participation, and in relation to gaining employment in the labour market. This is a very promising finding, not least considering the major differences in paid employment that we find among men and women in the overall refugee population.

From some quarters it has been asserted that using financial penalties to increase the participation in working life among ethnic minority women is unethical because this does not consider how attitudes on paid employment for women are different in many

cultures. However, we cannot see that the Norwegian authorities should have to contribute financially to maintaining attitudes that are perceived as the suppression of women in Norway. Another aspect is that the Norwegian language skills of mothers is one of the few factors that positively impact the school performance of ethnic minority children (Bakken and Krangle 1998:393). Hence, ensuring that women take part in Norwegian language training and working life (also as an arena for developing Norwegian language skills) is essential to prevent the living-condition problems experienced refugees from being inherited by the next generation.

6 Five bottlenecks

An important finding of our evaluation is that the work methods that were to be tested by the pilot projects have only been carried out to a limited extent. This even applies to completely basic elements of the pilot projects, such as alternative income provision and full-day programmes. Nor is the connection between programme participation and the payment of financial benefits clear in all the municipalities. In a number of municipalities cooperation between the projects, the adult education programme and *Aetat* has been demanding and time-consuming, and only a few of the projects have received the offers they wanted from these cooperation partners. In particular, many projects have struggled to find a sufficient number of adequate work training places.

In public policies the study of the implementation – or perhaps the lack of implementation – of public measures is a special and comprehensive research field. This research field is based on the recognition that the road from (political) decisions to (practical) action is full of pitfalls, and that the outcome of a decision may thus frequently deviate from what was originally planned.⁴ The experiences from the 16 pilot projects that centrally defined measures have not always been easy to realize in practice are thus in no way unique. However, it is also essential to attempt to specify what the impediments are, not least to determine where the responsibility lies for the various problems, and to determine who is next in line to do something about them.

1. Legal basis

At the commencement of the project it was still not clear what the alternatives were for so-called alternative income provision for project participants. This has had several consequences. First, many projects spent a great deal of time determining an income provision that could serve as an alternative to social benefits, and were thus delayed during the launch phase. Second, in spite of their efforts, many of the projects ended up with schemes that deviated negligibly from regular social benefits. The legal committee submitted its work and a proposal for an introductory act in August 2001. This proposal aims to open for an alternative income provision. If this proposed bill is adopted, this

⁴ See for example Pressman and Wildavsky 1973 and Kjellberg and Reitan 1995.

bottleneck will be relegated to a secondary position in the further activities with projects on introductory programmes for recently arrived refugees.

2. Cooperation problems

The qualification programmes for recently arrived refugees and immigrants in Norway have traditionally been organized as an integrated part of the programmes offered to the majority population. The intention is basically to satisfy the needs of refugees and immigrants using the same public agencies that serve the majority population. The consequence is extensive division of work between various local authority and state agencies. Cooperation problems and disagreements on areas of responsibility between the agencies have led to the fragmentation of responsibilities, and in far too many cases this has resulted in refugees being offered poor qualification programmes. This problem has been pinpointed by a number of evaluations over the last 20 years. The pilot projects were told to give priority to the establishment of formal cooperation with *Aetat* precisely to find a way around this. It has nevertheless proved to be insufficient to order agencies to cooperate. Cooperation continues to be largely dependent on individuals in the various agencies reaching agreement. Thus the pilot projects have not resolved the cooperation problems. Rather we have once again been shown how difficult it is to reach agreement on the roles to be played by the various agencies.

It has also been difficult to draw up joint guidelines for the roles to be played by *Aetat* in the introductory programmes. A working group convened by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in August 2000 was given the task of "examining and proposing criteria for the assessment of when participants in basic qualification, including Norwegian language training, should start with labour market measures aimed at giving them entrance to the regular labour market." However, the working group concludes that objective criteria for this are not compatible with individual adaptation (Report from the working group 2001). The report deals with the participation of both adult education and *Aetat* in qualification activities, but does not deal with how to tackle the lingering disagreements between the agencies.

3. Lacking programmes and capacity problems

The so-called measures fan, i.e. the scope of qualification programmes that can be offered to individual refugees, will differ from one municipality to the next. In particular, small municipalities will lack such programme elements as primary school for adults. The resources expended on qualification activities will also vary according to the local authority's economy and local political priorities. Therefore the number of participants a contact person is responsible for will vary significantly, and hence also the opportunities for thorough follow-up. Capacity problems are also substantial in adult education. For a number of years the local authorities have argued, through the Norwegian Association of Local Authorities and other forums, that the subsidy rates for Norwegian language instruction are inadequate (Steen-Olsen 2000: Appendix 6). The state authorities argue that what is not covered by the subsidy funding must be taken

from the integration subsidies. (Thus disagreement on funding has consequences for the implementation of the introductory programme.) Refugees are also vying for limited resources at *Aetat*. Some project managers also mention problems due to the lack of health schemes for the participants.

4. Lack of expertise

Integrating non-western refugees and immigrants into the Norwegian labour market is not easy. The pilot projects have moreover encountered major difficulties in connection with unclear legal empowerment of work methods and the establishment of new work methods. The projects have been followed up by the Integration Section of the Directorate of Immigration, both through visits to various municipalities and through network meetings, but many have nevertheless been struggling. This particularly applies to new employees and inexperienced project managers, but also to contact persons who through their roles need to maintain expertise and an overview of very many aspects of the participants' needs. A lack of expertise on a number of levels has on many occasions worked as an impediment to the design and implementation of new work methods.

5. Ethical considerations

We have found great variations as to how project managers, employees and the cooperating agencies have implemented the threat of reduced benefits when absenteeism has reached unacceptable levels. While some projects employ a rigid and consistent application of the provisions and deductions that are allowed, others are more random in their approach, with variations and changing assessments. Three projects do not make deductions at all. One possible reason for these variations may be the ethical considerations of the employees. If those who are responsible for formulating the regulations, signing attendance lists or implementing deductions do not feel that this is a legitimate measure to apply during the qualification programme, there is a greater probability that work methods will be inconsistent and unsystematic than in cases where this measure is perceived as legitimate.

7 Ethical and legal implications

The new methods in integration activities have two major ethical implications. First, good and efficient methods in integration activities will contribute to preventing refugees from falling into passive and unhealthy careers as long-term welfare clients. Hence, these methods may help alleviate a situation which is unfortunate both ethically and in other ways. On the other hand, there is reason to bear in mind that refugees are in a very vulnerable situation psychologically, economically and juridical. Many of them are seriously traumatized. In addition, life in Norway can be challenging. They are not Norwegian nationals, they have often been settled in parts of Norway against their own

wishes (Djuve and Kavli 2000), they are dependent on public welfare schemes, and they may be subjected to financial penalties if they do not participate in qualification programmes. Furthermore, they have little knowledge about the Norwegian system and their rights, and they basically do not speak the Norwegian language.

This is a situation where the distribution of power is extremely imbalanced, making it vital that power is not abused. We have found examples that in our opinion border on such abuse. Some projects force participants into signing "contracts" that only lay down obligations for the participants, not for the local authorities. One local authority throws participants out of the project if they are on sick leave for more than 14 days. A third local authority rejects participants' self-certified sick leave if they have been observed "out on the town" the evening before they became sick. A fourth local authority "forces" participants to take part in work training that does not contribute to language development, or contact with regular working life, nor does it provide instruction in a profession that is relevant for the refugee's qualification plan. Abuse may thus be connected to the regulations and to how the project employees interpret and implement them.

The large variations in the content and quality of the qualification programmes among municipalities and within one and the same municipality also lead to great differences in the way refugees with similar needs are treated. This undermines the due process of law for refugees, as the settlement municipality has a high degree of impact on the quality of the qualification programme. Variations within one municipality also make it difficult to legitimize the use of penalties when other refugees in the same municipality receive social benefits with requirements for participation in qualification programmes.

8 Transfer value

Measures such as one contact point, close follow-up, user cooperation, alternative income provision, work training, full-day programmes, collaboration with other involved agencies and network building may basically be used by any municipality (so far with some restrictions as to alternative income provisions). As we have seen, however, it has proved to be difficult to implement the methods, even with substantial resources for follow-up from the Directorate of Immigration. It is highly probable that other local authorities will encounter the same bottlenecks that have been pinpointed in Section 7.4 above. The project municipalities were moreover selected on the basis of applications. There is reason to believe that many of the project municipalities had a better position for implementing the measures when launching the projects than the average Norwegian municipality. The problems concerning implementation may thus also be prevalent in the other Norwegian municipalities. Hopefully, it will be possible to learn from the work now being carried out by the pilot projects.

We thus believe that the measures that have been tested in the pilot project period may have substantial transfer value for other municipalities, particularly if the major bottlenecks that have been found are cleared away. On the other hand, it may be that

continuing the large variation of programmes and work methods may have consequences for the stability of refugee residence. Those who are unhappy with inadequate programmes may gravitate toward municipalities with good qualification programmes, while refugees who have little motivation for participating in qualification programmes might want to leave municipalities that employ penalties.

9 What is needed to improve the integration activities?

After considerable effort has now been made by the 16 project municipalities, the Integration Section of the Directorate of Immigration and Fafo, in its evaluation, it will be interesting to draw some conclusions on how the findings may be applied to improve the qualification activities. We would therefore like to conclude by proposing six measures. The measures in part focus on continuing and distributing the good work models that have emerged. However, not all the problems encountered by the projects can be solved simply by new measures and work methods. We shall therefore also suggest measures that may contribute to resolving these problems. These proposals are, needless to say, a result of the research presented above, but in themselves they are not research findings in a strict sense.⁵

1. Get others to use the methods that work

The projects with comprehensive introductory programmes for newly arrived refugees and immigrants have brought to light a great deal of knowledge on what works positively for the integration of these groups in Norwegian working and community life. A major and important challenge awaits the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Directorate of Immigration in spreading this knowledge, and motivating/helping the local authorities to use it.

2. Method development and evaluation

There is always a potential for developing knowledge on how to operate good integration activities. Hence it continues to be important to have ongoing evaluation and distribution of findings. Good work methods do not arise in directorates or research institutions, but rather in the municipalities working directly with refugees. Thus evaluation and knowledge distribution are vital in this area.

3. Development of expertise

The evaluation has shown that even with requirements stipulating what a programme should contain and regular follow-up from the Directorate of Immigration, it has not been an easy task to translate the measures into practice. Some of the problems have

⁵ This is because the effect of the proposals has not been evaluated.

stemmed from vague guidelines from the central authorities. There have also been many examples of the pressing need to improve the level of expertise, both of municipalities in general and contact persons in particular. On the municipal level the authorities need to have better knowledge of what measures are effective for qualification and integration activities. For some contact persons specific training in good work methods is important. Drawing up an individual qualification plan of good quality in genuine collaboration with the participant is one example of a task we have found that contact persons are not always able to solve without special training. Interpreting and practising regulations governing acceptable and unacceptable absenteeism and quality requirements for work training are other examples. Ethically appropriate and respectful treatment of refugees should also be included in the development of further expertise.

4. Joint guidelines and minimum standards for all local authorities and for all newly arrived refugees

The wide variation in the interpretation and implementation of measures from one municipality to the next and differential treatment of recent arrivals within one and the same municipality has some negative consequences. The quality of the qualification activities in some municipalities is less than it could have been. The guidelines are also unclear, for example when it comes to the application of financial penalties, and the subsequent random use of measures represents a threat against the due process of law for refugees. Clearer national guidelines and minimum standards may ensure that all the municipalities adopt work methods that with certainty may facilitate the integration process for recently arrived refugees. The risk of variation and randomness from one municipality to the next and within one and the same municipality will be reduced.

Regulations determining what is acceptable and what is unacceptable absenteeism are an example of an element that could better be designed centrally, and another is minimum requirements for the content of individual qualification plans. It is also essential not to impede new good ideas and work methods. The discussion on elements that lend themselves to centrally defined standards must therefore be thorough so that the consequence will not be stagnation in the development of good work methods.

Bearing in mind today's settlement regime, an obvious problem may be that centrally defined and obligatory minimum standards for refugee activities could lead to even greater problems inducing local authorities to settle refugees. The problems that are related to the fact that the local authorities themselves determine whether or not they wish to settle refugees must therefore be solved before introducing state requirements for the content of municipal refugee activities. It is outside the mandate of this report to adopt a stance on the scope of municipal autonomy. We merely state that some aspects of this autonomy may have very negative consequences for the integration of refugees.

5. Goodbye to sector responsibilities

We have found that the pilot projects have not resolved the cooperation problems between the various agencies that share the responsibilities for the qualification activities. We believe that these problems cannot be solved if the agency with the overarching responsibility for the integration activities is not given the authority to

control the application of resources. It goes without saying that one agency cannot meddle in the internal affairs of another agency. Conversely the agency in charge must be allowed to choose whether to produce corresponding services itself or to buy them from others, if agreement cannot be reached with the adult education programme and *Aetat* regarding their contributions to the qualification activities. Thus the agency in charge must be allowed to re-allocate funds that otherwise would have been spent by the adult education programme or *Aetat*.

It is hardly likely that one and the same agency would be able to produce all the services that are part of the qualification activities alone. Therefore good cooperation among the various service providers will continue to be of great importance. By giving the responsible agency the authority and funding to bypass an uncooperative partner, the concern that disagreement will paralyse the progress of the qualification activities will be eliminated. Moreover, time which currently is spent on the sometimes arduous task of cooperation relations can be better use in other contexts.

There are many options when it comes to which agency should have the main responsibility. Candidates include municipal refugee offices, the adult education programme, *Aetat* or another state agency. Refugee activities may also be assigned to NGOs. We believe that the most important element is not necessarily where the responsibility is placed but rather that it is placed in one place, and that this agency or organization is given the necessary authority and funding to handle the responsibilities.

6. Reporting obligations and quality assurance

As we have seen, the quality of the qualification programme varies greatly. At the same time the relationship of power between newly arrived refugees and immigrants on the one hand and the public assistance agencies on the other is extremely asymmetrical. Obligatory participation in qualification programmes makes it very important to ensure the rights of refugees, for example through setting rigid requirements on the quality of the qualification programme and on the design and implementation of provisions for the use of penalties.

Today the responsibility for quality assurance of municipal refugee activities rests on those producing the programme, i.e. the local authorities themselves. In some cases this functions excellently, while in other cases it is not a very good solution. Norway currently allocates NOK 2.15 billion annually for integration subsidies with no requirements placed on the local authorities to report on what the funds are used for or the results that are attained. It is our belief that it would have been reasonable to request the local authorities to report on the content and results of their qualification activities. Such reports would necessitate a state quality assurance programme. The Directorate of Immigration would be a natural choice as the agency to undertake this quality assurance. The current scheme operated by the Directorate of Immigration involving visits to municipalities according to a rota system might supplement the self-reporting system. Needless to say, it is essential that the demand for reports does not grow so comprehensive that it will steal too many resources from the qualification activities.

8 Conclusion

The evaluation has shown that the new methods in the qualification activities represent a step on the way to a more responsible qualification policy, in the sense of effectively providing participants with relevant competence, while the assistance system does not relieve the participants of their responsibility for their own life situation. On the other hand, a number of these methods have proven to be demanding and in part impossible to carry out in some municipalities. This is in part due to the lack of expertise in some municipalities, but is perhaps even more due to the framework conditions of the current qualification programmes, cooperation relations between the involved agencies and the financial situation of the municipalities. The content and quality of the programmes offered to newly arrived refugees thus depend to a large degree on the place of residence.

Even though the methods that have been tested appear to be efficient in themselves, the variation in the quality of the programmes is a signal of the pressing need for quality assurance. This is important, not least because obligatory participation in introductory programmes of widely varying quality is ethically problematic. If the programmes have a poor quality, and it is virtually impossible to withdraw from them in practice, the participants will feel that they are demeaning, and this constitutes a qualification policy that is not very responsible.