



English summary  
of Fafo-rapport 2023:04

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Information for the  
immigrant population in  
times of crisis  
Interim report 1

# Information for the immigrant population in times of crisis Interim report 1

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Evaluation of extraordinary grant for voluntary organisations to implement information measures aimed at the immigrant population in 2020 and 2021

The COVID19 pandemic hit some parts of the immigrant population in Norway harder than the rest of the population, and the signs could be seen at an early stage. Questions were asked about whether information from the authorities about COVID19 and infection prevention was reaching the entire population. In 2020 and 2021, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) therefore announced an extraordinary grant for voluntary organisations to implement information measures aimed at the immigrant population. The aim was to provide information to immigrant groups who, for various reasons, could not be reached through existing channels.

This report evaluates the grant scheme. It is the first of three interim reports in a project about the role and work of the voluntary sector in providing information to the immigrant population during the pandemic. The analyses results are based on six data sources: 1) Registry data on infection rates in various country groups, 2) Focus group interviews with immigrants who had contact with voluntary organisations during the pandemic, 3) A case study of five selected organisations that received the grant, 4) A review of applications and reports from all grant recipients, 5) A survey sent to all organisations that received the grant, and 6) Semi-structured interviews with representatives from the authorities.

The evaluation shows that the grant scheme was broadbased in that various types of voluntary organisations received support. We distinguish between mainstream organisations, general minority organisations and specific minority organisations. The grant scheme especially mobilised minority organisations to contribute to the effort to disseminate information about COVID19. The organisations used different communication channels and tools, and the information was communicated in various languages. There are strong indications that the grant scheme helped reach target groups that could not be reached through other channels. The close contact between the minority organisations and the target groups seems to have played a crucial role in ensuring the success of the measure.

The grant scheme also stimulated the dialogue between the authorities and in particular smaller organisations. Admittedly, there is little evidence to suggest that the organisations had a direct impact on policy during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, they felt that their work helped lay a solid foundation for further cooperation with the authorities, including on crisis preparedness.

The organisations themselves are generally satisfied with their own results, and they believe that the grant scheme has better equipped them to provide their target groups with information related to COVID19. Most of the organisations' work was based on information from the authorities. However, it is apparent that the organisations also produced their own translations and tailored the information. It is not possible to identify the exact information that was provided to the recipients.

In light of the ongoing crisis when the grant scheme was introduced, the grant and the mobilisation of volunteers appear to be a quick, flexible and effective strategy for providing information to parts of the population that were difficult to reach. Both IMDi and the grant recipients adapted quickly to the constantly changing chaotic situation. The grant scheme strengthened the voluntary sector's work during the pandemic and the organisations are generally satisfied with the followup from IMDi in connection with the grant.

However, the analysis also shows that the decision to give the voluntary sector such a large responsibility for information dissemination is problematic from an overall preparedness perspective. An information strategy that is based on extraordinary grants for the voluntary sector is weak, lacks continuity and offers limited opportunity for the authorities to have overall control and carry out quality assurance. This is due to the democratic principles on how public authorities should relate the civil society. Voluntary work in organizations is carried out independently and should not be controlled. However, the organisations' observations of poorly translated and tailored material from public authorities and the work organisations undertook to compensate for this, show that the authorities could have taken a clearer and more overarching approach to ensuring plain language and good translations. This would have been a way to have more control over the kind of message that was conveyed through the voluntary sector.

There is also scope to engage with and listen to the voluntary sector to a greater extent, with a view to ensuring a high standard in terms of clarity, simplicity and choice of words and terms in information and translations from the authorities.

In retrospect, the grant scheme appears to be a successful strategy for quickly ensuring that all immigrants receive the necessary information. The voluntary organisations had networks and knowledge of how to communicate with parts of the population that were difficult to reach through established channels. However, the evaluation raises some fundamental questions about how the voluntary sector in its role as a mediator of information to the immigrant population can and should form part of the authorities' overall crisis preparedness strategy.