



English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2023:08

Career guidance for recently arrived refugees and immigrants

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Since 2021, recently arrived refugees in Norway have, as a general rule, had the right and duty to participate in career guidance. Although refugees and immigrants previously had the right to seek career guidance in the same way as the rest of the population, this has now been given a formal place in the Government's integration policy instruments. How does the mandatory career guidance for new refugees work, and what could be improved?

Fafo was commissioned to investigate this by the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills. The study is based on a combination of methods. Fafo has conducted qualitative interviews with 14 members of staff at county authority career centres, nine programme advisers and nine participants who have received career guidance. The Directorate also asked career centre managers and career guidance counsellors to complete a questionnaire. In addition, Fafo carried out a knowledge review, primarily based on scientific publications between 2016 and 2022. We summarise our main findings below.

The number of recently arrived refugees who are entitled to receive career guidance has increased sharply as a result of it becoming a mandatory part of the Integration Act and the large influx of refugees from Ukraine. This has increased the pressure on the resources available to the county authority career centres.

We find considerable variation in terms of where the mandatory career guidance takes place, how much time is spent on implementation, preparations and follow-up work, and who participates in the career guidance sessions. Consequently, the service provided for refugees varies in scope, and probably also in quality.

In the preparatory work for the Integration Act, the cost estimation of the scope of career guidance includes 1.5 hours of individual guidance and 1.5 hours of group guidance. This includes preliminary and follow-up work, which results in most career centres not having the resources to carry out more than one guidance session per participant. Most prioritise individual guidance over group sessions for recently arrived refugees with the right and duty to participate in career guidance. Many want the resources to carry out more career guidance sessions. One of the reasons for this, is that much of the mandatory guidance involves obtaining information about the participant and providing information about the Norwegian education system and labour market. This leaves little time to explore the refugee's wishes for the future. Some career centres have found a way to hold two or more meetings and have positive experiences with this.

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Good communication and a clear division of roles between career centres and the local authorities seem to be prerequisites for a well-functioning career guidance service. The model for mapping information about the refugees' competence prior to receiving career guidance is not optimal. Most career centres therefore set up meetings before the career guidance session so that the programme adviser can pass on information about the participant. Many of the programme advisers also participate in the career guidance sessions. Most of the career centre staff we have interviewed have a positive view of the programme adviser's presence at career guidance sessions. However, there are some centres where this is not common practice because the career centre wants to maintain an independent role. At most career centres, cooperation with the local authority regarding the individual participant ceases after the career guidance is complete. Some informants describe good cooperation between programme advisers and the career centre, while others have experienced disagreements about recommendations relating to what is possible within the framework of the Integration Act.

Career counsellors and their municipal partners point out the need to enhance competence. Career counsellors need, inter alia, expertise on the Integration Act and on communication with refugees. Programme advisers and others who will be working with the career guidance counsellors need to learn about the contribution that career guidance can make.

Among the refugees we have interviewed, opinions about the career guidance were divided. Some described how it had given them hope and support in the pursuit of their goals. Others did not feel that they had gained anything from the career guidance other than the information and advice they had also received from programme advisers, teachers or school counsellors. Some of the refugees describe a gap between the career guidance and what can actually be achieved within the framework of the introduction programme.

Among our informants, both in the municipalities and at the county authority career centres, there was broad agreement that three changes could improve the mandatory career guidance: 1) The purpose of the career guidance should be clarified, so that the scheme better utilises career guidance counsellors' specialist skills, instead of aiming for recommendations before the introduction programme starts; 2) The timing of the career guidance is felt to be too early for many, and should be more tailored to the individual refugee's life situation and needs; 3) The career guidance should be part of a long-term process rather than being limited to one or a few individual conversations at the start of the introduction programme.