

Summary

This report examines two key legislative changes in the introductory program: the introduction of a short introduction program for participants with completed secondary education and the introduction of temporary legislative changes due to high arrival numbers of displaced persons from Ukraine. The study is based on analyses of register data (Norwegian Introduction Register), surveys sent to the heads of introductory programs and schools for adult education in all Norwegian municipalities, and qualitative fieldwork in 12 municipalities – four of which were visited/interviewed several times between 2021 and 2023.

What is a short introduction program?

The Integration Act was introduced in 2021, aiming for participants in the introductory program to receive a program more tailored to their needs; both the type of measures and time in the program were to be adapted to each participant's need for qualification, considering their prior competencies and age. Additionally, the Integration Act aims to facilitate more participants obtaining formal qualifications through the introductory program, enhancing their opportunities to participate in various societal arenas, thereby generally supporting integration, and notably, helping them secure a stable and long-term connection to the workforce.

Participants who have completed secondary education should, according to the Integration Act, have 3–6 months in the introductory program, with the possibility of up to a 6-month extension. Completed secondary education refers to individuals who meet the educational requirements to enter universities (according to the GSU list). However, exceptions are made for participants with education from Ukraine, who are considered to have secondary-level education if they have only completed secondary education in Ukraine, even though this does not suffice for university studies according to the GSU list. Secondary education in Ukraine typically lasts for 11 years, compared to 13 years in Norway.

The right to Norwegian language training is independent of the right to participate in the introductory program, and participants with a short introduction program often have the right to Norwegian language training beyond the time they are in the introductory program. Individuals with secondary education level or higher are entitled to 18 months of Norwegian language training or until they reach their Norwegian language goal (B1/B2). Participants with temporary collective protection only have the right to 12 months of Norwegian language training but can receive an additional 6 months if the municipality has the capacity to offer this.

What are the temporary legislative changes?

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Norway chose to settle refugees from Ukraine with temporary collective protection in the municipalities and provided integration grants to cover, among other things, Norwegian language training and the

introductory program. To accommodate a high number of refugees, however, temporary adjustments were made to the legislation.

Key changes for participants with temporary collective protection (MKB) include:

- Participants with MKB have the right, but not the obligation, to an introductory program.
- Municipalities are obligated to offer an introductory program to participants with MKB, but the program does not need to be full-time.
- Participants with MKB are entitled to only 12 months of Norwegian language training but can receive an additional 6 months if the municipality has the capacity.
- Participants with MKB do not have the right or obligation to training in social studies and life skills, but municipalities are still encouraged to offer this if they have the capacity.
- Participants with MKB can enter the workforce.

However, the temporary law does not exempt from the overarching goal of the Integration Act to work towards ensuring participants in the introductory program gain a stable attachment to labour markets, and the goal for learning the Norwegian language remains the same as for other participants with a short introduction program.

Time in Program and entry to labour market

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of participants receiving a short introduction program from 2021 to 2024. In 2021, 14 percent of the participants in the introductory program had a short introduction program; by 2023, this figure had almost sextupled to 83 percent. The increase was primarily due to high numbers of arrivals from Ukraine, although there was also a marked increase among those following the introductory program under ordinary law. In 2021, 14 percent of participants not from Ukraine had a short introduction program, compared to 28 percent in 2023.

The vast majority (82%) of participants who completed a short introduction program before July 2023 had received 6 months or more in the program. Those who finished before 6 months generally did so because they had moved out of the country or municipality or because they had found employment.

Just over a third (35%) of participants with a short introduction program only receive 6 months in the program without an extension. The aim for the introductory program for participants with a short introduction program is to qualify them for either employment or higher education. Of those who exit the program after 6 months, only 22 percent are registered with a transition to employment or education.¹

Thirteen percent of participants are registered with a maximum program duration of 12 months, and this group has a higher proportion registered with a transition to

¹ Here we are only looking at those who can be assumed to be part of the workforce. This means those who have not moved, are not at home with children under one year old and are not registered as having quit due to health challenges.

employment or education than those who have 6 months in the program (39 percent versus 22 percent).

The group of participants that gets program time extended beyond 6 months, but still does not go the full 12 months in the program has the highest achievement rate (52% registered with a transition to employment or education). This group constitutes one third (34%) of the participants.

There is a significant group that exits the introductory program before they have had the maximum program duration of 12 months, even though they do not proceed to either employment or education. Looking solely at participants who have not secured a job or education after completing a short introduction program², only 16 percent have received the full 12 months in the program.

We find great variation in the municipalities' practice for extending the program for participants with a short introduction program. Nationality and municipality of settlement appear to have a greater impact on who gets an extension than the individual's needs for qualification. In 27 percent of the municipalities, no participants have received an extension beyond 6 months. Among those who receive the maximum time for a short introduction program, there is a clear majority of participants who follow the introductory program under ordinary law. Fifty-seven percent of participants with short introduction program from countries other than Ukraine receive 12 months in the program, compared to only 5 percent of participants from Ukraine.

There is also a significant difference between municipalities in the proportion of participants who move on to employment or education. Municipalities with high rates of participants moving on to employment or education are characterized by having established a well-functioning introduction program and offering more hours of training per participant than municipalities with a lower share who transfer to work or education after the program. Here, the number of hours of Norwegian language training seems to be particularly important.

Norwegian Language Training Within and After the Introductory Program

With the introduction of a short introduction program, the lawmakers aimed to facilitate for those who are predisposed to learn Norwegian quickly should receive language training adapted to this. In the municipalities we have visited, there has been a significant restructuring of Norwegian language training in this period, from minimal accommodation for this group in 2021 to a primary focus on those expected to learn quickly by 2023. Changes in the composition of the participant group, along with high arrival numbers from Ukraine, likely accelerated this restructuring. However, more rapid progression in training does not imply that municipalities have improved in individual adaptation to participants' needs. There is still a tendency for municipalities to adjust the training to the largest participant groups. In 2021, participants with a short introduction program were often frustrated by the slow pace of instruction, but in 2023, we met participants

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in several municipalities who did not benefit from the instruction because it progressed too quickly.

In the Integration Act there is an expectation that participants will have the opportunity to continue learning Norwegian after completing the introduction program, but far from all municipalities facilitate this for participants who move into employment after the program. Less than one-third of municipalities offer Norwegian language training in the evenings or on weekends. Adult education programs with many students more often have classes in the evenings and weekends compared to those with fewer students, but even among adult educations with more than 200 participants, only two-thirds offer evening classes.

With the Integration Act, the duty of municipalities to offer Norwegian language training was changed from a set number of hours to an obligation to facilitate participants reaching their Norwegian language goals. These goals are set based on prior education and their objectives of the introductory program. We find that municipalities rarely know how large a proportion of participants reach their Norwegian language goals. None of the municipalities we contacted about this had available data or estimates on how many actually reach this goal. There is also no national statistics on the proportion that reaches the Norwegian language goal. The absence of such data makes it challenging to monitor whether participants receive the training they are entitled to.

Limited Individual Adaptation of Program Content and Lack of Work Orientation

92 percent of participants with a short introduction program have employment as their goal for the introductory program, and by law, should have work-oriented elements as part of the introductory program. However, only 58 percent have received at least one work-oriented element. Municipalities work hard to establish work practice, but many participants who need work practice and do not speak Norwegian well can be challenging to place.

Beyond mandatory elements, participants with a short introduction program receive relatively little other program content, and 37 percent of participants with temporary collective protection receive either only Norwegian language training or Norwegian and work practice. Participants following the introductory program under ordinary law also have the right and obligation to training in social studies and life skills and thus often (but not always) receive more varied program content. Many municipalities also offer training in either social studies or life skills to participants with temporary collective protection; 57 percent of participants with temporary collective protection reside in a municipality that offers either social studies or life skills training to participants from Ukraine.

For participants with a short introduction program, and especially those with temporary collective protection, there is little individual customization of program content. Most primarily receive training in Norwegian and work practice if the municipality can find a work practice placement. Municipalities rarely have a wide variety of training options tailored for participants who do not speak much Norwegian, and participants with a short introduction program seldom reach a level where they can follow instruction in

Norwegian before nearing the end of the program time, contributing to little individual customization of program content. Dispersed settlement also means that there are rarely enough participants with specific training wishes or needs in any given municipality to establish more specialized courses, and in some municipalities all participants with a short introduction program receive the same content in their program. In interviews with us, participants have requested programs with more individual customization. For example, in almost all municipalities we visited, one or more participants have requested information on how to start their own business and wish for entrepreneurship training. Some municipalities, including smaller municipalities in the districts, have managed to establish varied program content with all mandatory elements and significant individual customization.

Significant Variation in Adaptation Strategies

In the period discussed in this report, there has been significant fluctuations in the arrival numbers of refugees. The first year after the introduction of the Integration Act saw record-low arrival numbers, while the last two years have been marked by rapid scaling up and restructuring of services in all municipalities due to record-high arrival numbers.

The temporary law encourages municipalities to also provide participants with temporary collective protection (MKB) a full introductory program but allows for a reduced program if municipalities face capacity challenges. In the first period of high arrival numbers, staff in Norwegian municipalities had to make extraordinary efforts to accommodate all the refugees in an adequate manner, and not all municipalities managed to offer a complete introductory program within the first year. Two years after the full-scale invasion, many municipalities are beginning to get in place all the components that participants should and ought to have, offering an introduction program in line with recommendations. However, some municipalities still have not scaled up their program in line with the arrival numbers and do not seem on track to provide a varied full-time program to MKB participants. It is sometimes unclear what capacity challenges these municipalities face that cause their program to differ significantly from other municipalities, as several smaller municipalities with limited settlement experience have managed to implement more comprehensive programs than some larger municipalities with settlement experience. In some municipalities, signals from the authorities aiming for Norway to appear less attractive as a destination country are interpreted as a message that they do not need to provide a full introductory program to this group because the group only has temporary protection and to make Norway appear less attractive as a destination country. The exceptions in the law, and the portrayal of the reception of refugees as «dugnad» (community effort) in the municipalities to accommodate a record number of refugees, may also have contributed to some municipalities understanding that it is not as important to do everything in accordance with the law for this group.

We have seen that many municipalities, in line with the intention of the Integration Act, work systematically to ensure that participants in the introductory program obtain formal qualifications and a long-term connection to the workforce. However, in some municipalities, exceptions are made for refugees with MKB, and employees in several different municipalities express that they believe the temporary law provides an exemption from the overarching goal of the Integration Act to work towards a permanent

attachment to employment. Unclear and mixed signals on how to handle this group contribute to municipalities having varying practices in deciding the content and length of the program for MKB participants.