


Beret Bråten and Rebekka Ravn Lysvik

After parental guidance

Refugee parents navigate the transition from the introduction programme to the wider integration process





After parental guidance: refugee parents navigate the transition from the introduction programme to the wider integration process

English summary of Faforeport 2025:36
ISBN 978-82-324-0791-0
ISSN 2387-6859
ID-nr.: 20950

© Fafo 2026

This research project explores refugee parents' experiences of their parenting role after receiving parental guidance delivered as part of the introduction programme. Drawing on earlier findings that highlight the need for follow-up after the programme ends (Andresen et al., 2025). We investigate how parents navigate ongoing challenges and whether they receive support from local services during the transition from the introduction programme to the continued integration process. The project therefore focuses on the period after targeted measures have ended, when parents must navigate the general local welfare services.

The report is based on qualitative data from interviews conducted in eight municipalities/urban districts, several of which were included in Fafo's study on parental guidance during periods with a high influx of refugees (Andresen et al., 2025). The dataset includes interviews with 21 parents who received parental guidance as part of the introduction programme, as well as 12 welfare service staff, mainly programme advisers and parental counsellors. Five healthcare employees were also interviewed. The municipalities represent both urban and rural areas, including some that have implemented digital parental guidance. The data provide insight into parents' needs and the practices of local services during the transitional phase between targeted measures and general welfare services for parents. As a qualitative study based on a sample of parents and local services, it does not offer a representative account of the parent population or municipal welfare services. Nevertheless, it identifies some patterns that may have broader relevance beyond this sample.

Three key parental needs were identified

First: newly arrived parents describe a mixed picture, with some children settling in well while others struggle to adjust. Reported challenges include children's difficulties in understanding why their parents have chosen to resettle in a new country, adjusting to kindergarten, bullying at school, problems making friends, health issues and behavioural patterns that may lead to a diagnosis. Yet when asked how they are managing as parents, many begin by saying that 'everything is fine'. We suggest that this response must be understood based on their current circumstances. The parents we interviewed are still in the early stages of the resettlement process. They are uncertain about both the formal and informal norms of parenting in Norway, and many have limited knowledge of how Norwegian institutions and systems function. Expressing needs requires a sense of security, trust and an understanding of what types of problems support services can help with. Without these conditions, parents' needs for follow-up often go unexpressed.

Second: parental guidance in the introduction programme has effects that extend beyond the programme itself. Parents learn and retain new approaches to interacting with their children, methods for relating to them, practical information about services, and connections with other parents. Most also have someone, either within or outside the welfare system, they can ask for advice. When a child-related issue is identified in kindergarten or school, there are several examples of this being followed up by the relevant services. However, being new to Norway can make parents hesitant to ask about everything; they may fear that their problem is unique or worry about being perceived as a 'burden'. Consequently, parents often face major questions alone, for example in

relation to their child's education, how their child can make friends, explaining war, or supporting their child in managing the uncertainty caused by their temporary situation. These experiences point to a need for continued parental guidance and for parent networks that can provide preventive support and ongoing assistance after the introduction programme.

Third: settling in a municipality provides stability after a period in a reception centre. However, those with a Ukrainian background have temporary collective protection and therefore what many parents describe as a 'lack of stability'. This uncertainty about where they will be living next year is especially challenging when children face difficulties such as having no friends or adjusting to life in Norway. The temporary nature of their stay leaves parents unsure and hesitant about decisions related to their children's education, such as whether they should pursue two parallel education pathways – physically in Norway and online in Ukraine. While this uncertainty is a particular challenge for Ukrainian parents, it also reflects a broader insecurity experienced by other newly settled families in Norway who are trying to make the best possible decisions for themselves and their children. They are required to make major decisions under uncertain conditions.

Follow-up in local services

We find that the needs and challenges parents describe are echoed in the needs identified by welfare service staff. These challenges relate to children's experiences at school, adapting to life in a new country, and the uncertainty associated with temporary stays. Programme advisers and parental counsellors report that their ongoing contact with participants is an important source of support and guidance, even after the programme has ended. In many cases, this takes the form of informal follow-up provided by staff who already know the parents and remain accessible. In some instances, they also have the same first language as a group of refugee parents. We have also observed formally organised follow-up, including a child welfare officer and an integration team within two different refugee services, as well as a family counsellor in the specialist health service supporting recently settled immigrants.

A thematic analysis of data from welfare services identified four factors as central to recognising and responding to parents' needs: 1) Services make themselves accessible to refugee parents by encouraging contact and providing information on how to make contact. 2) Certain service staff and parents share a common language. 3) Information is shared and collaboration occurs across services, where the refugee service is linked with, or actively engages with, services such as kindergarten and school. 4) Opportunities for parents to meet are initiated and established, e.g. through children's play or activities, or through supplementary parental guidance.

These factors are important regardless of whether follow-up is provided through formally established services, where parental support is part of the mandate, or more informally by staff within or connected to the refugee service. Both formal and informal support involves direct advice to parents and problem-solving in collaboration with, for instance, kindergarten and school. Preventive efforts in the form of parent networks are less common, even though there is a need for such support among some parents.

Fafo

Institute for Labour and Social Research

Borggata 2B, Oslo

P.O. Box 2947 Tøyen, NO-0608 Oslo

Telephone: +47 22 08 86 00

E-mail: fafo@fafo.no

fafo.no

