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**Guidance Courses for Parents as Part of the
Introduction Programme**





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Summary

In this research report, we evaluate parenting courses offered during periods of high arrivals. Specifically, we examine what municipalities choose to provide in situations where they can offer parenting guidance as defined in 2021 with 8–12 sessions, or under the exception introduced in July 2023, which allows for a minimum of 4 sessions (referred to as «parenting courses»). The study is based on a broad and diverse dataset, including a survey of municipalities, 12 observations of parenting courses/sessions, and interviews with participants (30) and facilitators (17) in ten case municipalities.

We find that nearly 90% of municipalities offer parenting guidance or courses to their participants. Several municipalities provide more than one type of parenting guidance or course, but the most common format is the original 8–12-session model. Seventy-five percent of municipalities still offer this version, while 40% offer the shorter format with 2–4 sessions allowed under the high-arrivals exception. However, only 15 municipalities and one city district (8%) exclusively offer the shorter version. Additionally, 40% of municipalities report offering alternative formats, which our visits and interviews in case municipalities reveal to be somewhere between the minimum version and the original. These alternative formats appear to be locally developed due to a belief that the minimum version is insufficient for achieving the goals of parenting guidance.

Based on our case study visits, we define four models of parenting guidance or courses, characterized by time (number of sessions), content (balance between information and guidance), and intention (the goals of those responsible for the courses).

- In the **classical model**, municipalities maintain the original ICDP format with 8–12 sessions led by certified facilitators. This is viewed as a comprehensive, preventive measure that can reduce future costs in schools, childcare, and child welfare services.
- The **reluctant adaptation model** includes municipalities that wish to offer classical ICDP courses but are constrained by resource and organizational limitations, leading them to provide shorter courses of 2–4 sessions. Facilitators express frustration over having to reduce content they consider essential.
- The **pragmatic adaptation model** also uses shorter courses (2–4 sessions), often tailored to Ukrainian participants. This model assumes that smaller cultural differences allow for a simpler format. Resource constraints and practicality are key drivers of this approach.
- The **balanced model** combines information and reflection-based guidance in a condensed format with 5–6 sessions, seeking to balance the need for information with deeper reflection and dialogue.

Several factors influence how parenting guidance or courses foster involvement and engagement among parents that can foster greater parental confidence. Time and

content are critical elements, yet central points of exceptions introduced due to the high-arrivals situation. Time affects the ability to build trust among participants and between participants and facilitators. Content varies between providing information and offering guidance aimed at strengthening parent-child relationships. Facilitators emphasize the importance of providing information about Norwegian laws, child welfare services, and other welfare services. At the same time, they see reflection on parenting views, relationships, and communication with children as crucial for fostering change and confidence in parenting.

Language barriers are a significant challenge in parenting guidance. Municipalities with facilitators who speak the participants' native language report better dialogue and engagement, a finding corroborated by observations and participant feedback. Where native-speaking facilitators are unavailable, interpreters are used, but this reduces discussion and reflection while increasing time requirements. On-site interpreters, especially those familiar with the course content, are less disruptive than telephone interpreters.

Parents participating in these courses vary widely in their educational backgrounds, from no formal education to university degrees. This affects how much they benefit from the courses. Several participants with a university education describe the parenting guidance as a repetition of things they already knew, while participants with little or no education highlight that they struggle to keep up and understand the information provided. Length of residency in Norway also influences outcomes. Most parents have a positive view of the courses, highlighting different aspects as valuable. For some, communication and relationship-building with their children are the most useful elements, while others emphasize learning about laws, rules, children's rights, and child welfare. Parents' feedback often reflects variations in the course's content and duration. However, parents have no opportunity to compare what they have received with other variations of parenting courses, which constitutes an important limitation of the interview data.

When asked about the most valuable aspect of the course, many participants highlighted the opportunity to discuss dilemmas and challenges with other parents in similar situations. This is particularly emphasized by participants in the longer courses. We interpret this focus on peer interaction as both a search for community and a sense of belonging, as well as a pathway to empowerment—building agency through collective discussion and problem-solving. Perhaps one of the key goals of parenting guidance—fostering confidence—can be achieved by creating such spaces where parents build agency and collaboratively navigate challenges.

Thirty percent of municipalities purchase parenting courses from private providers, primarily Atlas Kompetanse and Barnas Plattform. Atlas Kompetanse offers online guidance based on ICDP, delivered by certified facilitators in Arabic, Kinyarwanda, and Ukrainian. Barnas Plattform provides a self-developed model not included in the parenting programs recommended by IMDi and Bufdir. Their courses are conducted either by the municipality with an interpreter or online by a Ukrainian-speaking facilitator. Together, these providers have worked with 50–60 municipalities, likely covering over 100 municipalities in total. Municipalities choose these services due to a lack of certified

facilitators, diverse language needs among participants, or logistical challenges such as long distances. While private providers address these practical issues, they limit municipalities' insight into what participants have learned and their ongoing needs. This can undermine an often-overlooked goal of parenting guidance in the introduction program: the ability to follow up with families during and after the program.

Municipalities that provide their own parenting guidance or courses may have better opportunities for follow-up. However, follow-up practices vary widely between municipalities and facilitators. Some facilitators offer individual support or stay in touch after the courses, while others plan additional sessions for specific groups.

Finally, the report offers recommendations based on findings, interpretations, and discussions on how parenting guidance can be further developed in terms of time, content, participant support, and post-program follow-up.

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