



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF  
JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SECURITY

Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016) Report to the Storting (white paper) Summary

# From reception centre to the labour market – an effective integration policy





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*Recommendations of the  
Ministry of Justice and Public Security of 11 May 2016,  
approved by the Council of State on the same day.  
(Government Solberg)*



# **1 From reception centre to the labour market – an effective integration policy**

In May 2016 the Norwegian government launched a white paper on integration policy. The white paper is based on the migration situation in Europe and Norway in 2015 and 2016. It outlines how Norway's integration policy and measures should be organised to ensure that newly-arrived immigrants with refugee backgrounds enter the labour market or start an education without delay and acquire a permanent connection to the labour market.

The Norwegian welfare model is dependent on high participation in the workforce. It is essential for society that newly-arrived immigrants with refugee backgrounds are enabled to enter the labour market as soon as possible. It is essential that immigrants do not remain outside the labour market, and become dependent on cash benefits. Cash benefits requiring no commitment to work can mean that participation in the labour market is scarcely profitable, or even directly unprofitable. For newly arrived immigrants who have no connection to the labour market, benefits such as cash-for-care weaken the incentive to participate in the labour market. The government is therefore working on a thorough review of the entire social security system.

There are no quick fixes in integration work. It is natural to assume that it will take some time before people who are granted permission to stay in Norway, on the grounds of their need for protection, find their way into the labour market. At the same time, demographic developments mean there will be a reduction in the share of the population that is occupationally active in the future. This could pose challenges to the welfare system in terms of its sustainability and legitimacy.

Integration requires collaboration between multiple parties. The government emphasises that time spent in a reception facility shall be spent productively, that settlement in municipalities shall occur as soon as possible after permission to stay is granted, that qualification for employment shall be effective, and that any previously acquired skills and qualifications shall be put to use. It is a given that knowledge of the Norwegian language and society is necessary for people who remain in Norway for an extended period of time. This requires a considerable effort from each and every person coming to live in Norway. Those who wish to be a part of Norwegian society must be provided with incentives and opportunities to participate in the labour market and in society as a whole. If new residents are to succeed, effort is required of all parties: the authorities, local communities, the labour market and business sector, and not least of the individual immigrant him/herself.

## **1.1 Asylum seekers to Norway**

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The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that at the end of 2014, there were 56 million refugees and internally displaced persons in the world. Moreover this is affecting Europe to a greater extent than previously. In 2015, Europe saw the arrival of a record number of refugees and migrants.

At the beginning of 2016, there were 700,000 immigrants and 150,000 children born to immigrants in Norway. Some 16 percent of the total population in Norway is now of immigrant background. Over 200 nations are represented. Just under 20 percent of immigrants to Norway, around 188,000 people, had a refugee background in January 2016. The three largest groups with a refugee background in Norway are from Somalia, Iraq and Eritrea.<sup>1</sup>

In autumn 2015, the migration picture in Norway changed. From approximately 11–12,000 asylum seekers arriving in Norway every year over the last two years, 31,145 asylum seekers were registered in 2015,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/innvandring-og-innvandrere>



Figure 1

mostly over the course of a few months in the autumn. They mainly came from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea and Iraq. Whereas in 2013 and 2014 there were respectively 1,070 and 1,204 unaccompanied children who registered as asylum seekers in Norway, in 2015 as many as 5,297 unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors arrived in the country. In 2015, Sweden took in 162,450 asylum seekers; Denmark took 20,935 and Finland 32,345.<sup>2</sup> This is the highest number of asylum seekers these countries have taken in in the course of a few short months.

In a world where many millions of people are seeking a safer and better life, it is likely that more asylum seekers and immigrants will continue to come to Norway in coming years. Many will be granted protection in Norway. The prognosis from March 2016 shows that between 5,000 and 50,000 asylum seekers are expected to arrive in Norway in the course of 2016. In other words, the prognosis is very uncertain, both in Norway and Europe as a whole; developments in Europe will have considerable implications for the situation in Norway in the time ahead.

It is on this basis that many countries are tightening up their immigration policy. While immigration policy is becoming stricter, integration policy needs to be overhauled in order to deal with a new state of affairs. A more difficult labour market and greater pressure on both the state and municipal welfare services mean that policies must be adapted to the new reality. The government intends to keep the policies and measures that function well, but will take steps to ensure that they become more flexible and provide better incentives for the individual. The aim is a more

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00191&plugin=1>

efficient integration policy, one which will allow more immigrants with a refugee background to find jobs faster and to stay employed.

On 5 April 2016, the government presented Proposition no. 90 to the Lagting (2015–2016) ([www.regjeringen.no/JD](http://www.regjeringen.no/JD)) - on changes to, amongst others, the Immigration Act, restrictions II. The proposition deals with different restrictions in the field of immigration that the government believes are necessary in order to secure a sustainable policy in a situation with potentially huge numbers of asylum seekers arriving. The government believes that strict control of the number of residence permits granted in Norway is important. The integration field depends on immigration to Norway being handled in such a way that those who are granted residence permits are received in a good way and can enter the labour market and community life without delay.

## **1.2 An effective integration policy**

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Integration calls for a joint effort by many parties. The individual immigrant shall be met with requirements to contribute and participate, and considerable effort is expected of the individual. At the same time society must take steps to ensure that everyone can put their abilities to use in the labour market and community life.

### **1.2.1 The challenges**

Even though many immigrants work, too many still remain outside the labour market.<sup>3</sup> The rate of employment for immigrants is lower than in the population as a whole. 71 percent of men and 66 percent of women in Norway between the ages of 15 and 74 were in employment at the end of 2014. Among immigrants these rates were 68 and 58 percent. There are big differences between the various groups and between men and women. Differences in the reasons for immigration, period of residence and differences in education are highly related to differences in employ-

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/innvandring-og-innvandrere>



ment, but traditions from the country left behind also seem to play a part for many. Employment increases with the period of residence for all groups. Refugee employment is 20 percentage points lower than the average in Norway.

Remaining outside the labour market puts many families in a difficult financial situation. The upshot of this is that today children with an immigrant background make up more than half of all children in financially challenged families. A greater proportion of the population being dependent on government handouts raises concerns, especially when the differences follow ethnic lines. This is financially and socially negative for both the individual and their family, and at the same time results in lower tax revenues and increased pressure on the welfare system.

The government wishes to avoid having ever larger groups of inhabitants living outside of society. There are cities in Europe that have particularly vulnerable areas, with challenging living conditions, where many people remain outside the labour market and scarcely participate in society at all. Some of these areas are characterised by serious criminality that impacts the residents both directly and indirectly. Such areas are also characterised by residents generally having little trust in important social institutions. This distrust can lead to, for example, the police having difficulty doing their job. When individuals or groups do not participate, or experience feelings of not belonging, a parallel society can arise where people develop their own rules and codes, which in the worst case scenario may be in violation of Norwegian law.

This may pose a threat to society because trust in the community is undermined. The government's integration policy shall ensure that such a scenario does not arise in Norway. A society in which the majority participate in the workforce and society at large helps maintain a society firmly based on trust. The goal is to ensure that all inhabitants of Norway feel that they belong to Norwegian society, in order to avoid a society with a high degree of polarisation between different groups.

An effective integration policy shall pave the way for a society that does not have vast social and economic differences. Neither society nor the individual can afford to let many years go by before a newly-arrived immigrant is qualified to enter the Norwegian workforce. Training must to a greater extent occur in the workplace and in consultation with the

local business sector, to ensure the labour market has access to the right skills. The requirement to individuals that they participate, undergo necessary training and work is a clear line in Norway's integration policy.

The Introduction Act provides the framework by which immigrants with refugee backgrounds can receive the necessary training for work or education. The Introduction Programme has had good results.<sup>4</sup> In the past few years, about 70 percent of men that have taken part in the Introduction Programme have gone on to jobs and studies within a year of completing the programme. The results for women are lower: 50 percent are either in jobs or studying one year after completing the programme. At the same time, there is considerable variation between the municipalities' results for participants in the Introduction Programme, and the challenge is that a large number of both men and women do not acquire a stable connection to the labour market.

The municipalities have to use the flexibility of the Introduction Act. The government intends to contribute to a more work-oriented Introduction Programme and earlier skills profiling of newly-arrived immigrants with refugee backgrounds. The role of the community and business sectors in the integration effort is important.

On the basis of the high number of asylum seekers that came to Norway last autumn, the waiting time for people living in reception centres may become longer than ideal. The government wishes to have options in reception centres that counter passivity and highlight skills. Residents in reception centres must spend their time studying Norwegian and social studies, and learn about the fundamental values upon which Norwegian society is founded. Voluntary organisations can play, and do play, an important part in establishing contact between the local community and new inhabitants. Not least, they can play an important part for residents of reception centres.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ssb.no/utdanning/statistikker/introinnv>



Figure 2

### **1.2.2 The aim of integration policy**

The government's basic premise is that people want to contribute. The aim of integration policy is to introduce measures that provide incentives for participation in the workforce and in community life. The aim is that everyone who is going to live in Norway finds work or undertakes studies, and becomes a tax payer and contributing citizen. This is important for long-term development, not least in order to maintain a robust and economically sustainable welfare system. In principle, everyone shall provide for themselves and their dependants.

The Norwegian Constitution guarantees democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and subsequently, freedom of expression, equality and equal status. Norwegian law lays the framework for all people living in Norway. Everyone who lives in Norway must be familiar with their duties and rights, as well as the values that are central to Norwegian society. Within this general framework, there are many ways of being Norwegian.

Immigrants who come to Norway must adapt to a totally new set of circumstances, a new language, new social norms and a new society. People who come here must assume responsibility for creating a life for themselves, something which demands a great deal of effort on their part. At the same time, the state, municipality and county, as well as the business and community sectors must take steps to ensure that new residents become contributing members of society. While working on this white paper, the government has sought input from the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) as well as the municipalities, NGOs, the business sector, and employer and employee organisations.

### **1.3 Economic and social consequences of immigration**

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A high increase in numbers of asylum seekers leads to increased public spending and increased investment in the public sector. The greatest costs are related to running reception centres and care facilities for minors, as well as integration subsidies paid to the municipalities for people who are granted permission to stay. In addition, costs are incurred for a range of other state subsidies and transfers to municipalities, amongst others things to subsidise the teaching of Norwegian and social studies. As the population grows, costs for public services rise in the municipal sector too, amongst other things to increase capacity in kindergartens and schools, health and care services and infrastructure. The magnitude of these costs depends on the age of the immigrants, their level of education, their skill set, the scope of any health problems they may have, and a range of other factors.

One determining factor for the socioeconomic implications of increased immigration is immigrant participation in the labour market. Higher participation in the workforce leads to increased productivity, increased tax revenues and a reduction in the need for public benefits. There is a lower rate of participation in the labour market among immigrants with refugee backgrounds than in the population otherwise. This results in negative socioeconomic consequences. That said, people born in Norway to immigrant parents do have the same relationship to the labour market as the population as a whole. Thus the negative socioeconomic consequences are reduced over time.

This white paper highlights the need for higher labour market participation, particularly among immigrants with refugee backgrounds. This shall be achieved both by means of stricter requirements for the individual and a better alignment of the study options and the Introduction Programme. Increased labour market participation will reduce the economic cost in both the short and long term.

The government has appointed an expert committee to examine the long-term social consequences of high immigration.<sup>5</sup> The committee's

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<sup>5</sup> [www.regjeringen.no/inko-utvalget](http://www.regjeringen.no/inko-utvalget)

findings will form an important basis on which to make those decisions necessary in order to secure the Norwegian welfare model for the future. The consequences of immigration depend on the scope and composition of immigration, on trends in the labour market and Norwegian economy, on future skills needs, on the alignment of welfare provisions and services, and conditions related to increased inequality, the sense of community and trust, etc.

The committee will submit its findings by 1 February 2017. The committee will also provide input for the government's perspective report, which will be presented in 2017.

## **1.4 Summary and conclusion**

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There are many areas in society that are of relevance for the integration processes and the lives of immigrants in Norway. The white paper focuses primarily on the period of time that follows the granting of permission to stay in Norway and on the policies and measures that mainly apply to the initial years that immigrants with refugee backgrounds spend in Norway.

### **Chapter 2 The period in reception centres**

The motivation to start a new life is often considerable in the initial phase in a new country. A long stay in a reception centre, without any meaningful activities leads to passivity and makes it harder to start work and become self-sufficient.

Activities such as learning Norwegian, learning about Norwegian society and qualification for work should start while people are staying in a reception centre. The government emphasises the role of NGOs in this undertaking.

*The government will, for example*

- set up integration reception centres, with fulltime qualification programmes

- introduce 50 hours of courses in Norwegian culture and social studies for asylum seekers in reception centres
- run a pilot project with community coordinators
- waive the required Asylum Interview for a temporary work permit, and instead introduce the condition that there be a high probability that the asylum seeker will be granted a residence permit in Norway; the requirement for establishing identity will be upheld
- offer a minimum number of free hours in kindergarten for 2–3 year-olds that have been granted permission to stay (4–5 year-olds are offered a fulltime place in a in kindergarten)

### **Chapter 3 Settlement in the municipalities**

Settling refugees in Norwegian municipalities is an on-going task for the municipal sector. The government emphasises that it will still be up to the municipalities to decide if, and how many refugees they want to settle. An increase in the number of people to be settled this year and next year places a strain on the capacity of the municipal services apparatus. At the same time, a more efficient and flexible integration policy, with faster transition to work for new residents, will provide the municipalities with both the necessary workforce and tax revenues.

*The government will, for example*

- provide extra subsidies for the settlement of refugees in 2017
- enter a new formal collaboration with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)
- increase accessibility to governmental housing allowances for people living in housing cooperatives
- make it cheaper and faster to build new homes by further simplifying the Planning and Building Act's regulations

### **Chapter 4 Unaccompanied minors**

In 2015, there was a huge increase in the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Norway. The government prioritises this group, both



Figure 2

when it comes to applications for protection and in connection with settlement. It is an investment for the future to make sure that young people have access to education and security, and become functioning members of a local community. In this way, they also have a chance to find work and become self-sufficient in the future.

*The government will, for example*

- increase efforts to recruit more foster families for unaccompanied minors
- subsidise SOS Children's Villages' development of a settlement model for unaccompanied minors
- monitor the situation of unaccompanied minors with refugee backgrounds that are resident in Norway, with emphasis on their participation in the labour market and their education

## **Chapter 5 Training, work and education**

Immigrants must often start from scratch with an education and career in their new country. A mapping of people's skills, language teaching and qualification for work are prerequisites to finding a job for many. Everyone must learn Norwegian. Schemes in place for qualification, such as the Introduction Programme and the labour market programmes, shall continue to be used, at the same time as they must become more effective. Immigrants' prior education or skills shall be put to use in the Norwegian labour market. The government will simplify the current schemes and fast-track approval of skills and qualifications immigrants bring with them.

The public sector must be on the same team as the business and voluntary sector if the integration work is to succeed, and in order to create new jobs.

*The government will, for example*

- map the individual's skills and qualifications in the reception phase
- give careers advice in the asylum centre, based on the skills profiling
- amend the Introduction Act in such a way that the use of work and training schemes shall be aligned with work on people's individual plan
- establish fast-track access to the labour market for people who have been granted permission to stay and who have skills that are in demand in the labour market
- further develop and increase the use of free online learning resources in the Norwegian language
- set up complementary studies for immigrants that have teaching qualifications or nursing qualifications from their country of origin
- make it simpler for immigrants to document general academic competence in order that they can apply for admission to higher education
- collaborate with partners in the business sector on proposals to promote immigrant participation in the labour market
- subsidise school owners that offer additional basic education for young people
- increase the time spent in the Introduction Programme for those that need it
- introduce a minimum residence period of 5 years for the right to receive cash-for-care payments

## **Chapter 6 Every-day integration and community work**

It is in every-day life, at school and work, and in the local community that people meet. In order for the integration policy to succeed, effort is required from all parties: the authorities, the local community, NGOs, the labour market and the business sector. Not least, a particular effort is required on the part of the new arrivals in the local community, as they





Figure 3

must learn new customs, a new language and about a new society. Community organisations, as well as sports, cultural and religious communities can play a particularly important role in establishing contact between the local community and newcomers to Norway.

*The government will, for example*

- increase capability and spread the word on good examples of collaboration between municipal authorities and NGOs
- further develop community centres as meeting places for local community works
- take steps to ensure that cultural institutions and their activities contribute to a more inclusive art and culture life

## **Chapter 7 Public services that provide equal opportunities**

Immigrants coming to Norway will come into contact with public services such as kindergartens, schools and health services. The services that are available influence the opportunities for every individual, and thereby also the conditions for participation in society. Public services shall provide equal opportunities for all.

The principle of mainstreaming in the public sector requires that each authority have responsibility for adapting their service provision to the diverse needs of the users. This involves all sectors taking responsibility for contributing to the overarching goal of integration policy, which is to ensure that immigrants and their children contribute to and participate in their communities.

*The government will, for example*

- increase kindergarten attendance among children from low-income families and among children from minority language groups
- start courses for school administrators and teachers in order to strengthen and tailor teaching for children and young asylum seekers and other newcomers
- spread knowledge about the health of immigrants with a refugee or immigrant background to the relevant actors in the health sector
- present a new action plan against forced marriage and circumcision for the period 2017–2020

## **Chapter 8 Participation in the community**

All people living in Norway shall feel that they are accepted for who they are; they shall feel at home, shall feel safe and shall be treated fairly. Norwegian democracy and laws establish the framework for everyone living in Norway.

Creating secure individuals and a secure society, whilst preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, is about ensuring good living conditions for children and young people, fighting poverty and working to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, benefits from a sense of belonging and protection from discrimination.

*The government will, for example*

- present a plan of action against hate speech by autumn 2016
- launch IT tools for use in schools to counter antisemitism and racism, radicalisation and undemocratic attitudes
- develop teaching resources to counter group-based prejudices, for use in teacher training

## **Chapter 9 Citizenship**

Citizenship may be defined as a legal bond between the state and the subject. Norwegian citizens enjoy the unconditional right to reside in

Norway, the right to a Norwegian passport and protection from deportation, the right to vote in parliamentary elections and military service. The government believes that Norwegian citizenship should not be easily obtained, and that the conditions for it shall contribute to ensuring that new Norwegian citizens are active participants in Norwegian society. Therefore, stricter conditions for citizenship will be proposed.

*The government will, for example*

- make a good command of Norwegian and passing of a test in social studies requirements to obtain Norwegian citizenship
  - increase the period of residence required for an application for citizenship
  - introduce rules for the rescinding of citizenship for the violation of certain provisions in the Penal Code
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