Settling and integrating refugees

The introductory programme

While the UDI is responsible for refugees until their applications have been processed, the local authorities are responsible for them after they have been settled. From 1 September 2004 it became obligatory for the local authorities to offer introductory programmes to refugees settled after 1 September 2003. This was the culmination of many years of preparation with pilot projects in various municipalities and after a pilot year during which it was voluntary for the local authorities to offer introductory programmes. The refugees in the target group were also obliged to follow the programme they were offered. The introductory programme is linked to introductory benefits that are given on the basis of participation. The benefits correspond to twice the basic amount in the national insurance scheme. In practice, this means that the social security office is no longer the first institution refugees encounter in Norway.

The target group for the introductory programme is refugees between 18 and 55 years of age who are settled in municipalities in agreement with the UDI. They have the right and obligation to attend individual instruction in Norwegian and social studies, and to attend programmes that prepare them for working life. Family members reunited with refugees also have the right and obligation to attend the introductory programme. Moreover, the local authorities may choose to offer the introductory programme to more persons than those who come under the provisions in the Act.

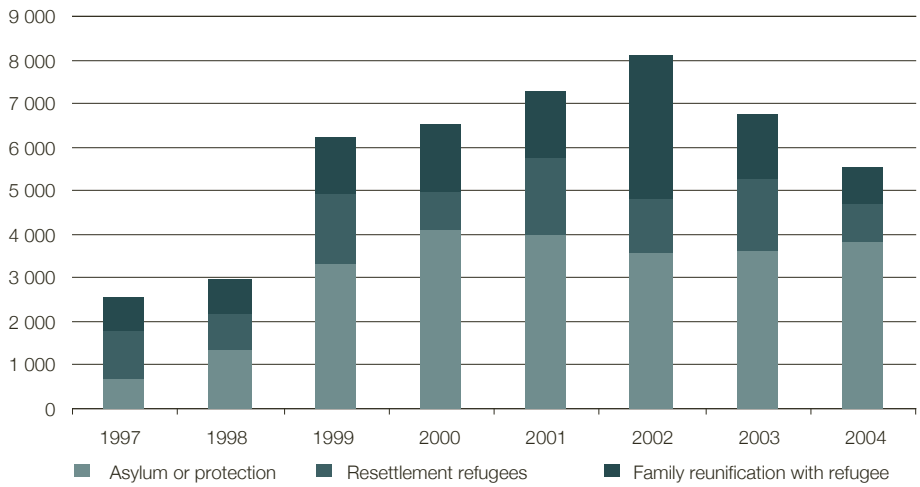
An introductory programme is a full-time programme of up to two years that provides refugees with an introduction to the Norwegian language and social studies, and prepares them for participation in working life or ordinary education. At the end of 2004 there were around 4600 persons in the target group with the right and obligation to take the introductory programme. The aim of the programme is that newly arrived refugees should become financially independent and integrated into Norwegian society as quickly as possible. National standards ensure a better and more uniform programme throughout the country. Experiences so far indicate that everybody benefits from the introductory programme. Society will benefit more quickly from the resources represented by refugees, and refugees get to participate more quickly in Norwegian working and social life.

In 2004 the UDI used substantial resources on putting the Introductory Act into effect. For several years the UDI has been responsible for initiating and following up pilot projects in a number of municipalities. Just in the last two years before the Act became obligatory, the UDI allocated NOK 60 million to 228 municipal projects to finance the development and start-up of the introductory programme. In 2004 the UDI held training seminars in all regions and ran a major information campaign about the programme. This campaign will continue in 2005.

Settling refugees

In 2004, 4700 refugees were settled in Norwegian municipalities by agreement with the Directorate of Immigration. This is not a satisfactory number, and at the end of 2004 more than 2000 refugees were still waiting in Norwegian reception centres for settlement in a municipality. The UDI, KS and the Norwegian State Housing Bank ran a successful campaign in the second half of 2004 aimed at the settlement of single refugees, a group which has proven to take more time to

Refugees and their families settled in municipalities, by category: 1997–2004















Florence's youngest brother Robert, her son William and her niece Mahawa attend school.

"The children are happy at school, but we wish we could practise our Norwegian more outside school. We haven't got to know that many Norwegians yet," says Florence.

In 2004 around 250 Liberian refugees came to Norway as resettlement refugees. Every year, by arrangement with the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Norway receives a quota of refugees who are not safe in the countries to which they have fled. They are called resettlement refugees.

settle, and the results were good. During the campaign period 953 single refugees were settled. For the first time in years, the proportion of single individuals among refugees in reception centres ready for settlement fell below 50 per cent.

The need for settlement places in 2005 is only slightly affected by the drop in the number of asylum seekers. Based on the forecasts we have at the start of the new year, an estimated 5250 settlement places are needed. Settling refugees will also be a challenge for the UDI and the local authorities in 2005. In addition to settling 4700 refugees in the municipalities, around 800 individuals reunited with families moved to municipalities

Major effort to develop programmes for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

"Unaccompanied minors" is the generic term for all children and young persons under 18 years of age who come to Norway without parents or who have no other adults with parental responsibilities here in the country. In 2003 and 2004, 26 projects and development programmes were launched that aim in various ways to ensure good follow-up of unaccompanied minors and increase the competence of those working with this group. The UDI has also initiated closer cooperation with the child welfare services to provide better care for unaccompanied minors in reception centres. In 2005 special focus will be placed on tracing parents so that children can be reunited with their caregivers in their country of origin.

Information projects for good integration

In 2003 and 2004 Norway received large groups of refugees from Liberia and Burma/Myanmar for the first time. To contribute to a good integration process for these groups in Norwegian municipalities the UDI initiated two information projects in the spring and autumn of 2004. Seminars were arranged for municipal employees working with refugees, and for relevant persons from the voluntary sector in all regions where the refugees are settled. Here, knowledge about the refugees' backgrounds and tips on integration activities were presented. A major media campaign was also conducted to inform the general public about the refugees from these two countries. In the spring of 2004 we produced an educational package about refugees from Liberia for lower secondary school. This package deals with such topics as fleeing one's home, being a refugee, cultural differences and information about Liberia. Early in 2005 a similar package about refugees from Burma/Myanmar will be made available. Feedback from the local authorities has been very positive.

The FAFO report "Hvordan gikk det etterpå?" (How did it go afterwards?), published in the summer of 2004, examined whether refugees who have participated in introductory programmes later participated more in ordinary education, working life and social life than refugees who have lived in municipalities that do not offer introductory programmes. The researchers concluded that refugees who had participated in introductory programmes, both men and women, were more integrated into regular working and social life and attained financial independence more quickly.