

Summary

PwC have conducted research on behalf of KS into «How municipalities handle unaccompanied refugee minors? The research was conducted during the period of June until November 2016.

The purpose of this research project has been to provide KS up to date knowledge of where the problems lie for municipalities in their efforts to settle unaccompanied refugee minors. This is necessary both because municipalities have to settle a greater number of unaccompanied minors than before and due to the change in municipal economic conditions. The content and quality of municipal measures are of great importance to the success of the integration of unaccompanied minors, including when it comes to the minors participation in education and employment.

The following issues have been addressed:

- Which care services exist and how do municipalities adapt their services and resources to this particular group?
- Do municipalities assume the same level of responsibility for this group compared to other children that the municipality have a responsibility of care for?
- Which resource challenges are the municipalities facing when it comes to developing and providing the right services to unaccompanied minors?
- How has the change in funding affected what municipalities can offer and their results? Including: Do they feel the process of reimbursement for such services is predictable and transparent?
- To what extent have the municipalities succeeded in getting unaccompanied minors into work and/or education?

Methodology

We have conducted face-to-face interviews in a sample population of municipalities. These were supplemented with telephone interviews, which covered a larger number of municipalities. Those who took part in the interviews were municipal managers, employees and the unaccompanied refugee minors themselves. We also conducted analysis of municipal costs associated with the settlement of unaccompanied minors.

Which care services are available in each municipality, and how does each municipality adapt its services and resources to this group?

The project has shown that in the municipalities there exists a variety of care services for unaccompanied minors. It is possible to categorize these for example, shared accommodation and bedsit accommodation, however we see a large variations in the individual arrangements of the municipalities. The settlement of unaccompanied minors involves a number of different municipal services. We also see differences in whether the work has an embedded overall strategy, and the extent of whether the minor's welfare or an academic perspective is most prevalent.

Municipalities are free to choose which housing and care services they will offer unaccompanied minors. The analysis shows that supervised shared accommodation is the most prevalent care service for unaccompanied minors. Some municipalities have recently established shared accommodation in response to the request from IMDi (Integration and Diversity Directorate) to settle unaccompanied minors. Other municipalities have recently decided to discontinue housing for unaccompanied minors. One of the municipalities sampled did not offer shared accommodation.

There are few unaccompanied minors living in foster care, despite the fact that foster care is the preferred housing measures for the youngest of the minors. This is because the municipalities are facing challenges in recruiting enough foster homes in general. The alternative for these children is often shared accommodation. For older children several municipalities also offers lighter measures

such as conjoined bedsits, private flats and bedsits connected to a host family house. In most of these municipalities, minors spend time in shared accommodation at first and then move on to alternative living arrangements. The survey also shows that some municipalities place unaccompanied minors alone, directly in a bedsit.

The project also reveals that municipalities put different emphasis, from an academic perspective, on general child welfare and refugee welfare in their approach to working with unaccompanied minors.

Do municipalities assume the same legitimate responsibility for the unaccompanied minors as they do for other children in their care?

Municipalities are finding that they do assume the same legitimate responsibility, but it is not possible to give an objective answer to confirm this. Unaccompanied minors, without a responsible adult in Norway, are not automatically the responsibility of Child Protection Services. This indicates that they are treated differently from other children in which the municipality is responsible for.

All municipalities consider that they provide appropriate care services. However it varies what informants believe is an appropriate offer. This can be illustrated by that fact that most municipalities offer shared accommodation, while some municipalities believes it is prudent to settle unaccompanied minors alone, directly in a bedsit. For a minor, these two alternatives are very different, especially as to regards to the degree of follow-up and contact with adults. Municipalities have a large degree of flexibility when it comes to the alternatives of housing measures and assessment of the care needed. This assessment is based on different views on the objective of such a provision, where some individual municipalities emphasize the care aspect, while others place greater emphasis on independence. These alternatives are also affected by economic conditions. There is greater scope for discretion when it comes to working with unaccompanied minors than for other children that the municipality has custody of.

In the asylum phase there is a clear distinction between unaccompanied minors under and over 15 years. Bufetat (Children, Youth and Family Affairs) is responsible of youngest children, whilst UDI (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration) is responsible of those over 15 years. One of the reasons for this is that the children shall have care services that meet their specific needs, and which has the same quality as offered other children under CPS care. Such age distinction are not for other children that the municipality has custody of.

Which resource challenges are the municipalities facing when they develop and provide services to unaccompanied minors?

Municipalities experience the regulatory framework as unpredictable. They find it very challenging that they design and build an offer of resources and service under certain conditions, only to actually operate under worse conditions. This concern includes both predictability when it comes to financing, as well as a wide variation in the number of minors that are to be resettled. Municipalities have also pointed out that they incur resource challenges, investment and startup costs in order to establish new offerings before they receive full financing.

Today's funding is twofold. On the one hand, funding is based on grants paid per unaccompanied minor the municipalities takes care of. On the other side, there is a reimbursement scheme in which the municipalities are reimbursed 80% of the expenses they have beyond a fixed deductible. There is also a third arrangement whereby municipalities can apply for additional grants to meet their expenses for unaccompanied minors with disabilities and behavioral problems.

Municipalities experience the regulatory framework as unpredictable. The arrival of less unaccompanied minors needing resettlement may mean that municipalities are left with spare capacity, resulting in organizational and financial challenges.

How has the change in funding structure affected what municipalities can offer and the results? Including: Is the reimbursement system considered predictable and transparent?

The cutback in the funding mechanism has resulted in changes in the services offered. Some local authorities have closed down or reduced their services. Staffing at shared accommodation has been reduced and it is made cutbacks in measures such as activities out in the community and support when leaving such a facility. We have no basis to say that these changes have affected the results, in terms of the integration of minors. Municipalities experience the reimbursement system as bureaucratic, but the new electronic reimbursement form has made it somewhat more straightforward. Changes in the degree of reimbursement, the ongoing discussion about the additional changes, as well as variation in the number of arrivals has led to the municipalities experiencing the financial structure as unpredictable.

Until 2014, financial expenses related to childcare was 100 percent funded beyond a municipal deductible of about 200 000 NOK per year per child / minor. After 2014, the reimbursement system changed to a system of 80 percent reimbursement beyond the deductible. At the same time, a new electronic reimbursement form was introduced in order to help calculate the refund claim.

Municipalities stated that they understand that there were cutbacks in the reimbursement system, and that the previous system of full reimbursement lacked incentives for efficiency. Municipalities have however experienced, that the change in the funding mechanism has had effects that are unfair in the sense that the municipalities that initially had been focusing on cost-effectiveness and operated with a relatively low day rate, have been made to cut the same share of costs as those municipalities who initially ran less effectively. Many municipalities were also frustrated that quality was not considered as part of the assessment for funding, and felt that their efforts targeted towards quality measures were not appreciated. Two municipalities chose to close down their accommodation, sitting too much unpredictability, both in terms of financing and the real settlement needs of minors. In the “case” municipalities, which we have followed over several years, the staffing factor in such accommodation has reduced from an average of 2.31 to 1.99. We also seen the tendency for municipalities, which previously purchased private spaces, to discontinue this practice.

How should the framework for quality services in shared accommodation look like?

We believe it is important that services should be designed according to the same standards, regardless of which municipality the minor is settled in. The details of these standards need to be described in detail and designed in cooperation with expert groups.

Through our research, we believe the following principles should be applied:

- **Management of the shared accommodation should develop strategies, plans and procedures whilst establishing common values and understanding among employees and management**
- **Staffing should be designed as to promote stability and continuity**
- **Shared accommodation should have limited capacity and if possible ensure diversity in terms of nationality and, where possible, gender**
- **All shared accommodation should have staff present at night. Resources present on the afternoon/evening should be prioritized. The municipality should also consider whether it is necessary to have an employee present during the day whilst the minors are at school**
- **Approximately half of the staff should have relevant higher education**
- **Staff should receive systematic competence training**
- **The group of employees should be differentiated with respect to age, gender and ethnicity**
- **Shared accommodation should be located in close proximity to schools, activities and / or collective transport**
- **Municipalities should measure the effect of their implemented actions**
- **Municipalities should ensure funding for activities, support and integration measures**

- **The municipalities should increasingly involve the users/ accompanied minors in the design of the shared accommodation**

Historically we have seen that the current funding has greatly influenced which living arrangements municipalities have established. Institution uses that most resources with regard to staffing. The measure also has clear guidelines and requirements related to quality. In connection with the introduction of the reimbursement system under Bufetat (Children, Youth and Family Affairs), shared accommodation became the dominant housing measure. It has been documented that the facilities in shared accommodation varied considerably between municipalities. After the restructuring of the funding system, we have seen that many municipalities established and expanded new types of measures.

Several of the informants suggested that the framework for municipalities' use of shared accommodation needed to be defined more clearly and in what circumstances it is appropriate to use this measure. In many municipalities¹, shared accommodation is the first measure the minors are placed in. This measure insures that there will be competent adults present who have the opportunity to undertake a thorough assessment of the minor's individual needs, which is not always possible at a care or immigration center. Some youngsters will be ready for a more independent living arrangement relatively quickly, while others will need to stay for a longer period.

To which extent have municipalities succeeded in getting unaccompanied minors into education and/or work?

Statistics from SSB can demonstrate that there is considerable variation between municipalities when it comes to getting unaccompanied minors into education and / or work, but we lack research that can document the relationship between housing measures and integration. Several municipalities have examined how the minors are getting on and their findings are positive, however these studies have their methodological limitations.

The municipalities sampled have not conducted systematic documentation of the extent to which the unaccompanied minors have undertaken education or work. Figures from SSB (Statistics Norway) per November 2014, suggest that 77 percent of those classified as unaccompanied refugee minors aged 18-29 were active in education or work. This is significantly lower when compared with the same age group in the general population, but it does show an increase of 6 percent from 2011.

Several other participating municipalities have attempted to examine how the minors are getting on, without having any systematic documentation over time. One of the municipalities stated that all unaccompanied minors completed primary school, the vast majority completed secondary education, and just under half completed higher education. Several other municipalities provide the same findings. We have compared the statistics collected from SSB with what we know about housing facilities in the municipalities participating in both our and SSB studies. Many factors affect integration and these extend beyond housing to including origin and unemployment levels in the individual municipalities. However, we have seen a tendency for municipalities that offered a high standard of shared accommodation have outperformed municipalities that practice "lighter measures". This sheds light on the relationship between the quality of housing and results, however long term studies need to be conducted in order to gather enough evidence to confirm these findings.

In the project we have mapped what the municipalities think are important for successful integration of unaccompanied minors. In addition to housing, those questioned state that care, respect, school, community, recreational activities and job / internships are important factors.

The unaccompanied minors have told us that they primarily want to be like other teenagers. For them, this means, among other things, attending school and participation in activities with other Norwegian youngsters. They do not want to be different or receive preferential treatment.

¹ Only 2 of the participating municipalities offer institutional to the youngest children

Conclusion

The municipalities are currently free to choose which living arrangements they offer and how they put together and implement different measures. The mapping of needs in care or immigration center seem in many cases to be inadequate. There is therefore no assurance that measures provided matches the individual's needs. This is significant for the municipalities' work and follow up of the minors, but also for the results of the work. The municipalities are more or less deliberate of aligning the offer to what we know is important for the minors and providing results. Many municipalities have gained valuable experiences in working with unaccompanied minors, of which other municipalities can benefit from.

We also know that the political framework that municipalities operate under is of great importance for the design of such offers. Various financing arrangements provides various incentives when it comes to balance quality and economy. Variations in settlement needs also results in unpredictability of the municipalities.

The financing arrangements for unaccompanied minors has changed constantly. The change in the reimbursement system from 100 to 80 percent has meant that municipalities have increasingly had to focus on measures of streamlining and downsizing. In next year's budget, it was announced additional changes in the financial mechanisms. The consequence of failing with financing, general conditions and those previously mentioned are significant. If municipalities are rewarded for offering a "lighter" version of support with less following up of the unaccompanied minors, the costs in the long term will far exceed the short-term gains.

Those involved in this field of work believe it is critical, from both the child's perspective and a long-term financial and integration perspective that the municipalities succeed in dealing with unaccompanied minors. Important decisions regarding financing are to be made and municipalities are asking for a level of predictability. A key challenge is how best to encourage positive practices and ensure a well-functioning framework for municipalities to use in their work.

Recommendation

Municipalities have some leeway when it comes to ensuring quality housing that promotes the integration of unaccompanied minors. Many municipalities have worked long and hard with this topic and there is a huge potential for learning from each other. It is striking that the experience of the local authorities, who for many years have worked with experts to develop quality measures, are so congruent with the minors themselves in that they believe it is so essential to integrate and have good quality of life in Norway.

In addition, it is evident that the framework they operate under conditions the municipalities' opportunities for success. We have investigated the financial framework, but third parties outside of the municipality have an important role when it comes to integration. Therefore, we also want to raise some recommendations in these areas. Many elements must be in place to ensure the best possible conditions for integration.

Recommendations to the municipalities

- Municipalities should ensure a comprehensive approach to working with unaccompanied minors, including structuring the work of the municipal management, requirements and expectations of cooperation between relevant stakeholders, agreed values and knowledge-based service development
- Shared accommodation, defined by certain quality criteria², should be the foundation in municipal housing measures. The first period, all unaccompanied minors (which are not placed in a foster home or institution) should be placed in supervised shared accommodation, to ensure a thorough assessment of their individual needs. The minors' needs and age should be determining for the period of time living in the shared accommodation. The period of time in this measure may vary from a few months to several years. Shared accommodation should

² Referring to the recommendation to state authorities relating to criteria for accommodation based on quality

be supplemented with other, “lighter” measures for minors who have lived in such facilities longer or who require less supervision

- Municipalities must focus on integration as part of their duty of care, this includes
 - Cooperation with voluntary organizations and sports clubs to insure active participation
 - Cooperation with the business community to establish internships and part time jobs. Municipalities should also focus on internal internships
 - Promote networking by establish measures for visits to friends and family homes

Recommendations to state authorities

- Delay the proposed introduction of unit price financing in 2018 and only differentiate based on type of housing and not by age. It is proposed that pricing be based on three different rates. One rate for approved institutions, another rate for shared accommodation and one for all other types of housing
- Establish criteria for accommodation based on quality
- Introduce an application system via the County Governor of each municipality to cover additional costs incurred during the establishment of new offers
- Review the regulations regarding grants for unaccompanied minors with disabilities and behavioral problems and make them simpler
- Conduct a review of the objectives and methodology related to mapping of the minors needs, both in immigration and care centers. Review the flow of information and cooperation between the municipalities, IMDi and the care and immigration centers
- Establish appropriate mechanisms that test the quality criteria for shared accommodation
- Review the guardian scheme for unaccompanied minors to ensure equal opportunities and better legal protection
- Ensure participation in comprehensive education for unaccompanied minors over 16 years, where possible together with Norwegian youths
- Implement research on long-term effects of accommodation and integration measures for unaccompanied minors