



Career Guidance in the Service of Integration in Norway

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RESEARCH



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ABSTRACT

In 2021, Norway introduced a new Integration Act in which career guidance is expected to contribute to the 'accelerated integration' of newly arrived refugees. While there is extensive research on both Norwegian integration and career guidance policies, the position of career guidance in the current integration policy remains underexplored. In this article, we employ Carol Bacchi's 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' (WPR) approach to analyse nine recent Norwegian policy documents that shape the understanding of the integration 'problems' that career guidance is intended to address. We ask: How are the problems that career guidance is intended to solve represented in Norwegian integration policy, and what effects can these understandings have on career guidance for refugees? We explore three problem representations in Norwegian integration policy and discuss alternative perspectives on integration and career guidance, which are overlooked in integration policy problematisations.

SAMMENDRAG

I 2021 innførte Norge en ny integreringslov der karriereveiledning forventes å bidra til 'raskere integrering' av nyankomne flyktninger. Selv om det forskes mye på både norsk integreringspolitikk og karriereveiledningspolitikk, er karriereveiledningens posisjon i den nye integreringspolitikken fortsatt lite utforsket. I denne artikkelen bruker vi Carol Bacchi's tilnærming 'What is the Problem Represented to Be' (WPR) for å analysere ni nyere norske policydokumenter som former forståelsen av integreringsproblemene som karriereveiledning er ment å adressere. Vi spør: 'Hvordan blir problemene som karriereveiledning er ment å løse, representert i den norske integreringspolitikken, og hvilke effekter kan disse forståelsene ha på karriereveiledning for flyktninger?'. Vi utforsker tre problemrepresentasjoner i norsk integreringspolitikk og diskuterer alternative perspektiver på integrering og karriereveiledning, som blir oversett i integreringspolitiske problematiseringer.

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INTRODUCTION PROGRAM IN NORWAY

Globally, over 100 million people are forcefully displaced, and Norway has resettled 65,000 refugees over the past two years (Regjeringen, 2024). Like its Nordic counterparts, Norway has developed a comprehensive Integration Program (IP) including language training, job market knowledge, and job placements. Norway's IP, launched in 2003, is a full-time municipal scheme for new refugees entitled to introduction benefits (Flatø et al., 2023). The current Integration Act (2021) addresses the perceived underutilisation of refugees' skills and poor transitions to employment or education post-program (Prop. 89 L, 2019). An explicit aim of the Act is to increase the number of refugees pursuing education. It also introduces mandatory career guidance, where:

'Career guidance is intended to enable individuals to make informed choices about work and education, and to ensure that the IP is tailored to the individual's needs.'
 (Integreringsloven, 2021, §11)¹

Career guidance (approximately 1.5 hours individual guidance) is recommended before program initiation and is provided by county council career counsellors. This process concludes with a 'career counsellor's note', including competence mapping, career aspirations, and, ideally, a goal recommendation within the law's framework. Subsequently, the municipal refugee service takes over the follow-up of refugees in the program. The municipality has been responsible for competence mapping and drafting an Individual Plan (IP) for refugees since the start of the IP; however, this has not been called career guidance. In the current Integration Act (2021), career guidance became an official part of the program.

This study examines career guidance within the Norwegian welfare service context, characterised by a strong ethos of employment and integration through work (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018). Norwegian national policies, in line with the EU and OECD policy recommendations, promote career guidance as a tool for enhancing population competence (Kjærgård, 2012). Professional approaches adopt a more holistic view of career guidance of refugees, where the goal is not just rapid employment, but also social and cultural belonging with a sustainable career (Sultana, 2022). This can lead to tensions in career guidance, which ought to serve refugees' integration support needs while adhering to societal labour-market integration or knowledge economy objectives (Hooley et al., 2018; Kekki & Linde, 2022). To gain a more nuanced understanding of these potential tensions, it is essential to critically problematise the ways in which career guidance is portrayed as a 'solution for integration' in these policy strategies.

We utilise Carol Bacchi's 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach to explore nine policy documents linked to the Integration Act (2021), and ask: How are the problems that career guidance is intended to solve represented in the Norwegian integration policy, and what effects can these understandings have on career guidance for refugees? We analyse career guidance as a service, that is linked to how the career-related challenges of refugees are presented in the documents. We have limited our exploration to career guidance provided by the County Council under the Integration Act (2021). Moreover, regulations and documents concerning Ukrainian refugees with collective protection were excluded because of their temporary and changing nature. In the following sections, we describe our theoretical and methodological framework and data material with associated considerations. This is followed by an analysis of the three problem representations found in the policy texts and a discussion of our findings.

THE NORWEGIAN INTEGRATION POLICY AS A PLATFORM TO EXPLORE DISCOURSES WITHIN CAREER GUIDANCE

Integration is a politically, academically, and colloquially complex and contested term. Politically, refugee integration is seen as an adjustment to the new society to avoid economic, social, or cultural marginalisation. (Sætermo et al., 2021.) In the Nordic region, the discourse on integration emphasises the importance of labour market inclusion. In Norway, integration

¹ We have translated the citations from policy documents ourselves.

system operates under the broader social welfare regime structured around active labour market policies (ALMP), which promote integration through workforce participation (Stein & Fedreheim, 2022). Taking a broader perspective on integration, we acknowledge that it entails both macro- and micro-processes by which refugees become accepted and included in the new country. In other words, it is a reciprocal and ongoing process between the individual, the local community and broader society (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2014). The social and cultural aspects of integration involve belonging to a civil society and being good citizens and communities (Sætermo et al., 2021).

Our understanding of discourse builds on Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016, p. 33) description, inspired by Foucault, in which discourses are socially produced forms of knowledge that set boundaries for what it is possible to think, write, or speak about a given social practice. It shapes our understanding of ourselves and influences our perceptions of the world. In professional work, discourses inform us of what we may consider professionally correct or the purpose of the work we do. In Sultana's analysis of both professional and policy discourses in career guidance (Sultana, 2014, 2018), he identifies career guidance as serving broadly three different interests or 'rationalities', namely technocratic, hermeneutic (later called developmental or humanistic), and emancipatory.

In the technocratic discourse, the purpose of career guidance is to promote socioeconomic effects. Inspiration is drawn from matching perspectives, which focus on matching individuals with available jobs to ensure a smooth flow between supply and demand using psychometric methods. In humanistic discourse, career guidance promotes unlimited individual personal growth and self-realisation, and the ethos of free choice is strong. Emancipatory discourse incorporates a critical sociological view that acknowledges how structural conditions frame career opportunities in certain groups. This discourse critiques preceding discourses which attribute too much responsibility to individuals for career success or failure (Hooley et al., 2018). These discourses have inherent tensions between the potential utility of career guidance for society and individuals. Under Q2 and Q4 we use Sultana's typology as theoretical support to analyse the assumptions (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5) underlying the problem representations and their potential effects on career guidance.

UTILISING WPR METHODOLOGY TO EXAMINE THE CONDITIONS OF CAREER GUIDANCE FOR INTEGRATION

WPR is a method for analysing policy from a Foucault-inspired post-structuralist perspective (Bacchi, 2009, 2020; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Policy is considered a cultural, historical, and human construction that plays a central role in how we are governed, and how subjects and objects are produced (Bacchi, 2009). Policies, such as integration are formulated by providing solutions to identified societal problems (Bacchi, 2020). Bacchi, by contrast, asserts that policies create or shape problems to be solved. The focus of the WPR method is not on how people shape arguments, as in critical discourse analysis (policy as text), but on the deeply seated ways of thinking that underlie political practice (policy as discourse) (Bacchi, 2000). She points out the connection between problem understanding and proposed solutions, and examines the premises on which the problem representations are built and the effects they create (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Therefore, by interrogating the proposed solutions presented in a policy, we grasp what is implied as a problem, which Bacchi (2009) refers to as a problem representation. By examining how different solutions are outlined, one can discover what is considered a problem and how 'policies give shape to 'problems'; they do not address them' (Bacchi, 2009, p. x).

We utilised Bacchi's WPR method's seven analytical questions to answer our research question "How are the problems that career guidance is intended to solve represented in the Norwegian integration policy, and what effects can these understandings have on career guidance for refugees?". The potential effects will be analysed and discussed under WPR Q5. We adapted the questions to match our research objective as follows:

1. What assumed problems is career guidance intended to solve according to the Integration Act and Norwegian integration policy?

2. What deep seated assumptions and presuppositions underpin the idea that career guidance is a solution to these problem representations related to integration?
3. How has career guidance emerged as a solution to ‘problems’ in integration policy?
4. What is left unproblematic and where are the silences in problem representations?
5. What discursive, subjective, and lived effects are produced by the problem representations?
6. How are problem representations produced, disseminated, and defended?
7. Apply the list of questions to your own problem representations.

(Bacchi, 2009, p. xii)

Q1 is about identifying, what is represented as ‘problem’ within a given policy. Our analysis begins by recognising integration ‘solutions’ linked to career guidance, and subsequently asking: If career guidance is the solution to the integration of newly arrived refugees, what is the problem? We look at the justifications for career guidance and how these are intertwined with some understandings of ‘problems’. In Q2 we do not address the ‘why’ aspect of the problem representations connected to integration where career guidance is offered as a solution. Instead, we interrogate the discursive practices involved in the production of ‘problems’. The aim is to examine, which discourses shape the realm of what becomes possible to think and perceive within ‘problems’ of integration and career guidance (Bacchi, 2009). Q3 is illuminated by a historical review of the selected policy documents with attention to text excerpts where career guidance is described as a solution to various integration ‘problems’. In Q4 and Q5, we analyse what is taken for granted in the problem representations and what effects may they have? What is omitted and silenced? Can one think differently about the ‘problem’? How are the actors described, how is career guidance described, and what effects do these descriptions have? We examine discursive, subjective, and lived effects (see Table 2). Discursive effects refer to how problem representation sets limits for what can be thought and said. Subjectification effects are how problem representations produce certain desirable types of individuals, for example, the ideal refugee or career counsellor. Lived effects refer to how problem representations affect career guidance in practice. Q6 concerns how career guidance as a solution to certain problems in the integration field is reproduced, disseminated and defended at different discursive sites. The answer to this enquiry partly coincides with the historical analysis provided under Q3, and we have therefore chosen to combine the analysis regarding these questions. Finally, we reflect critically and ethically our own position (Q7) in conclusions.

METHOD

We selected nine political documents that addressed career guidance for integration. These documents² are presented in under Q3. Documents were selected for analysis based on their status as policy documents related to the Integration Act, including preparatory works and guidelines. Additionally, we included Norwegian policy documents preceding the Act that advocate career guidance as an integration service for adult refugees. Table 1 presents an overview of the documents analysed in this study.

YEAR	DOCUMENT TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH
2016	White Paper 30 (2015–2016) From reception centre to the labour market – an effective integration policy. (Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016))
2016	Chapter ‘Career guidance for integration’ in Norwegian Official Report NOU 2016:7 Norway in Transition – Career Guidance for Individuals and Society. (NOU 2016:7)
2017	NOU 2017: 2 Integration and trust- Long-term consequences of high immigration. The Brochmann II Committee. (NOU 2017:2)
2018	Government’s integration strategy 2019–2022 Integration through knowledge. Ministry of Education. (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018)

(Contd.)

Table 1 Selected policy documents.

² We will use the document name **in bold** when referring to the documents in the analysis.

YEAR	DOCUMENT TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH
2019	Legislative proposal. Prop. 89 L (2019–2020) Integration through knowledge. Ministry of Education and Research. (Prop. 89 L, (2019–2020))
2021	Act on integration through education, education, and work (Integration Act). (Integreringsloven, 2021)
2021	Regulations to the Integration Act (the Integration Regulations) (Integreringsforskriften, 2021)
2024	Legal guide to the Integration Act. (Imdi, 2024)
2024	White Paper 17 (2023–2024) On integration policy: Setting Expectations and Showing Up. (Meld. St. 17 (2023–2024))

Bacchi encourages the identification of specific solutions. We read the policy documents multiple times. Initially, we identified the solutions present in all the documents. Based on these, we formulated overarching problem representations that covered the themes most relevant to career guidance for refugees, naming them accordingly: 1) It takes too much time to mobilise refugees' skills for the benefit of the Norwegian labour market 2) refugees are not employable – yet, and 3) refugees lack the ability to make independent and rational career choices. In the next section, we describe each problem representation, followed by a more in-depth analysis and discussion utilising WPR Q2–6. We conclude the analysis by revisiting our research question. In the article, we selected text excerpts/quotes based on their ability to effectively convey the problem representation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

PROBLEM REPRESENTATION 1. IT TAKES TOO MUCH TIME TO MOBILISE REFUGEES' SKILLS FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE NORWEGIAN LABOUR MARKET

This problem representation addresses refugees' lack of knowledge about how to put their competences into use in ways in which are relevant for the Norwegian labour market and how this prolongs the integration process. In the White Paper 30 (p. 63), career guidance is described as:

...advice about the path to and choice of education and work, but it is also a process in which individuals become more aware of their own competences. By providing immigrants with early career guidance, they can use their time better and be better able to make informed choices.

Here, we identify a time aspect to integration: newly arrived refugees take too much time to put their existing skills and competence into use in the new country. White Paper 30 frames career guidance as a measure that enables newly arrived refugees to use their time more effectively in the early integration phase. Career guidance is described here as effective for the individual, and a similar reasoning is also seen later in the same document:

It can be time-consuming for adult immigrants to acquire knowledge about Norwegian society and understand how they can use their own competence to enter the labour market. Career guidance is central for refugees to be able to use their existing competence and obtain a stable and lasting connection to working life. (P. 63)

The time from when refugees arrive in Norway to when they are employed is considered as a problem. Here, inefficiency is seen at the individual level, and it is the individual refugee's responsibility to be efficient in their integration process. With support from career guidance, it is expected that refugees will become aware of the relevance of their competence in the Norwegian labour market. We also find a formulation in which career guidance should contribute to a more efficient IP delivery for refugees, thus contributing to the effectivization of integration at a systemic level. In the Government's Integration Strategy 2019–2022 (p. 27), career guidance is described as a solution to poorly adapted and inflexible qualification programs, as follows: 'Early competence mapping and career guidance can lead to a more

targeted qualification and career choice for the individual and contribute to better adapted measures from the municipality’.

Time perspective also affects career guidance as a service. The Integration Act recommends that career guidance should be provided before the start of the IP. The guidance session should last approximately 1.5 hours, after which the career counsellor is expected to draft a career plan outlining recommended objectives for the induction program. Therefore, career guidance should come early in the integration process, be a short-term offer, and quickly conclude and come with recommended plans for further career progress.

What we also notice is that the term ‘quick’ often appears in arguments promoting career guidance for refugees. In NOU 2016:7’s chapter on career guidance for integration, the term quick appears 24 times in various combinations such as quick work orientation and quicker transition to work. Compared to other chapters addressing various target groups for career guidance, we find the word quickly seven times in the chapter ‘Career-oriented guidance in NAV’ and not at all in the chapter ‘Career guidance in correctional services’. In contrast to other target groups, career guidance for refugees is predominantly viewed as a mechanism for swift entry into the job market. In the same chapter, it is argued that:

Early access to career guidance will promote rapid work orientation and the start of work-related activities, counteract passivity, and prevent exclusion. In other words, career guidance is a cost-effective tool to counteract exclusion and welfare-financed livelihoods. (NOU 2016:7, p. 191)

Here, career guidance is justified from a socioeconomic perspective in that it will contribute to lower welfare payments.

While the first problem representation addresses how refugees’ limited understanding of labour and education opportunities leads to inefficient integration, the second focuses on deficiencies in their professional competence and social resources in a new country.

PROBLEM REPRESENTATION 2. REFUGEES ARE NOT EMPLOYABLE, – YET

The next problem representation we found in several of the documents and research literature is attention to refugees’ deficiencies in navigating their way in the new host country and its system. These deficiencies are mentioned as the reason for the assumed inefficient integration process.

Many of the adults will have competence they can use or build on, but very few will be able to go directly into the same profession or type of job they have previously had — Those with the lowest formal and informal competence naturally often face the greatest challenges in getting a job... (NOU 2016:7, p. 192)

Further, we can read in NOU 2016:7 (p.191) that:

The education system is complex, and the labour market can seem overwhelming. Newly arrived immigrants have fewer networks, colleagues, and family to rely on than the rest of the population, while many of them will have a particular need for and benefit from information, clarification, and help to find out about their educational and job opportunities in Norway.

These shortcomings are directly related to the resources available for refugee individuals. Integration challenges here refer to a lack of existing skills, social networks and the right kind of information about educational and job opportunities in Norway, as well as a problematic scenario where employment opportunities misalign with refugees’ existing professional expertise. In that case, integration is considered successful if refugees manage to acquire the ‘right skills’ to enter the labour market, even if this means letting go of their existing occupational identity (Drange & Orupabo, 2018; Masoud et al., 2020). The idea of refugees as malleable workforce becomes clear in text excerpts which highlight their potential use value for the labour market that: ‘Immigrants constitute an important labour force resource, which the labour and social life should have access to and benefit from’ (NOU 2016:7, p. 192).

Career guidance is considered useful in contributing to education and job focus in the early phase of the integration process (Opinion, 2017). In the years since arrival, education in the

host country is linked to higher employment and income in the long term (Bratsberg et al., 2016). Education is highlighted as an important integration tool, and the Integration Act has made it easier for more individuals to include education in their IP (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018). The proposed solutions in the documents suggest that refugees have a potential that is not being well utilised and that their resources can be released or developed (e.g. taking education in Norway) based on career guidance. In other words, they are not employable yet.

PROBLEM REPRESENTATION 3. REFUGEES LACK THE ABILITY TO MAKE INDEPENDENT AND RATIONAL CAREER CHOICES

This problem representation also deals with a focus on deficiencies, but where the second problem representation focuses on the refugees' lack of 'right skills', here refugees' lack of ability to make career choices becomes the problem, in other words, something they cannot manage. Therefore, it is assumed that refugees require career advice for career planning.

As presented previously, White Paper 30 describes career guidance as 'advice on the path to and choice of education and work but also a process where the individual becomes more aware of their own competence'. In the Integration Act §11 we find formulations that align with this perspective: 'When the career guidance has been carried out, a recommendation should be given about work or education for the individual participant...'. Thus, refugees are framed as needing advice and recommendations regarding their career choices. In addition to advice and recommendations, good career choices are highlighted as being based on information, since: 'The career guidance should contribute to the individual being able to make informed choices about work and education and to the IP being adapted to the individual's needs' (Integreringsloven, 2021, §11).

Here, the condition for refugees to make 'good' career choices seems to be that career counsellors provide them with career information and advice. Refugees do not have career information in the early integration phase, so recommendations from the career counsellor are advisable. Implicitly, there is an understanding that when they have eventually acquired career information, they will be able to make 'good' career choices.

Some recurring themes are identified in the three problem representations. The most clearly expressed is the deficit view on the refugees: what they *lack*. The focus in all problem representations is on what refugees do not know, cannot do or do not manage to establish a career in a new country. However, problem representations also describe refugees with potential; deficiencies can be developed with the support of, among other things, career guidance. Career guidance should help transform refugees' deficiencies into labour market assets, thereby facilitating a faster integration process.

Q2: WHAT ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPIN THE IDEA OF CAREER GUIDANCE AS A SOLUTION FOR INTEGRATION?

The analysis here involves identifying the underlying premises of the three problem representations, all of which point to the need for career guidance for more efficient integration. However, the identification of the cause of this need may be related to different discourses.

A recurring theme in the analysed documents is that career guidance can contribute to more efficient integration processes within a technocratic discourse focusing on competence and socioeconomics. There seems to be a strong assumption that acquiring the 'right' knowledge and skills will render refugees employable and ensure a stable attachment to the labour force. The responsibility to acquire the formal competence demanded by the labour market is placed on individual refugees. Hence, it becomes the government's duty to support refugees in acquiring skills in accordance with society's competence requirements. Concurrently, there is a knowledge-economic discourse in which capital lies within an individual (Kjærgård, 2012). An economic argument is made for increasing educational opportunities, as demonstrated in the following quote from the Government's Integration Strategy for 2019–2022 (p. 10):

The calculations of the Brochmann 2 Commission show that under certain conditions, it is socio-economically profitable to invest in the education of refugees, as it provides significant gains in the form of increased employment.

The time it takes for refugees to gain employment appears as a challenge, both for the individual refugee, due to a lack of self-sufficiency, independence, and participation, and for society, which experiences a shortage of labour and increased welfare state expenses (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018). This resonates with Sultana's (2014, 2018) technocratic discourse, where the goal is socioeconomic efficiency and strengthening the country's economy by ensuring a good flow between supply and demand for competence. It is argued that this balance is lacking in the field of integration. Technocratic discourse promotes scientific methods to match job seekers' skills with labour market needs. Career choices are considered rational decisions, and career guidance is viewed as a measure that can organise people for the benefit of both the individual and society (Hooley et al., 2018). Those outside the labour market or education are often portrayed as having weak qualifications (Kjærgård, 2012), and career guidance is expected to assist refugees in acquiring desirable qualifications, thereby enhancing their labour market prospects (Masoud et al., 2020).

The responsibility of developing competencies and making sound career choices is placed on individual refugees. This perspective is tied to neoliberal logic that focuses on what individuals should do to improve their own life situation (Hammer, 2021). The notion of individual responsibility for lifelong learning and career competence is reflected in various policy texts from the EU (2008), OECD (2004), and national documents (NOU 2016:7). This neoliberal logic is associated with the governance form of governmentality, where governance 'from above' is intertwined with self-governance (Hammer, 2021). Problem representations and solutions may seem obvious to those involved, and perspectives such as employability discourse can appear self-selected by both career counsellors and refugees (Drange & Orupabo, 2018).

We also identify a humanistic discourse (Sultana, 2014, 2017), which suggests that career guidance should help tailor the IP to the individual's needs. Legislative proposal (Prop. 89 L, (2019–2020), p. 71) states: 'Career guidance should, in the department's view, also take into account the individual's age, motivation, and aspirations.' Here, the individual is at the centre, and career guidance can contribute to self-awareness and understanding of the motivations that each refugee has for a career in a new country'.

Career guidance for refugees often prioritises societal considerations and market needs over individual needs. This is seen in an integration discourse in which job seekers are to adapt to the labour market's demands (Kekki & Linde, 2022; Masoud et al., 2020). The integration discourse emphasises getting refugees on the correct trajectory as quickly as possible to avoid potential threats to the integration process (Magnussen, 2020). What is best for society and the individual is often determined by the governing powers, and career guidance serves as a 'soft' political instrument serving the political goals within the integration field (Hooley et al., 2018).

Q3 AND Q6: HOW HAS CAREER GUIDANCE EMERGED AS A SOLUTION TO THE 'PROBLEMS' IN INTEGRATION POLICY? HOW ARE PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS PRODUCED, DISSEMINATED, OR DEFENDED?

This chapter engages in a genealogical analysis of the problem representations and discourses presented in previous analysis. We highlight the historical development of two policy discourses—integration policy and competence policy—that influence problem representations in our study.

In 1975, Norway introduced an immigration stop for foreign non-Nordic workers, with exceptions for refugees, among others. This action was undertaken due to the societal situation in Norway and to improve social circumstances for immigrants already residing in the country (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2014). Norway adheres to a universalistic welfare model, and since 1975, its immigration policy has been shaped by the perception that immigration threatens the sustainability of the welfare system. Consequently, the number of individuals who attain economic independence from the welfare system through employment became a critical factor in integration.

In 2000, EU Prime Ministers resolved to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010 (The European Council, 2000). In this knowledge economy, the competence of the population is seen as the society's most important resource (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2018). Since then, political actors such as the OECD, EU, and World Bank have linked career guidance to economic growth and increased competitiveness.

According to OECD, democratic societies should develop career guidance systems that ‘...also develops people’s ability to manage their own careers’ (OECD, 2004, p. 139). This approach to holding citizens responsible for adapting to a competence society is recognisable in Norway’s integration policy over the past 10 years (Stein & Fedreheim, 2022).

The number of refugees coming to Norway has increased since the 1980s, and due to the high influx of refugees in 2015, the Solberg Government desired a ‘more efficient’ integration policy (White Paper 30). One measure was the establishment of the Brochmann 2 Committee, which assessed the long-term consequences of immigration. The committee recommended the quick commencement of education and qualification programs for newly arrived refugees and better mechanisms to assess and complement their existing educational background and qualifications (NOU 2017:2).

White Paper 30 referred to NOU 2016:7, specifically the chapter ‘Career Guidance for Integration’, which advocated professional career guidance as a tool for the integration of newly arrived refugees. NOU 2016:7 highlighted, that municipalities assess refugees’ competencies and interests, but this falls short of professional career guidance. The committee recommended the following:

Newly arrived immigrants must have sufficient access to career guidance in the introduction scheme’ and ‘people with a high probability of getting residence should already in reception have access to career guidance. (NOU 2016:7, p. 206)

The Solberg Government created several integration reception centres in 2016, with full-time programs for residents. This was the first time that professional career guidance was introduced as a mandatory measure in the integration field. Career guidance was provided by career counsellors at county municipal career centres (Meld. St. 30 (2015–2016)).

The Solberg Government was critical of the original IP. In their integration strategy 2019–2022, the government stated that many municipalities did not have ‘sufficient results in their qualification programmes’ and that there were significant differences between municipalities. They wanted to reform the IP and to focus on education and formal qualifications. Reform of the IP came with the Integration Act in 2021. Here, the right and duty to provide career guidance at the start of the IP was legally established.

The Støre Government issued its integration report White Paper 17 on integration policy ‘Set requirements and show up’ in 2024. The main message was that more immigrants should enter and gain a stable position in the workforce regulated by law. The report referred to existing measures of career guidance in the integration system, without mentioning new tasks for public career guidance services.

This historical review highlights how changes in Norwegian integration and competence policies have contributed to framing refugees as inadequately qualified and in need of upskilling to enter the workforce and to become economically self-sufficient. There has been an increasing emphasis on competence development, and career guidance has been outlined as a suitable service that contributes to accelerating refugees’ entry into qualification programs.

Q4: WHAT IS LEFT UNPROBLEMATIC AND WHERE ARE THE SILENCES IN PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS?

Our problem representations view career guidance dominantly through a technocratic discourse, where refugee skills, and career support, are primarily evaluated against labour market needs. Research indicates that career counsellors direct refugees towards occupations with favourable job prospects (Kekki, 2024). Many refugees adapt their career plans to quickly integrate into the workforce and achieve financial independence (Hertzberg, 2023), which can be perceived as assimilation into the employment domain.

Career counsellors’ professionalism is challenged as they find themselves conflicted between facilitating refugees’ adaptation to societal structures and promoting their personal development (Kekki & Linde, 2022). The principle of neutrality and client-centeredness is compromised, when career guidance involves holding refugees responsible for enhancing their skills in accordance with the demands of the labour market. This discourse also excludes career guidance as a critical practice addressing contextual, systemic, and societal issues as

part of the ‘problem’ with integration, such as local labour market limitations, discriminating qualification assessment models, or segregation in education and the labour market. Workplace discrimination against refugees has been documented in Norway (Bratsberg et al., 2016).

Migrants’ deficits are emphasised through a discourse on employability in career guidance practices (Masoud et al. 2020; Drange & Orupabo, 2018). Labour market structures and cultures remain unchanged, while refugees must work on their habits and identities and present an ‘assimilated façade’ to be accepted (eg. Masoud et al., 2020). The employer’s perspective in the work integration process is downplayed, although it is more prominent in White Paper 17, where the issue of too many refugees ending up in precarious labour market is problematised. Work and education are described as key integration arenas in career guidance, while a broader perspective on integration as a two-way process or everyday integration is understated.

Technocratic discourse and its confinement to job matching, rational career choices, and integration through work overlooks various challenges related to career guidance in the early integration phase. Topics such as career conceptions in a new country (Arulmani, 2012), and non-Western views on career and career approaches (Sultana, 2017) remain unproblematised. Several scholars critique a rational understanding of career choices, emphasising meaning, chance, or interests as significant factors (2009; Savickas, 2019). Idea of career as a “choice” resonates little among those most vulnerable in society, as structural conditions shape people’s opportunities and careers (Hooley et al., 2018). When integration discourse homogenises refugees as deficit or culturally other, intersectional differences and structural disadvantages are trivialised (Sultana, 2017).

According to the Integration Act (2021), career counsellor should recommend work or education within the temporally short-term framework of the IP. This rigid task conflicts with professional principles, such as guidance as a process which strengthens the counselee’s position to manage their career which stretches life wide and lifelong. Career guidance should be early and quick, raising questions about the possibility of establishing a good relationship within this timeframe, a key element of career guidance. According to Kekki (2024) integration should be seen as a process rather than a condition to be achieved, and that such a process is time-consuming and can span generations. Exploring other perspectives takes time. When guidance involves an interpreter, this can be time-consuming and require multiple guidance sessions.

Q5: WHAT DISCURSIVE, SUBJECTIVE, AND LIVED EFFECTS ARE PRODUCED BY THE PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS?

Now we wish to return to our research question concerning, how are the problems that career guidance is intended to solve, framed in the Norwegian integration policy, and what effects can these understandings have on career guidance for refugees. The ways in which problems are framed in policy generate various discursive, subjectification and lived effects in career guidance for newly arrived refugees. As the discursive effects have been discussed earlier, we will here focus on subjectification and lived effects. Lived effects are part of an integrated analysis of how discursive and subjectification effects can have implications for people’s lives (Bacchi, 2009). Our analysis includes a critical reflection on how problem representations that describe refugees’ issues as an individual’s responsibility can have consequences for career guidance services.

Career guidance depicted in the documents, informed by a technocratic discourse, promotes certain practices to ensure a match between refugees’ skills and market needs. Instead of asking the refugees what *they want* help with, career guidance in the IP may need to start by explaining to the refugee why they *should* have career guidance and then lead discussions towards topics that counsellor must cover to evaluate potential career goals within the IP. Such a practice assigns different roles to counsellors and counselees based on power positions (Bacchi, 2009). We identified that career counsellors take on an expert role, and refugees become passive recipients in guidance situations. Kekki’s (2022) research illustrates how career counsellors in the integration field wield power by directing conversations towards employment topics and evading what they perceive as problematic issues that refugees try to address. Flatø and colleagues (2023) analysed career guidance as regulated by the Introduction Act concluding, that it mainly focused on evaluating refugees’ existing qualifications and skills and providing information about the education system and labour market, with little focus on future aspirations. While career counsellors aim for an exploratory

approach, it is difficult to implement as refugees attend career guidance involuntarily and typically have only one session.

According to Kjærgård (2012), society is increasingly pushing the responsibility of making choices (and bearing their costs) to individuals, requiring active individuals who make reasonable decisions. Our analysis thus far has presented an image of exactly these kinds of refugee subjects, with both deficiencies and unharnessed potential. The ideal refugee is portrayed as motivated to adapt his or her career to the new country's labour market needs, eager to learn and get a job, rational and realistic, and willing to receive career advice from career guidance, which is framed as an expert service of the state's integration system. Thus, career guidance in the field of integration contributes to the production of subjects who feel responsible for their own integration and employability adapted to the Norwegian labour market (Hooley et al., 2018). The image of the competent career counsellor is one who is an expert on Norwegian conditions, quickly manages to map refugees' skills and career aspirations, provides relevant career information, and concludes with recommendations for plans in the IP.

Table 2 summarises the key findings of our analyses.

WHAT ASSUMED PROBLEMS IS CAREER GUIDANCE INTENDED TO SOLVE ACCORDING TO THE INTEGRATION ACT AND NORWEGIAN INTEGRATION POLICY?	WHAT ASSUMPTIONS UNDERPIN THE IDEA THAT CAREER GUIDANCE IS A SOLUTION TO THESE PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS RELATED TO INTEGRATION?	WHAT IS LEFT UNPROBLEMATIC AND WHERE ARE THE SILENCES IN PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS?	WHAT DISCURSIVE, SUBJECTIVE, AND LIVED EFFECTS ARE PRODUCED BY THE PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS?
It takes too much time to mobilise refugees' skills for the benefit of the Norwegian labour market	Technocratic discourse. Flow between supply and demand of competence. Integration discourse tied to employment. Socioeconomic discourse.	<u>Taken for granted</u> Economic burden of receiving refugees. Individual's responsibility. Refugees need to adapt to Norwegian conditions. <u>Silence/Omission</u> Structural conditions. <u>Could it be thought differently</u> Integration as a two-way process.	<u>Discursive Effects</u> Refugees as an economic burden where career guidance is expected to contribute to rapid employment. <u>Subjectification Effects</u> The motivated, responsible, willing to learn, and adaptable refugee. The career counsellor as the extended arm of the state in the field of integration. <u>Lived Effects</u> Career guidance for rapid income security.
The refugees are not employable, – yet.	Technocratic discourse. The individual's responsibility for their own integration by acquiring the right competence. Deficit discourse. Knowledge society and competence discourse.	<u>Taken for Granted</u> Refugees will acquire skills according to available jobs, not necessarily based on their existing skills and competence. <u>Silence/Omission</u> Structural conditions' impact on career opportunities. <u>Could it be Thought Differently</u> Integration as a two-way process. Competence for return to the homeland.	<u>Discursive Effects</u> A deficiency view of refugees' competence. <u>Subjectification Effects</u> The refugee as the one responsible for acquiring the right competence. The career counsellor as an expert on what the right competence might be. <u>Lived Effects</u> Career guidance characterised by competence mapping set against the Norwegian labour market.
Refugees' inability to make independent and rational career choices.	Technocratic discourse. One can test (map competencies) and recommend based on the results. Career choices based on information and rational decisions.	<u>Taken for Granted</u> That one has career choices. <u>Silence/Omission</u> A broader understanding of factors that shape career choices. <u>Could it be Thought Differently</u> Career guidance as a process.	<u>Discursive Effects</u> Career paths can be planned. <u>Subjectification Effects</u> Refugees as passive recipients and career counsellors as experts. <u>Lived Effects</u> Career guidance characterised by providing career information.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE RESULTS AND OUR POSITIONALITY

As Bacchi (2009) states, it is an ethical exercise to explore the harmful effects of problem representations. Moreover, we are critically and ethically aware that our analyses and own problematisations are intertwined with our subjective positions. We have worked as career counsellors and spent recent years conducting research in the field of integration, careers

Table 2 A summary of our analyses.

and career guidance research, immersed in the scholarly discussions on this field. We place ourselves in a more sociological field within career guidance, thus giving us an additional focus on the structural conditions that frame guidance. Researchers in other positionalities may have obtained different results in the analysis of the same documents.

Reflecting on the findings, we identify contradictions in the way career guidance is portrayed the Norwegian integration policy. On one hand, refugees are recognised as a potential resource; on the other, they are viewed as an economic burden with inadequate qualifications for the Norwegian labour market. Career counsellors must strike a balance between providing guidance on refugees' comprehensive career issues and steering the discussion towards subjects deemed relevant within the integration and welfare policy context, such as labour force participation (Kekki, 2022). Our analyses highlighted specific understandings of integration and career guidance, as assimilation and individual responsibility. Career guidance is seen as a fast process emphasising information provision and recommendations from counsellors. The counsellor is assigned an expert role, and refugees are positioned as passive receivers, but with clear expectations to eventually arrive to rational career choices. This work does not require the breadth of professional career guidance methods or approaches.

From a social justice perspective in career guidance, we lack 'problem representations' which stem from perceiving integration as an ongoing two-way process between the refugee individuals and the host society. From this standpoint, career guidance would entail cultural openness and curiosity towards refugee counselees, acknowledging structural barriers beyond cultural/ethnic 'otherness', and awareness of the intersectional differences each subject experiences (Ribeiro & De Almeida, 2019). We contend that these perspectives can give way to a more holistic and potentially emancipatory career guidance, in contrast to the dominant technocratic approach and its associated political-economic logic we find in the current integration policy.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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