

Area-based policies in urban areas: How to promote good living conditions for children and youth (Norway, 13-14 November 2012)

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Introduction

This Peer Review – focused on combating child and youth poverty through area-based approaches aimed at improving service involvement on the part of marginalised groups and enhancing integration in deprived urban areas - offers a valuable opportunity to consider a policy approach that has novel elements in the current policy context. The action plan for the area Groruddalen emphasises especially the engagement by not just children and young people in services but also their parents and members of the wider community in a way that charts a course away from poverty and social exclusion and towards integration (of those from immigrant backgrounds especially). One of the largest ever initiatives of its kind in Norway, the plan adopts a broad and yet integrated approach to child and youth poverty, emphasising early child development, health, services for youth, as well as the engagement of migrants with Norwegian language and culture.

It links closely with a number of themes in social policy. Poverty among children and their families forms a vital part of the backdrop to this Peer Review. Children (defined as those aged under 18 years) are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU than the overall population with a rate of 27.1% as against 23.5% on the latest figures (Social Protection Committee 2012; TARKI 2010). In only a minority of countries (Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Slovenia, Sweden and Norway) are children less at risk than the total population. Matters relating to child and youth poverty have been prioritised by the EU and are present in a transversal manner in a number of EU policy areas. These include the EU Agenda on the Rights of the Child; policy on poverty and social ex/inclusion; education and training policies (in particular in relation to early school leaving and early childhood education); integration policy.

A second issue which is central to the Peer Review is that of area-based planning. While the Member States have a long and diversified history of area-based provision for children and their families – with some especially notable models such as that of Sure Start in the UK (Eisenstadt 2011) – the strength of the local area focus and the extent to which municipalities plan anti-poverty measures varies considerably across countries. The Norwegian approach showcased here consists not just of a wide-ranging plan to counter key aspects of poverty and social exclusion at municipality level but the creation by the Norwegian government in



2003 of a grant scheme for anti-poverty projects and activities at local level in the most disadvantaged urban areas. Children and young people particularly exposed to the risk of poverty especially those from households with a non-western immigrant background, are a key target group. There are strong currents of universalism also in the overall approach.

This paper is organised as follows. The first section gives an overview of the policy framework and policy debates at European level and sets out the measures to counteract child and youth poverty, especially at local level among those from immigrant backgrounds. The second section describes the Norwegian case and offers an analysis of issues associated with the transferability of the Norwegian measures. The paper closes with a set of questions and topics for debate at the Peer Review meeting.

1. Setting the scene – overview of the related policy developments at European level

1.1 The relevant issues in the European agenda

There are five key elements to the relevant policy, discourse and institutional framework at EU level.

A first element is the focus on children's rights and the living conditions of children, in particular as expressed through their recognition as rights' holders in the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and the 2006 Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' (European Commission 2006). The Charter (Article 24) recognises that children have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being and also makes the child's best interests a primary consideration in all actions relating to children. The 2006 Communication had the aim of designing a common strategy for children. One of the activities that resulted from it was the European Forum on the Rights of the Child which provides a platform for the promotion of children's rights and well-being in EU internal and external actions. In addition, a further Communication in 2011 advocated an EU agenda to reaffirm the strong commitment of all EU institutions and of all Member States to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies and to turn it into concrete results. In the future, EU policies that directly or indirectly affect children should be designed, implemented, and monitored taking into account the principle of the best interests of the child (European Commission 2011a). In addition, the Communication elaborated a number of concrete actions in areas where the EU can bring real added value, such as child-friendly justice, protecting children in vulnerable situations and fighting violence against children both inside the EU and externally. Europe 2020 is seen to be especially important as a vehicle to take forward these commitments.

EU cooperation on social issues (in particular through the Social OMC and now the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion) provides the second main



element of the framework for addressing child and youth poverty in an EU context. Child poverty was one of the thematic areas to emerge strongly over the course of the Lisbon Strategy and it has become an active field in EU policy. For example, it has been the subject of a number of Council Conclusions (especially December 2010, June 2011) and October 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee has issued an Opinion on the subject (Official Journal 2011) as has the Regional Committee (Official Journal 2012). Furthermore, addressing child poverty and child well-being were important priorities of the presidency trio ES-BE-HU which adopted a Common Declaration on the issue. The Belgian presidency organised a major stakeholder conference and published a 'Roadmap for an EU Recommendation on Child Poverty' in September 2010 (Belgian Presidency 2010). A background paper 'Child well-being in the European Union – Better Monitoring Instruments for Better Policies' was prepared for the Hungarian Presidency (TARKI 2011). The Social Protection Committee (SPC) has also focused rather intensively on the issue. For example it oversaw the work of the Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-being in 2008 which led to a major report on child poverty (Social Protection Committee 2008). All of these initiatives have set the scene whereby, as part of the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, we await a Recommendation on the subject of child poverty. There is every reason to expect this Recommendation to be a high point of EU engagement with child poverty and child well-being going forward.

In preparation for the Recommendation, the SPC has published (June 27th, 2012) an advisory report for the European Commission on the subject of tackling and preventing child poverty and promoting child well-being. This report is a major contribution in several respects and is especially helpful in identifying the EU's contribution to the field of child poverty (Social Protection Committee 2012: 8) which it summarises as follows:

- It has helped to develop a **common understanding** of the determinants of child poverty, identifying common challenges and increasing the knowledge base informing governments. It has enabled Member States and stakeholders to benchmark national developments with those of other countries.
- It has contributed to a **shared awareness of policies and programmes that work best** (such as holistic approaches, an adequate balance of universal and targeted benefits, a stronger focus on prevention and early childhood years).
- It has helped to **develop and strengthen indicators and other analytic tools**. This has included reinforcing the child dimension of the existing social inclusion indicators' portfolio (e.g., by having more detailed age breakdowns of the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children, by refining the material deprivation and low work intensity indicators). Work is currently ongoing to strengthen the child-specific nature of existing indicators and to develop, where necessary and after thorough previous analysis, some new ones, especially related to the non-monetary aspects of the social exclusion of children (e.g., child deprivation).



- It has given momentum to the issue by putting child poverty on the political agenda and giving it increased visibility.
- It has supported networking between key actors at EU level and in Member States, providing an important resource of contacts and information for policy development at various geographical levels.

A third relevant element/focus of EU engagement is the matter of the rights, well-being and participation of young people. While there is uncertainty around where child policy ends and youth policy begins, it is best to see these as over-lapping and complementary without assuming that one can be subsumed into the other or that an age threshold – typically 18 years – neatly separates the two. Youth policy is in fact a strong area of EU engagement and one which has become more prominent over time. Europe 2020, for example, devotes one of its five headline targets to youth (reducing early school-leaving and increasing tertiary educational attainment) and two other headline targets also share a youth dimension – to reduce the risk of poverty and to increase the share of the population in employment. Furthermore, the flagship initiative entitled ‘Youth on the Move’ promotes youth mobility, while young people are also included in two further flagship initiatives: ‘Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’ and ‘Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion’. In 2009, the Council endorsed a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), based on the Communication ‘EU Youth Strategy: Investing and Empowering’ (European Commission 2009). The Strategy’s two overall objectives are to: create more and equal opportunities for all young people in education and in the labour market, and promote the active citizenship, social inclusion and solidarity of all young people. Both are relevant to the current Peer Review. The Youth Strategy is a useful backdrop to the Grouddalen activities because it is action-based and cross-sectoral. It branches out into eight policy areas: education and training; employment and entrepreneurship; social inclusion; health and well-being; participation; culture and creativity; volunteering; youth and the world. The latest Communication from the Commission on the subject (published on September 10 last) reports that all but two Member States now have an inter-ministerial working group or some other institutionalised mechanism on youth policy (European Commission 2012a).

A fourth relevant axis of EU engagement is around the matter of social cohesion and especially the integration of minorities. In this regard there are elements of the EU Roma strategy that have relevance to this Peer Review (although the Grouddalen area has migrants from many different backgrounds and does not prioritise Roma over others). The European Commission on 5 April 2011 adopted an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, calling on Member States to prepare or revise National Roma Integration Strategies in order to address more effectively the challenges of Roma inclusion to tangibly improve the situation by the end of the current decade (European Commission 2011b). The endorsement of the Framework by EU Heads of States and Governments indicates that inclusion of Roma is becoming an important priority for the Member States,



despite the economic and financial crisis. The aim of the EU Framework is to help Member States make a tangible difference to Roma people's lives by bringing about a change in the approach to their inclusion. As well as being concerned with four key policy areas (education, employment, healthcare and housing), the EU Framework also prioritised structural requirements that are seen to be necessary for integrated policies to work. Such structural requirements include cooperation with civil society, with regional and local authorities, monitoring, antidiscrimination and establishment of a national contact point as well as funding. As general principles these have relevance to any policies that seek to counter social exclusion but they seem particularly relevant to policies that seek the integration of immigrants or minorities.

A fifth (related) relevant frame of EU engagement is around the matter of access to services. This is widely integrated as a core element of EU social policy – in fact along with an adequate income, access to social services is seen to be key to exiting poverty. It was, for example, one of three priority themes in the 2008 Recommendation on *Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market* and was very prominent also in the earlier Recommendation on *Common Criteria Concerning Sufficient Resources and Social Assistance in Social Protection Systems* (in 1992) (European Commission 2008; European Council 1992). Services which aim for the full participation by children and young people dovetail with the increasing emphasis placed by the EU – over the course of the Lisbon and EU 2020 strategies as well as previously – on the importance of access to quality services in the context of the fight against poverty and joblessness. Childcare- and youth-specific measures are especially relevant in this context. Early childhood education and care has been an especially strong theme of EU policy, with the Barcelona targets in 2002 setting an ambitious standard for Member State provision of pre-school care and education services. The importance of childcare in terms of growth and equal opportunities as well as the development and well-being of children has continued to be emphasised, although the targets remain to be achieved by many countries.

The broad field at EU level is defined, then, at one end by a concern about child and youth poverty and at the other by a focus on services and other means of integrating children and their families, especially those from immigrant backgrounds.

1.2 The approaches taken by the European countries in tackling the challenging issue of child and youth poverty

There are two policy themes of direct relevance and they will be discussed in turn: these are child poverty and youth policy; in the section that follows a broader set of themes will be considered.

When it comes to child poverty, Member State policies cluster around three common objectives (Frazer and Marlier 2007). The first is to ensure that children



grow up in families with sufficient resources to meet their essential needs. The second is to make sure that children, while growing up, have access to the services and opportunities that will enhance their present and future well-being and enable them to reach their full potential, and to make sure that children in vulnerable situations are protected. Early childhood education is now seen to be especially important following a strong message from research to the effect that the negative impact of poverty is more intense in early childhood and has a greater effect on outcomes than poverty experienced in later life (Luo and Waite 2005). This has been actioned through the Barcelona targets. The third common objective is to promote the participation of children in social life and in particular in social, recreational, sporting and cultural life. This, however, is much less common as a policy objective in comparison to the other two. The importance of participation links closely with the social exclusion perspective which underlines also the need to address the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion. In addition to these, Frazer and Marlier identify two themes which are especially relevant to this Peer Review. These are, first, the importance of early intervention and ensuring that children have a good start to their lives and are reared in families which are not impoverished across generations; and, second, the need to improve delivery of policies at regional and local levels.

When it comes to child poverty, most Member States seem to combine both universal and preventative policies with more targeted policies. However, the balance between the two changes depending on the situation and also the tradition of policy in the Member State (Frazer and Marlier 2007). Historically, the Scandinavian countries tended to be more universal in approach whereas other countries went either for coverage through social insurance (such as the continental European countries) or through policies targeted at the poorest (the United Kingdom for example). The period of the Lisbon agenda was one which saw a strong move towards universalism in services for children. However since then, targeting has been firmly on the agenda and at the present time there seems to be a consensus across countries that universalism needs to be reconsidered. The whole question of what constitutes the most effective approach over time to child and other forms of poverty is therefore being opened up again. In this context it is interesting to consider the possibility of tailored universalism which endorses a rights-based approach but recognises the need for services that are oriented to the specific needs of different target groups. All of this has strong resonance with the Groruddalen Plan which marries targeting with universalism and localism. There is another sense also in which the Norwegian policy has resonance with insights about what makes for a successful child/youth policy: its orientation to engage with parents.

The second thematic area of policy is that of the social inclusion of young people. As mentioned this, too, is an increasingly vital field in EU and Member State policy. It is for example a 'field of action' of the EU Youth Strategy and also a key priority of the Youth in Action programme. This programme supported more than 7,100 projects in this area with expenditure of almost €105 million in 2010 and 2011. More than 150,000 young people participated in these projects, of which more than



one-third were young people with fewer opportunities (European Commission 2012b: 42). With regard to the social inclusion of young people from minority backgrounds, there is considerable variation in policy focus across Member States. However, some relevant initiatives in Member States include the following (ibid: 46):

- **Germany** reports two federal initiatives with particular emphasis on disadvantaged youth and young people with migration background to promote tolerance and democracy, and strengthen civil society.
- **Portugal's** 'Escolhas' programme aims to mobilise local communities for projects of equal opportunities aimed at children and young people from vulnerable socio-economic contexts, particularly the descendants of immigrants and ethnic minorities.
- **Spain** communicates with youth and addressed the topic in a youth friendly manner through the launch of the initiative 'Rap Against Racism' – a song, a video and a campaign with the participation of leading representatives of the Spanish hip-hop scene.

Looking at policy against child and youth poverty overall, there are two outstanding challenges, both of which dovetail closely with the subject of this Peer Review. The first is the difficulty of implementing a multi-dimensional approach which integrates efforts across different policy areas. According to TARKI (2010) only a few Member States have implemented a coherent package of measures. They report that action has typically been piecemeal - for example policy to increase selected benefits and to expand childcare provision, accompanied in some cases by action to increase incentives to work. Mainstreaming policies to promote the inclusion of children is still at an early stage in most Member States. A second outstanding challenge is to bring about the participation of children and young people. While this is an approach which almost everyone agrees today is the best philosophy, a widespread absence of arrangements to involve children in the development of policies and programmes to promote their greater social inclusion is reported (Frazer and Marlier 2007). Two main barriers seem to exist here: first the difficulty of specifying the meaning of 'participation' for children and young people, and second the difficulty of realising such participation especially in light of highly patriarchal and family-oriented systems.

1.3 Thematic links to earlier policy debate and research

Along with child and youth poverty, the approach underlying the Groruddalen initiative – and the anti-poverty strategy in place in Norway more broadly – touches on a number of themes and developments in policy debate and in academic thinking and research more broadly. Those that have not been touched upon already include cultural and other forms of integration of migrants, the broader philosophical thinking around social policy development and the reform of the welfare state and urban development.



The broader context for all Peer Reviews is the debate on social policy reform in Europe. In the current climate, there is much debate about the appropriate course of action as countries seek reforms that make welfare provision more efficient and also more affordable. One very prominent set of ideas about reform is the social investment perspective (Morel et al 2012). This makes the case for social policy as a productive factor beyond the traditional emphasis on social protection, extending it to encompass investing to improve the quality of education and training and human capital, of children as well as adults. In practice, it can be summarised as an approach that seeks to “prepare’ individuals, families and societies to adapt to various transformations, such as changing career patterns and working conditions, the emergence of new social risks, population ageing and climate change, rather than on simply generating responses aimed at ‘repairing’ any damage caused by market failure, social misfortune, poor health or prevailing policy inadequacies” (Vandenbroucke et al 2011). The social investment approach takes it for granted that the welfare state has to change but it also urges continued investment in social services and attributes great importance to education (lifelong) and life chances for young people and children as well as activation for all. The Groruddalen approach draws from a social investment perspective in key respects, especially in its emphasis on tailored education and other services for target populations.

A second broad theme that should inform the Peer Review is that of cultural integration of immigrants. This, too, is the subject of a very lively debate, in both academic and policy circles. One of the most burning issues has been about where to strike the balance between multi-culturalist and integrationist approaches. While diversity still characterises the field across the EU, there are countries which strongly favour multiculturalist approaches – which allow immigrants a high degree of cultural and other forms of autonomy – and those which favour integrationist approaches – which require acceptance of the host society’s culture and institutions (Joppke 2012). The Nordic countries also adopt different approaches. A recent review has characterised Sweden as following a multiculturalist approach; Denmark is placed at the opposite pole with its immigration policy being described as protectionist and dualised; Norway is said to be somewhere in between (Brochmann and Hagelund 2011). The Introduction Act in 2003 (and as amended in 2005) mandated an introductory programme for arriving immigrants which sought to standardise practices across municipalities. Participation in courses in the Norwegian language and culture was made a right and a duty for some groups of immigrants. This has since been extended to long-term immigrants as well (except EU/EEA citizens). The Groruddalen Plan is based on the recognition that additional efforts need to be made to ensure that all sectors of the population take up the opportunity to get education in the Norwegian language.

The EU has also sought to agree the fundamentals of a policy approach on the integration of immigrants. In 2004 the Council adopted a conclusion on the establishment of common basic principles on the integration of migrants (Council of the European Union 2004). While children and young people are not prioritised in these principles, the 11 principles are worth noting:



1. Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States.
2. Integration implies respect for the basic values of the European Union.
3. Employment is a key part of the integration process and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible.
4. Basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is essential to successful integration.
5. Efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society.
6. Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration.
7. Frequent interaction between immigrants and Member State citizens is a fundamental mechanism for integration. Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures, and stimulating living conditions in urban environments enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.
8. The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the Charter of Fundamental Rights and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law.
9. The participation of immigrants in the democratic process and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, supports their integration.
10. Mainstreaming integration policies and measures in all relevant policy portfolios and levels of government and public services is an important consideration in public-policy formation and implementation.
11. Developing clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms are necessary to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective.

It can be seen that the Norwegian policy is in line with these principles and offers an interesting point of reflection for how these principles are put into action.

A third theme of relevance is urban development and change in cities. For policy makers the key issue here is how urban development can be both managed and harnessed for social purposes and the role and resourcing of services that are municipality based. Research underline how cities are very vibrant and continuously changing. Two recent reports produced by the Eurocities network and in particular



the Cities for Active Inclusion project¹ provide insights relevant for policy on social inclusion. One highlights how immigration is one of the key trends affecting city life in Europe (Eurocities 2012a). Among other things immigration tends to be associated with spatial concentration which in turn can lead to social exclusion, especially of migrants and young people. Eurocities is not alone in pointing out that if these trends are not properly managed, whole areas can fall behind the rest of the city, making it very difficult for people to improve their living conditions. A second set of case studies looks at what actions cities are taking to help integrate vulnerable young people into employment (Eurocities 2012b). While the cities have different approaches and projects in place, they also share practices that are based on integrated working methods and a personalised approach to specific target groups.

As well as picking up on these themes, this Peer Review will build upon and augment the lessons learned in several earlier reviews. While none is located in the exact field, there are a number which are relevant. Among these are: 'Sure Start', (UK 2006); 'The City Strategy for tackling unemployment and child poverty' (UK 2009) 'Promoting social inclusion of children in a disadvantaged rural environment – the micro-region of Szécsény' (Hungary 2010); 'Building a coordinated strategy for parenting support' (France 2011).

As well as shedding light on national initiatives and debates relevant to child and youth poverty, well-being and social inclusion, these and other previous Peer Reviews have highlighted some key policy messages that should also inform this Peer Review. These include:

- The necessity and benefits of early intervention;
- The need for balance between universal and targeted approaches;
- The need to pay special attention to vulnerable groups of children and adults; the importance of early and sustained intervention in this context and more widely; recognition that a policy on child poverty has to be also a policy on family poverty;
- The need for policies to be underpinned by principles and aims that allow for equal opportunities and balancing the rights of children and other dependent people with those of able-bodied adults;
- The benefits of services that are local or area-based and cater for a wide range of needs and especially those which focus on outreach and empowerment;
- The recognition that combating poverty and social exclusion requires policies that are complementary and multi-layered;
- The contribution of holistic and life cycle approaches to matters relating to child and youth poverty and social inclusion;

1 The cities involved are: Birmingham, Bologna, Brno, Copenhagen, Krakow, Lille Metropole-Roubaix, Rotterdam, Sofia and Stockholm. See <http://www.eurocities.eu>.



- The importance of an integrated approach, building partnerships and involving local communities and especially stakeholders.

2. Assessment of the Norwegian good practice under review – specific measures to promote area-based policies in urban areas

2.1 Brief summary of the main features of the Norwegian case study

While the Norwegian municipalities have a relatively high degree of autonomy - being responsible for managing, financing and delivering a range of services, including social assistance, nurseries, primary schools, primary health care and measures to promote the integration of immigrants – they do not necessarily have separate action plans to combat poverty. The area in question – Groruddalen – does. This is an area of Oslo which has a long history of deprivation and encompasses neighbourhoods with some of the largest concentrations of immigrants in the country (in some districts between 29 and 41% of residents are immigrants). The Groruddalen Action Plan is a joint initiative between the national government and the municipality of Oslo. The initiative started in 2007, and is scheduled to run to 2016. The aims of the Groruddalen Action Plan as a whole are to facilitate sustainable urban development, effect visible improvements to the environment, achieve higher standards of living and overall better living conditions in the area. The overall responsibility for the Groruddalen Action Plan is shared between the Ministry of the Environment and the city council of Oslo. Work proceeds in close cooperation with residents, organisations, neighbourhood associations, housing cooperatives, city districts and public institutions. As of 2012, it is estimated that more than 200 projects have been initiated and in the region of NOK100 million allocated annually. By the end of the period, an estimated NOK1 billion (€125 million) will have been invested in the area. Funding is shared equally between the municipality and the national level. Especially significant in the latter regard is a national grants scheme targeted at combating poverty among children and youth in larger urban areas which was initiated in 2003 (as an initiative under the first national action plan against poverty).

The Groruddalen Action Plan is divided into four programme areas. The one that is at the centre of this Peer Review is focused on children and youth, schools, living conditions, cultural activity and inclusion.² It has six programme areas which emphasise especially early child education and development, the reduction of health inequalities, the improvement of activities for youth and the promotion of a diverse and inclusive cultural and organisational life. An important underlying principle throughout is that integration should be promoted through the

2 The other programme areas have a strong environmental and housing focus.



involvement and participation of individuals and through voluntary action. Among the initiatives that are to be highlighted for Peer Review are the following:

Free core time in Kindergartens

This is a measure that offers up to four free hours per day in kindergartens to four and five year old children. This is a policy that has been in place in a number of areas of Oslo since 2006/2007 and the Groruddalen Action Plan continues this measure in its area. The underlying rationale is that children who take part in a kindergarten are better prepared for starting primary school and have improved Norwegian language competence as well as superior general social skills. A secondary aim of the scheme is to make parents aware of the importance of their own capacity in Norwegian. For this purpose kindergartens have introduced several services for parents, such as parental guidance programmes and low threshold programmes that give priority to learning Norwegian through practical tasks. The nature and extent of the services offered vary across districts. Children and their parents are recruited through a range of measures including information, networking and outreach.

Språkløftet

The translation of this is 'the national strategy to enhance language and social competence in young speakers of minority languages'. The aim of the initiative - which was organised as a project in all districts in Groruddalen in the period from 2007 to 2011 - was to create a smooth transition from kindergarten to school for children who initially had limited language skills. The initiative covered both kindergartens and schools and emphasised language development, Norwegian skills, and social skills among pre-school children. The guardians of the child, most obviously the mothers, were also offered Norwegian lessons.

Norwegian language offensive in Groruddalen

Norskoffensiv i Groruddalen (NOG) consists of a set of courses targeted at adults with very little knowledge of the Norwegian language. It was initiated in 2008, and has run continuously since in all the districts in the area. Participants in the courses are partly newcomers and partly immigrants who have lived in Norway for long periods of time. The courses are free of charge. Because the course is targeted at people who for whatever reason have found it too hard to participate in ordinary Norwegian-language training, entry is made as easy as possible. While there are no formal official targets for the courses, an internal target has been set: by 2011, the aim was that 70 per cent of the participants should develop skills to pass the Norwegian test 1, 30 per cent should be able to pass the oral Norwegian test 2, and 10 per cent should pass the written Norwegian test 2. Moreover, 50 per cent of participants should move on from NOG-courses to ordinary Norwegian courses.



Public health initiatives

This heading houses a range of initiatives including the project *Stork Groruddalen* which is both a research project and a public health initiative targeting pregnant women and those who have recently given birth, so as to improve the women's health and life-style. Participants are recruited through the health stations. All districts that have implemented Stork now offer participation in a physical activity programme for women who have recently given birth (known as Smart Start). From 2010, a similar activity has been offered to pregnant women.

Measures targeted at voluntary participation, sports and culture

Of primary importance here are initiatives for youth. These include the "youth lighthouses" (*ungdomsfyrtårn*) which vary from one district to the next, but all operate more or less according to the same principles: courses and groups and workshops which all end in a show, performance, exhibition or concert. Another initiative is the Nysirkus Bjerke (New circus Bjerke, <http://www.nysirkusbjerke.com>). Among other things, this initiative organised a circus summer school in 2011, with classes in topics like acrobatics, aerial acrobatics, and juggling. Fyrhuset is a music workshop with locations for practice and a studio).³ This is the biggest local music workshop in Oslo which gives users individual instruction in singing/vocal performance, guitar, drums and bass guitar. District Stovner focuses on a dance project which comprises several dance-related activities.

2.2 Assessment of the Norwegian area-based approach to combat child and youth poverty

The Groruddalen initiative as a whole as well as the individual programmes will be of major interest to the participating countries. They are novel and quite broad-ranging in terms of their aims and coverage.

First, the Groruddalen Plan is underpinned by a broad approach to and understanding of 'integration'. In being proactive in creating opportunities for children and parents experiencing poverty and exclusion to become involved in a range of educational activities it develops a different meaning to activation which usually tends to follow the approach of integration through employment. The locus of integration is kindergarten and related services, rather than market or economic activity and the overall measure is aimed at helping children and adults from immigrant backgrounds to develop educationally, with specific reference to proficiency in the Norwegian language and

³ See <http://www.fyrhuset.no>



culture. In relation to children, measures such as free core time in kindergartens and Språkløftet place the matter of children's inclusion in the context of early learning and subsequent development. In this and other ways the measure has a strong orientation towards prevention and social investment. The measure also draws from a holistic philosophy of meeting the needs of children and other sectors of the population.

Other noteworthy features include:

- The diversified nature of the responses;
- Recognition of the significance of a local response and of the important role of municipalities and a host of other statutory and non-statutory actors;
- The fact that in many respects this is a policy that is responding to demand from the ground-up;
- The attention given at national level to coherence in policy approach and the wish to support the development of new services and procedures in a coherent manner.

There are also challenges that have to be thought about however. The evaluations that have been carried out (as reported in Part II of the host country report) are helpful in drawing attention to some key issues. One can highlight the following:

- The need to continually improve the capacity to reach vulnerable groups and especially the parents of children and young people at risk of exclusion;
- The need to find a balance between the national level and the municipal level in terms of ownership and control;
- The need to engender cross-district collaboration in the development of programmes;
- The need to avoid stigmatisation;
- The need to put in place a well-developed evidence base. For this other purposes clear objectives, aims and populations or need targeted need to be set out.

3. Questions to structure the discussion

What are the barriers to getting children and youth from excluded backgrounds to engage in childcare and education services? And what about health services? How can the most excluded children and youth – those from immigrant families for example – be reached?

What are the advantages and challenges for municipalities in devising and implementing their own anti-poverty plans? What is the most appropriate planning unit for anti-poverty initiatives? What resources (financial, skills, information/knowledge) are needed for this purpose and what level of national oversight is appropriate? And what are the risks (fragmentation in approach between municipalities)? How is 'local ownership' to be achieved?



Can countries afford universal policies in this day and age? Are there policies against child poverty that simply have to be universal in reach (e.g., early childhood education and care)? Does a long-term approach imply universalism? What variations are there on universalism (e.g., tailored universalism)?

And what about targeting in relation to children? Do children benefit from more targeting or is this mostly a cost-effectiveness issue? What are the risks associated with targeted services for children? Does targeting result in less of a social mix for children and in particular are targeted provisions merely services for poor people?

How do we bring the parents and family with us? To what extent can children be targeted without their parents or is a holistic family approach necessary? Do parents need to be 'educated' about the benefits and value of participation for themselves and their children in services and in Norwegian society more broadly? What are the gender elements here given that we know that the roles and practice of mothers and fathers in relation to their children tend to be quite different?

What role is there for existing service providers (like schools, youth clubs and so forth)? Could the functioning of these services be improved and also better co-ordinated to ensure that the overall accessibility and supply of integrative activities for immigrants? How can they be enabled to exchange knowledge and learning? Can civil society be strengthened through these measures?

How can we best engage directly with children and young people? How is the child's/young person's perspective to be ascertained? What is the role of student bodies and youth organisations in this context for example? And what is the role of stakeholders as well as other actors involved in defending children's and young people's needs, such as NGOs, the education and social services?

What is the role for the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty? How can the EU show leadership here? Are there specific initiatives that could be supported, either on a pilot or other basis, especially through the Structural Funds? What are the messages for the forthcoming Recommendation? What are the links to existing Recommendations and Communications? What good practice examples are there in the use of Structural Funds to support initiatives relevant to combating child/youth poverty and social exclusion on a municipality or area basis?

What about information and data gaps and monitoring? Is it possible to prove the benefits of these kinds of interventions? Should we even try? How can the missing gaps in knowledge about children's, young people's and adults' participation be augmented? And monitoring – should participation in educational and other services be included in the primary indicators of social exclusion? How do we involve children and young people directly in the process of gathering the necessary information, even allowing them a say in what data should be gathered?



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