

## Area-based policies in urban areas: how to promote good living conditions for children and youth (Norway, 2012)<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Background

#### 1.1 The debate about child poverty

The proportion of children who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) in the European Union are on the increase.<sup>2</sup> By 2010, which is the latest figure available, 27 per cent of all children in the EU were at risk (Eurostat 2012). As late as in 2008, by the onset of the financial crisis, the corresponding figure was 20 per cent (Eurostat 2010). Rates had increased in every EU country in the course of two years, more dramatically in some than in others. By 2010, rates varied between 48,7 (Romania) to 14,2 (Finland). Norway, with a child AROPE rate at 14,6, is close to its Nordic neighbour. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that children in the Nordic countries have a lower risk of poverty and social exclusion than the working age population, while the opposite is true in almost every other country covered by Eurostat (Eurostat 2012).

The increasing risk of poverty and social exclusion for children in Europe must be understood in the light of the severe financial crisis. It happens despite a long-standing commitment within the EU to reduce poverty rates in general, and child poverty rates in particular. Combatting child poverty has been prioritised by several consecutive EU Council Summits, and was one of the central themes in 2010, the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. For several years, also, the "social investment perspective" has guided EU social policies (cf. Morel, Palier and Palme 2012). This paradigm recommends investments in labour over "passive" spending on social benefits. As the argument goes, children are the workers of the future, and, as poverty is associated with marginalisation and low education, allowing children to grow up in poverty is a poor investment. One of the five main targets of the EU 2020 Agenda is to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 20 million. The increase in poverty and social exclusion, especially among children, is a major worry within the EU, and innovative initiatives to reduce poverty are eagerly sought.

In Norway as well, poverty has been relatively high on the political agenda for more than 10 years. In 2002, the centre-right coalition government launched the first action plan against poverty, in 2006; the centre-left coalition government launched

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2 The AROPE indicator is defined as the share of the population in at least one of the following three conditions: 1) household incomes below 60 % of the median, 2) in a situation of severe material deprivation, and 3) living in a household with very low work intensity.



the second.<sup>3</sup> The 2006 action plan highlights three main goals: (1) opportunities for all to participate in the labour market, (2) opportunities for participation and development for children and young people, and (3) improved living conditions for the most disadvantaged groups. The current centre-left government, in its political platform for 2009–2013, declared “In order to reduce inequalities in levels of living, this government will decrease economic and social inequalities and combat poverty”. The Government launched a white paper in the autumn of 2011 on income distribution policies (Meld. St. 30 (2010-2011)), emphasising a broad-based and preventive approach, including investments in early childhood education and care. Further, the 2012 budget contains a revised action plan against poverty, reporting on the measures being employed to reach the three targets outlined in 2006. No new, high-profile initiatives have been launched in 2012, but the continuous updates on progress highlights that the issue is still on the agenda.

## 1.2 On child poverty in Norway<sup>4</sup>

Rates of monetary poverty among children are comparatively low in Norway, and poverty spells tend to be of relatively short duration. A study from 2009 showed that while 16,5 per cent of all children in Norway had lived in low-income households at some point between 2004 and 2007, only 2,6 per cent had lived with low incomes for the entire period (Epland and Kirkeberg 2009). It should also be pointed out that the poverty threshold in Norway is the highest in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Studies (e.g. Grødem 2008, Fløtten and Pedersen 2009) have showed that the majority of children living in low-income families have access to many of the same consumer goods that their non-poor peers have, and indicate that children’s needs have high priority within the family.

A recent report (de Neubourg et al 2012) compared rates of material deprivation among children in Europe. The report charted the proportion of children in different countries lacking key items, on the individual (child) or household level. 5,9 per cent of children in Norway lacked one or more of the 14 items on the list used in this study, while 1,9 per cent lacked two or more. Among all the countries included in the study, 22 per cent of children lacked one item, 13 per cent lacked two, 36 per cent of children lacked three or more of the chosen key items. All in all, this study confirms that levels of living are high among children in Norway.

These are the good news. The bad news is that child poverty rates in Norway are on the increase. In 1996, it was 7 per cent, by 2010; 9 per cent (annual rates) (Statistics Norway 2012). Proportions who live in households with continuously low incomes over three-year spells increased from 7 per cent in 2004–2006 to 7,7 per cent in 2008–2010 (op.cit.). While these increases are in no way dramatic, they have taken place in a period with increasing affluence, and where poverty rates for the population at large has been unchanged. The main explanation for the disproportionate increase in child poverty rates, is increasing poverty among children with immigrant backgrounds. While the poverty rates among children in the majority population have remained relatively unchanged, it has increased among immigrant children (Epland and Kirkeberg 2009). A total of 4,3 per cent of

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3 The Action Plan is available in English at <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ad/tema/velferdspolitik/midtspalte/action-plan-against-poverty---status-200.html?id=557729>

4 Unless stated otherwise, “household incomes below 60 per cent of the median per consumption unit” is used as the poverty threshold in this section.

5 See table “At risk of poverty threshold” at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income\\_social\\_inclusion\\_living\\_conditions/data/main\\_tables](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/data/main_tables)



all children in Norway lived in low-income families in 2007 and at least two of the three previous years: 2,6 per cent of children in the majority population, and 26,9 per cent of children with backgrounds from Asia, Africa and Latin-America.<sup>6</sup> The highest proportion was found among children with Somali background, at 53,3 per cent (Epland and Kirkeberg 2009).

The comparatively low rates of child poverty in Norway must be understood in the light of high employment rates, particularly among women. The high employment rates are enhanced by long parental leaves, parts of which is reserved for fathers, the right to a place in a nursery, and the maximum rate of parental payment in nurseries (currently NOK 2330, 291 EURO, per month) Moreover, Norway has comprehensive welfare benefits for families with children, including the universal child benefit, and special benefits for lone parents. The slight increase in child poverty rates is caused by increasing immigration, and the fact that immigrants often have lower labour market participation rates and larger families than the majority population. Also, some observers attribute the increase to the decrease in real terms of cash payments to families; in particular, to the fact that the child benefit has decreased in real terms during the 2000s (NOU 2009:11).

Even in a comprehensive welfare state in a rich country, some families with children fall through holes in the safety net. It is by now widely recognised that poverty is a relative phenomenon. Norwegian children's experience of poverty, and the associated sense of exclusion, can be stressful even though they are unlikely to lack food and basic clothing. While the state has the measures to prevent poverty, measures to alleviate the consequences of poverty are often implemented at the local level. Local governments thus play a vital role in the joint efforts to create a unified effort in combating poverty. Area-based interventions are one aspect of this.

### **1.3 Addressing poverty through area-based policies in urban areas**

Municipalities in Norway have a large degree of self-rule, and are, in principle at least, encouraged to develop their own policies and make their own priorities. An important benefit, social assistance, is managed and financed by the municipalities. Nurseries, primary schools, primary health care and measures to promote integration of newly arrived immigrants are also municipal responsibilities. Also, many municipalities take on active roles in promoting cultural activities at the local level, both through public initiatives and through support for voluntary organisations. Municipalities thus play a vital role in anti-poverty efforts in Norway, in the sense that many of the measures that can reduce the effects of poverty are managed locally.

Most municipalities do not have separate action plans against poverty, but anti-poverty measures can be included in overall municipal plans, which all municipalities are obliged to have. Having separate action plans against poverty is more common in bigger cities than in smaller municipalities (Grødem 2012). Since the first national action plan against poverty in 2002, several national and state-financed grant schemes within different target areas have been launched. The targeted areas include child poverty, child welfare services, social housing, homelessness, youth programmes, and initiatives to reduce school drop-out rates. These are earmarked for initiation of local programmes regarding social welfare, pre-emptive work towards people considered at risk, and the development of new

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Norway no longer uses the term "non-western immigrants". Instead, they list the regions of origin: Asia, Africa, Latin-America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, and Europe outside the EEA. Here, we use the "abbreviation" Asia, Africa and Latin-America.



patterns and structures of cooperation to improve the availability of local programmes for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion (Nuland et al 2009, Grødem 2012).

The targeted state grants are an addition to the work that is already being done in the municipalities, that is funded either by the municipalities' own means, or by grants and initiatives from state bodies. Often, the targeted grants are used for developments of new methods, new modes of work, innovative forms of cooperation, etc. A lot of social work methods development is being undertaken at the local level, with the ambition that once the funding ends, the new and smarter modes of working will be continued.

It is recognised that the bigger cities have some problems regarding child poverty that more rural areas may not have. This motivated the introduction of the Grant scheme for children and youth in urban areas. Moreover, the Groruddalen Action Plan is a targeted effort, the first of this magnitude and scope in Norway, to improve levels of living in the most vulnerable areas in Oslo. These are the measures to be further described in this report.

## **2. State grants to combat poverty among children and youth in larger urban areas**

These grants are provided by the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (BLD) to selected urban areas and city district, including city districts in Groruddalen. Youth groups, city districts, voluntary organisations and public and private sector agencies are eligible for grants by application, given a municipal (political and administrative) endorsement. Grants are offered to specific measures targeting children, youth and families affected by poverty, and areas and individuals experiencing poor living conditions are prioritised. Thus, the grants are meant to be means to alleviate and prevent poor living conditions among adolescents and young adults. In practice, grants are distributed to projects/measures focusing on holiday or leisure time activities, measures to increase labor market attachment and to coordinating (longer term) measures to counteract marginalisation of poor children and youths. About 1/3 of the funds are awarded to qualifying measures for young people who have dropped out of education and work, which often involve cooperative projects between schools, youth clubs, the child welfare services, and the Labour and Welfare service.

The state grants have been distributed since 2003 and were subjected to an evaluation in 2010 (Nuland et al. 2010; see part II of the National Report), where the focus was on the measures employed and on the grant management within municipalities/city districts. According to the evaluation, three groups in particular are targeted; ethnic minorities, children of unemployed parents and high-school drop-outs. Most measures are organised to increase participation during holidays and leisure time, but in recent years there has been an increase in qualifying measures and coordinated anti-marginalisation measures. From 2003 up to the evaluation one third of the different municipalities (including city districts) implemented no changes in the compositional distribution of measures, whereas one out of four municipalities increased their efforts on qualifying measures in the period, and almost half implemented an increase in measures regarding holiday and leisure time.

The numbers of children targeted by the various measures vary from only a few children, to more than 100, depending on the need for individual follow-up. The content of the measures vary a lot, from pure leisure time activities such as



camping and day trips, after school activities and a variety of training offers, to qualifying measures for youth, such as help to fill out forms, write CVs and job applications, and help to find practice in temporary jobs.

The causal effects of these measures are difficult to estimate, and it remains unclear whether the different measures reach the very poorest and most marginalised. Nevertheless, among administrators and organisers there is an agreement that the state grants have created an opportunity for targeted children and youth to participate in activities which they otherwise would not have experienced.

### **3. The Groruddalen Action Plan**

#### **3.1 About Groruddalen (the Grorud Valley)**

By January 2012, Oslo was a city of 613 000 residents. 134 000 of these – more than one in five – lived in the four districts in Groruddalen: Alna, Bjerke, Grorud and Stovner. Groruddalen covers app. 37 square km, about 8 per cent of Oslo's building zone. Before 1960, it was mainly agricultural land, but in the 1960s and 1970s, several large building projects took place in the valley. As a result, the population increased by an estimated 70 per cent between 1960 and 1990.

The Groruddalen districts have some of the highest proportions of immigrants in Oslo, and hence in Norway. By 2012, between 29 and 41 per cent of the residents in the four districts were immigrants from countries in Africa, Asia or Latin-America, or Norwegian-born children of parents from countries in one of these regions.<sup>7</sup> In Oslo as a whole, the figure is 20 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

Groruddalen has for some time had a somewhat shady reputation. When the large-scale building projects were initiated in the 1960s and -70s, the ambition was to move people out of derelict urban areas and into spacious and modern homes in greener areas. During the 1970s, however, this optimism was frustrated. This had a lot to do with the lack of funding to create the services and attractive meeting places that should have followed the building of homes. Through the 1970s, the new suburbs in the Grorud valley gained a reputation as soul-destroying environments infested with drugs and crime (Nadim 2008) – and that was before the immigrants started to arrive. The negative image of the valley is strengthened by the fact that three main thoroughfares north-eastwards out of Oslo pass through the valley, making it heavily trafficked, and that the floor of the valley is an industrial rather than a residential area. In recent years there has been a lot of debate about the alleged "white flight" from Groruddalen, brought on mainly by the dominance of immigrants in some schools in the area. The new fear is that the valley is being "taken over" by immigrants, and that segregation and isolation in too many residential areas will increase and create a "ghetto".

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7 Source: StatisticsNorway 2012, own calculations in the Statistics Bank, <http://statbank.ssb.no/statistikbanken/>

8 The Municipality of Oslo: Oslostatistikken, <http://www.utviklings-og-kompetanseetaten.oslo.kommune.no/oslostatistikken/>



As part of the initiation of the Groruddalen Action Plan (see below), two projects were commissioned to look at levels of living in the valley (Nadim 2008, Aalandslid 2009). Both reports highlighted the high proportion of immigrants<sup>9</sup> in the four Groruddalen districts. However, Aalandslid (2009:9) points out that there are areas in Groruddalen (Årvoll in district Bjerke and Haugerudtoppen in district Alna) where the proportion of immigrants is just over 10 per cent. Conversely, the proportion is over 60 per cent in areas like Rommen and Smedstua (both district Stovner).

Both reports (Nadim 2008, Aalandslid 2009) note that employment rates are lower in Groruddalen than in Oslo as a whole, and correspondingly, that median incomes are lower and poverty rates higher (see the appendix for details). However, both studies indicate that immigrants living in Groruddalen are better off than immigrants elsewhere in Oslo. This is in line with other studies (i.e Bråten et al 2007), which indicate that moving from areas in Oslo's inner east to Groruddalen can imply upwards mobility for immigrants.

Health conditions were shown to be poorer in Groruddalen than elsewhere in Oslo. 18 per cent of residents in employable age were out of employment, permanently or temporarily, for health-related reasons, while the corresponding figure for Oslo was 13 per cent. Also, 23 per cent reported in a survey that their health condition was poor, compared to 19 per cent in the city as a whole. These differences are not reduced when controlling for immigrant background, age or education, which indicates a genuine "Groruddalen effect" on health (Nadim 2008).

Despite the above, residents in Groruddalen report in surveys that they are happy with their local environment. Almost 80 per cent say that the social relations in their neighbourhood are good, and the valley stands out in Oslo by the number of people who report having friends and acquaintances from different parts of the world. Groruddalen does not stand out negatively in Oslo with regard to general satisfaction or residents' evaluations of their level of living. Residents do not report more neighbourhood problems or crime than people living elsewhere in Oslo, with a partial exception for the proportion who have problems with noise from traffic (Nadim 2008).

### 3.2 The Groruddalen Action Plan

The Groruddalen Action Plan is a joint initiative between the State and the Municipality of Oslo. The initiative started in 2007, and is scheduled to run to 2016. The aims of the Groruddalen Action Plan are to facilitate sustainable urban development, visible improvements to the environment, higher standards of living, and overall better living conditions in the valley. Work proceeds in close cooperation with residents, organisations, neighbourhood associations, housing cooperatives, city districts and public institutions. By 2012, it is estimated that more than 200 projects have been initiated.<sup>10</sup>

The state and the municipality of Oslo have committed to awarding app. NOK 50 million each to the Groruddalen Action Plan annually. In reality, total sums have been higher. By the end of the period, an estimated NOK 1 billion (€125 million) will have been invested in the area. The overall responsibility for the program is shared between the Ministry of the Environment and the city council of Oslo. Cooperation is based on an agreement between the parties.

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9 Here, "immigrants" include people who have immigrated and their descendants. Nadim's report include all immigrants, while Aalandslid focus on immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin-America.

10 From the Action Plan's website: [http://www.prosjekt-groruddalen.oslo.kommune.no/om\\_groruddalssatsingen/](http://www.prosjekt-groruddalen.oslo.kommune.no/om_groruddalssatsingen/)



The Action Plan is divided into four program areas. Each Program Area is managed by a Program Group, made up by representatives for each of the four Districts in Groruddalen, and representatives of the State and municipal bodies responsible for the topics covered under the program area. The program areas are 1) environmentally-friendly transport, 2) the river Alna, green spaces, sports and cultural milieu, 3) development of housing and local communities, and 4) children and youth, schools, living conditions, cultural activity and inclusion.

This report deals with program area 4 exclusively. Some of the measures mentioned under "cultural activity and inclusion" however touch on program area 3, the development of local communities. In practice, the two are not always too clearly separated.

### **3.3 Program Area 4 of the Groruddalen Action Plan**

The aim of program area 4 is to improve levels of living, schools and the conditions in which children grow up, and to enhance local culture and local environments. Integration should be promoted through the involvement of individuals, their participation and voluntary action. The programs aim at improving cooperation, improve skills and knowledge, and promote new methods for strengthening district councils and schools beyond the period of the Action Plan. The program area has defined six sub-targets:

- Pre-school children should have sufficient knowledge of Norwegian language to manage when they are enrolled in school, and parents' involvement shall be strengthened;
- School results should be as good, and school completion rates (non-drop-out) as high, in schools in Groruddalen as in schools in Oslo on average. Models to improve cooperation between homes and schools should be developed further;
- More persons from vulnerable groups should participate in employment. Rates of unemployment and non-employment in Groruddalen should not be significantly different from the average for Oslo;
- Differences in health among the population in Groruddalen should be reduced. Health conditions should not be significantly different from the average for Oslo;
- Activities for youth in Groruddalen should be maintained, and be developed as attractive and inclusive places to meet. Young people should be able to participate in positive activities and have the opportunity to make contact with adults;
- A diverse and inclusive cultural and organisational life is to be developed and maintained, with broad participation from all groups of residents in Groruddalen. Voluntary organisations should be given space and opportunities to develop.

This report does not discuss measures under goal 4.2, schools and education. In the following, key measures developed to reach goals 4.1 and 4.3 – 4.6 are presented.

#### **Free core time in Kindergartens**

Free core time in kindergartens is a key measure under the Groruddalen action plan, and by far the most expensive measure under Program Area 4 (See the National Report, Part II). It has five explicit aims: (1) to reimburse city districts for lower rates of parental payment, (2) increase recruitment of minority-language



children to kindergartens, (3) systematic language stimulation in kindergartens, (4) increase competence among kindergarten staff, and (5) implement measures to increase Norwegian skills among parents, particularly mothers.

Already in 1998 the Municipality of Oslo started to offer children free core time in Kindergartens. This first experiment started in the city district Gamle Oslo (east-central), and the goal of the initiative was to increase the number of immigrant children in Kindergartens. All five year olds in Gamle Oslo were included, and even children who were already enrolled in a Kindergarten got twenty hours a week deducted from their bill (Nergård 2002). The reason for offering free hours in Kindergarten is the assumption that children who take part in a Kindergarten are better prepared for starting primary school, the Norwegian language competence is improved for speakers of minority languages, and overall their general social skills will benefit. Since 2006/2007, five Oslo city districts (Stovner, Alna, Grorud, Bjerke and Søndre Nordstrand) have offered free core hours to all four and five year old children in Kindergartens, and the in the Groruddalen Action plan this measure was continued.

Several mappings and evaluations of the free core time-project in Goruddalen have been carried out. In a mapping from 2009 special attention was paid to how the children were recruited to the project and what kind of measures that have been introduced to increase the parent's awareness of the importance of their own language skills (Bogen and Reegård 2009). According to this report, the city districts make great efforts to come into contact with children not at present having a place in a Kindergarten. Information is for instance being passed out through the public health centers, midwives, the service centre (Servicetorget), primary schools, language training programs for adults, home visits to families where the children do not attend Kindergarten, designated recruitment teams carrying out door-to-door campaigns, and the Open Kindergartens. In addition network-based recruitment and "the jungle telegraph" were considered important channels. In the early stage of the program, information was passed out in written form, but the informants in the Kindergarten administration concluded that many of the parents in the target group were in need of extensive information on how the Kindergartens actually functioned, some of them were illiterates, and some of them had never heard of a Kindergarten. Therefore information through personal contact, and especially through networks, was considered the most effective. As a result of these extensive efforts to spread information, the report concluded that most of the parents in the city districts are now aware of the scheme.

Furthermore, for the recruitment to succeed, it is important that the kindergartens are situated reasonably close to the child's home. Many of the mothers have younger children at home and if taking their four or five year old child to Kindergarten take an unduly long time, the family is less likely to take part in the scheme. This finding is confirmed by a mid-term evaluation of the scheme in 2011 (Ruud et al 2011). This evaluation concluded that the scheme was successful in the sense that the number of four and five years old being in a Kindergarten at least 20 hours a week had increased, but in some areas this was due to an increase in the population and the *share* of children was stable. The city district administration explained this partly with a lack of places in the Kindergartens, but some parents also declined the offer to have four free hours a day in the Kindergarten because the Kindergarten was located too far from their home. On the one hand this illustrates the need for a very considerate organisation of the scheme, on the other hand it may also illustrate how poorly the idea that the children are in need of language training and socialising with peers is internalised by the target group parents (Ibid.: 155). At the same time the 2009-evaluation refer to employees in the city district administration reporting that an increasing number of parents have





become aware of the importance of learning Norwegian before entering primary school (Bogen and Reegård 2009: 11).

When it comes to the other aim of the scheme, namely assuring that the parents become more aware of the importance that they improve their own language skills, the 2009-report (Bogen and Reegård 2009: 13) concludes that several services for parents have been introduced, as parental guidance programmes and low threshold programmes that give priority to learning Norwegian through practical tasks. According to a survey carried out among the parents, the services for parents have become very popular among the mothers.

The 2011-evaluation points out that the direct effect of the programmes for the parents are not documented, but it is proven that taking part in such basic programmes often are followed up by participation in other relevant courses (Ruud et al 2011: 158). The Kindergartens report that the follow up by the parents vary and that it is sometimes difficult for the employees to engage in regular contact with the parents because the child is often taken to the Kindergarten by older siblings or other relatives. On the other hand, some schools report that the parents have become more eager to follow up their school age children, and this may be due to an effect of the language training (ibid. 158).

Other positive effects mentioned in the 2011-evaluation is that the kindergarten employees are making use of new techniques to improve language skills among immigrant children (Ruud et al. 2011: 160), and the contact between the city district administration and the parents has improved (ibid: 164). Also, kindergartens have been more aware of the importance of Norwegian skills among staff, and since 2011, kindergartens no longer employ staff who have not passed Norwegian test level 3 (European level B1) in permanent positions.

An effect evaluation of the free core time scheme is recently initiated (see part II of the host country paper).

### **Public health initiatives**

The public health initiatives under program area 4 of the Groruddalen Action Plan relate to sub-target 4.4, to reduce health differences among people in Groruddalen and improve the general health condition to match the Oslo average. Three of the districts – Grorud, Stovner and Bjerke – have implemented one joint public health program, while Alna has chosen a slightly different path.

#### *Stork Groruddalen*

The project Stork Groruddalen is implemented in Stovner, Grorud and Bjerke. The project targets pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, both immigrants and women in the majority population. The main ambition of the project is to improve pregnant women's health and life-style.

Stork Groruddalen includes both a research project and an intervention part. The research project recruited women at the health centres in the three districts from May 2008 through May 2010. Health centres give services to all pregnant women in the area, and enjoy high levels of trust in all population groups. According to practitioners, women in some immigrant communities place more trust in the health centre than in their GP. When the recruitment ended, 823 women from 65 countries had been recruited (74 per cent of those asked). This is regarded as highly successful (Annual report 2011). 59 per cent of the women recruited had ethnic minority backgrounds. The research project is thoroughly documented in



Jenum et al. 2010. The most important finding of the Stork research project so far is that gestational diabetes is far more common than previously assumed in all the population groups participating in the study.

The research project Stork Groruddalen has resulted in some small changes in how health personnel work with pregnant women with immigrant backgrounds, mainly summed up under the heading "improved information". This consists of the use of interpreters, information material in eight languages, visualisation, consciousness of the use of Norwegian language (using concrete language), checks that information is understood, and increased emphasis on 1:1 talks between pregnant women and health workers (Ruud et al 2009:186). Also, as a direct result of the research project, health stations have increased their offer to pregnant women by a separate consultation where diet and physical activities are discussed. As a result of Stork, and unusually in Norway, all pregnant women in Groruddalen are screened for gestational diabetes.

All districts that have implemented Stork offer participation in a physical activity program for women who have recently given birth (known as Smart Start). From 2010, a similar activity has been offered to pregnant women. As part of the Stork intervention, each district in Groruddalen has established two full-time positions devoted to promoting physical activity (Annual report 2011).

More culturally sensitive methods for the care for pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, as manifested in "improved information", is seen as an important outcome of Stork Groruddalen (Ruud et al 2009). No evaluation has been carried out to measure other potential success criteria, such as a healthier life style among participants (op.cit.).

#### *The public health project in Alna*

Alna is the one district in Groruddalen that has chosen not to implement Stork, but rather developed a separate program known as "public health project in Alna". This builds on already established initiatives in the Alna district. It has a stronger emphasis on physical activity than the Stork project, and also a wider target group. District Alna has employed a public health coordinator, and plans public health work around the "healthy living-model" as recommended by the Directorate of Public Health. An important measure in this model is individual or group-based guidance about physical activity, diet and smoking habits. The district also places major emphasis on developing arenas for physical activity locally. Also, the public health project cooperates with Stork in targeting pregnant women and working to improve their health condition.

The national strategy to enhance language and social competence in young speakers of minority languages (Språkløftet)

Språkløftet was organised as a project in all districts in Groruddalen districts in the period 2007–2011. The aim of the project has been to advance Norwegian skills and social skills among children in order to promote social inclusion. An important aim of the initiative was to create a smooth transition from kindergartens to schools for children who initially had limited language skills. The initiative emphasised language development, Norwegian skills, and social skills among pre-school children. The guardians of the child were also offered Norwegian lessons when relevant (Annual report 2011).

The language skills of all children are tested at the Health station at the age of four. At the start of Språkløftet, 20 children in each district were singled out for extra attention. These were followed up for four years: two years in kindergarten, and



two years at school. In the course of the project, schools and kindergartens have worked together to develop better methods for teaching in this group. After the initial group of "focal children" started school in 2009, work has continued to develop these methods in other nurseries in Groruddalen. As part of the project, personnel working with parents and children have been educated in the teaching of language to bilingual children, and cooperation with bilingual parents (Rambøl 2009). Also, nurseries and schools have been given the means to buy tools for language stimulation, which increased motivation among children as well as awareness among personnel.

An important success criterion for Språkløftet is whether more efficient methods have actually been identified. The district governments report that nurseries and schools cooperate better than they did before the program, and that they express more understanding for each other's ways of working. This has improved the continuation of pedagogical methods from nurseries into schools (Rambøll 2009, Hagen et al. 2012, Annual Report 2012). Also, improved methods for contact between schools/nurseries and families are developed, including parent-teacher meetings focusing on language teaching, parental guidance (ICDP), and lending of books that parents can read to their children.

Did Språkløftet improve the language skills of the targeted children? The aim was that the targeted children should score as high as children in their age group on average in Oslo on standardised language tests. The results of testing are ambivalent, and varied a great deal between the schools included in the project. Focal children in some schools scored higher than the city average, in other schools they scored lower. For the group as a whole, the focal children's score was just below the city average. The Oslo Municipality Education Unit has concluded that the ambition is partially fulfilled, and that it is worth continuing language stimulation along the lines developed in Språkløftet (Annual Report 2011).

### **Norwegian language offensive in Groruddalen (Norskoffensiv i 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 four districts. Participants in the courses are partly newcomers, and partly immigrants who have lived in Norway for long periods of time – sometimes since the 1970s – but still have very limited Norwegian skills. The courses are free of charge, and limited to 200 sessions.

Because the course is targeted at people who for some reason have found it too hard to participate in ordinary Norwegian-language training, entry is made as easy as possible. For instance, when entering ordinary courses, participants are required to show up at a central registry at Helsefy (in east Oslo) to register, take a test and clarify their rights and obligations. This is skipped for participants in NOG (Ruud et al. 2009:180). However, while the courses were initially intended for low-skilled immigrants, who were often illiterate and had very limited knowledge of the Norwegian language, the target group has "slid" over time to include high-skilled immigrants who wished to learn the language (Annual report 2011) (See part II of the National Report). This has led to a tightening up of access criteria, where participants who are offered a job or other forms of qualification lose their access to NOG (Tertialrapport 1, 2012)

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. According to the Annual report for 2011, these targets have been hard to reach, but the results are still described as "acceptable". Particularly the aim of continued Norwegian training within the ordinary system has proved hard to reach.

A small alteration of the NOG was implemented in 2012, when the limit of 200 hours was lifted. From spring 2012, participants can continue in NOG until they reach the level where they pass Norwegian test level 2 (Tertialrapport 1, 2012). It has however been pointed out that Norwegian level 2 (A2 by European standards), which indicate sufficient language skills to function in every-day life in Norway, may be insufficient to get and keep a job. For instance, popular immigrant employers like nursing homes, kindergartens (see above) and Oslo Taxi Company will not employ staff that has not passed the level 3 in Norwegian language.

There is no evaluation of NOG as such. An evaluation report of a single language and social issues course targeted at immigrant women in Groruddalen is outlined in Part II of this national report.

### **District Council's initiatives to promote better levels of living<sup>11</sup>**

The municipality of Oslo grants the four districts in Groruddalen annual sums to be used according to local needs and priorities to improve levels of living in the valley. In 2012, the grant from the municipality was NOK 2.5 million (€ 300 000), or NOK 625 000 to each district. This award is a supplement to the municipal awards granted for ordinary services in the districts.

The four districts have chosen to spend the grant in different ways. Priorities have also varied over time, and the overview here refers to 2011 only.

#### *District Alna*

Alna has given priority to increased efforts to improve language skills. The grant has been used on two projects: "the Norwegian campaign", and "the study circle". The most important measure in the Norwegian campaign has been to employ a project manager whose main job it is to inform residents about their rights, obligations and opportunities regarding Norwegian training and basic education. The main target group is home-based immigrants who need pre-qualifying measures in order to benefit from established Norwegian language training courses. The aim of the project is not necessarily to qualify these residents for employment, but to enhance their sense of competence and inspire them to learn more.

The "study circle" draws on a long tradition in Norway, particularly within the labour movement, for home-based studies under the supervision of a teacher. The model has however been used very little in Norwegian-training for immigrants. District Alna cooperates with an established provider of adult education programs (AOF) on developing a model for Norwegian self-study. The target group is highly educated immigrants.

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<sup>11</sup> All information in this section is drawn from the Annual report 2011.



### *District Bjerke*

District Bjerke's priority in 2011 was to establish a local job centre. The job centre has provided courses three days a week. One of the rooms is equipped with a computer, so that users can apply for jobs with the help of qualified staff. Since November 2011, courses has been run five days a week in cooperation with other initiatives targeted at immigrants and others who may have problems in the labour market (the Introduction programme, the Qualification programme, and Ny sjanse).

In the program plan for 2012, district Bjerke signals that it will expand activities at the job centre, and include measures targeted at language teaching, social inclusion and public health. This is expected to improve the coordination of many of the key measures included in the Groruddalen Action Plan in the district.

### *District Grorud*

District Grorud, like Alna, have divided the funds from the municipality into two main focal areas. One is the so-called Cooperation project (Samarbeidsprosjektet), which aims at unifying several projects that have operated for some time. Each of the projects targets, in various ways, young people at risk.

Second, district Grorud uses the available funds to strengthen the "healthy living central" in the district (Frisklivssentralen). The aim is to improve preventive services for residents in the district, mainly to prevent life style illnesses. This is to be achieved through improved cooperation between relevant actors: General practitioners, Health stations, the local Labour and Welfare offices (NAV), mental health services, user organisations and voluntary associations.

### *District Stovner*

Stovner is the only district that channels the funding made available by the municipality exclusively towards health services, more precisely, to improve the mental health service at a local primary school. The health service at Rommen primary school – a school where 94 per cent of pupils have immigrant backgrounds – was strengthened with one psychologist in a 50 per cent position. The psychologist is available at school premises 2 ½ day per week on average. The service is free of charge and does not require reference from a GP. The psychologist also cooperates with teachers, ordinary psycho-social services and school-based health services, and also guides teachers on topics like bullying, class management and the social environment at school. The initiative has been very well received by teachers, pupils and parents, and a more formal evaluation of the initiative is planned.

### **"Youth lighthouses"**

The municipality of Oslo grants the districts in Groruddalen money to develop initiatives for young people, called – with a joint name – "youth lighthouses" (ungdomsfyrtårn). These have been running since 2007. The light house initiatives vary from one district to the next, but they all operate more or less according to the same principles: courses, permanent groups and workshops are organised, and eventually end in a show, performance, exhibition or concert.

In Alna, the main initiative has been the media workshop "Almedie" (<http://www.almedie.no>). The workshop has run a series of courses, and has been involved in a number of exhibitions and shows. There is no estimate of how many



young people have used the workshop in one way or another, but about 80 had been engaged as actors, extras or similar in projects in 2011 (Annual Report 2011). The initiative targets participants between 12 and 20 years old.

Bjerke has established Nysirkus Bjerke (New circus Bjerke, <http://www.nysirkusbjerke.com>). This initiative organised a circus summer school in 2011, with classes in topics like acrobatics, aerial acrobatics, and juggling. The summer school was aimed in particular at youth who did not have other plans during the summer holiday. Other courses in circus-related skills have also been held. The group staged several performances in 2011, one of them, *Crossover*, was displayed in the Oslo Opera House. An estimated 250 children and young people, aged 8–20, participated in the Nysirkus Bjerke in 2011.

Fyrhuset in district Grorud is a music workshop with locations for practice and a studio (<http://www.fyrhuset.no>). This is the biggest local music workshop in Oslo, and, according to the Annual report 2011, quite on par with those covering the entire city. The money from the Groruddalen Action Plan is spent on employing three instructors for 10 hours each per week. According to the Annual Report, Fyrhuset has about 100 unique users per week (Annual Report 2011: 22), aged 11–20.

District Stovner focuses on a dance project which comprises several dance related activities. Continuous classes have been organised, in addition to a series of single events. Single events have included workshops, shows, and a “mini festival”. Around 80 youth have participated in the classes, in addition, many have participated in single events. The largest event, the festival Mini Mela, involved 2 500 people (Annual Report 2011:22).

The mid-way evaluation of the Groruddalen Action Plan argues that the various youth lighthouse initiatives have established themselves as attractive meeting places for local youth. They are visible, stage plays and shows, and take home prizes for their performances. They also play a role in overcoming prejudice youth in other parts of town may have about youth in Groruddalen (Ruud et al. 2009).

### **Initiatives to maintain cultural and voluntary organisational life**

The four districts are awarded money, both from the state and from the municipality of Oslo, to promote and maintain voluntary activities. The state grants and the municipal grants have different intentions, and are used in somewhat different ways. An overview of activities in each of the four districts, and an evaluation of the initiative in one area in district Bjerke, are given in part II of the national report.

## **4. Reflexions on the area-based policies to promote good living conditions among children and youth**

The state grant to combat poverty among children and youth in urban areas is a state grant with relatively loose guidelines, made available to actors at the local level. The Groruddalen Action Plan is a cooperative project between the state, the municipality of Oslo, and the local district councils. As such, they represent two models for cooperation between the state and the local level. In both cases, the state makes funds available, and local operators either decide unilaterally, or have a strong say, in how funds should be used. This final section of the report reflects on strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches, based on the evaluations that have been carried out.



The evaluation of the state grant indicated that there is a great deal of creativity among municipalities with regard to developing measures and initiatives (Nuland et al. 2010). Also, forms of organisations, and what local bodies and organisations are involved, vary greatly. Both measures and forms of organisation are tailored to local needs, and the grants are flexible enough to allow for this variation. As such, they fulfil their intention. The evaluation concludes that in order for local anti-poverty initiatives to be successful, municipalities and practitioners at the local level must feel ownership to the initiative. The state grant has given local actors financial muscles to act according to local needs, and has heightened awareness of the issue of child poverty at the local level.

Some limitations in the grant scheme are also pointed out in the evaluation. Even though measures are initiated based on local need, local "anchoring" is a challenge. Many practitioners fear that the initiatives will be discontinued once the ear-marked grant is lost, because they are not given priority within a strained municipal economy. Interestingly, the evaluation suggests that the concept "poverty" is alienating in municipalities, and that many instead prefer terms like "vulnerable youth". Many case workers are committed to user participation, but find this difficult to implement in practice. Few of the initiatives have systems for active user participation. Local anchoring and user participation come across as the Achilles' heels of the state grant-financed measures. The lack of anchoring may seem paradoxical, given that municipalities are free to design measures according to local needs. A strained financial situation in Norwegian municipalities however implies that even the best-designed, and popular, measures survive on the mercy of state grant providers. This is frustrating, and creates insecurity, among practitioners and users.

The Groruddalen Action Plan has been described as a plan with ambitious goals, but limited means (Asplan Viak/Agenda Kaupang 2010). The evaluation still argues that the plan is on "the right course". A number of projects have been developed, and are in the process of being carried out. According to the process evaluation, the Action plan "does not come across as a beaming lighthouse that is easily identified by participants, involved parties and observers. Rather, it is characterised by a multitude of varied measures, each creating effects that, in sum, point towards the overall goals" (Asplan Viak/Agenda Kaupang 2010:50). The evaluation highlights that the District councils have been through a valuable learning process in their closer cooperation with bodies at higher levels, and that the meeting places that have been created through the Action Plan have an important function.

The mid-way evaluation of the Action Plan also stressed administrative learning and new meeting places as important aspects of the plan, and agrees to the conclusion that the Action Plan is on the right track (Ruud et al. 2011). It also points out how the whole, at least potentially, becomes more than the sum of the parts, such as when public health aims on Program Area 4 are partially realised through the utilisation of green spaces developed under Program Area 2.

This report has looked especially at Program Area 4 in the Groruddalen Action Plan. The mid-way evaluation (Ruud et al 2010) points out that a central aim of this Program Area has been to increase employment rates among inhabitants in the valley in general, but many of the measures have targeted groups that have a long way to go before being able to find a job – typically immigrant women with very limited Norwegian-skills. This may be part of the explanation for why results, at least at the relatively early stage, appear to be meagre. Another point is that Program Area 4 aims at developing forms of cooperation, new patterns of cooperation etc. where results may be difficult to measure in the short run. Nevertheless, free core time has increased the proportion of immigrant children in nurseries, Norskoffensiv has helped districts target residents in need of language



training, STORK is an internationally notable initiative within health care for pregnant women, and the “youth light houses” has improved the image of the valley in popular imagination. The Groruddalen Action Plan, now half-way finalised, appears to be a promising model for urban development.





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