



Peer Review
in Social Protection
and Social Inclusion
2012

Area-based policies in urban areas:
how to promote **good living
conditions** for children and youth

SHORT REPORT

Norway, 13-14 November 2012

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Short Report

Held in Oslo (Norway) on 13-14 November 2012, the Peer Review was hosted by the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). In addition to participation from host country government departments, institutes and organisations, six peer countries were represented: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece and Romania. They were joined by stakeholders from Eurocities, and the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN), and by the Thematic Expert, Mary Daly from the University of Oxford. Taking part for the European Commission was a representative of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Thematically this Peer Review was closely linked to the one organised in September 2012 in Belgium on combating child poverty¹.

The policy under review

Tackling poverty has been high on Norway's political agenda for over ten years and improving the living conditions of children and youth received focused attention. The policy has three main aims: provide opportunities for all to participate in the labour market; encourage participation and development for children and young people; and improve living conditions for the most disadvantaged groups.

Monetary poverty among children is comparatively low and tends to be of short duration. It is worth noting that the poverty threshold in Norway is the highest in Europe. However, child poverty rates are on the increase. In 1996, it was 7%, by 2010, 9%. The main reason is increasing poverty among children with migrant backgrounds.

While the state has the finance to tackle poverty, the measures are often implemented locally. Norwegian municipalities have a large degree of autonomy and are encouraged to develop their own policies and priorities. Their responsibilities include managing social assistance, organising nurseries, primary schools, health care and integration of newly arrived immigrants. These activities are financed by targeted state funds, the municipality's own means or grants from national bodies.

Central to the Peer Review's discussions were the Norwegian good practices:

- 1) State grants to combat poverty among children and youth** in large urban areas provided by the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (grant scheme started in 2003). In 2009, for example, NOK 31,5 million – about EUR 4,3 million – were allocated for these purposes.

The grants are meant to be a means to alleviate and prevent poor living conditions among adolescents and young adults. The following types of programmes can receive the grants: (i) leisure time (holiday as well as extra-curricular activities); (ii) qualifying measures for young people; (iii) long term and concerted efforts to combat marginalisation of children and young people experiencing poverty. Among the key target groups are children from migrant background, children from jobless households, children or young people who have dropped out of school. Examples of projects include: youth clubs, subsidised holidays, nature walks, homework assistance, activities for school drop outs,

¹ "Combating child poverty through measures promoting the socio-cultural participation of clients of the Public Centres of Social Action/Welfare" held in Brussels (Belgium) on 20-21 September 2012
(<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=1427&furtherNews=yes>)

membership in soccer team, dance lessons and other cultural activities like visits to amusement park, etc.

- 2) The Groruddalen Action Plan (2007-2016)** to improve overall living conditions in one of Oslo's most vulnerable areas with a very high proportion of immigrants, health problems and relatively low levels of employment. It is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Environments and the City council of Oslo (each contributes NOK 50 million a year - about EUR 6,8 million). The Action Plan is the first area-focused initiative of such magnitude and scope in the country.

The Action Plan consists of four programme areas: (i) environmentally-friendly transport; (ii) sports and cultural milieu, green areas; (iii) development of housing and local communities; and (iv) social inclusion and standards of living including children, youth and schools. The Peer Review concentrated on the fourth strand, although some activities overlap with other programmes. The set of targets involved aims to ensure pre-school children have a sufficient knowledge of Norwegian, to help more people from vulnerable groups into employment, to reduce differences in health among the population, to develop youth activities and promote diverse and inclusive cultural and organisational life. The key initiatives are:

- **Free core time in kindergarten.** This provides 20 free hours for four and five year olds per week. The aim is to help prepare children, especially those with a minority language background, to start primary school with a good knowledge of Norwegian and general social skills. At the same time the programme encourages immigrant parents to develop their own knowledge of Norwegian.
- **Public health initiatives.** The Stork Groruddalen project which includes both a research project and an intervention part aims to improve the health and life style of pregnant women and those who have recently given birth. It has been particularly successful in recruiting women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Alna, one of four districts in Groruddalen, has implemented its own public health project with a strong emphasis on physical activity and a wider target group.
- **National strategy to enhance language ability (Språkløftet).** Språkløftet was organised as a project in all districts in Groruddalen in the period 2007–2011. The aim has been to advance Norwegian skills and social skills among children with minority background in order to promote social inclusion. The project is based on close collaboration between schools and kindergartens.
- **Norwegian language offensive (Norskoffensiv I Groruddalen).** This consists of a set of courses for adults, essentially immigrants who have recently arrived or been in the country for some time, with very little knowledge of Norwegian. It was initiated in 2008, and has run continuously in all the districts of Groruddalen.
- **Improving living conditions.** The municipality of Oslo grants the four districts in Groruddalen annual sums to be used according to local needs to improve levels of living in the valley. The four districts use finance for this purpose in different ways. These include projects to improve language skills, encourage healthy living, operate a mental health service and establish a job centre.
- **Youth lighthouses (ungdomsfyrtårn).** Since 2007 the municipality of Oslo grants financing to develop initiatives for young people, called – with a joint name – “youth lighthouses” (ungdomsfyrtårn). The initiatives for young people range from media and music workshops to training in circus skills and dance

but all of them are organised in a similar way: courses, group training and workshops resulting in a performance, exhibition or concert at the end of the year.

Key issues discussed during the meeting

The discussion at the meeting was organised around the following questions:

- What are the ways of overcoming barriers in reaching children and youth from excluded backgrounds and engaging them in childcare and education services?
- What does the Norwegian example tell us regarding the balance between universal and targeted approaches?
- What are the advantages and challenges for municipalities in devising and implementing their own anti-poverty plans?
- What role is there for existing service providers (like schools, youth clubs and so forth)? To what extent have localism and a spatial approach in anti-poverty policy been tried and proven?
- Can the same set of policies cover child poverty and youth poverty?
- What are the lessons around the long-term sustainability of projects/measures?
- How can we best engage directly with those involved and especially the most vulnerable?

One of the main topics of discussion was the relative merits of targeted and universal approaches. The action plan constitutes a mix of the two approaches. The specific measures to promote good living conditions for children and youth in Gørudalen rest on a context of universalism, a key part of which is the nationwide anti-poverty programme. It was pointed out that targeted and universalist approaches are not mutually exclusive. In general, Norway operates a universal approach with free schooling and health care, but if it emerges that some groups are falling through the net, then targeted measures are introduced on top of this. To suggestions that the measures appeared largely focused on the immigrant community, it was explained that they are available to all citizens in the area, but that problems of poverty and social exclusion tend to be more prevalent among immigrants.

There was much discussion on the ways of collaboration between different actors and levels; on the extent to which the different aspects of the action plan were decided by central government and the municipality or involved contributions from local associations, NGOs and residents. The initial impetus for the action plan was a political decision by the national and local authorities, but as it developed more input came from the local community. Various measures had improved Gørudalen's image and reputation, which previously, partly due to the media, were rather low.

The notion of giving people incentives to participate or benefits if they do participate was also discussed. Having heard the experiences of different countries where incentivisation is variously used, this was felt to be a strategy that could yield results especially with minority groups such as immigrants.

The importance of directly engaging with the most vulnerable was emphasised through the debate. Consultation with representatives of the target groups regarding the service needs and service performance could become a shortcut to formulation and launching of relevant measures. Different possible methods and forms of engagement were discussed.

Key learning elements

- **Targeted measures and universalism.** Research suggests that countries most successful in combating poverty adopted predominantly universal approach backed by targeted and individualised methodologies. In a similar way Norway combines universal base with targeted personalised approaches. Moreover it is a multidimensional approach going beyond employment and education. This helps to reduce the risk of stigma and further social exclusion for beneficiaries. Close links between the two makes targeted measures more politically acceptable and easier to defend when financial times are hard. Building bridges with universal measures helps to make the initiatives function better for vulnerable groups.
- **Spatial approach.** Within its strategic antipoverty framework Norway developed a spatial, bottom-up approach to inclusion in close collaboration with local stakeholders. Special programmes to upgrade disadvantaged neighbourhoods can promote social cohesion as well as social inclusion. Improved living conditions strengthen a sense of being part of a wider community. Social housing is an important ingredient to ensure people facing poverty have somewhere suitable to live. Local public services can play a constructive role as employers and facilitators.
- **Child poverty.** There is no doubting the success of the Norwegian welfare model. However, levels and measurements of child poverty are very different across the European Union. In some countries, children may lack sufficient food and clothing, in others their perceived needs may be far less basic. Given the variation in the level or extent of need, countries vary in terms of their policy portfolio or preference. In some countries the policy approach is to treat the child as the main beneficiary of services – a right that may protect against any cuts in those services – while in other countries the identified unit for policy support is the family.
- **Sustainability.** Participants were of the view that the future of this or any programme once its initial funding has ended can be viewed in different ways. It may be rendered sustainable by having a foundation in national legislation. Several other factors can help ensure the extended life for a programme or measure. One is clear evidence that investment at the local level has brought economic gains (by reducing the need for social security benefits, for instance) or identifiable improvements for the beneficiaries. Another is separation on the one hand between a service provider and local managers who will remain committed to the project and, on the other, a funder who may not. Existing structures, systems and operators should be prepared to adapt, while cross-sectoral links with schools, social and employment departments and others will strengthen a programme by embedding it among existing service providers and structures.
- **Local anchoring.** People benefiting from a programme need to feel a sense of ownership and involvement. This can be helped by involving them in its elaboration, asking them what their needs are instead of these being anticipated by a higher authority. Priorities should be set locally (as well as nationally) and a diversified set of awareness and contact techniques used. These can involve trusted service providers such as health centres, easily understood leaflets translated into several languages and face to face contact. Successful engagement will make the local community an agent for change and tap into local knowledge.
- **Other success factors.** Discussions concluded that successful programmes require many ingredients: enthusiasm among the people involved, commitment to participation, staff continuity, good collaboration between all involved (government ministries, local authorities, NGOs and other partners), practical ways of reaching out to beneficiaries who are known to be hard to reach, methodology for engaging children/youth and their families as users and active partners, early intervention,

measures embedded in existing services, involvement of employers and private sector.

Contribution of the Peer Review to Europe 2020

The focus of the Peer Review – the Groruddalen action plan – has resonance for the Europe 2020 strategy in several ways. It offers a template for contributing to two of its targets. The first – education – aims to reduce school drop-out rates to below 10% and ensure that at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completes third level education. The second – poverty/social exclusion – looks to reduce by at least 20 million the number of people in, or at risk of, poverty and social exclusion.

The topic and the measure also feed into guidelines 9 and 10 of the Europe 2020 strategy by demonstrating how to develop the performance of education and training systems at all levels, including participation in tertiary education, and to improve social inclusion and combat poverty.

The discussions provide food for thought for the forthcoming Recommendation on Child Poverty. This will emphasise that investing in children and families is essential for the dignity of society and Europe's economic and social future. It will propose common principles on issues such as early childhood education and care, health, housing, social services and children's participation.

The Peer Review was timely in many other ways also. It was held just days before the publication by Eurostat of the latest child poverty figures and occurred soon after the Council conclusions on child poverty and child well-being were adopted in October. In addition, it raised some similar issues as an earlier Peer Review held in Belgium in September 2012 on access to socio-cultural participation as a means to combat child poverty².

Several of the issues raised will be relevant for the Youth Employment Package, with its two initiatives on youth guarantees and enhanced quality traineeships, which the Commission is preparing for the end of 2012.

² "Combating child poverty through measures promoting the socio-cultural participation of clients of the Public Centres of Social Action/Welfare" held in Brussels (Belgium) on 20-21 September 2012
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