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

SYNTHESIS REPORT

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promote **good living conditions** for
children and youth

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SYNTHESIS REPORT

European Commission

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Executive Summary

The Peer Review addressed the topic of area-based policies to promote good living conditions for children and youth. Held in Oslo 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 recently held in Belgium on combating child poverty.¹

The Norwegian approach showcased here consists of a grant scheme and wide-ranging plan to address key aspects of poverty and social exclusion at municipality level in a low-income area of Oslo city. Children and young people exposed to the risk of poverty, especially those from households with a non-western immigrant background, are the key target group. The Plan adopts an area-based approach to poverty and social exclusion. One of the largest ever initiatives of its kind in Norway, the part of the Plan which was considered for Peer Review has 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 migrant children and their parents with Norwegian language and culture.

The different papers as well as the presentations led to wide-ranging discussions. These focused on six main themes.

The relative utility of and **relationship between, universal and targeted approaches** was a major point of discussion. The specificity of a universal as against a targeted approach and the utility and merits of each in the current context of recession gave rise to considerable debate. The Norwegian policy adopts a combined approach but primarily emphasises universalism. It is preventive in orientation, seeks full coverage and helps to reduce the risk of stigma and social exclusion for beneficiaries. It was suggested that building bridges between universal and targeted measures serves to make the initiatives function better for vulnerable groups and can lead to policy innovations. The free core hours in kindergarten is an example of such a bridge because it introduces children to the kindergarten and ensures they have some time there. At the same time this measure enables parents to extend their child's period in the kindergarten if they wish to by paying for extra hours.

A second theme was **the role of a spatial approach** and how to link it with existing provision. Within its strategic anti-poverty framework Norway has put in place a spatial, bottom-up approach to inclusion in close collaboration with local stakeholders. The advantages of this kind of approach are many. 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 a suitable place to live. With regard to the role of existing service providers, there was much discussion on the possibilities of collaboration between different actors and

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>)



levels. The significance of local public services and their potential role as employers and facilitators of integration were especially highlighted.

Child poverty was a third focus of discussion. In this regard, participants reflected on both the learning taking place and the specific features of child poverty in different countries. The discussions underlined that the scale of the challenge of child poverty varies between Member States. It was also noted that the Member States with the lowest levels of child and youth poverty are all Nordic and apply a strong universal approach accompanied by additional targeted initiatives. Other cross-national variations include the extent to which children are the target for policy. **While national differences are striking, the discussion underlined the value of childcare and early education as a response to child poverty.**

Fourthly the issue of **sustainability** was discussed. Participants were of the view that there are different ways of securing the future of this or any programme once its initial funding has ended. For example it may be made sustainable by being incorporated in national legislation. Several other factors can also help ensure an extended life for a programme or measure also. One is clear evidence that investment at the local level has brought economic gains (e.g. by reducing the need for social security benefits) or identifiable improvements for the beneficiaries. Another is being able to differentiate between service providers/local managers who will remain committed to the project and those who may not. This and other considerations relating to sustainability should be taken into account when the project is being initiated. Establishing inter-sectoral links was also identified as a potential contributor to sustainability.

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The importance of directly **engaging with the most vulnerable** was a fifth focus of discussion. It was pointed out that **consulting target group representatives about their service needs and service performance is essential to effectively formulating and launching relevant measures.** Different possible methods and forms of such engagement were discussed. These included once-off surveys, user panels, conferences and other meetings to communicate with the public. The merit of giving people incentives to participate was also discussed. The fact that the childcare is free is an obvious incentive in the case of the Groruddalen Action Plan.

Finally, **localism and local anchoring** also came up in the discussion in addition to the **balance between the national, regional and local levels.** People benefiting from a programme need to feel a sense of ownership and involvement. This can be facilitated by involving them in policy making and 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 techniques used for awareness raising and contact making. The latter 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. **The balance between the different levels of decision making, funding and service provision was considered to be an urgent issue in the current climate of local level funding cuts, at a time when the responsibilities of the local providers may be increased and the level of local need almost certainly increased by recession.**



A. Policy context at European level

The Groruddalen Action Plan is closely linked to a number of themes in EU social policy. There are five key elements to the relevant policy and institutional framework at EU level.

1. A first element is the focus on children's rights, in particular as expressed through the recognition of children 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) expresses recognition 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, protect and fulfill the rights of the child in all relevant EU policies and to turn this commitment into concrete results (European Commission 2011a).
2. Issues relating to child and youth poverty have become EU priorities and are present in a transversal manner in a number of EU policy areas. The fight against child poverty is a major focus of EU social policy and was a key theme of the Belgian EU presidency in 2010 and the Cyprus presidency in 2012. In addition, child poverty is being prioritised in EU cooperation on social issues - in particular through the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Child poverty was the subject of a number of Council Conclusions (especially June 2011 – Council 2011) and is the subject of a forthcoming Recommendation on child poverty and social exclusion as part of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.
3. A third relevant element and focus of EU engagement is the matter of young people's rights, well-being and participation. In 2009, the Council endorsed a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018) and Europe 2020 devotes one of its five headline targets to youth (reducing early school-leaving and increasing tertiary educational attainment). Two other headline targets also share a youth dimension – to reduce the risk of poverty and 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'.
4. A fourth relevant aspect of EU policy concerns the matter of social cohesion and especially the integration of minorities and immigrants. In relation to minorities, there are elements of the EU Roma strategy that are relevant for this Peer Review (although the Groruddalen 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 and to make tangible improvements by the end of the current decade (European Commission 2011b). In relation to the cultural integration of immigrants, the EU has also sought to agree the fundamental aspects of a policy approach and 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).

5. A fifth issue of relevance for EU involvement concerns access to services. This is widely integrated as a core element of EU social policy – which together with adequate income and access to social services – is regarded as key to exiting poverty and especially social exclusion. Services which aim for 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.

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 experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Turning to Member States, there are a number of core components in their child poverty policy (Frazer and Marlier 2007). The first is to ensure that children grow up in their 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, thereby enabling them to reach their full potential, in addition to making sure that children in vulnerable situations are protected. Early childhood education is regarded as vital in this context. A third common, although much less widespread, objective is the promotion of child participation in social life and, particularly, in recreational, sporting and cultural life.

Most Member States seem to combine both universal and preventative policies with more targeted policies. However, the balance between the two varies according to the situation and also the policy tradition in the Member State. Frazer and Marlier (2007) point out that the evidence from the countries with the lowest levels of child poverty (especially the Nordic countries) suggests that the most effective approach is targeted policies for children at high risk which rest on a pillar of universal policies. Endorsing a rights-based approach, the policy course they prescribe is a sort of tailored universalism. This resonates strongly with the Groruddalen Plan, which marries targeting with universalism and localism.

The second relevant thematic area of policy in Member States is that of the social inclusion of young people. With regard to the social inclusion of young people from minority backgrounds, there is considerable variation in policy focus across Member States. However, this is a 'field of action' in the EU Youth Strategy and also a key priority of the Youth in Action programme. This programme supported more than 7,100 projects in the Member States with expenditure of almost EUR 105 million in 2010 and 2011. More than 150,000 young



people participated in the projects, of which more than one-third were young people with limited opportunities (European Commission 2012: 42).

A further policy 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 have strong municipal links. Research indicates that cities are very vibrant and are continuously changing and that immigration is one of the key trends affecting city life in Europe (Eurocities 2012). While cities have different approaches and projects in place, the most progressive endorse priorities such as devising area-based solutions, family support, user-centric social services and the use of an integrated and co-ordinated approach with a strong emphasis on prevention.



B. Host country policy/good practice under review

Showcased by the host country for the subject of the review were two major initiatives. The first concerns **state grants to combat poverty among children and youth** in large urban areas provided by the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (the 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 of alleviating and preventing poor living conditions among adolescents and young adults. The following types of programmes are eligible for 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 backgrounds, children from jobless households and 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, soccer team membership, dance lessons and other cultural activities such as visits to amusement parks, and so forth.

The second initiative is the **Goruddalen Action Plan**, 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 Goruddalen Action Plan 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 covered by the Plan. Work is carried out 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 some NOK 100 million allocated annually. By the end of the period, an estimated NOK 1 billion (EUR 125 million) will have been invested in the area.

The Action Plan is divided into four programme areas. The one at the centre of the Peer Review is focused on children and youth, schools, living conditions, cultural activity and inclusion. It has six sub-programme areas which emphasise especially early childhood education and development, reduction of health inequalities, improvement of youth activities and the promotion of a diverse and inclusive cultural life. An important underlying principle throughout is that integration should be promoted through the involvement and participation of individuals and through voluntary action. Among the initiatives that were highlighted for Peer Review purposes were the following:

- **Free core time in kindergartens:** Up to four free hours per day in kindergartens are offered to all children in the area aged four to five. The underlying rationale is that children who take part in a kindergarten are better prepared for starting primary school and have acquired competence in the Norwegian language 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 the Norwegian language. 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.

- **Språkløftet:** The aim of ‘the national strategy to enhance language and social competence in young speakers of minority languages’ 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 mothers, were also offered Norwegian lessons.
- **Norwegian language offensive:** This consists of a set of courses targeted at adults with very little knowledge of Norwegian. 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.
- **Stork Groruddalen:** Included here is 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). Since 2010, a similar activity has been offered to pregnant women.
- **Measures targeted at voluntary participation, sports and culture:** Of primary importance here are youth initiatives. These include the “youth lighthouses” (ungdomsfyrtårn) which vary from one district to another, but all operate more or less according to the same principles: courses, 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>).

Taken as a whole there are several notable features of the Groruddalen Plan. First, it is underpinned by a broad approach to and an understanding of ‘integration’. By 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 model of activation to that which views integration in terms of employment. In this instance 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 culture. In relation to children, measures such as free core time in kindergartens and Språkløftet place 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 provisions;
- Recognition of the significance of a local response and of the important role of municipalities and a host of other locally-based 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 commitment to support the development of new services and procedures in a coherent manner.

But there are also challenges that have to be taken into account. The evaluations that have been carried out (as reported in Part II of the host country report²) are helpful in drawing attention to some key issues:

- The need continually to improve the capacity to reach vulnerable groups, 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.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=1396&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news>



C. Policies and experiences in peer countries and stakeholder contributions

In **Belgium** the fight against social exclusion in childhood and among young people has been made one of the main tenets of the government's poverty reduction policy, at both the federal and regional level. Together with the regional governments, the federal government plans to reduce childhood poverty via a number of measures in different areas of life affecting children and their families (access to adequate resources and support to households, access to quality services and children's participation). This reflects the conviction that tackling poverty requires a multi-dimensional and multi-level policy-framework. A universal approach dominates along with more targeted actions developed when necessary. However, there is considerable regional variation. In Flanders, social integration policies are mostly targeted at migrants and other special target groups such as Roma, refugees, irregular immigrants, while in the French community the approach is one of mainstreaming. The need to focus on the urban dimension is felt at all levels in Belgium with the importance of the local level being especially recognised. Hence, the Federal Urban Policy formulates only broad objectives, such as: strengthening social cohesion in deprived neighbourhoods, reducing the ecological foot print; reinforcing the image of the city and its neighbourhoods. Urban policy has also addressed the issue of child and youth poverty and social exclusion (among other issues) through the Sustainable City contracts in which 17 cities and municipalities participate.

Of the peer countries it is **Finland** that comes closest to the host country approach. A generally universal approach is adopted to tackle child poverty though whereas in Norway state grants are more area-based, in Finland discretionary government transfers to local government are available to all the municipalities in the country. Policies to combat child poverty and improve the living conditions of children and young people are laid out in the Finnish Government Programme and are implemented via a wide-ranging action plan to reduce the social exclusion of young people. Currently, government supported measures to combat child poverty and social exclusion of young people are organised through two major programmes. The first is a wide-ranging action plan targeting the social exclusion of young people, coordinated by the Ministry of Employment. This programme includes a social guarantee for young people under which each young person under 25 and recent graduates under 30, will be offered a job, on-the-job training, a study place, or a period in a workshop or rehabilitation within three months of becoming unemployed. The second programme is at local government level and is implemented via the National Development Plan for Social Welfare and Health Care, Kaste-programme, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. A major goal of this programme is to reform services for children and families. The current phase targets three thematic and operational areas: the family centre service concept, school and student health care and child welfare services. One of the main principles common to all these is the strengthening of the preventive approach, especially through early intervention.

In **Germany** a very relevant initiative is 'The Social City: Investment in the Neighbourhood'. This is essentially an urban development investment programme which, since its inception in 1999, has benefited more than 600 neighbourhoods in Germany. A joint initiative between the Federal government and the Länder, it supports local authorities in stabilising

and upgrading neighbourhoods that are economically and socially deprived. The actions involved, while oriented to improving the local infrastructure, vary considerably since a fundamental principle governing the programme is to respond to local need with tailored projects. In some cases the funding is used by the local authorities to improve the housing stock and the residential environment. In other cases measures seek to increase community involvement and improve the image of the locality or indeed promote social inclusion. Along with housing the programme covers the provision of education, training, employment community integration, health and the strengthening of the local economy. In this and other ways the Social City initiative seeks to promote local development as part of an area-based approach. The programme is underpinned by principles of integrated development, interdepartmental cooperation, and local stakeholder involvement.

In **Greece**, there is no universal payment for children. Nor is there a minimum income safety net. Poor children are entitled to marginal cash benefits only if their families satisfy the eligibility conditions which tend to be strict. The scheme for protected children provides a monthly allowance equivalent to €44 per child for children in lone parent families or for those who take care of children without families, provided that the annual income does not exceed EUR 3,000. Municipalities also provide discretionary welfare benefits for poor children who are not eligible to receive other benefits. Faced with a massive economic and social crisis, Greece has introduced a set of measures designed to address poverty and social exclusion on a regional basis. One initiative, which is being implemented on a pilot basis in four urban areas of high child poverty, is for integrated local services for poor families with children. The aim is to guarantee a basic range of services for children and their parents through local support centres. The services include personal care services, parenting advice, and measures to support the employment of parents. A second innovation is the TOPEKO initiative which is designed to mobilise local stakeholders with a view to creating jobs and training for unemployed vulnerable social groups. It utilises a bottom-up philosophy and works on the basis of development partnerships. Thus far, 132 action plans, involving 12,000 beneficiaries, have been approved or are underway.

With the ambitious objective of reducing child poverty under its action plan against poverty and social exclusion, **Romania** continues to reform its set of income benefits and social support services. When it comes to children it has both universal and targeted measures in place. There is a state child allowance for example which is paid for all children up to 18 years of age regardless of the parental income (currently valued at €10 a month per child). There is also a means-tested family allowance which is conditional not just on income but also on child attendance at school. There is also a child raising benefit which is an indemnity granted to parents while on parental leave until the child reaches the age of two. The service infrastructure for children in vulnerable families is also being developed and upgraded as the country moves from its historical focus on institutionalising vulnerable children towards a policy oriented to community services and children's rights.

At European level, **EAPN** emphasises that the Norwegian case study provides a positive example of an integrated approach to promoting better conditions for children and young people through a strategic local development partnership approach. It points out that the plan is not simply an implantation of national policy priorities but aims at being a positive exercise in community action planning. It views the action plan as particularly timely in the current political context of austerity measures, and the upcoming Commission Recommendation on child poverty by prioritising, a preventative, social integration approach for



children and young-people's development based on rights, participation and universal principles, which could be usefully supported by Structural Funds initiatives. EAPN welcomes the emphasis on increasing access to affordable, quality childcare, as a means to child development and integration, as well as the importance of creating a 'public meeting space' through childcare and other centres for children, young people and their families. EAPN also underlines the challenges involved in the approach adopted by the Groruddalen Action Plan. One challenge is to set objectives that are sufficiently specific and focused while allowing for local responses; another is to make language teaching part of an integrated, personalised path to inclusion. Furthermore, there is the issue of engaging in ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and in mainstreaming the measures in the Action Plan so that they can be sustained beyond the life of the Plan. In EAPN's view, the challenge of promoting good living conditions needs to start from the premise of how to defend universal principles combined with more targeted delivery to meet the needs of specific groups. Another primary principle is to limit cuts in services for children and young people and to prioritise empowerment of children and young people as users of services.

Eurocities points to the growing segregation in European cities not only between populations but also between richer and poorer urban areas. They emphasise that research demonstrates the importance of neighbourhood, especially as regards participation and mobility. Governance is critical and Eurocities points out that there are in the Groruddalen Action Plan as elsewhere significant governance-related challenges. In particular, public services tend to become more and more specialised, demanding more coordination within and between different units as well as across different domains of administration. In this context, Eurocities referred to Copenhagen. One of the important goals of policy for disadvantaged areas of Copenhagen is to establish a transparent overview of services, measures, expenditure and outcome in each area so as to be able to coordinate across sectors intelligently in the years to come and to reach the targets within the budget. There are also challenges in involving residents and other stakeholders. Eurocities underlines the importance of involving local stakeholders to create a local ownership. Another issue is how to involve the more disadvantaged residents in the initiatives in improving living conditions for such sectors of the population.



D. Main issues discussed during the meeting

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

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

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One of the main topics of discussion was the relative merits of **targeted versus universal approaches**. The Groruddalen Action Plan constitutes a mix of the two approaches. But the specific mix is important. It was noted that the Norwegian approach has a double universalism in the sense that, first, the additional measures for target groups such as children from immigrant backgrounds rest on a set of universal benefits and services and, second, since an area-based approach is adopted, everybody in the locality is a potential beneficiary of the additional resources put in. In general, Norway operates a universal preventive approach to poverty with child allowances, free schooling and free health care. However, if it emerges that some groups are falling through the net, then targeted measures are introduced on top of the universal base. The language-related initiatives which are built into the Groruddalen Action Plan are a good example of the way specific initiatives can be grafted on to a general approach.

These and other examples underline that targeted and universalist approaches are not mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the differences between them merit emphasis in that universal approaches are aimed at prevention and take a long-term view whereas targeted approaches are focused on dealing with problems or situations that have emerged. Universal provision has many advantages – not least the fact that it tends to generate collective use and thereby a sense of collective ownership. There is also the possibility that services or benefits focusing solely on the poor are poor services and benefits. The resources required especially in the current climate were also a subject of discussion. Providing an effective safety net requires constant investment, not just in benefits but also in social workers, training and building a network of services. Also raised was the issue of the mix of universalism and targeted provision and whether both are needed on an ongoing basis. Targeted meas-



ures may have a larger role to play in the current crisis. It was also suggested that targeted policies should be devised with universal measures and policy principles in mind. Failure to do so could see the beneficiaries stigmatised. Again an important example here can be taken from the Norwegian approach which, in the context of immigration, emphasises a multi-cultural approach. Multi-culturalism and using culture as a medium of integration, skills and identity building were also evident from some of the projects visited as part of the Peer Review.

With regard to the role of existing **service providers**, there was much discussion on the possibilities of collaboration between different actors and levels. Questions were raised and discussed about the extent to which different aspects of the Action Plan were decided on 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. Moreover, there are differences between the four elements of the Groruddalen Action Plan. Some projects, such as the kindergarten initiative, are planned by the ministry; others are initiated by local residents, especially those in area three of the Action Plan (development of housing and local communities) with different neighbourhoods being involved and finance coming from the national level. Regular meetings take place with residents and volunteers to determine their needs and ways to improve their living conditions and how to further develop initiatives already in place.

When debating the issue of **differences between child and youth poverty**, the focus was mainly on child poverty. Participants reflected on the learning taking place in this regard (at national and international levels), especially since child poverty as a focus of policy in its own right is new in many respects. The specific features of child poverty in different countries was a subject of reflection. The discussions at the Peer Review underlined variation in the scale of the challenge that child poverty poses for Member States. In some countries it is almost a matter of ensuring that children continue to receive food and basic services, whereas in others child poverty is more about children's opportunities and future prospects. It was also noted that the Member States with the lowest levels of child and youth poverty are all Nordic and apply a strong universal approach accompanied by additional targeted initiatives. Other cross-national variations include the extent to which children are the target for policy. In some countries the policy approach is to treat children as the main beneficiaries of services – a right that may protect against any cuts in those services – while in other countries policies target the family. While national differences are striking, the value of childcare and early education as a response to child poverty is to be underlined not just by the Groruddalen experience but also more generally.

Another question discussed was how to **identify and reach the most disadvantaged groups**. There were two main questions raised in this regard. The first was whether there is too much reliance on ethnicity as a marker of disadvantage and whether this obscures other pockets or factors of disadvantage. The second concerned the need to be aware that disadvantage and exclusion are dynamic and therefore change from time to time which means that policy makers must be vigilant about ensuring that they search for and keep up to date with any changes in the nature and location of disadvantage. In this regard, participants also discussed the challenge of ensuring participation among those who are disadvantaged or distant from provision. Among the practices mentioned in this regard which had been tried in the Groruddalen area were an information campaign in several

languages, identifying potential participants through registration records, working through other local services providers, personally visiting people to tell them about the initiatives and encourage them to participate.

The sustainability of measures was another focus of discussion. There were several points developed in this regard. The complexity of the different ways in which sustainability should be viewed was underlined. For example, institutional sustainability, which can guarantee rights through legislation or practice, is different from financial sustainability. Participants also agreed that in the current climate the sustainability of existing measures may be as critical as that of new measures. With regard to new measures, it was pointed out that a project's chances of continuing, once initial funding ends, are raised if it has integrated into or with existing patterns of organisation. Inter-sectoral links were identified as very important for this purpose. For example, cross-sectoral links with schools, social and employment departments and others should serve to strengthen anti-poverty programmes by embedding them among existing service providers, aims and structures. But for this to take place, existing structures, systems and operators have to be prepared to adapt and change. The means of monitoring programme outcomes, while relevant in their own right also have implications for sustainability. The prospect of budget cuts means that projects which cannot demonstrate their value could lose funding. In some Peer Review countries the authorities are engaging with universities to carry out this monitoring role since national authorities do not have the resources.

The importance of directly engaging with the most vulnerable was emphasised throughout the debate. It was pointed out that consultation with representatives of the groups targeted regarding their service needs and service performance is essential to effectively formulating and launching relevant measures. Different possible methods and forms of such engagement were discussed. These included once-off surveys, user panels, conferences and other meetings to communicate with the public and using schools and local public agencies to make people aware of what exists and also to consult them about their needs. The merits of giving people incentives to participate were also discussed. The fact that childcare is free is an obvious incentive in the case of the Groruddalen Action Plan. It seems that many countries opt to offer incentives for participation. Having heard the experiences of some of the Peer Review countries, participants agreed that this strategy could yield results especially with hard to reach groups.

Localism and the issue of the balance between the national, regional and local levels also came up in the discussion. Although it can be costly and may involve significant reorganisation, a spatial approach to poverty has been demonstrated to work. However, to have an impact on poverty such approaches must entail initiatives that cover more than a single sector and they must range beyond the physical upgrading of the area (important as that is). The balance between the different levels of decision making, funding and service provision was considered to be an urgent issue in the current climate of local level funding cuts, at a time when the responsibilities of the local providers may also be increased and the level of local need almost certainly increased by recession. Local authorities also have a role to play in localising projects by raising awareness and setting priorities. They are important, not just as service providers but also as employers. Those in the private sector, especially those trading and providing services locally, also have a role to play in a local context.



E. Conclusions and lessons learned

- **Targeted measures and universalism.** The evidence suggests that countries which are most successful in combating poverty follow predominantly a universal approach backed by targeted and individually tailored methodologies. Norway is exemplary of such a combined approach. Moreover, the Norwegian practice is multidimensional going beyond single policy spheres and seeking to link anti-poverty measures with employment, housing, transport, education and health. This helps to reduce the risk of stigma and further social exclusion for beneficiaries. Close links between the universal and targeted measures make the latter more politically acceptable and easier to defend when times are hard and finance scarce. Building bridges between universal and targeted measures also helps to make the initiatives function better for vulnerable groups and can lead to policy innovations. The free core hours in the kindergarten scheme is an example of such a bridge because it introduces the child to kindergartens and ensures they have some time there. At the same time this measure enables parents to extend their child's period in the kindergarten if they wish by paying for extra hours
- **Spatial and local approach.** Within its strategic anti-poverty framework Norway has put in place 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 also play a constructive role as employers and facilitators.
- **Child poverty.** There is no doubting the success of the Norwegian welfare model. Norway has found that services for parents are very popular and that parenting-related services can be a bridge to children. 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 child poverty is far less basic and less extensive. Given the variation in the level or extent of need, it seems essential that different approaches are adopted in different countries and that the view of child poverty adopted reflects the specific features and scale of the problem facing each particular country, in addition to other factors.
- **Sustainability.** Participants were of the view that there are different ways to secure the future of this or any programme once its initial funding has ended. It may be made sustainable by having a foundation in national legislation for example. Several other factors can also help ensure an 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 being able to differentiate between service providers/local managers who will remain committed to the project from those who may not. Establishing inter-sectoral links was also identified as a potential contribu-



tor to sustainability. This and other considerations relating to sustainability should be taken into account when the project is being initiated.

- **Local anchoring.** People benefiting from a programme need to feel a sense of ownership and involvement. This can be facilitated by involving them in its formulation and 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 techniques used for awareness raising and contact making. The latter could 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 and good monitoring and evaluation.



F. 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 complete third level education. The second – poverty/social exclusion – looks to reduce the number of people in, or at risk of, poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million

The Peer Review also feeds into guidelines 9 and 10 of the Europe 2020 strategy³ 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.

Among the aspects of the Groruddalen Plan that could feed into the Recommendation is the scheme of providing free core hours of access to kindergarten. This seems an important contribution to fighting child poverty.

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.

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/Brochure%20Integrated%20Guidelines.pdf>



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

Host country: **Norway**

Peer countries: **Belgium - Denmark - Finland - Germany - Greece - Romania**

Stakeholders: **EAPN, Eurocities**

Based on two schemes in place in Norway, this Peer Review is an opportunity to explore area-based policies promoting good living conditions for young people in deprived areas. The problems in these urban areas are to a large extent related to socio-economic factors; therefore most measures target the whole population while special efforts are aimed directly at residents with an immigrant background. Combatting poor standards of living amongst children and youth, and promoting social mobility in urban areas with poor living conditions is crucial for breaking the transmission of disadvantage across generations and diminishing the likelihood of social exclusion in the future.

A major regeneration project in the east district of Oslo, the Grorud Valley, launched jointly by the government and Oslo City Council (2007-2016) aims to improve living conditions as well as to upgrade transport and environmental infrastructure. Most relevant to the Peer Review are actions targeting young people. One particularly successful venture has been the provision of free core-time day-care for children aged 4 and 5, which has been shown to result in the improved performance of children when they reach the 10th grade and in lower rates of school drop-out. For the children of immigrants it provides a valuable opportunity to gain the language skills necessary to reap the full benefits of regular education and later to enter the labour market, both of which can be crucial for securing their long-term social inclusion.

More generally a grant scheme introduced by the government in 2003 provides financial support across Norway for children and young people in urban areas affected by poverty, with local authorities having the freedom to tailor programmes to local needs. Two of these programmes focus on enabling children to take part in extra-curricular activities, irrespective of their parents' financial situation and on helping young people with few or no qualifications to enter the labour market. Those programmes present examples of social investments with positive returns as the costs will be outweighed by long-term benefits for children and society. Such programmes are in line with the goals of Europe 2020 Strategy (namely, poverty reduction; reaching benchmark on early childhood education and participation, reducing the share of early school leavers, raising employment).



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