

NORWAY

NATIONAL POLICY BRIEF



The objective of this policy brief is to present the current situation and progress made in family support on behalf of the children's rights in Norway towards achieving quality standards using the quality assurance protocol for family support services developed by the 19 countries participating in the COST Innovators Grant IG18123, QA[4]EuroFam. The aim is to provide key messages on current strengths as well as recommendations to key audiences, bringing relevant views and appraisals from the group of interdisciplinary experts, representatives of various sectors in the field at national level.

National Working Group

Consensual responses were provided by members of the Norwegian National Working Group made up of 7 researchers and coordinators of services and social entities at national and regional levels in social, health, and community sectors.

1. Contextualization and characterization of family support in Norway



Q Definition and understanding of family support: Family policy and family support refer to a broad range of legislation, policies, and services, regulating and supporting families' and children's living standards and well-being. In Norway, family policy refers to income transfers, taxes, and benefits, such as child benefits, paid parental leaves and other work-family reconciliation schemes. Family support covers resources and services provided to families and their children, such as public social services, child welfare and protection, family counselling, health-services and -centres for parents and children. Specialist support and targeted provision (e.g., disability support services, parenting programs) also exist. Non-profit groups are part of the welfare mix.

Q Family support services in context: The Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) has responsibility for family policy and support, delegating matters relating to child welfare and family support to The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir). The Ministries of Labour and Social Inclusion, Health, and Education are also important to families. Most child welfare and social services are provided by the 357 municipalities, holding a high degree of autonomy. Each of the 15 counties has a County Governor, representing an important link between municipalities and central authorities. Furthermore, there are ombudspersons and NGOs, often working in cooperation with the public services.

Q Political perspective on family support: The Norwegian welfare system is identified as a social democratic regime, characterized by a robust public welfare state, mixed economy, and a commitment to universal human rights, including children's rights. A core principle is the provision of universal benefits and access to public services, alongside more targeted measures. Equality is a fundamental value, encompassing economic equality, gender balance and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. However, some of these values are challenged by rising economic inequalities, and a shift from universal services to more targeted ones. (Abela, A. (red) 2021: Child and family support policies across Europe. EUROFAM reports.)

2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



Families and Children

STRENGTHS

1. The existence of universal benefits and services, such as transfers, child benefits and parental leaves as well as free school, social services, and health services. Targeted services to those in need are statutory, such as family counselling, which is a free, low-threshold service available nationwide to couples, families, and individuals.
2. Norway has a strong commitment to human rights. International and European Human Rights Conventions grant children and families the right to the necessary support to enjoy family life. Norway is therefore committed to continuously improving the understanding of what is required to provide families and their children with sufficient support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A substantial rise in the income of poor families with children, through increasing e.g., the child benefit, allowances, and social assistance.
2. Improve information to children and parents about their rights to support consistent with international conventions and Norwegian law. Establishing rights-based universal parenting courses may facilitate information about their rights and expectations to them as parents, and emphasis the value of building networks.



Professionals

STRENGTHS

1. A well-developed education system at the university and university college level, providing professionals well-educated for high-quality family support within health and social services, as well as schools.
2. Locally, there are numerous examples of good practices in involving children and parents. There is significant potential for collecting and systematizing this knowledge and experience into guidelines which would benefit services nationwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Take advantage of competence-enhancing measures and practice extensive cooperation to provide a variety of competencies and perspectives.
2. There is a need to ensure that parents' and children's rights to participation are realized in practice, including that they are invited to share their perspectives on their needs and measures. This involves challenging the power imbalance that exists between professionals and service users.



Policymakers

STRENGTHS

1. Strength There is an increased awareness of the need for better coordination between sectors responsible for family support. Recently, several initiatives have been taken at the national level to address this challenge.
2. A strong commitment to parents' and children's rights exists. Regulations are upcoming with a general obligation to incorporate children's best interests in all governmental policies and planning that may affect children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need to ensure that efforts to improve coordination at the national level have substantial implications for what happens at the local level of practice. Moreover, it is recommended to ensure systematic support and dissemination of knowledge about innovative projects and promising development work in the practice field.
2. Recommendation: To strengthen the emphasis on children's rights to an adequate standard of living and to family life.



Academics

STRENGTHS

1. The major Norwegian Universities and several regional centers have departments focusing on family policy and family support research, and dissemination of relevant best practice knowledge.
2. "BarnUnge21-strategien (The Children&Youth21-strategy)", which sets a course for a larger and more comprehensive focus on research and innovation, aims to prevent more children and young people from falling through the cracks throughout their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that research includes parent's and children's own perspectives and is close to and relevant for practice. Give priority to research on family support services and parenting programs.
2. Research on vulnerable children must apply children's rights as well as a family perspective, building on the families' strengths and the value of preventive services and strengthening their networks.

3. Insights and lessons learned regarding the quality of family support



1 In Norway the main focus in implementing the UNCRC has been on Protection and Participation. Recent initiatives also give higher priority to children's rights to an adequate living standard, cf. UNCRC Art 27 and to incorporate the best interest of the child in all planning processes that may affect children.

2 There has been a strong emphasis on children as autonomous individuals with rights and on the intimate parent-child dyad. A more holistic perspective is required acknowledging children's rights to family life, parents as more than caregivers and paying greater attention to living conditions and the value of various family relations.

3 We have seen a growing economic inequality in Norway in the last decades with increasing numbers of children living in families below the poverty line. Recent suggestions include raising the Child benefits and social assistance and implementing activation policies that support families and children's rights to adequate living standards.

4 A wide variety of quality services are available in Norway. Lack of service coordination is a challenge at local, regional, and national level. New initiatives to improve the coordination are being implemented. They must be evaluated to guarantee that families and children themselves experience better coordination and outcomes.

5 Norway has a strong commitment to respect human rights, including the rights of children and parents as service users. Interestingly, children have more explicit rights than parents. There is an inherent power imbalance between services and users, demanding measures to ensure that rights to participation are real for parents and children.

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