

Abstract – ESPAnet 2010 conference

Title: Growing up poor in a rich country – the Norwegian policy to fight poverty and social exclusion among children and youth

Stream: Poverty and social exclusion

The Nordic welfare model is characterised by a relatively large redistribution of wealth through its income tax system, its universal welfare system, and a comprehensive, publicly financed education system. Nevertheless, awareness of the issue of poverty has grown in the last ten years in Norway. Until a decade ago the term poverty had been noticeably absent from public debates and it was believed that a strong focus on equalizing measures and improving living conditions had helped abolish the problem it once was. However, poverty crept back at the centre of the political agenda and, by 2002, the government presented a specific plan of action to fight it. Since 2003 the yearly national budgets have consequently included a “poverty package”, with dedicated resources allocated to fight poverty.

One of three overarching goals of the action plan is to ensure opportunities for wider social participation and development for all children and young people. In line with this, the government has invited selected municipalities to join a strengthened partnership to improve welfare and protection of children through different grant schemes. This will initiate programmes in relation to social welfare, pre-emptive work towards families considered at risk, and develop new patterns and structures of cooperation to improve the availability of local programmes for families with children. This paper will look at three of these grant schemes and investigate how they generate “new” ways of working to fight child poverty, and whether the programmes are successful in reaching those most in need.

The data for this paper are based on two projects carried out by Fafo and NOVA evaluating three of the grant schemes, both commissioned by the Norwegian government. The data includes two questionnaire surveys conducted among participating municipalities, and interviews with programme coordinators, local politicians and local administration in 19 case studies.

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