NORWAY’S REPORT

ON

THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR CHILDREN

AND

STATUS AND CHALLENGES

AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW DECADE

Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs
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A. Introduction

Like other states, Norway signed the “World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children” at the World Summit for Children in September 1990. At the same time Norway committed itself to the Plan of Action for implementing the World Declaration before the year 2000.

A special session of the UN General Assembly will be held to review the achievement of the goals of the World Summit, discuss lessons learnt and future action. The Special Session on Children will take place on 19-21 September 2001. The Member States are invited to prepare a report reviewing progress achieved since the World Summit, with an overview of remaining challenges and recommendations for the future. The report should include statistics describing developments during the past decade. Based on the national reports the Secretary-General will present a consolidated report to the Special Session. The present report is Norway’s contribution.

In 1992 Norway prepared a report on the follow-up to the World Summit for Children. The report described measures undertaken since the Summit and objectives and challenges with regards to child and youth policy in the 1990s. The present report has these objectives as its point of departure in the presentation of the current status of child and youth policy.

Having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Norway submitted its first report on the implementation of the Convention in 1993. The second report was submitted in 1998. The Norwegian authorities were examined by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in May 2000. Included in the present report (part B) is a brief description of the reporting process and a summary of the concluding observations made by the UN Committee.

It is the understanding of the Norwegian authorities that the main challenge of the World Summit Plan of Action was to improve the situation for children in developing countries. Therefore Norwegian development assistance constitutes an important part of our follow-up of the Plan. After the World Summit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs developed a Strategy for Assistance to Children in Norwegian Development Co-operation.

During the 1990s, Norway allocated 0.9 - 1 per cent of GNP for official development assistance (ODA). Following the World Summit for Children the focus on children increased. A larger portion of Norwegian aid was disbursed for child related programmes. In its international dialogue Norway put child rights on the agenda. Norway hosted international conferences related to
children. Norwegian expertise and non-governmental organizations were actively involved in child related issues. In 1997 the Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Co-operation was updated. In 1998 the Strategy for Assistance to Children in Norwegian Development Co-operation was evaluated and then revised. After the UN Special Session on Children in September 2001, the Norwegian government will consider developing the strategies further.

B. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – report and follow-up

Norway ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on 8 January 1991. Two reports have been submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; the initial report in 1993 and the second report in 1998. The reports are a result of co-operation between the following ministries: Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Major non-governmental organizations were invited to bring their views into the reporting process. The Norwegian Ombudsperson for children and the Norwegian NGO Coalition on CRC submitted separate reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

On the basis of its second report the Norwegian authorities were examined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 19 May 2000. The Committee presented its concluding observations in June 2000. The Committee highlighted several areas where progress has been achieved, such as:

- The positive and independent role of the Office of the Ombudsperson for children
- The priority given to the social sectors both in international development assistance and through participation in relevant international fora. The establishment of the research organization "Childwatch International"
- The constructive dialogue between government and NGOs
- Increasing budgetary resources for Child Welfare
- Efforts to combat trends towards intolerance against foreigners and to address the issues of racism and xenophobia
- Amendments to the Citizen Act (its positive impact on foreign children adopted by Norwegian citizens), the act prohibiting female genital mutilation, and the Marriage Act (forced marriage)
- Programmes available to parents and spouses regarding their relationships with children and as a family
The Committee also presented their main concerns as well as a number of recommendations, including:

- Incorporate the Convention into domestic legislation
- Guarantee equal access to the same standard of services to all children, irrespective of where they live
- Continue the efforts to inform children, parents and legal professions of children’s right to express their views
- Continue training professional groups and municipal council members in implementation of the Convention
- Ensure that children without Norwegian nationality and legal status fully benefit from the rights of the Convention
- Ensure that children maintain personal relations and direct contact with an imprisoned parent, where this is in the best interest of the child
- Ensure that the best interest of the child is taken into consideration in cases where deportation will mean the separation of a child from his or her parent
- Establish a standard procedure for information on family reunification possibilities
- Ensure that children with disabilities are able to be with other children
- The committee is concerned by the high incidence of anorexia nervosa and bulimia, the consumption of alcohol and the incidence of suicide by children and youth. It recommends, inter alia, further research, and providing children with more timely access to mental health services
- Ensure that day care places are available to all children
- Give greater consideration to the need for prevention and rehabilitation of young offenders
- Continue efforts to prevent and address cases of sexual abuse

The concluding observations made by the UN Committee are made widely available to the public and disseminated to state institutions, municipalities, NGOs, colleges and universities. The state authorities are asked to give comments concerning follow-up of the conclusions. On this basis the Government will discuss further action.

C. Action at the international level

The Strategy for Assistance to Children in Norwegian Development Cooperation developed in 1992, emphasized two modalities of action. On the one hand, the strategy included measures aimed directly at children, for example promotion of breast-feeding, immunization programmes and basic education. On the other hand, areas of special importance for children were identified, for example health and educational programmes for women and mothers, provision of clean water and improvement of sanitary conditions.
Recommended actions were based among others on the strategy for women in development elaborated in 1984-85.

After the World Summit, children have been given greater attention in Norwegian development co-operation. Norway has promoted child related issues in its dialogue with international and bilateral partners. The main focus has been on child rights, with special emphasis on children’s right to protection during armed conflicts and against harmful child labour. The Norwegian government has initiated and participated in efforts to solve these problems. Norway hosted the international conference on child labour in Oslo in 1997. Norway participated actively among others in international conferences on basic education, on children in armed conflicts and on children subjected to sexual abuse. Norwegian expertise has been involved in the various activities. Special contributions were made concerning the treatment of trauma in war-affected children and the experiences of the Norwegian ombudsperson for children. Norway participated in the working groups negotiating two additional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and have signed both protocols. In addition, Norway recently signed the protocol incorporating a complaints procedure in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. Norway has recently ratified ILO Convention no.182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour. The Norwegian Parliament passed a comprehensive Plan of Action for Human Rights in 2000, making children and women a priority with regard to human rights activities both in Norway and internationally.

The Strategy for Development Co-operation for Women and Equality was updated in 1997 following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. It emphasized the need for basic education for girls and measures related to reproductive health. The Strategy for Assistance to Children in Norwegian Development Co-operation was supplemented following an evaluation in 1998. Norway is committed to continued and increased focus on children and women in international development co-operation. Particular attention is given to the protection of children with special needs and the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on children. The promotion of health and nutrition and basic education remain top priorities.

In its state-to-state cooperation, Norway is willing to increase the child-related component of assistance. In accordance with the 20/20 principle raised at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, primary attention is given to basic social services, including basic education, health services, provision of clean water and sanitary services. Norway supports sector-wide assistance programmes for basic education in some of its main partner
countries. In India and Bangladesh, education projects are being used as a means to combat child labour. School attendance with improved quality of education can provide a viable alternative to child labour. Child labour is a priority area of intervention in several partner countries.

In Norway’s collaboration with multilateral organizations, education and health are priority areas. Through UNICEF and the World Bank, Norway provides substantial support to comprehensive basic education programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa, with particular focus on girls. Norway also funds educational activities through UNESCO. The World Food Programme receives support for school feeding programmes. Health is mainly supported through the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the UN Population Fund. The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), receives considerable funds from Norway, immunization being considered key to the survival of children. Reproductive health interventions, addressing the rights of both women and youth, have been funded over a long period of time. In 1990 Norway did not support any child related programmes through the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the World Bank. At the end of the 1990s, support is given, particularly to child labour programmes, through ILO and the World Bank, as well as through UNICEF. Among others, Norway supports a joint programme on data collection and statistics related to child labour. Norway helped the UN High Commissioner for Refugees establish a special focal point for children.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are becoming an increasingly important channel for international development cooperation. Through NGOs, activities related to child rights and child development have been funded with special emphasis on health and education. NGOs have been invited to participate in the preparations for various UN conferences and initiatives. A NGO coalition against the use of child soldiers was supported. Both Norwegian and local NGOs in Norway’s main partner countries receive financial assistance and play an important role in the development of civil society. Furthermore, NGOs represent an important channel for humanitarian assistance in situations of natural disaster or armed conflict, where children need particular attention.

Norwegian statistics now disaggregates resources targeting children. During the 1990s an increased portion of Norwegian aid has been allocated to child related programmes, including basic education and health interventions for children. The components of Norwegian funding which target children through organizations like the World Bank and the WHO have increased in recent years. The allocations to UNICEF have almost doubled from 1990 to 1999 (a total of USD 59.7 million was contributed in 1999). Norway set the goal that by the year 2000, 10 per cent of ODA (Official Development Assistance) would be allocated to education and 10 per cent to health. In 1999, the support for health and education amounted to more than 20 per
cent of ODA. These areas will continue to receive priority in future budgets. The target for funding for education has been revised up to 15 per cent. Substantial resources have recently been set aside for the combat against HIV/AIDS. Immunization programmes in developing countries are given increased funding. Financial support for child labour programmes grew from USD 600,000 in 1996 to USD 3 million in 1998. The Norwegian government committed itself to spending a further USD 22 million by the end of 2000 for this purpose.

D. Specific actions in Norwegian child and youth policy of the 1990s

Objectives and challenges for the child and youth policy of the 1990s were described in the Norwegian report to UNICEF in 1992 on the follow-up to the World Summit for Children. The report recognizes that although most children in Norway live in safe and stable family situations, small groups have difficult and insecure lives, for instance in cases where parents are divorced, children are abused or neglected. The major challenges were:

- Development of coherent care services for children under the age of 10
- Development of family counselling services and mediation in cases of divorce
- Quality Child Welfare Service
- A guaranteed economic framework for families with children
- Actions targeting young people, especially immigrants and youth in the cities.

The status of today’s policy will be examined below. In order to provide a complete presentation, the primary and secondary school reforms of the 1990s are included.

D1 – Development of coherent care services for children aged 0-10

A coherent system of child care services consists of different arrangements adapted to children’s needs, different conditions and different family situations. Care may imply services outside the home, cash transfers to families or a combination of the two.

Norway has developed extensive ante- and post-natal care services reaching the total population. Immunization rates for children are consistently above 90 per cent, and infant and child mortality rates are extremely low (4 per thousand live births before the age of five).
It is the goal of the Norwegian government to provide all children whose parents so desire with access to early childhood education and care. This goal is almost reached for children over three years of age, while it should be reached for children under three in 2003. The majority of the Norwegian Parliament has agreed to the goal and both legal and economic means will be used to attain it. At the end of 1999, nation-wide access to day care institutions was 51.4 per cent for children aged 0-5 years and 61.1 for children aged 1-5 years. Parental leave entails that the need for care outside the home for children under one year is limited. The Government will present a bill to the Parliament with an amendment to the act relating to day care institutions. The bill includes a provision requiring the local authorities to provide places in day care. The state share of the total operating costs of the institutions will gradually increase from approximately 40 per cent today to 50 per cent in 2005.

Day care centres are primarily educational institutions, representing the first step of society’s support for lifelong learning. Furthermore, they are a response to the increasing work force participation of mothers with young children, and provide parents with safe care for their children while they are at work or studying.

D2 – Primary and secondary school reform

Education for all has a long tradition in Norway. The compulsory school age was lowered from 7 to 6 years in 1997. The total number of years of compulsory education was at the same time expanded from 9 to 10. In 2000 net school enrolment in lower secondary school was approximately 99 per cent with an equal number of boys and girls.

The local authorities have an obligation to offer out of school leisure activities for children in grades 1 – 4, providing opportunities for play, cultural and recreational activities and homework. The central authorities provide operating grants for the activities, but the arrangement has as yet not been sufficiently developed.

Since autumn 1994, young people between the age of 16 and 19 have a statutory right to three years of upper secondary education leading to higher education or providing vocational qualifications. Upper secondary education embraces all courses leading to educational qualifications above the lower secondary level and below the level of higher education. Fifteen basic courses are offered. Applicants are entitled to a place in one of the three basic courses they apply for. County authorities are obliged by law to provide a follow-up service for young people between 16 and 19 who are neither attending a course nor employed. Physically disabled pupils are entitled to more than three years of upper secondary education. In upper secondary school the enrolment is 95 per cent among girls and 93 per cent among
boys. There are marked gender differences related to vocational preferences, reflecting a traditional gender-based division of labour.

Apprenticeship schemes are part of the upper secondary school system. The first two years of training are provided at school, whereas the final specialized part (up to two years) consists of on-the-job training. If not enough apprenticeships are available, the county authority must offer training at school in the form of a third year course. The final examination is the same whether training has taken place at school or at a workplace.

**D3 – Development of family counselling services and mediation in cases of divorce**

Many children in Norway experience their parents being divorced. A dissolved family may lead to a reduced income, less contact with one of the parents, usually the father, and environmental changes for the child. In 1999 the number of dissolved marriages was 9,124 (10.4 per 1000 existing marriages), among which 56 per cent had children under 18. The dissolved marriages affected totally 9,015 children.

As per January 2000 the total number of children under 18 in Norway is 1,044,700. Among these 77 per cent live with both parents; 64 per cent with married parents and 13 per cent with co-habitant parents. Approximately 18 per cent live with a single parent, a 4 per cent increase from 1989. There is an increasing number of co-habitant parents in Norway. Research shows that the risk of a dissolved relationship is three times as high among co-habitant as among married parents.

The Family Counselling Service offers mediation in order to enable parents to reach amicable agreements concerning parental responsibility, where the child shall reside and right of access. The Family Counselling Service ensures that the agreements attach importance to the best interest of the child. The Family Counselling Service consists of 63 agencies located throughout the country. During the last 10 years the services have been expanded substantially, with the establishment of 18 new agencies, corresponding to a 30 per cent increase in capacity. Most agencies have been established in rural areas, to make the service available nation-wide. There is a special ethnic agency for the Sami population in the northern districts.

The Family Counselling Service is regulated by a law from 1998. The administration of the agencies has been transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to the county authorities. According to the law, the responsibility for further expansion of the service lies with the counties.

From 1993 mediation has been mandatory for spouses with children under the age of 16 who apply for legal separation or divorce. The Family
Counselling Service provided 56 per cent of the mediations in 1999. The remaining 44 per cent were provided by clergymen, lawyers, members of school psychology services and social welfare officers. Cohabiting parents who terminate the cohabitation can attend mediation on a voluntary basis. Mediation is required before a case concerning parental responsibility, where the child shall reside or right of access can be brought before the court or the County Governor. This applies to previously married and cohabiting parents as well as parents who have never lived together.

D4 - Quality Child Welfare Service

According to Norwegian legislation the Child Welfare Service should intervene in situations where there are indications that a child is being abused or neglected, or when a child has shown consistent and serious behavioral disorders. A fundamental objective is to provide high quality services and measures as well as legal protection during all stages of Child Welfare cases. A large number of reports and cases are handled by the municipal Child Welfare Service. In 1993, the number of cases came to 13,000, while the figure for 1998 was 16,000. This accounts for 1.3 and 1.5 per cent, respectively, of the age group 0-17 in Norway. A little less than half of the cases are dropped, which means that the Child Welfare Service has not found reasons to take concrete measures under the law. Many of the cases that are dropped, still involve counselling and guidance, or the cases are referred to another authority. In 1998 and 1999, decisions to take Child Welfare measures were taken within the deadline of 6 weeks in about 97 per cent of cases.

The Ministry will continue to offer training to personnel who work with children and youth with behavioural problems. Further training will be offered to employees in municipal Child Welfare Services in the larger cities who work with immigrant children and families.

A number of amendments to the Child Welfare Act were adopted and came into force in 1999. A new provision was adopted requiring a police certificate of good conduct for employment in and assignments for the Child Welfare Service. The object of the provision is to prevent persons who have committed sexual offences against children from working in the service.

Placement in foster care is the most important measure available to the Child Welfare Service. 4,952 children were placed in foster care in 1993 and 5,456 in 1998. All counties and most municipalities have elaborated plans for following up and enhancing their work in this area. The Ministry has continued to provide support to counties in the area of recruitment and training of foster parents. A large nation-wide recruitment campaign will be launched to provide foster care for children and youths that are in need of this service. A course has been organized for supervisory and training
officers in municipalities with a view to enhancing recruitment of supervisory officers.

D5 - A guaranteed economic framework for families with children

The financial situation of families with small children has improved during the 1990s. This is mainly due to women's increased participation in the labour force. The total public support to families with small children has increased when both services and financial transfers are taken into consideration. The amounts below refer to payments in 2000.

Child benefits. The most important scheme is the child benefit paid to all families with children under 18 years of age. In 2000 the age limit was increased from 16 to 18 years. Until 2001 the annual benefit rate differed according to the number of children in each family. From 2001 there is one annual benefit rate - NOK 11,664 per child. A supplement of NOK 7,884 per year is granted to families with children aged 1-3. Single providers with children under the age of 18 are entitled to child benefits for one child more than they actually have. Child benefits are not allocated on the basis of need and are not taxable. They are thus paid in full to all families in Norway.

Cash benefit scheme. The cash benefit scheme was introduced in 1998, and is offered as an alternative to or in combination with child care services. The right to the cash benefit applies from the child's first to the third birthday. The benefit is payable for each child without testing of means or needs and is tax-free. Parents receive a full cash benefit on the condition that they do not have a full-time place for the child in a day care centre receiving a state grant. If the child stays in a day care centre less than 33 hours a week, the family may receive a reduced benefit. A full cash benefit amounts to NOK 36,000 per year.

Parental and adoption benefit. In 1993 the parental benefit scheme related to child birth was widened to cover either 52 weeks with 80 per cent pay or 42 weeks with 100 per cent pay. The equivalent adoption benefit period is 49 or 39 weeks. Nine weeks of the total parental benefit period are reserved for the mother and 4 weeks are reserved for the father (paternity quota). The rest of the period may be shared by the parents. 8 out of 10 fathers entitled to the paternity quota make use of this right.

Women who do not qualify for a parental or adoption benefit, receive a lump sum. All women therefore receive some form of national insurance benefit when they give birth or adopt a child. The lump sum grant is NOK 32,138. The grant is not subject to taxation. In the case of multiple births or adoptions, the grant is payable for each child.
Tax rules for families with children. Persons with dependants are entitled to certain deductions in income tax such as tax allowance for dependants, tax allowance for child-care expenses and personal allowance.

D6 - Actions towards young people, especially youth with an immigrant background and youth in the cities

A Plan of Action for Children and Young People with Immigrant Backgrounds was presented in 1996. An important objective was to ensure that children and young people with immigrant backgrounds have the same care, rights and legal safeguards as other children in Norway. The plan includes many measures with the objective of eliminating racism and promoting understanding between minorities and mainstream society.

An important effort relates to the follow-up to the Youth Campaign against Racism. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and the Directorate of Immigration have provided support for the Idea Bank, a project run by the Norwegian Youth Council (LNU). The purpose of the Idea Bank is to strengthen multicultural programmes for children and young people by funding local projects. The Idea Bank provides support for activities and information campaigns that emphasize the importance of contacts, cooperation and mutual tolerance between children and young people with different national backgrounds. Priority is given to projects run jointly by Norwegians and immigrants.

Another important instrument is the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs’ grant scheme Urban Youth Projects from which funding is provided to the ten largest urban municipalities in Norway. The scheme is designed to improve the conditions in which young people grow up and live in urban municipalities. Great importance is attached to efforts to combat prejudice, racism and discrimination and promote mutual tolerance. The scheme targets young people aged 12 to 25. A gender perspective is being applied.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is responsible for the Development Programme to Improve the Conditions in which Children and Young People Grow Up, which has been drawn up in collaboration with a number of other ministries. The objective of the programme is to strengthen and further develop the local environment in which children and young people grow up to improve the possibilities of children and young people to participate and cope successfully with their home situation, school, working life and leisure activities. Efforts to prevent violent behaviour, bullying, drug abuse, crime and racism among children and young people will be intensified. In order to gain some experience, financial support was given to 10 municipalities in autumn 1998. In the long term, the aim is to achieve a
broad-based effort to improve conditions for children and young people in all Norwegian municipalities.
E. Challenges in the area of child and youth policy in the next decade

An overriding objective of child and youth policy is to provide all children and youth with a good environment and adequate living conditions. All children and youth shall enjoy equal development opportunities irrespective of sex, social background and status, and wherever they live in the country. A further objective is to counteract marginalization and poverty and reduce differences in living conditions among children and youth. Moreover, the authorities will seek to prevent various forms of abuse, maltreatment and neglect of children and youth.

Children and youth in Norway receive a steady stream of impulses from other countries and are increasingly in direct contact with children and youth from other parts of the world. Modern information technology is generating new youth networks across borders. Norway’s child and youth policy must include an international dimension in order to reflect this reality.

These and other challenges will be described in the report to the Parliament on the environment and living conditions for children and youth in Norway, which will be submitted in June 2001. A further description of some of the challenges is provided below.

E1 - Participation and influence of children and youth

In Norway, there is growing awareness of the important contribution children and youths can make to civil society, particularly in local politics. Many are surprised at how creative and at the same time sensible the proposals of children and youths can be. There will be a need for a long time ahead to spread good examples in order to convince more adults that children and youths can and should have greater influence.

In 2000, more than half of the country’s 435 municipalities will have a children and youth council or similar body providing children and youths with a channel of influence. There are wide differences among municipalities, with a continuous need to exchange ideas and experiences. There is also a need for attitudinal changes and further development of methods for providing children and youths with greater influence in planning processes and the development of school, leisure and community activities.

In 1999, the central government authorities established the Youth Democratic Forum. The purpose of the Forum is to spur debate on how to promote children and youth participation and influence on the development of civil society. The Forum has presented a number of proposals to the central and local authorities during the two years of its existence, e.g. measures to increase voter participation among young people, a quota system for youths on municipal councils and committees, training of
politicians, information campaigns on rights and duties in working life, measures to improve school democracy, an Internet port and youth representation on public councils and committees at national level. In all these areas, there is a need to enhance the influence of children and youth. The Forum will continue its activities up to the summer of 2001. Before concluding the work it will present proposals as to how youth influence can be strengthened, particularly at the national level.

E2 – The role of parents in modern society

The role of parents is constantly changing. Women’s participation in working life has increased dramatically during recent decades, while men are becoming more conscious of their role as fathers. Local communities are being transformed as well as social and cultural relations in society at large. It is a challenge to elaborate political measures to meet a changing society and the changing role of parents.

Parents are faced with increasing demands on their time and attention. Conflicts can arise between economic demands and career ambitions on the one hand, and children’s need for security and the presence of parents on the other. Rapid cultural changes may cause parents to feel alienated from factors that influence their children. An increasing challenge in our society is to enable both mothers and fathers to spend more time with their children, and reduce the negative effects of cultural gaps between generations.

Many parents seek professional assistance to deal with children and young people. In order to prevent children and youth from developing psychological and interrelational problems, Norway has carried out a national parental guidance programme since 1995. The programme has generated extensive knowledge to the benefit of both professionals and parents. The measures are voluntary and are often implemented in child day care centres or kindergartens, but also include the Child Welfare Service and schools. The programme was designed for all age groups, but concentrated on early childhood to begin with. Recently, material has been developed for use in schools. The parental guidance programme is subject to systematic evaluation, also for parents with children in school and their teachers.

Some children and youth in Norway grow up in families that have low income over an extended period of time. This applies in particular to single parent families, children whose parents are unemployed or receiving social welfare benefits, and families in receipt of public assistance. Low income over an extended period of time may lead to a situation where the families concerned cannot afford goods that are taken for granted by most members of society. Children of these families may not be able to participate in the same activities as other children, or may not be able to afford things (such as sports equipment, computers and clothes) that are usually accessible to most children. The problem will be looked into in the above mentioned report.
to the Parliament on the environment and living conditions for children and youth in Norway, which will be submitted in June 2001.

Another risk group is children who grow up with family violence, or in families where parents suffer from drug problems. Abuse and lack of care are often associated with such problems. Children tend to cover up their parents’ drug problems rather than talking about them to other adults. As a result, the problems are not necessarily discovered by the social and health services or by the school. The children concerned are often exposed to such heavy strains in their childhood and youth that the result may be permanent damage. Some of the same problems apply to children who grow up in families where the parents suffer from mental problems. Children of such families have a substantial need for care, which other relatives or the social and health services cannot always provide.

**E3 - Cultural activities and recreation**

The aim of Norwegian policy with regards to recreational and cultural activities is to give girls and boys opportunities to participate in meaningful activities of their own choice. In any community there should be a variety of leisure activities for every child to find one of interest. The leisure activities are organized both by voluntary organizations and municipal authorities.

Since 1951, the government has supported voluntary work with and for children and youth by giving grants to the central level of voluntary youth and children’s organizations. A new “grant scheme” for local voluntary work among children and youth was introduced in 2000. Grants are given to local voluntary organizations and groups working in the areas of sports, culture and general child and youth activities.

The local authorities are running recreational activities for children and youth in day-care facilities for schoolchildren, voluntary programmes in music and arts and leisure-time clubs. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs encourages the local authorities to organize such activities as part of a holistic policy to create an enabling environment for children and young people, where all measures are seen as complementary. The Ministry has started a developmental programme in 10 different municipalities to improve the environment for children. Further, the Ministry provides grants for recreational activities for youth both in rural municipalities and the larger cities.

Recreational activities enhance the development of children and youth, as they give young people the opportunity to be creative on their own terms through activities of their own choice. As the area of leisure is so important it is essential that children have the opportunity to influence these activities. Children’s right to participation is a central element in all grants provided by
the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to cultural and recreational activities.

The recreational activities of interest to children and youth are constantly changing. A challenge is thus to develop a policy flexible enough to accommodate changed conditions. Further, it is a challenge to stimulate leisure arenas that include all groups of children and young people, irrespective of sex and ethnic origin.

**E4 – Immigrant children and youth – integration and participation**

In the past century, many societies have experienced the ethnic diversity associated with immigration. Labour migration to other countries, family reunification often accompanying this immigration and the shifting flow of refugees throughout the world have contributed to this situation. Many young women and men who are first or second generation immigrants in Norway feel Norwegian on the one hand and Pakistani, Vietnamese, Iranian, etc., on the other. Studies show that children and youth who manage well and perform well in school, are those who do not deny their parents’ culture at the same time as they are able to function on the new society’s terms.

A youth survey conducted in Oslo in 1996 shows that immigrant youth are more concerned and uncertain about the future than Norwegian youth. We also know from more recent surveys that discrimination among students and on the part of teachers towards immigrant students occurs in schools. Schools are widely recognized as a paramount arena for socialization and a considerable challenge lies in providing equal standards for all students in the school system. Immigrant children and youth are an important group in this connection.

The challenges related to improving integration are international and should generate knowledge about living conditions and education for children and youth who belong to ethnic minorities. There is a need for international as well as national measures to provide young immigrants with equal rights and opportunities and promote their integration into society. There are important gender differences that must be taken into consideration.

**E5 - Single minor asylum seekers**

In recent years, a growing number of single minor asylum seekers has been registered in Norway. Some of those who are registered as minors by the Norwegian authorities prove in fact to be older than 18 and are thus not minors. At the same time, an increasing number of younger children has been registered. These children constitute a particularly vulnerable group, and it is thus important that their situation is handled in an appropriate manner.
Many of the children and youth who come to Norway have experienced severe physical and/or psychological strains. The vast majority come from countries where conditions are unstable. They have experienced loss of family, friends, care, security and protection. As a result of their experiences, they often require trauma counselling and other forms of assistance. There is a need to develop viable solutions with regard to psycho-social treatment services for single minors. The psycho-social treatment should take into consideration the different circumstances and needs of young girls and boys.

It has been pointed out that the work of the Child Welfare Service and other public services are sometimes poorly coordinated, and that there is a lack of expertise. There is also uncertainty as what are the best housing arrangements and what other measures should be taken.

- The Government has launched a research and development project to develop models for local government work with refugees and asylum seekers who are single minors. The project will be completed in the course of autumn 2001.
- The Government has started a project to identify how single minor asylum seekers and refugees have managed since their arrival in Norway about ten years ago. The report from the project will be available in January 2001.
- The Government has reviewed the financial and administrative aspects of the separate grant to municipalities that provide single minor settlement. The Government has concluded that local government expenses for this work are on average covered by the central government through a combination of state grants (the separate grant and integration grant) and state reimbursement of expenditure on Child Welfare measures through the county.
- The Government will prepare a handbook for local government employees’ work on asylum seekers and refugees who are single minors. The handbook will be available in February 2001.

The Government has recently presented a report to the Storting on asylum and refugee policy in Norway (c.f. Report no. 1 2000-2001). In the area of single minors the Government will:

- give priority to processing asylum applications from single minors
- intensify efforts to find the parents or any other care providers with the aim of reunification in the home country
- increase the efforts of the local government Public Guardian’s Offices to recruit guardians
- evaluate the functions of the guardians and the Public Guardian’s Office and determine whether allowances for the guardians’ work should be introduced
- increase staff and expertise of employees in the divisions for single minors in asylum reception centres
• enhance the supervision of single minors in asylum reception centres and draw up guidelines for supervision
• provide single minors with a follow-up dialogue and a more extensive health examination in ordinary asylum reception centres so that any need for assistance can be clarified at an early stage
• encourage NGOs and municipalities to collaborate actively with the asylum reception centres in order to strengthen the social network for single minors
• assess various models to enhance local government advisory services with regard to the work on single minors

E6 - Children and the media – “The Oslo Challenge”

The issue of children and the media - including new media - is closely linked to the protection and rights of children. Developments in the field of communication technology have provided children and young people with new opportunities to acquire knowledge and find information and entertainment. At the same time, the images presented often promote gender stereotypes and the internet gives access to the harmful influence of violence and pornography.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child addresses children’s relationship with the media. Setting into practice the ideas laid down in the Convention is of the greatest importance in all future political activity related to children and media. The media have an international impact, and it is important that we co-operate across borders both in establishing international norms for the protection of children from the damaging effects of the media, and in promoting the right of children to express their views.

In 1997 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights requested Norway to look more actively at children and the mass media. This resulted in “The Oslo Challenge”, a collaborative project between UNICEF and Norway on the issue of children and the media.

The Oslo Challenge
• is aimed at everyone with responsibility for and a commitment to the rights of children and young people
• represents an opportunity for all responsible people to ensure that the media play a central role in the promotion of the rights of children and young people wherever they live
• can be an instrument to promote the rights of children and young people
• requests all media to work hard to ensure that children have access to relevant and understandable information
• is an instrument to promote the participation and contribution of children and young people to the development of society
• gives the media a considerable responsibility to see that children and young people have the opportunity to exercise their right to freedom of speech
• makes the media responsible for ensuring that children and young people are not exposed to portrayals of graphic violence
• is a challenge to the authorities in all countries to give children and young people necessary instructions in the use of media as an instrument to realize their rights.

Together with UNICEF, Norway will help to make sure that The Oslo Challenge is further developed as a practical tool in the promotion of the rights of children and young people.

**E7 – Children and youth with serious behavioural problems**

Behavioural disorders are the most common psychiatric diagnosis among children and youth in Norway. According to an expert group established by the Norwegian Research Council in 1998, about 5 per cent of children and youth suffer from such disorders. As a rule of thumb, the expert group found that about half of the children with problems of this nature will continue to have problems during adolescence.

The Child Welfare Act provides for the placement of children and young people with serious behavioural problems in educational or treatment institutions. However, it is widely agreed among professionals that placement in an institution does not generally help children and young people who have developed serious problems. In light of this recognition, Multisystemic Therapy has been introduced in most counties. The method was developed in the United States for young people with severe behavioural problems and consists of an intensive family- and community-based treatment programme. Treatment takes place in the youth’s natural environment with the participation of all relevant agents (family, school, friends, employer, police, etc.). The average treatment period is four months during which the social welfare officers involved are available around the clock. Considerable research shows that the method yields results. Aggressive and criminal behaviour is reduced. The Norwegian evaluation has not been completed, but preliminary results indicate that the treatment functions effectively in a Norwegian setting.

A similar method, Parent Management Training, has been developed for younger children with varying degrees of behavioural problems. Most counties have also started using this method. The treatment involves the training of parents in using more effective strategies to handle a child with behavioural problems. The study shows that the Parental Management Training model leads to a substantial reduction of behavioural problems both at home and at school. This form of parent training should be continued and expanded.
E8 - Children and youth with mental health problems (including eating disorders)

In 1998, the Government presented a proposal for expansion of the mental health care services in 1999-2006. Emphasis was placed on expanding municipal services and strengthening psychiatric measures for children and youth. Mental health problems tend to affect girls and boys differently. Girls are for example more exposed to eating disorders, while boys are overrepresented with regard to suicide. Both preventive measures and treatment consequently need to be gender sensitive.

In the years ahead, the authorities will give priority to prevention of psychosocial problems and mental disorders in children and youth. The objective is to expand and enhance the quality of municipal mental health services. Additional municipal posts will be established in the areas of counselling and prevention. Health centres and school health services play an important role in the prevention of psychosocial problems. The authorities will increase the number and competence of personnel in these services.

The focus will be on groups at risk and children and young people who have already developed problems requiring treatment. Psychiatric services for children and youth is an area that needs considerable improvement, and the authorities have proposed an expansion towards 2006. This implies an increase in the number of places in in- and out-patient services and recruitment of more professionals.

Eating disorders constitute a considerable health problem, and the authorities will continue to promote prevention and health measures to address the problem. The Government has drawn up a strategic plan related to eating disorders to enhance prevention, treatment and expertise among health personnel.

E9 - Children and young people who are sexually abused

Sexual abuse of children is considered to be a serious problem in Norway. Some researchers claim that approximately 5 per cent of all children have experienced sexual abuse before they reach the age of 18, while others have suggested higher figures. Children who have been exposed to sexual abuse, often have to wait a long time before receiving treatment. Police and legal procedures, inadequate knowledge and insufficient assistance represent problems.

A main challenge in this area is the development of measures to assist exposed minors in municipalities, counties and regions. Another important challenge concerns the enhancement of skills in the relevant municipal and county services, in addition to the police and judicial system. Effective
prevention of child sexual abuse represents a third very difficult challenge. Appropriate methods should be developed in Norway or drawn from experiences in other countries.

One way of stopping repeated incidences of abuse could be to provide more and better treatment programmes for persons who have abused children sexually. Such measures should include minors who are showing clear signs of developing abusive sexual behaviour. Another task is to place the issues of child pornography, child prostitution and trafficking visibly enough on the agenda. Better and more extensive research based literature is needed, Norwegian as well as international, about child sexual abuse and exploitation.

**E10 – Crime and violence among children and youth**

In Norway, the overall official crime rate has risen sharply throughout most of the period after the Second World War. The number of registered crime multiplied in the periode from 1960 to 1990, showing a tencency to levelling out during the 1990s. In 1999 31,519 persons were charged with crime, constituting 7.54 per 1000 inhabitants. The ratio of male and female criminal offendors is approximately 6:1. Approximately 30 per cent of the total number are under the age of 20. Statistics show, however, a somewhat slower rate for children and youth than for the adult population. After increasing sharply towards the end of the 1980s, crime among children and youth has levelled off in 1990s. The increase in crime among youth under the age of 15 has been particularly moderate. The expansion of the Child Welfare Service may have contributed to reducing the number of offences committed by minors that become a police matter. When we take a closer look at the different types of crime committed by young people, the picture is less encouraging. The number of more serious crimes such as robbery, violence and drug offences has increased. A small group of youths is responsible for a large share of the crimes registered, with a pronounced tendency towards recidivism.

Measures to combat violence and crime among children and youth constitute a priority area for the Norwegian government, as set out in its Action Plan against Crime among Children and Youth presented to the Parliament in 1999. The plan provides a detailed overview of how the Government intends to enhance efforts to prevent and combat criminal activity and improve the environment for children and youth. A central task is to improve the coordination of prevention activities. The plan comprises more than 40 ongoing and new measures in six main areas:

- Coherent prevention efforts
- Action in schools
- Recreational and local community measures
- Follow-up of children and youth with serious behavioural problems
Follow-up of young offenders and criminal youth gangs
Knowledge development and research

The plan of action is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The plan will be implemented during 5 years (2000 – 2004). A special challenge will be the cross-sectoral collaboration at central and local level.

Efforts to combat bullying will be key component of further work in this area. A programme against bullying and antisocial behaviour has been developed at the University of Bergen. The programme involves the participation of teachers, students and parents, and focuses on primary schools. Over a short period, bullying has been reduced by a good 30 per cent in schools where the programme has been tested. Against the background of the evaluation, the programme will be offered to as many schools as possible.

The action plan is being carried out in cooperation between the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs. The action plan will be followed up over a period of 5 years (2000-2004). A particular challenge lies in ensuring effective interdepartmental cooperation in the follow-up work, both at the local and central level.

E11 - Action plan against forced marriage

In the course of the 1990s, the media disclosed several cases of young girls from ethnic minorities who were returned to their parents’ home country and married against their will. The girls had spent all or most of their lives in Norway. According to Norwegian legislation as well as international conventions, society has both the right and the obligation to protect young people who are being forced by their parents to accept engagement or marriage against their will.

In 1997, the Parliament requested the Government to draw up an action plan against forced marriage. One year later, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs presented a plan, which included more than 40 new measures. It is a three year plan elaborated in close cooperation between several ministries, public bodies, minority groups and non-governmental organizations.

The main objectives of the plan are:
- to prevent young women and men from being subjected to forced marriage
- to improve the assistance provided to young people who are or have been subjected to forced marriage.

A key element of the action plan is prevention through information, conflict resolution and mediation and skills-enhancing measures. Information measures are directed at various target groups and include brochures, videos etc. Several measures build on existing activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations and minority communities with experience in the matters. These communities can also apply for support for projects.

International collaboration is important in this area. The Norwegian Plan of Action for Human Rights includes measures to combat forced marriage, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasizes the importance of establishing contact with the authorities of relevant countries in order to achieve rapid and effective handling of concrete cases when young people have fled from their families. Exchange of information and experience with countries close to Norway with a large immigrant population is particularly useful.

**E12 – Action plan against female genital mutilation**

In the autumn of 2000 the media brought to light cases of young girls in Norway who live in fear of female genital mutilation. In the 1980s and 1990s, Norway received refugees from African countries where genital mutilation of young girls is widely practised. In 1995, Norway adopted a law specifically prohibiting female genital mutilation, even though this has long been prohibited under the Penal Code. The intention of the new act was to affirm more clearly the Norwegian authorities’ opposition to female genital mutilation.

Late in 2000, the Parliament asked the Government to elaborate a plan of action against female genital mutilation. It was presented in December. It was a joint effort by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The objective of the action plan is to:
- Prevent female genital mutilation in Norway
- Provide assistance to girls that have been subject to genital mutilation
- Establish cooperation with organizations and individuals
- Contribute to the eradication of female genital mutilation internationally

The action plan will focus on information and communication to bring the act of 1995 prohibiting genital mutilation to the attention of relevant target groups, describe what genital mutilation entails and the complications often associated with the procedure. Furthermore, it is important to inform and assist girls and women who have been genitally mutilated, ahead of marriage, pregnancy and birth.
Norway supports various measures related to female genital mutilation both multilaterally through UN agencies and bilaterally through voluntary organizations working in countries where the tradition is practised. Norway has participated actively in international summits, the UN General Assembly, Human Rights Commission and Commission on the Status of Women where themes related to women and reproductive health, violence against women and discrimination have been on the agenda, and where resolutions have been adopted with the aim of eradicating female genital mutilation. Norway has supported the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and her work related to the rights of women and children.