

7

Poor, but Included?

STONE FLØTTEN

Director, Fafo

ABSTRACT This chapter examines the relationship between monetary poverty and the social wellbeing of children in Norway. Poverty not only has immediate material consequences for children but increases the risk of social marginalization and hampers future life chances. This chapter asks whether Norwegian policies are adequate in order to secure children decent living conditions; economically or materially as well as socially. Examining laws and conventions concerning the rights of poor children and empirical evidence of children's living conditions, it provides a partly mixed picture of progress and presents some of the dilemmas policy makers face when children's rights are implemented. Finally, measures to improve children's living conditions in Norway are presented.

KEYWORDS poverty | living conditions | participation | social inclusion | children's rights | CRC

7.1 INTRODUCTION

An important aspect of children's rights is the possibility of growing up in non-poor households. Poverty limits access to basic necessities, it affects the likelihood of taking part in social activities and it affects the dignity and self-worth of individuals. In this chapter, poverty among children in Norway is discussed, by focusing on indicators of children's economic and social well-being and the measures implemented to deal with children's rights.

For decades, Norway has had great success in protecting most families with children from poverty. Compared to most other countries the 'at-risk-of-poverty' rate¹ has been low. Norway still enjoys a favourable position, comparatively spea-

1. The at-risk-of-poverty term is used by Eurostat. The at-risk-of-poverty-threshold is set at 60% of the national median equivalized disposable income after social transfers. The income is equivalized to take differences in household composition into account.

king, however since the 1990s, an increasing number of children are experiencing poverty during their childhood. The share of children below the age of 18 living in a household experiencing risk of long-term poverty² was four percent in the period 1997–1999, while the share increased to more than 10 percent in the period 2014–2016. Previously the adult population had the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate, but now the risk of poverty among children slightly exceeds that of adults (StatBank, SSB).

An important explanation for this development is the demographic change of Norway, with an increase of immigrant families. On average, some of the larger immigrant groups have larger family sizes than families of Norwegian origin and the work intensity is lower (Epland & Kirkeberg 2014). The wage level is also low among many of the immigrant workers. Hence, the likelihood of falling below the poverty line is higher for immigrant families than for families of Norwegian origin. It must, however, be noted that there has been a rise in the number of low-income families also among native Norwegians, especially among single parent families (Epland 2018). In addition to demographic changes, the increase of children in low income families is also related to the fact that some of the transfers often received by families with children have not been regulated according to the overall price- and wage-rise. This is amongst other things a case for the universal child benefit.

The increase in risk of poverty among children is worrisome for many reasons. In Norway, equal distribution is a pervasive ideal, and the mere existence of child poverty violates this ideal. Child poverty is also problematic because children are dependent upon their guardians and have no possibility to improve their situation on their own. Furthermore, child poverty affects children's conditions negatively here and now and poor children have an increased risk of social marginalization. In addition, poverty may not only affect the childhood living conditions, it may also hamper the future life chances of children. The family income affects children's likelihood of completing secondary education (Bratsberg 2010), and poor children have an increased risk of experiencing poverty themselves as adults (Lorentzen & Nielsen 2009). An overrepresentation of emotional problems among children from families of lower socioeconomic status as well as from low income families has also been shown (Bøe et al. 2012; Bøe et al. 2016; Bøe, et al. 2017a; Bøe et al. 2017b). The correlation between family income and children's living conditions speaks directly to the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC). According to the CRC, children have the right to a standard of living that

2. Risk of long-term poverty is measured by income below 60 per cent of the average national median in a three-year period.

is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs (Article 27) and they should be able to engage in recreational activities and cultural life (Article 31). If children are at risk of being socially excluded this violates their rights, regardless of whether they are excluded because of poor economy or due to other reasons.

Last, but not the least, child poverty may have long-term negative effect on welfare state sustainability. High employment rates and low numbers of welfare state dependants are a prerequisite to preserve the generous and universal welfare state. If children are not provided the best opportunity to fulfil their potential so that the human capital of society is maximized, the prospects may be that in the future fewer young people will enter the labour market and more young people will be dependent on public allowances to make a living.

Since there are children in Norway living in families experiencing low incomes for a prolonged period of time, and since the problem is increasing, it is relevant to ask whether Norwegian policies are inadequate in order to secure children decent living conditions; economically or materially as well as socially. Moreover, when the problems of poverty and social exclusion are persistent or even increasing, is that a violation of children's rights?

In an international perspective, there is little doubt that poverty denies children their rights. Looking to the developing world, children living in absolute poverty³ are likely to suffer from hunger, malnutrition, ill health, lack of educational options and often impaired physical and/or mental development.

In developed welfare states, as the Norwegian, it is far less obvious whether poverty represents a violation of children's rights. Several Norwegian laws as well as international conventions establish the right of children to live their lives free of poverty and to enjoy living conditions ensuring, amongst others, a sound social development. The Norwegian welfare state provides educational services for all children, and the universal health system grants access to health services. The social security system is constructed to ensure that no individuals or families fall below a certain level of living, and the child welfare services shall make sure that all children – poor or not – do not experience failure of care, abuse or exploitation.

As will be shown, the majority of children living in low-income families have access to the most common consumer durables and take part in ordinary peer activities (Stefansen 2004a; Fløtten & Pedersen 2009; Fløtten & Kavli 2009; Kristoffersen 2010; Sletten 2010). Nevertheless, the mere existence of poverty, and the fact that more poor children than others do not have access to conventional con-

3. The concept of absolute poverty is used to denominate a condition where household income is below the level necessary to support the individual's physical needs, as a minimum standard of food and housing.

sumer durables and/or do not take part in organized or unorganized social activities, makes it relevant to ask whether their rights are indeed realized.

In this chapter, the following questions are asked:

1. What are the most important laws and conventions to take into account when discussing children's rights in relation to poverty in Norway?
2. How does Norway score on children's right to decent material living conditions and to social participation compared with other European nations, and how far are poor children lagging behind?
3. What dilemmas do policy makers face when children's rights are to be executed?
4. What do central and local authorities do to attend to poor children's rights (both material and social)?

7.2 LAWS AND CONVENTIONS

Unlike in many other countries, Norwegian policy has a long tradition of considering children's needs in law-making. When preparing the *Castbergske barnelover* in 1915 it was argued that the needs of children were to be taken into consideration (Skevik 2003). The needs of children were also central in the development of the modern Norwegian welfare state, and the government introduced allowances that were supposed to protect children in especially vulnerable situations, such as orphans, children without fathers and war babies (Grødem & Sandbæk 2009:186).

Today there are several Norwegian laws underlining the rights of children. For the scope of this chapter, laws that concern children's economic, material and social situation are of relevance and the question is how they correspond with the paragraphs of the UN convention on children's rights.

7.2.1 SOCIAL SECURITY

According to Article 26 of the CRC all children – either through their guardians or directly – have the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need. Every child has the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and the authorities shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right in accordance with their national law. The benefits granted shall take into account the resources and the circumstances of the child.

Several Norwegian laws reflect Article 26:

- ▶ The Children's Act §§66 and 67 establish the duty of parents to rear their children and the practice of maintenance payment (fostringstilskottet).
- ▶ The Social Act contains several sections (§§1, 12, 15, 45) that can affect children's economic situation. The act underlines the duty of the municipality to make sure that it is aware of the living conditions of the inhabitants. The act does, however, not mention the need of children per se. §45 specifies that the NAV office has a duty to inform the child welfare services if there are reasons to believe that children the NAV office obtains information about could benefit from action from the child welfare services.
- ▶ The Child Welfare Act §1 establishes the purpose of the act, which is 'to ensure that children and youth who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance and care at the right time'. According to §3-1 'the municipality shall closely monitor the conditions in which children live, and is responsible for creating measures to prevent neglect and behavioural problems.' It is reasonable to interpret this as an obligation to ensure that children are experiencing economic security.

7.2.2 ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

It is difficult to draw a sharp demarcation line between legal provisions that concern economic security and legal provisions that concern material and social living conditions more generally. Article 27 of the CRC states that 'Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing.' Article 31 concerns children's right to 'engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts'.

The sections of the Children's Act, the Social Act and the Child Welfare Act mentioned above all relate to these articles. In addition, §4-4 of the Child Welfare Act states that the child welfare service 'shall contribute to provide the individual child with sound living conditions and opportunities for development by providing advice, guidance and assistance'. The possibility of engaging in peer activities is an important part of children's living conditions, and such participation is important for children's development. Consequently, this section can be considered a parallel to Articles 27 and 31 of CRC.

7.2.3 REMARKS ON NORWEGIAN PRACTICES

Although Norwegian laws reflect Articles 27 and 31 of the CRC, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has observed some shortcomings in Norwegian practices. In the consideration of reports submitted by States parties under Article 44 of the Convention, the Committee notes that the level of coordination between government and municipalities, as well as among and within municipalities should be improved to assure that the services offered take the needs of children into consideration.⁴ This requires a more systematic training and raising of awareness of all professional groups working with families and children. The awareness of children's rights should also be raised at the policymaking and administrative level in municipalities.⁵

Furthermore, the Committee specifically mentions the situation of children living in poverty.⁶ It welcomes the increased attention paid to children living in families with incomes below the poverty line and measures targeted at these children, but it expresses concern about the geographical differences within Norway. The Committee recommends that Norwegian authorities undertake efforts to protect all children from the consequences of living in poverty, for instance by targeted programs in kindergarten and schools, measures for better nutrition and health and measures to make municipal housing more child-friendly.⁷

In its latest report on Norway in 2018, the Committee recommends that the State party 'increase resources allocated to combat child poverty, including by increasing child benefit rates and by adapting them to wage inflation'.⁸ Clearly, this would reduce the rate of children at risk of poverty, but this recommendation contradicts the recommendations by a recent commission looking into the public transfer to families with children (NOU 2017:6). The majority of the members of this commission suggests that the authorities prioritize benefits in kind over benefits in cash. Instead of increasing the child benefit rate, the commission suggests that the Norwegian authorities should grant universal access to kindergartens free of charge and convert the child benefit from a universal to a targeted measure.

In the 2018 report, the Committee also recommends that the State party 'Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the budget needs for children, with a particular emphasis on children in vulnerable and marginalized situations'.⁹ Consump-

4. UN Doc. CRC/C/Nor/CO/04, p. 2.

5. *Ibid.* p. 4.

6. *Ibid.* pp. 9–10.

7. *Ibid.* p. 10.

8. UN Doc. CRC/C/NOR/CO/5-6, p. 8.

9. *Ibid.* p. 2.

tion Research Norway has developed a Reference Budget for Consumer Expenditures that shows ordinary consumer expenditures for different types of households.¹⁰ This budget could, however, probably be used more actively to assess the situation of children and to set the levels of public allowances for families with children.

7.3 CHILDREN'S LIVING CONDITIONS

When measuring children's living conditions, a broad range of dimensions are relevant. Here we will concentrate on the risk of poverty, the degree to which children have access to fundamental consumer durables, and whether they are taking part in peer activities (formal or informal).

In Norway, as in most other western countries, poverty is defined as a relative phenomenon. To be poor, or at risk of poverty, is not characterized by severe material deprivation, but by a living standard markedly poorer than that of other members of the same community. The most common definition of poverty states that people are poor if 'they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or are at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong' (Townsend 1979:31). The definition recognizes the lack of ability to take part in activities as a fundamental dimension of poverty. How precisely to incorporate this social element in concrete measurements of poverty has been discussed since Townsend introduced his relative definition in the late 1970s (see Fløtten 2005). An important reason for this is the recognition that a person may very well experience economic poverty without simultaneously being materially deprived or socially excluded, and vice versa. Rather than presenting an aggregated measure taking economic shortcomings, material problems and social exclusion into account simultaneously, the following graphs therefore illustrates each of these social problems separately.

The relative definition of poverty, as well as the use of low income as an indicator of poverty, is regularly debated. Very few countries have official poverty lines and the poverty measures presented by national or supranational statistical offices are therefore often questioned. Especially in wealthy welfare states as the Norwegian, it can be hard to comprehend the relatively high share of children who are poor according to conventional measures as for instance 'income below 60 per cent of median income'. The discussion of the poverty measure tends to appear in

10. <http://www.hioa.no/Om-HiOA/Senter-for-velferds-og-arbeidslivsforskning/SIFO/Referanse-budsjettet>

election campaigns, such as during the Norwegian election campaign in 2017. Both journalists and politicians were questioning the relative poverty measure, and there were efforts in the media to find a definition of what some journalists and politicians labelled ‘the real poverty’.

The aim of this chapter is not to engage in a discussion of the relative poverty measure per se, but for clarification it should be kept in mind that the poverty measures employed are statistical measures *indicating* poor living conditions:

The relative income measure of poverty is meant to indicate the difference between the typical income level of a household and the income level of poorer households. The limit of 50 or 60 per cent of the median income is not meant to express any unquestionable divide between good living conditions and unacceptably poor living conditions. There is no point in the income distribution where the living conditions suddenly drop markedly; it is more a question of a continuum (Fløtten 2006). The poverty line must be seen as an indication of unacceptably poor living conditions. The line marks the level where a household has an income so low that the society cannot take it for granted that the household is able to uphold living conditions that are in accordance with the general level of living in this society. In practise, some households with income below the poverty line are able to uphold a relatively decent level of living. This could for instance be due to a situation where the household experiences just a short period of economic short-fall, because they receive help from family and friends or because they have savings or other resources to eat into. Correspondingly, some households with income above the poverty line may suffer from a severe material or social short-fall, for instance because the income has been relatively low for a long period of time, because the expenditure is high due to illness or disability, or because the household lacks the ability to balance budgets.

The idea that there is a non-normative ‘true’ measure of poverty is rejected by most poverty researchers. Poverty is considered a normative phenomenon, and there is no poverty measure independent of time and place. Where exactly to set the poverty line is in the end a normative question, and the role of scientists is to illuminate the consequences of setting the level at different points.

Despite the discussions surrounding the poverty concept and the poverty measures, most countries regularly report on measures of low income. Using the same measure over time and across countries makes it possible to monitor the development over time, to compare the situation of groups and to compare between regions within a country as well as between countries. It is also worth mentioning that regardless of the measure employed the same groups of the population tend to stand out as disadvantaged (Fløtten et al. 2011).

7.3.1 THE RISK OF POVERTY IN NORWAY

Compared to other European countries the share of children who are at risk of poverty in Norway is limited (Fig. 7.1). The rate is almost half of the EU average when risk of poverty is measured on a yearly basis. As mentioned earlier, this share has increased sharply over the past ten years (Fig. 7.2), but nevertheless, the Norwegian child poverty rate is far below the European average.

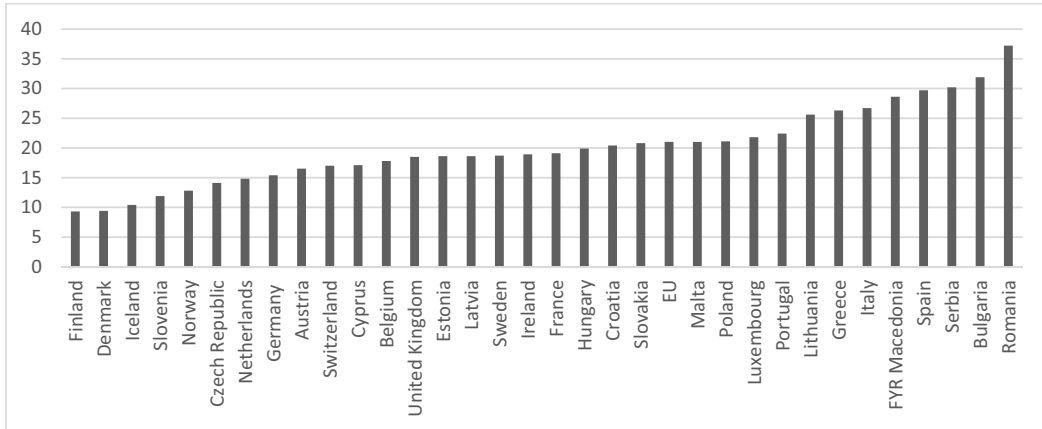


FIGURE 7.1 Share of persons below 18 years of age living in a household with disposable income less than 60 percent of the national median. 2016.

Source: Eurostat database, table ilc_li02, extracted 01.07.2018.

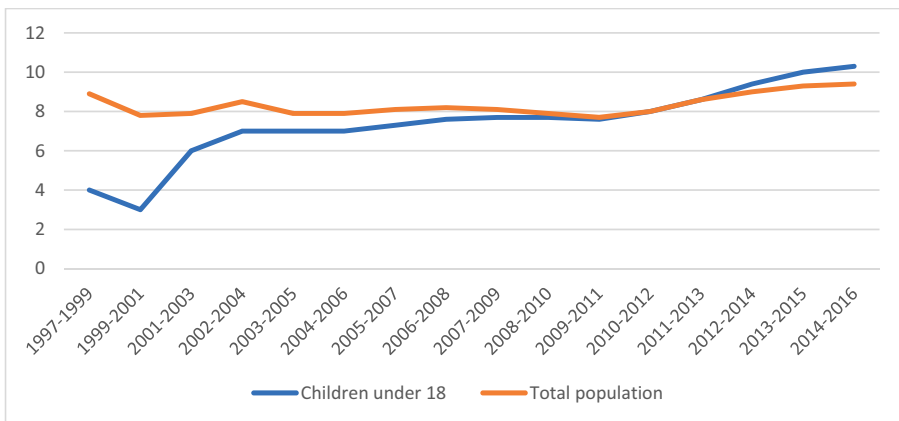


FIGURE 7.2 Share of persons below 18 years of age and the total population living in a household with disposable income less than on average 60 percent of the national median over a three-year period.

Source: Epland et al. (2011) for 1997/1999–2006/2008, Statbank SSB for the other periods.

When we look at the Norwegian numbers more closely, it is apparent that the risk of poverty is unevenly spread (Fig. 7.3). On average 10.3 per cent of children was experiencing long-term risk of poverty in the period 2014–2016. The risk was four times as high for children of immigrant background as for children in general, and for some immigrant groups the risk of long-term poverty is more than 50 per cent. The risk of poverty is also markedly higher among single parents than among couples with children. Furthermore, the higher the number of children in the household the higher the poverty rate is.

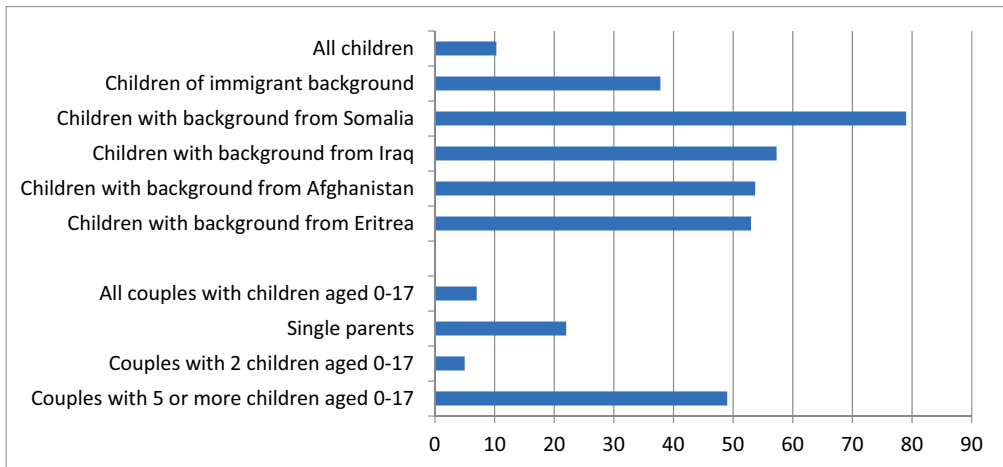


FIGURE 7.3 Share of children at risk of poverty by immigrant background and share of persons at risk of poverty by number of children in the household and relationship status of family provider. 2014–2016.

Source: StatBank (tables 09572, 09571 and 09008, extracted 20.06.2018).

7.3.2 MATERIAL LIVING CONDITIONS

The material living condition of Norwegian children is also comparatively good (Fig. 7.4). Less than three per cent of Norwegian children live in a household that suffers from severe material deprivation.¹¹ The corresponding share for all chil-

11. ‘The material deprivation rate is an indicator in EU-SILC that expresses the inability to afford some items considered by most people to be desirable or even necessary to lead an adequate life. The indicator distinguishes between individuals who cannot afford a certain good or service, and those who do not have this good or service for another reason, e.g. because they do not want or do not need it. Severe material deprivation rate is defined as the enforced inability to pay for at least four of the deprivation items’ (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tespm030>).

dren in the EU is 8.5 per cent and in four countries more than one in four children experiences such severe deprivation.

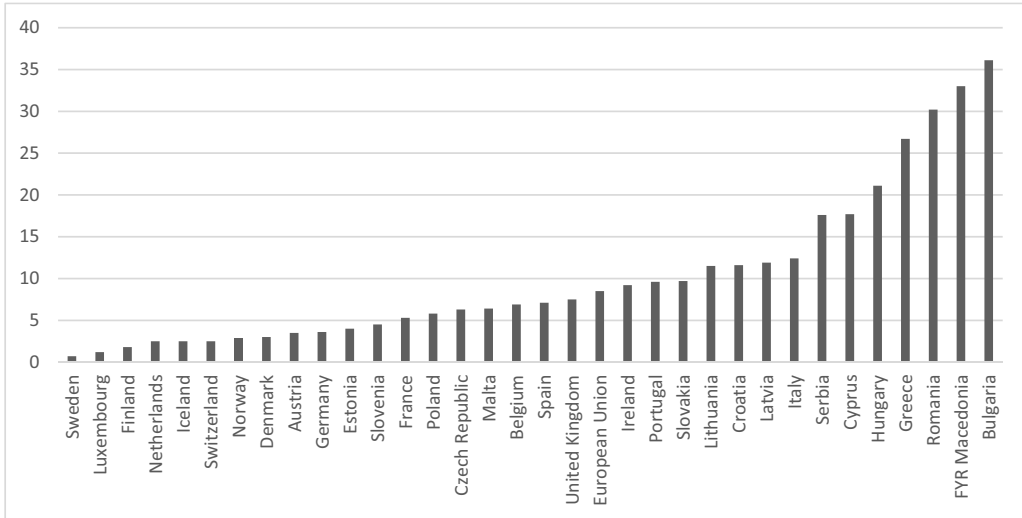


FIGURE 7.4 Share of persons below 18 years of age experiencing severe material deprivation. 2016.

Source: Eurostat database, table ilc_mddd11, extracted 26.06.2018.

Although there are few children experiencing severe material deprivation in Norway, it is worth noticing that children living in households with low income have a much higher risk of being in this situation than other children (Fig. 7.5). Ten percent of the households with dependent children in the lowest income quintile experiences severe material deprivation, while barely any families in the third quintile experience this. Compared to most other European countries, however, the share of severely deprived families is small even in the lowest income quintile.

When examining the material deprivation among those in the lowest income quintile, and separating families with dependent children from families without dependent children, Norway seems to be marginally less able to protect the families with children than families without (Fig. 7.6). The differences are generally small, but in some European countries, the material deprivation among those worst off economically is less in households with dependent children than in households without. This is the case in several east European countries as well as in Finland. Against this backdrop, it is not evident that Norway is succeeding more in protecting the most economically vulnerable children than other countries.

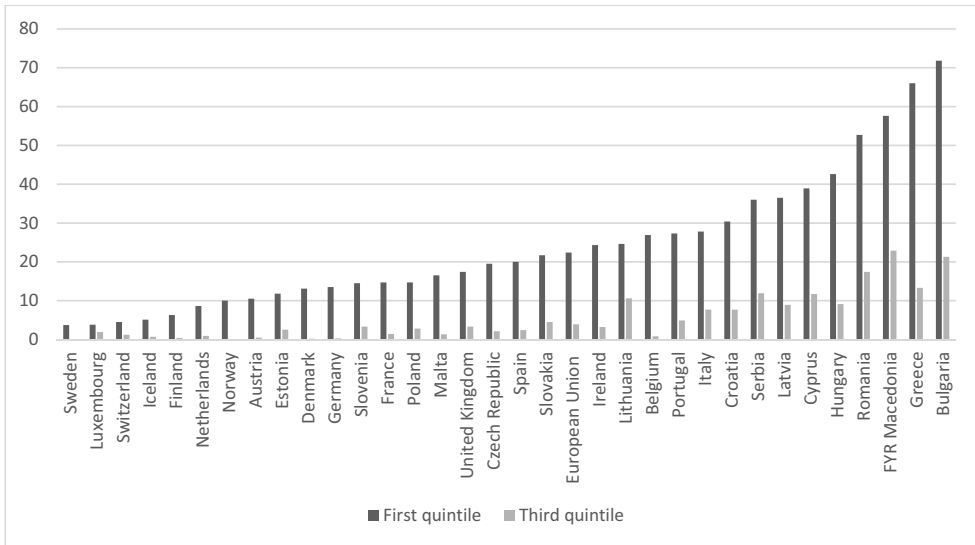


FIGURE 7.5 Share of families with dependent children with income in the first or third income quintile who are experiencing severe material deprivation. 2016.

Source: Eurostat database, table ilc_mddd13, extracted 26.06.2018.

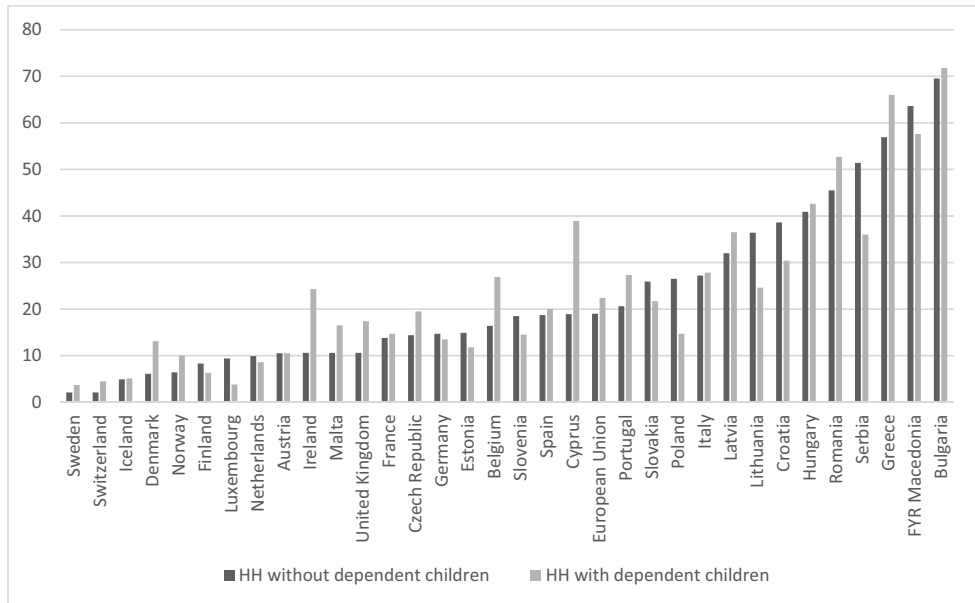


FIGURE 7.6 Share of families in the lowest income quintile experiencing severe material deprivation after presence of dependent children in the household. 2016.

Source: Eurostat database, table ilc_mddd13, extracted 26.06.2018.

In the figures above, the concept of material deprivation does not include indicators of the housing situation. In Norway, most families own their own dwelling and the housing quality is good. Approximately 150 000 persons are, however, considered to be disadvantaged in the housing market. Approximately 25 per cent of these are families with children (The strategy Bolig for velferd, page 30). Children in families with low income do more often than other children experience poor housing conditions (NOU 2011:15). According to the Eurostat database 6 per cent of Norwegians below the age of 18 are living in an overcrowded household, while the average for EU is 23 per cent. Twenty-two per cent of Norwegians (all ages) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold are living in a crowded household, while the same is case for only 3 per cent of those above the threshold.

In recent years, several researchers have scrutinized the housing situation of families with children in general and poor families in particular (Hansen & Lescher-Nuland 2010; Grødem & Sandbæk 2013). These researchers conclude for instance that the housing situation of children from low income families is below the general housing standard in Norway, and that children at risk of poverty are far more likely to relocate frequently. Langford and Johnsen (2011) has discussed the Norwegian housing policy in a rights perspective and they find that a relatively large share of Norwegians spend a disproportionate large share of their income on housing and single parents are especially exposed in this regard.

7.3.3 SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

According to CRC article 31, children have the right to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. The ability to take part in leisure time activities is a cornerstone of childhood and all children should have this possibility. There are few databases allowing for comparisons of children's social participation, but de Neubourg et al. (2012) have calculated child deprivation based on EUSilc data from 2009. According to their calculations, the share of Norwegian children who are not taking part in specific social activities are far lower than the corresponding share for the average European child (Fig. 7.7).

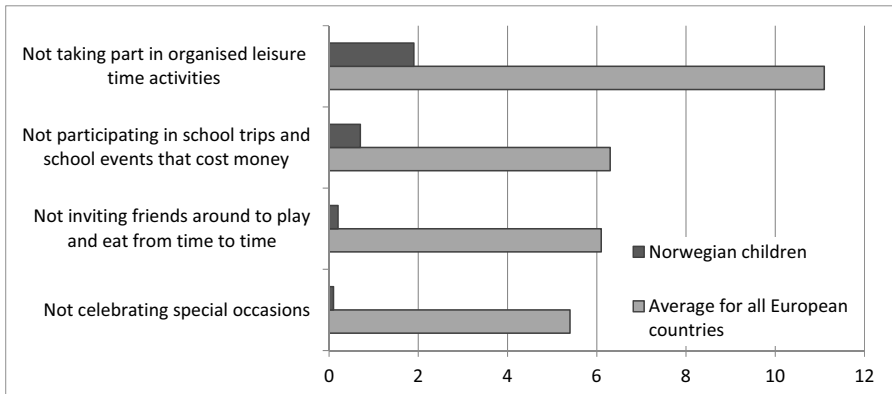


FIGURE 7.7 Share of children in Norway who do not engage in specific social activities compared to the average of children in European countries. 2009.

Source: de Neubourg et al. (2012: 9).

7.3.4 VIOLATION OF RIGHTS?

The review of material and social living conditions of children in Norway shows an overall advantageous situation. Not only does the state guarantee health services, education and other social benefits, compared to children from other European countries children in Norway are also less likely to be at risk of poverty, to lack vital consumer durables or to be excluded from social activities.

At the same time, the review shows that there are vulnerable children in Norway. Although an at-risk-of-poverty rate at 10 percent is low in an international comparison, it demonstrates that a considerable number of children are at risk of experiencing economic hardship. The hardship Norwegian poor children experience may in many instances be milder than the hardship experienced by poor children in poorer countries. Since poverty is defined as a relative phenomenon, the relevant comparison is, however, between Norwegian poor and non-poor children, not between poor children from Norway and elsewhere.

For many of the children experiencing risk of poverty during childhood the hardship will last only for a limited period, for instance because their guardians are in transition from education to work, because their guardians are between jobs or because the number of breadwinners in the household increases. For others the problems are longstanding.

Regardless of the longevity of poverty, it cannot be taken for granted that the fundamental rights of children are fulfilled when the family experiences economic hardship. Norwegian and international research have shown that children in poor

families are striving both to handle their own daily life and to help their parents handling theirs (Redmond 2008; Ridge 2009; Stefansen 2004b). Although many parents do their best to protect their children from the consequences of poverty (Thorød 2006), the children are often aware of the difficult situation their family is in (Stefansen 2004b).

As shown, the share of poor children is especially high in some immigrant groups. These children are also more at risk of not taking part in social activities (Fløtten & Kavli 2009) and therefore experience multiple disadvantages. For some poor children it is reasonable to assume that the consequences of poverty on their daily life are serious enough to assert that the child's wellbeing is negatively affected, hence that their rights according to the CRC are not fulfilled.

7.4 DILEMMAS IN PROTECTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

In Norwegian policymaking, the principle of equal distribution of income and resources has been dominant. In various policy areas, measures to promote distribution and to stimulate the development of human capital are present (NOU 2009:11, 284). This combination of redistribution and social investment policies is important to explain why the child poverty rate is comparatively low and why the living conditions of children are comparatively good. Free health care and education of high quality, inclusive labor market policies, universal welfare allowances and progressive taxes are important policy measures in this respect.

When the ambition is to reduce poverty further and to alleviate the consequences of poverty, policy makers will need to consider (partly) conflicting considerations.

First, one needs to decide whether to concentrate on measures directed toward the child or on measures directed toward the parents. Is the main ambition to eradicate or reduce poverty in itself, or is the main ambition to ensure good living conditions for the children, regardless of the family economy?

If the ambition is to reduce poverty, the income level of the family needs to be increased, and a second dilemma arises. When changing the situation of the parents is the first priority, this can be accomplished either by helping the parent to increase his/her earning ability or by increasing the income of the parents through the social security system. Helping people into paid employment is the favoured way to eradicate poverty and this choice implies few dilemmas, but increasing the parent's income through public allowances is far more challenging. This will put strain on public budgets and the incentive effects can be questioned.

The authorities must therefore carefully balance different considerations if parents cannot escape poverty by other means than by public allowances.

Third, even if the family income is successfully increased, there is no guarantee that an increase in income will actually benefit the child. It is common to expect that family members distribute income equally. Some studies indicate that this is not always the case (Sen 1983; Goode et al. 1998), but there are also studies concluding that poor parents go to the greatest possible length to make sure that their children's needs are satisfied even in situations of economic scarcity (Ghate & Hazel 2002; Thorød 2006; Stefanssen 2009). Research scrutinizing the distribution of income within families is scarce, but from the Norwegian research available, it is reasonable to assume that an increase in family income would most likely benefit the children.

At the same time, there is another strand of research suggesting that some of the problems affecting children from poor families are not caused by poverty in itself. Children from poor families are worse off than children from affluent families across a number of dimensions. However, the factors causing parents' low incomes, or other traits of the family, may influence children's living conditions (Mayer 1997). In her analyses, Mayer concludes that there is not necessarily a causal relationship between low income and the disadvantages a child experience. Fløtten and Kavli (2009) draw similar conclusions in an analysis of immigrant children's tendency to participate in organized leisure activities. They found that for boys with Pakistani or Somali background, low family income had a significant effect on participation in such activities, also when controlled for other factors. For girls of the same origin low income level did not have a significant effect on their participation rates.

If the observed correlations between family income and children's living conditions and life chances do not necessarily reflect a causal relationship, this complicates the policies introduced to fulfil children's rights, both with regards to the right to 'a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs' (CRC Article 27) and with regards to their right to 'engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (CRC Article 31). If it is obvious that increasing the family income improves the child's situation this might be a strong case for cash transfer programs. If not, other and more integrated measures are needed to ensure good living conditions for the children (Fløtten & Grødem 2014).

If we cannot automatically assume that an increase in family income eliminates the disadvantages the child encounters and/or if there are no short-term prospects for improving the income level of the family, measures can also be directed

towards the children. There are a number of such measures implemented in Norwegian municipalities (see below), and they may very well be introduced simultaneously with measures directed towards parents.

When the authorities decide to concentrate the efforts directly towards the children, a fifth dilemma is apparent: is it the parents or the authorities who are to decide what living conditions a child shall enjoy? What are the responsibilities of the parents and what are the responsibilities of the state?

In Norwegian welfare policy, benefits in cash are important measures to help alleviate poverty (as child allowance, cash grants to families with small children, unemployment benefit, disability benefit, social assistance, work assessment allowance etc). When the breadwinners receive one or more of these benefits, it is their decision how to allocate the money. If, however, the authorities have reason to question whether parents spend their money in the best interest of the child, more benefits must be earmarked, or benefits in kind must replace benefits in cash.

When the authorities decided to freeze the child allowance and instead accelerate the establishing of kindergartens, this is an example of such a shift in policy. This concrete shift was not initially made to prevent poverty, but in current policy debates many argue that kindergartens are a vital measure to prevent the transmission of poverty between generations. The equalizing effect of child care is the subject of Chapter 15 in this book. Here Drange concludes that child care may enhance child development, and that child care seems to be particularly important for children from disadvantaged families. Nevertheless, it is still a core principle within Norwegian policy that the parents have the main responsibility of creating a materially safe and a stimulating childhood for their children (NOU 1996:13 and NOU 2017:6).

7.5 MEASURES TO IMPROVE LIVING CONDITIONS

As mentioned above, the main measures to prevent poverty in Norway are parts of the general education, welfare and labour market policies, such as the unitary school system, the inclusive labour market policies, the coordinated system of wage setting, the progressive tax system, the universal welfare allowances and health services that are universal and free of cost. When a family, despite these measures, experiences poverty, both the state and the municipalities have introduced a variety of concrete measures to reduce poverty and to alleviate the consequences of growing up in poverty. Some of the measures are directed towards the parents, some towards the children. This dual approach is necessary if the ambition is both to help breadwinners out of poverty and to make sure children's rights

are realized. Not all the relevant measures can be described here, but by providing a brief overview of some of the measures and programs, one gets an impression of the scope and magnitude of the policy.

First, there are several measures of a universal character. These are not implemented primarily to reduce poverty, but as a part of the general family policy:

- ▶ The universal child benefit (barnetrygd)

A monthly allowance to all families with children below the age of 18.

- ▶ Cash grants to families with small children (kontantstøtte)

A monthly allowance paid to parents whose children between one and two years of age do not attend publicly financed kindergartens.

- ▶ Subsidized kindergartens

The municipalities allocate grants to all publicly approved kindergartens to assure that children can attend kindergartens regardless of the parents' economic situation.

Second, some measures are more specifically aimed at families with low income, as the following three examples:

- ▶ Free core time in kindergartens

Children aged 3, 4 or 5 years from low-income families have a right to 20 hours free kindergarten per week.

- ▶ Social assistance

According to the Social Act all adults, including parents have a means-tested right to monetary support if unable to support themselves through paid work or other means.

- ▶ Social housing

Families with children who have problems getting or upholding a stable dwelling have the right to several measures. In the national strategy 'Bolig for velferd' (2014–2020) the government promises to strengthen the efforts to ensure that all young people have a decent and stable housing situation. It is for instance a national aim that all rental accommodation for families with children shall be of good quality in a safe dwelling area.

Third, there is a range of measures specifically directed towards children living in low-income families, partly by helping the whole family, partly by ensuring that children are taking part in school and peer activities. Besides from Fritidserklæringen, the following measures are all included in Children Living in Poverty – The Government's Strategy (2015–2017) (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2015):

- National grant scheme to combat child poverty

The aim of this scheme is to combat poverty and lessen the consequences of poverty among children and young people. The municipalities and NGOs can apply for grants, and the funds can for instance be used to send children to holiday clubs, to offer low-cost leisure activities, to develop equipment resource pools etc. The grant scheme cannot be expected to reduce poverty as such, at least not in the short term, but it aims at alleviating possible negative social consequences of poverty.

- Measures for children and young people in large cities

This scheme aims at improving living conditions for children and young people in large cities by developing open meeting places, as youth cafes, youth clubs etc. All large cities can apply for grants from this scheme; many of the programs are a collaboration between the municipal authority and voluntary organizations.

- Grant scheme to prevent and reduce poverty among children and families who are in contact with the social services at NAV (the labour and welfare administration). The objective of this scheme is to reinforce and develop the social and preventive work in the municipalities. Low-income families, both children and parents, are followed up. Young people dropping out of, or at risk of dropping out of, upper secondary school are also a target group.

- Programme to follow up low-income families in NAV

This program is a trial, starting up in 2015, targeting families with children who have persistent low incomes. The municipalities shall closely follow up both parents and the children, and there is a systematic collaboration between different services to assure that the families are provided the best measures available. A group of researchers are monitoring and evaluating the pilot (Malmberg-Heimonen et al. 2016).

- ▮ Coordinated, interdisciplinary help for vulnerable children and young people under the age of 24 (the 0–24 Partnership)

Through early intervention and coordination of services, the 0–24 Partnership aims at ensuring that children and young people grow up healthy, that they complete basic education and that they are given the necessary basis for regular employment.

- ▮ Measures to combat child poverty from the voluntary field

The government recognizes the role of voluntary organizations in creating opportunities for children to make friends, and for having positive experiences. Many organizations are part of a network cooperating to combat poverty and social exclusion among children and young people (the NDFU, see <http://www.allemed.no>), and the government is supporting this initiative.

- ▮ Fritidserklæringen (The declaration of leisure time)

In 2016 the government (by the Prime Minister and several ministers), the confederation of Norwegian municipalities (KS), the Norwegian Sports association, Save the Children and a number of other NGOs signed Fritidserklæringen. This declaration is directly based on CRC Article 31 and by signing the state, municipalities and NGOs are obliged to assure concerted efforts to include all children in at least one leisure time activity, regardless of the economic and social situation of their parents. The declaration underlines the importance of cooperation between different actors who are working with children.

The list of examples illustrates that there are many specific measures implemented to improve the living conditions of poor children, as well as children who are vulnerable for other reasons. Both national and local authorities assign much weight to measures that help including children and young people in leisure time activities. It must be noted, however, that more than a fair share of the measures described above are designed to alleviate the consequences of poverty and not to increase the income level of families above the poverty threshold.

Despite political attention and many initiatives, the Office of the Auditor General of Norway has criticized the efforts of Norwegian municipalities to prevent child poverty and its consequences (Riksrevisjonen 2014). In the report from the Auditor General the CRC was, amongst others, used as a backdrop for the evaluation of the municipal efforts. The Auditor General criticizes the municipalities for not doing enough to ensure that poor children can take part in leisure time activities. All municipalities have introduced at least some measures to assure social

inclusion of poor children, but there is no linear relationship between the number of measures introduced and the child poverty rate at local level. In many municipalities, there are only a few measures and they are not sufficiently targeted towards the children from poor families. Furthermore, the Auditor General criticized the central government for inadequate coordination of the efforts to reduce the consequences of poverty for children. There are for instance several state grants that the municipalities may apply for, but these grant schemes are insufficiently coordinated (see also Fløtten & Hansen 2018). As mentioned above, also the Committee on Child Rights criticizes Norwegian authorities for not assuring sufficiently coordinated services. The report from the Auditor General also mentions that there is a need for more evaluation of how different measures work. Finally, NAV is criticized for not taking the situation of children sufficiently into account when parents are applying for social assistance (Riksrevisjonen 2014). The Auditor General based its conclusions on data mainly from 2013, and the municipalities are constantly working to improve their anti-poverty policies. At some points the critique may therefore be a bit outdated, but there is no reason to believe that there is a total change in the situation of poor children over the course of only four to five years.

So far, there are also few traces of a rights perspective in the public policy to prevent child poverty and to alleviate the consequences of poverty.¹² The Auditor General refers to the CRC in its report on the child poverty policies, but neither the CRC nor the concept of rights is mentioned in the government's strategy Children Living in Poverty. There are no traces of the CRC in the previous action plans against poverty, either.

7.6 CONCLUSION

According to the CRC all children have 'the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs', as well as a right to 'engage in play and recreational activities'. In Norway, the access to data illuminating the living conditions of children is good, and the authorities are monitoring the development along a range of indicators on a yearly basis.¹³ Although the share of children in Norway who are at risk of poverty is low in a comparative perspe-

12. One program worth mentioning is the so-called Sjumilssteget (see sjumilssteget.no). This is a model introduced to help municipalities to concretize the articles of CRC in case management involving children.

13. See for instance the annual reports from Statistics Norway on economy and living conditions for low-income groups.

ctive, and although most children enjoy reasonably good living standards, there are children and young people in Norway who experience severe economic hardship and who do not take part in recreational activities on level with their peers. In the light of this, one could say that there is a breach of the Convention. At the same time, Norwegian children, both poor and non-poor, enjoy better living conditions than children in most other countries do, and there is a wide range of measures implemented to assure good living conditions of children. It therefore seems a bit steep to claim that Norway breaches the CRC, neither was the ambition of this chapter to form a definite conclusion in this regard. It is more important to underline that the fact that Norway is doing well, comparatively speaking, does not mean that there is no room for improvement.

It is first and foremost the parents who are responsible for taking care of children's needs, but securing the rights of children demands an effort also from the state and the municipalities. From the discussion above, it is obvious that the aim of ensuring that children enjoy good economic, material and social living conditions is not straightforward, not even in an affluent welfare state such as the Norwegian. The authorities will need to balance a set of different considerations when they propose and implement anti-poverty measures. The implementation of measures is further complicated by the fact that not all problems children may experience will be solved by improving the economic situation of the family only. The recent weigh put on so-called integrated and coordinated measures is positive in this respect.

The fact that there are few traces of a rights perspective in the anti poverty policies implies a potential for bringing children's rights higher up on the political agenda, also when it comes to combatting the negative consequences of child poverty. Such a shift towards a more rights-based policy might help the state in its efforts to develop effective measures to prevent poverty as well as the municipalities in their efforts to create good alleviating measures.

REFERENCES

- Bratsberg, B. 2010. *Utdannings- og arbeidskarrierer hos unge voksne: hvor havner ungdom som slutter skolen i ung alder?* Oslo: Frischsenteret.
- Bøe, T., E. Dearing, K. M. Stormark, and H. D. Zachrisson. 2017a. Subjective economic status in adolescence: determinants and associations with mental health in the Norwegian Youth@Hordaland Study. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 38. First online: 23 October 2017.
- Bøe, T., M. Balaj, T. A. Eikemo, C. L. McNamara, and E. Solheim. 2017b. Financial difficulties in childhood and adult depression in Europe. *European Journal of Public Health*, 27: 96–101.

- Bøe T., M. Hysing, and H. D. Zachrisson. 2016. Low family income and behavior problems in Norwegian preschoolers: Is child emotionality a marker for sensitivity of influence? *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, 37: 213–222.
- Bøe, T., S. Øverland, A. J. Lundervold, and M. Hysing. 2012. Socioeconomic status and children's mental health: Results from the Bergen Child Study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 47: 1557–1566.
- de Neubourg, C., J. Bradshaw, Y. Chzhen, G. Main, B. Martorano, and L. Menchini. 2012. Child deprivation, multidimensional poverty and monetary poverty in Europe. IWP-2012-02. Florence: Unicef.
- Epland, J. 2018. *Flere barn i husholdninger med vedvarende lavinntekt*. ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/artikler-og-publikasjoner/flere-barn-i-husholdninger-med-vedvarende-lavinntekt
- Epland, J., and M. I. Kirkeberg. 2014. *Flere innvandrerbarnfamilier med lavinntekt*. <https://ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/artikler-og-publikasjoner/flere-innvandrerbarnfamilier-med-lavinntekt>
- Epland, J., and M. I. Kirkeberg. 2017. *Ett av ti barn tilhører en husholdning med vedvarende lavinntekt*. <https://ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/artikler-og-publikasjoner/ett-av-ti-barn-tilhorer-en-husholdning-med-vedvarende-lavinntekt>
- Fløtten, T. 2006. *Poverty and social exclusion – Two sides of the same coin. A comparative study of Norway and Estonia*. Doctoral dissertation. Oslo University / Fafo-report 487.
- Fløtten, T., and H. C. Kavli. 2009. Barnefattigdom og sosial deltakelse. In Fløtten, T. (ed.), *Barnefattigdom*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Fløtten, T., and A. W. Pedersen. 2009. Når kan barn kalles fattige: En opinionsbasert tilnærming. In Fløtten, T. (ed.), *Barnefattigdom*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Fløtten, T., I. L. S. Hansen, A. S. Grødem, A. B. Grønningsæter, and R. A. Nielsen. 2011. *Kunnskap om fattigdom i Norge: En oppsummering*. Fafo-rapport 2011: 21. Oslo: Fafo.
- Fløtten, T., and A. S. Grødem. 2014. *Helhetlig oppfølging av barnefamilier: En kunnskapsoppsummering*. Fafo-rapport 2014:18. Oslo: Fafo.
- Folkehelseinstituttet. 2016. *Barn, miljø og helse: Risiko- og helsefremmende faktorer*. Oslo: Folkehelseinstituttet.
- Ghate, D., and N. Hazel. 2002. *Parenting in poor environments: Stress, support and coping*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Goode, J., C. Callender, and R. Lister. 1998. *Purse or Wallet? Gender Inequalities and Income Distribution within Families on Benefits*. Policy Studies Institute.
- Grødem, A. S., and M. L. Sandbæk. 2013. *Helt bakerst i køen: Barnefamilier med ustabile boforhold*. Fafo-rapport 2013. Oslo: Fafo.
- Hansen, I. L. S., and B. R. Lescher-Nuland. 2011. *Bolig og oppvekst: En studie av konsekvenser av å vokse opp under vanskelige boforhold*. Fafo-rapport 2011:16. Oslo: Fafo.
- Langford, M., and J. Nilsen. 2011. Å leve er også å bo. Norske boutgifter – i overensstemmelse med retten til bolig? *Kritisk juss* 02/2011: 92–119.
- Lorentzen, T., and R. Nielsen. 2009. Går fattigdom i arv? In Fløtten, T. (ed.), *Barnefattigdom*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Mayer, S. E. 1998. *What Money Can't Buy. Family Income and Children's Life Chances*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

- Notten, G., and C. de Neubourg. 2011. Monitoring absolute and relative poverty: 'Not enough' is not the same as 'much less'. *The Review of Income and Wealth*. 57(2): 247–269.
- NOU 2009: 11. *Fordelingsutvalget*.
- NOU 2011: 15. *Rom for alle*.
- NOU 2016: 16. *Ny barnevernslov – Sikring av barnets rett til omsorg og beskyttelse*.
- NOU 2017: 6. *Offentlig støtte til barnefamilier*.
- Omholt, E. L. (ed.). 2016. *Økonomi og levekår for ulike lavinntektsgrupper 2016*. Reports 2016/30. Oslo/Kongsvinger: Statistisk sentralbyrå.
- Redmond, G. 2008. *Children's Perspectives on Economic Adversities: A Review of the Literature*. Innocenti Discussion paper IDP 2008-01. Florence: Innocenti.
- Ridge, T. 2009. *Living with Poverty: A Review of the Literature on Children's and Families' Experiences of Poverty*. Research Report No 594. Norwich: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Riksrevisjonen. 2014. *Riksrevisjonens undersøkning av barnefattigdom*. Dokument 3:11 (2013–2014).
- Sandbæk M., and A. W. Pedersen (eds.). 2010. *Barn og unges levekår i lavinntektsfamilier. En panelstudie 2000–2009*. Oslo: NOVA.
- Sen, A. 1983. Economics and the family. *Asian Development Review*, 1:2.
- Sletten, M. A. 2010. Social costs of poverty; leisure time socializing and the subjective experience and social isolation among 13–16-year old Norwegians. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(3): 291–315.
- Sletten, M. A. 2011. *Å ha, å delta, å være en av gjengen: Velferd og fattigdom i et ungdomsperspektiv*. Doktoravhandling. NOVA-rapport 11/11. Oslo: NOVA.
- Stefansen, K. 2004a. Fritid og sosial deltakelse. In: M. Sandbæk (ed.), *Barns levekår: Hva betyr familiens inntekt?* NOVA-rapport 11/04. Oslo: NOVA.
- Stefansen, K. 2004b. Barns opplevelse av familieøkonomien og egne økonomiske ressurser. In: M. Sandbæk (ed.), *Barns levekår: Hva betyr familiens inntekt?* NOVA-rapport 11/04. Oslo: NOVA.
- Thorød, A. B. 2006. *En normal barndom? Foreldrestrategier for å skjerme barn fra konsekvenser av å leve med lav inntekt*. NOVA, Rapport 2/06. Oslo: NOVA.
- Townsend, P. 1979. *Poverty in the United Kingdom*. London: Penguin Books.