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National strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness

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The pathway to a permanent home The Norwegian strategy to prevent and combat homelessness

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1. Introduction

During the 1990s there was a growing awareness of big differences in living conditions within the Norwegian society. Living condition surveys and reports made it clear that some groups were lagging behind in the welfare development that had taken place in Norway since the 1970s. In 1999 the Government launched a white paper to Parliament on distribution of income and living conditions, the Equalisation report. One of the issues addressed in this white paper was homelessness, and a national project to combat homelessness was proposed: Project Homelessness. At the turn of the century poverty became a frequently discussed issue in public debate, and in the 2001 national election campaign poverty was the main social political issue. The following year the new Centre-Right¹ government presented an action plan against poverty, and homeless people were one of the target groups. This was followed up with a national strategy to combat homelessness launched in a White Paper to Parliament on housing policy in February 2004, and adopted by Parliament in June the same year. This White Paper states that the overall vision of the Government's housing policy is that everybody should have adequate and secure housing. The main strategy for realising this vision is to stimulate to a well functioning housing market. At the same time the Government states that some groups have fewer resources in the housing market than the majority of the population, and need help to get access. As a consequence the second strategy for realising the vision of adequate and secure housing for all is to provide housing for groups that are disadvantaged in the housing market, as well as measures to enable these groups to continue to live in their homes. (White Paper no. 23 (2003-2004): p.5). Homeless people are one of the targeted disadvantaged groups. The national strategy to combat homelessness is presented below as "The pathway to a permanent home".

The aim to combat poverty and homelessness has to a certain degree crossed party lines and different governments. All national initiatives have been rooted in Parliament. After the national election in 2005 Norway got a Red-Green² Government and in its Governmental Declaration this government stated as a main goal the elimination of poverty and, as a part of that, the eradication of homelessness.

The Norwegian strategy to combat homelessness is formulated by the Government and grounded in Parliament, but the body responsible for securing housing for disadvantaged groups is the municipalities. This is one of the main challenges related to the Norwegian strategy: national targets and goals in an area that is, in principle, the responsibility of the municipalities.

1 Coalition of Christian Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberals.

2 Coalition of the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party, and the Centre Party.

The main object of this paper is to give a presentation of the Norwegian strategy. To do so we find it necessary to place the strategy in a context. First we give a description of what is considered as homelessness in Norway and the main targets and goals in the strategy. Then we give a brief introduction to Norwegian housing policy and some relevant background information about Norway and its structure of governance. In chapter 2 we present some of the main findings from research concerning homelessness in Norway, and in chapter 3 and 4 we give a more thorough presentation of the strategy and the measures available to implement the strategy. In chapter 5 we give an overview of the results so far. In the closing chapter we raise some questions for discussion related to the strategy chosen in Norway.

Homelessness in Norway

The most recent survey of homelessness in Norway was conducted in 2005 (Hansen et al. 2006) and estimated that 5 500 persons were homeless. This is 300 more than at the same time in 2003 (Hansen et al. 2004), but 700 fewer than the estimated number of homeless based on the first national survey conducted in Norway in 1996 (Ulfrstad 1997).

The definition below is a definition based on the definition used in these surveys and has in many ways become the official definition of homelessness in Norway:

By homeless is meant people not owning or renting their own place of residence, but who are referred to casual or temporary accommodation, who live temporarily with relatives, friends or acquaintances, or who are in prison or in an institution and who are to be released or discharged within two months and who do not have a place of residence. And people without an arranged place to stay for the coming night.

By "institutions" are meant all kinds of institutions, most commonly psychiatric institutions and institutions for drug treatment, but under this category are also included persons in child welfare institutions. The survey from 2005 shows that 15 per cent of the homeless are in institutions and ten per cent under correctional services. Those without any organised place to stay the coming night constitute a very small share of homeless in Norway, only one per cent of the total number. One-fourth live in overnight shelters. The largest group of homeless people live temporarily with relatives, friends or acquaintances. These surveys also show that the major group of homeless people have problems with substance abuse or mental illness (Hansen et al. 2006). We will give a broader description of homelessness in Norway in chapter 2.

The pathway to a permanent home

The national strategy to combat homelessness was launched in 2004 and presented in a booklet under the name "The pathway to a permanent home". The strategy is set for the period 2005 – 2007. Below, we present a figure of the three primary objectives and five specific targets set for the period up to 2007.

Primary objective	Target
Preventing people from becoming homeless.	Number of eviction petitions shall be reduced by 50 per cent, and the number of evictions by 30 per cent No one shall have to spend time in temporary housing upon release from prison. No one shall have to seek temporary housing upon discharge from an institution.
Contribute to improve the quality of overnight shelters.	No one shall be offered overnight shelters without a quality agreement.
Help ensure that homeless people receive offers of permanent housing without undue delay.	No one shall stay more than three months in temporary housing.

In 2007 the strategy will be evaluated and a further developed strategy presented for the Parliament. The strategy is presented more thoroughly in chapter three.

Norwegian Housing Policy

The main ideology within Norwegian housing policies has been that everyone should be able to own their own home. The public rental sector is very modest. In larger towns there are housing cooperatives. In 2001 there were almost two million dwellings in Norway, and every Norwegian had on average approximately 52 square metres at his/her disposal. The same year 77 per cent of the households owned their own dwelling, either as a free holder (62 per cent) or as co-owner (housing cooperatives, 14 per cent). 23 per cent of the households were renting their homes, and there were more renters in the big cities than elsewhere. Most tenants rent in the private market. In total as much as 96 per cent of Norwegian homes are privately owned.³

We find housing shortage as a topic as far back as the end of 1800. In this period housing shortage was a problem especially within the working class. One of the slogans of the labour movement was that “no one should own other peoples’ homes”.⁴ When the Labour Party mobilised for local elections in 1890 one of their main demands was that the housing shortage must be combated by public building of houses for the working class (Mauseth 1979). At this time we can identify a quite clear distinction between the worthy and the unworthy needy. In the Vagrant Act adopted in 1900 being vagrant or a vagabond and for example drinking in public became criminalised. This could be punished by fines or prison. Being homeless for this group was regarded as being self-inflicted, and therefore they were considered as unworthy needy. The criminalising of homelessness lasted until 1970 when the Vagrant Act was revised.

³ White Paper no. 23 to Parliament (2003-2004). On Housing Policy.

⁴ Halvorsen (1991): Innføring i sosialpolitikk (Introduction to Social Policy), Tano.

Policy development along two axis

How homelessness has been contextualised in Norway varies over time. This could be explained along one main axis: Homelessness as a question of housing policy or social policy. In addition it is possible to identify one parallel axis related to emphasizing individual or structural explanations of homelessness.

Housing policy and social policy

Homelessness is situated in the crossing point between housing policy and social policy. Traditionally there has not been much connection between the two policy areas. Within housing policy housing problems primarily have been related to lack of dwellings and lack of economic resources. Within social policy homelessness has more frequently been discussed in relation to the personal or social problems of the homeless. In broad outline this means that housing policy has been centred on access to housing and not on other problems related to homelessness.

Within the area of social policy the focus has been more on the personal and social problems, and less on housing. A widespread practice within social service has been that the client has to “qualify” for housing, for example by getting sober and overcoming drug problems. Housing has not been viewed as an objective in itself. In an official report to Parliament on the Act Related to Social Services in 1985⁵ the question was raised about the need to legally establish a public responsibility for providing sufficient housing for disadvantaged groups. The new Act Related to Social Services stated a responsibility for the local authorities to provide housing for these groups.

Even though the main focus within housing policy was the provision of housing, there was an increasing awareness about the need to strengthen the social support to homeless people. Project Homelessness established in the autumn of 2000 in many ways represented a paradigm shift, trying to establish homelessness as a question of both housing and social problems, and with a more overall perspective. In 2002 the central government distributed a circular to the municipalities on supported housing work emphasizing an overall approach in the work to prevent homelessness⁶. In the white paper on housing policy from 2004⁷ homelessness for the first time is related to the general situation of the homeless, and as a question not only about getting access to housing, but also about being able to keep it on a long-term basis.

Individual characteristics and structural features

The other axis relates to different focuses in understanding homelessness. The individual model relates to individual characteristics as the main focus for understanding homelessness. For example drug problems or mental health problems. This leads to a focus on the individuals' need for follow-up support and to strengthen the individuals' resources so that they can manage in the housing market. Another way to see it is a more structural approach focusing on societal structures that can contribute to homelessness. This could be the passage from institution to the local

⁵ NOU 1985:18 Act Related to Social Services etc.

⁶ Circular U-10/2002. Supported Housing Work.

⁷ White Paper no. 23 to Parliament (2003-2004). On Housing Policy.

community, from prison to freedom, the organisation of the welfare system, potential traps within the system. The individual approach has been the most common model until recently. To a certain degree, the national strategy to combat homelessness represents a shift from an individual approach to a more structural approach (White Paper no. 23 [2003-2004]: p.43).

In the presentation of the national strategy in the White Paper on Housing Policy the government introduces a focus on different positions on the housing market as an approach⁸. The positions are ranged according to their strength in the housing market; with owning your own home as the strongest position and being without an arranged place to stay the coming night as the weakest. Other positions in between are for example renting your own home with ordinary tenancy contract, staying in an institution or a prison, staying temporarily with friends, acquaintances or relatives, and staying in lodging houses, pensions or other overnight shelters. The rights, duties and possibilities will vary between the different positions. The approach in the new Norwegian strategy is to focus more on the transitions between different positions and impose measures to avoid a weaker position in the housing market by such transitions. For example if the focus is on the transition from institution and back to the local community, how can the system related to discharge be organised to avoid this becoming a housing trap that produces homelessness. Another example is the passage from prison to local community.

Both individual and structural approaches could be identified in the Norwegian strategy, but the new strategy has a more structural approach than earlier.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank

The Norwegian State Housing Bank was established in 1946 and has been of great importance within Norwegian housing policy. The foundation of the bank was a result of an extensive housing shortage after the Second World War, and its aim was to stimulate the building of houses at reasonable prices. By this arrangement the state recognized a responsibility for housing. The target group was ordinary people, and the measures were general. Everybody could receive loans at reasonable conditions if they built a house within the regulated size and costs. The bank financed both private homes and building by private housing cooperatives. As a result the majority of Norwegian homes have been financed by loans from the Norwegian State Housing Bank. This is also one of the main explanations of the large extent to which homes in Norway are privately owned.

Throughout the 1980s, Norway witnessed a deregulation of the housing market, and since then prices have increased. In the same period the government's initiatives in housing policy have to a larger degree been targeted to disadvantaged groups in the housing market. Several reports to Parliament during the 1980s supplemented this policy. The target of the housing policy was vulnerable groups like youths, elderly, immigrants and single persons⁹. During this period the housing policy in many ways became more closely linked to social policy. In this period the building down of institutions started. There were large reforms in social policy related to the elderly, to the mentally disabled and, the latest, to mental health. These reforms represented large housing challenges for the municipalities and the Norwegian State Housing Bank played an important role

⁸ For more knowledge about homelessness as a position on the housing market see e.g.. White Paper no. 23 (2003-2004), Ulfstad 1997 or Ytrehus and Drøpping 2004.

⁹ White Paper no 12 (1981-82) On housing policy, White Paper no. 83 (1984 –85) The Government's Long term program 1986-89, White Paper no. 34 (1988-89) Housing policy for the 90s.

in establishing houses. The Norwegian State Housing Bank has gradually been transformed from being a tool to facilitate houses at reasonable prices for ordinary people, to becoming a tool for implementing the Government's policy on securing vulnerable groups in the housing market. In recent years the Government has strengthened the Norwegian State Housing Bank's role as a facilitator, knowledge provider and advisory body on this topic. Since the launching of Project Homelessness in 2000 the Norwegian State Housing Bank has been the responsible agency for coordinating the work regarding homelessness.

Background of the Norwegian society

The population of Norway is approximately 4.6 million¹⁰. As of 01.01.06 Norway is divided into 431 municipalities and 19 county municipalities. The capital Oslo is classified as being both a county municipality and a municipality. More than half of the municipalities have less than 5 000 inhabitants, and only eight have more than 50 000.

Norway has three levels of government: National, county and municipalities.

The framework for activities of the county municipalities and the municipalities is laid down by Parliament (the Storting) through legislation and decisions regarding local government financing. The Government can only assign new functions to the local governments by means of legislation or decisions made by Parliament. The principle of local governance is strong in Norway and there is a strong reluctance against using legislation and regulations to make local governments take responsibility and fulfil national targets on specific policy areas. It is political consensus to uphold a high degree of local governance independence. Since the 1960s considerable changes have taken place in the distribution of functions between the three levels of government. Today the municipalities/local government produce most of the welfare services provided for the public.

Different stakeholders

The municipalities have organised themselves in the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS). KS is a national member's association for municipalities, counties and public enterprises under municipal or county ownership. All counties and municipalities are members. KS is an employer's and central bargaining organisation, an advisory and consultative body, and spokesman and advocate on behalf of its members.

The Directorate for Health and Social Affairs is a specialised directorate within these areas. The Directorate is an integral part of the central administration of health and social affairs, and is organised under the joint auspices of the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. The Directorate will ensure that the government's adopted policy is pursued in the sphere of health and social affairs.

The County Governor is the chief state representative in the regions and the Governor shall work to implement policy decisions made by Parliament and the central government. The duty of the office of the Governor is to inform, advice and supervise the municipalities. The County governors

¹⁰ Ref: ssb.no/english/subjects/02/befolkning-en/

administer different grants (from the Directorate for Health and Social affair) related to social services and homelessness and follow up and supervise the municipalities in this field. Most important is the role as ombudsman and a safeguard of the legal rights of the citizens.

The specialist health care services such as hospitals and institutions (somatic and psychiatric) are organised in five regional health enterprises (owned by the state). These regional health enterprises are also in charge of running drug addicts' institutions, while the County Governor supervises the institutions.

As mentioned, the Norwegian State Housing Bank is responsible for administrating the government's housing policy. The Norwegian State Housing Bank has a main office and six regional offices around the country.

The Norwegian Correctional Services have six regional offices. The Enforcement Officers is responsible for administrating cases of evictions. They are organised under the National Police Directorate and have their own bodies in the largest cities, and elsewhere are organised under the different police districts.

This implies that the State has several representatives on the regional level: The county governor, the Norwegian State Housing Bank, the Regional Health Enterprises, the Correctional Services and the Enforcements Officers. These bodies are all important stakeholders in implementing the strategy of combating homelessness.

2. What do we know about homelessness in Norway?

The survey of homelessness conducted in 1997 gave new information about homelessness. Since then two additional surveys have been conducted, and more knowledge about homelessness have been provided. A four-year national trial project has generated more knowledge and also research studies and evaluations of projects have added to the knowledge. In this chapter we will present some of the main findings from the research on homelessness.

Project Homelessness

Project Homeless was launched in 2000 and was a four-year national trial project. The project was ended at the end of 2004. The main object was to develop methods and models to counteract homelessness. The project was to make it possible to try out different local solutions on housing and support, establishing formalised mutual, cross-department services, and forming the basis for a national effort on the topic. The project was administered by the Norwegian State Housing Bank and grounded in the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and since 2002 also in the new Directorate for Health and Social Affairs.

Seven municipalities participated in the project, mainly the largest cities, and four non-governmental organisations. The seven municipalities that participated represent 25 per cent of the total population in Norway, but 70 per cent of the homeless.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank funded a project manager for each municipality and for the non-governmental organisations. Each city has had a local steering committee with representatives from municipal administration, health and social services, housing services and the regional offices of the Norwegian State Housing Bank. The main target group has been the most disadvantaged homeless people¹¹. Within the project 368 housing units have been established, but in total many more people have received follow up services through the project (Dyb 2005). The Norwegian Building Research Institute has evaluated the project from the start. In the final report they draw five main conclusions from the project (Dyb 2005). The first conclusion is that the project has created larger acceptance for the right of homeless people with substance abuse or combined diagnosis substance abuse / psychiatric problems to have access to housing and services. They find that the focus on model development resulted in elevation of the work from simple measures to an all-embracing perspective on homelessness and the homeless peoples' need for both housing and services. The other conclusion is that Project Homelessness became a housing project. They emphasise two reasons for this; the first is that the project was grounded and led by the Norwegian State Housing Bank, and secondly that the normal life ideals gained ground. Even though the project resulted in houses as the main solution, not institutions, they find that some of the housing solutions exhibit clear institutional characteristics. They emphasise that a continuous awareness is needed about housing not being institutionalised more than absolutely necessary. Another conclusion is that it has been important and necessary to build competence about the field and the target group. The one single most important element they consider is the establishment of a one-year part-time study on the topic at college level. In the evaluation they conclude that the result of the Project appears to be implemented and grounded in management in the municipalities and professional departments. At the same time they point out that the belief as to whether the results achieved will be permanent differs: The members of the steering groups have the greatest confidence that the result will be permanent, while the service providers working with the clients are more pessimistic. One interpretation is that the last group knows how much efforts are needed, and that the client group has a low status within the local support system. A last conclusion is that there has been too little room in the Project for other groups than the primary one, the most disadvantaged homeless (Dyb 2005: 14-21)

Three Surveys on homelessness

Three national surveys on homelessness in Norway have been conducted. The first one was carried out in 1996 (Ulfrstad 1997), the second in 2003 (Hansen et al., 2004) and the third in 2005 (Hansen et al., 2006).

1996: 6200
2003: 5200
2005: 5500

We can see that from 1996 to 2003 there is a significant reduction in the estimate of homeless people (1000 persons), but from 2003 to 2005 there has been a small increase of 300 persons. In total there still is a decline in the number of homeless people for the whole period from 1996, but it looks like the decline has stopped up and been replaced by a certain increase. It should be noted that these kinds of estimates are linked with a certain uncertainty and in that perspective

¹¹ Substance abusers and those with combined drug problems and mental illness.

the increase is quite modest (Hansen et al., 2006:7). The surveys provide a lot of information regarding the group of homeless. In short, the survey from 2005 shows that homelessness is still a big city problem, but as a whole the largest cities and municipalities with more than 39 000 inhabitants still have a small decrease of homelessness¹². The increase is to be found in the municipalities with 10 000 – 39 000 inhabitants. The variation from municipality to municipality is significant.

The survey tells us that three fourths of the homeless people in Norway are male. They are young – the average age is 35 and the women registered are younger than the men. Persons from Africa, Asia and Oceania are overrepresented; they constitute 12 per cent of the homeless¹³. The homeless have low education and weak attachment to the labour market. Seventy per cent are single, 29 per cent have children under the age of 18¹⁴. The largest group of homeless people, 42 per cent, stay temporarily with relatives or acquaintances. The number staying with relatives or acquaintances has increased significantly since the previous surveys¹⁵. One-fourth stay in overnight shelters, and here the number is not very different from that of 2003 (27 per cent), but represents an increase from 1996 (19 per cent). In 2005 one per cent lack an organised place to stay the coming night, and this is a reduction from the previous surveys¹⁶.

In 2005 one-third experience homelessness as a recurring problem. The survey shows a definite reduction in the number that experience homelessness as a long-time continual problem, 35 per cent in 2005 compared to 46 per cent in 2003. A larger share experience acute homelessness in 2005 (22 per cent) than in 2003 (14 per cent). In 2005 the survey for the first time included a question about eviction, and it was found that one out of four had experienced eviction during the last six months.

The majority of the homeless have problems with drugs or/and mental illness. Only 11 per cent were not substance abusers or suffer from mental illness, but this group have increased from 2003 when only six per cent were registered without these problems. The group of substance abusers have declined with almost ten per cent since 2003, to 61 per cent. That is back to the same level as in 1996. The number that are assessed to have a mental health problem have increased, to 38 per cent in 2005¹⁷. One-fourth of the homeless are registered with a combination of both substance abuse and mental health problems.

On the other hand the report from 2005 shows that the group with no other registered problems than housing has increased significantly. It is still a marginal group, seven per cent of the homeless, but in 2003 this group only constituted four per cent of the homeless. This group consist of those who are not substance abusers, have no visibly signs of mental illness, are not in prison or other institutions, or have been discharged from institutions during the last six months. This group differs from the whole in other ways too; it is found that two out of five are women, more than half of this group are born outside the Nordic countries, almost three-fourths live with relatives or ac-

¹² The exception is Bergen, which is now the city in Norway with the most homelessness per inhabitant.

¹³ Compared to 5,7 per cent of the total population.

¹⁴ Of these 14 per cent have daily custody and 41 % have visiting rights.

¹⁵ In 1996 and 2003 one-third stay with relatives or acquaintances.

¹⁶ In 1996 four per cent lacked an organized place to stay the coming night and in 2003 two per cent were in this situation.

¹⁷ 24 per cent in 1997 and 32 per cent in 2003.

quaintances and one out of four has custody for children. A larger share of this group have work-related income. Only five per cent have experienced long-term homelessness.

A summing up this survey shows that homelessness is still a big city problem, but while there is a decline in homelessness in these cities, there is an increase in the number of homeless in the medium-sized cities and municipalities. Since the last survey in 2003 there has been a decrease in the number of substance abusers, but an increase of persons with mental illnesses. There has been a clear reduction in persons that experience homelessness as a long time continual problem, while the number that experience acute homelessness has grown. The number of persons with no arranged place to stay the coming night has gone down compared to the previous surveys and constitute only one per cent of the total number of homeless.

More knowledge about homelessness

Several studies during the last few years have centred on the need for both housing and services. A study of local services delivered to previously homeless people (Ytrehus og Drøpping 2004) shows that 70 per cent of the municipalities consider that all or most of the clients with drug problems need follow-up assistance in their housing situation. Only one out of four municipalities reports that this kind of support is given. Three out of four municipalities report that all or most of the clients with psychiatric problems also have a need for housing support to keep a stable housing situation. Less than 60 per cent of the municipalities report that all or most of the clients receive this kind of help. They find that preventing homelessness is not so much a question about housing as a question of providing adequate help and services (Ytrehus og Drøpping 2004). Several studies have indicated that a considerable share of the homeless live rather chaotic lives, moving between different kinds of housing, institutions, lodging houses and staying with friends and family (Ytrehus and Drøpping 2004, Hansen 2006, Taksdal et al. 2006). The Taksdal et al. (2006) study based on qualitative interviews with homeless people emphasises that hospitalisation seldom represents a central break in the career as homeless. Solheim (2000) has pointed out that the practises of the welfare services, especially in relation to drug addicts and people with mental illness, are of great importance as a means to break the wandering between different kinds of shelters and places to stay. In addition, many other earlier studies have showed that the lack of coordination between departments and different services can contribute to the maintenance of homelessness (see for example Ulfrstad 1999, Ytrehus 2002, Taksdal et al. 2006).

Some recent studies show that many of those previously homeless people receiving services are satisfied. Among the core elements related to being satisfied with the support is the experience of being treated like ordinary people, understood and accepted (Ytrehus and Drøpping 2004). The way the services are organised has great impact on the degree of satisfaction among the users. Key elements are: one permanent person as the main contact with the client, flexibility in relation to the needs of the clients, coordination of services from different departments, an assessment of services needed directed towards the whole living situation 24 hours a day, the provision of adequate support (Hansen 2006). The study by Taksdal et al. (2006) states that part of the treatment and service delivery system seems to have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the clients and their lives and that this may produce intolerable conditions and unrealistic measures.

“The Collaboration project – Less evictions”, is a joint project in Oslo by the Enforcement Office and the municipality to prevent evictions and improve the system that handles evictions and housing policy. The project has clarified the connection between evictions and homelessness.

This is also shown in the latest survey of homelessness (Hansen et al. 2006). The project has established collaboration between private and public landlords, the social services and the Enforcement officers. The latest evaluation indicates that the follow-up support of people at risk of being evicted gives results. One of the findings is that early intervention in the eviction process weakens the probability of the eviction being carried out (Fyhn 2006, Oslo municipality 2006.).

A study of local authorities' use of temporary housing shows that all municipalities at times have a need for the use of temporary housing, and that in many cases they find it hard to achieve the goal that nobody should stay more than three months in temporary housing. One of the explanations is lack of more long-time provisions, but another explanation of the employees was that many of the persons are not ready to move into permanent houses on their own. The employees emphasize that these clients do not have the ability to live on their own. This indicates that awareness is needed about the approach that everybody should have permanent long-time housing regardless of lifestyle, drug abuse or mental health problems. The study also raises a question whether people in temporary housing get the follow-up services they need (Drøpping 2005).

Several of the research reports document the need for both housing and services. Other reports show that there is still a need for providing houses. Recent studies have pointed at the need of housing for persons with mental illnesses staying in institutions or staying under insufficient housing conditions in the local community (Hansen 2005, Dyb 2006).

3. The pathway to a permanent home

The concrete strategy to prevent and combat homelessness was presented in 2004 under the name "The pathway to finding a home" as a joint initiative by four different ministries; Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Ministry of Health and Care Services, and Ministry of Justice and Police. The strategy is presented in a booklet, which also includes information about grants and other kinds of measures, examples of how to implement the strategy, collaborators and participants. In the presentation of the strategy it was emphasised that this national strategy is a continuation of Project Homelessness, but that it is wider, includes all municipalities and has more focus at the prevention of homelessness.

Objectives and targets in the strategy

Below we describe the primary objectives and targets that are to be achieved by the end of 2007. In all the areas the targets are ambitious and has specific goals for the period. The strategy does not give specific descriptions on how these targets should be reached, but leave it up to the municipalities to work out strategies adapted to their local situation.

1. Preventing people from becoming homeless

Within this first primary objective three specific and very ambitious targets are set:

- The number of eviction petitions shall be reduced by 50 per cent, and the number of evictions by 30 per cent.

- No one shall have to spend time in temporary housing upon release from prison.
- No one shall have to seek temporary housing upon discharge from an institution.

All these targets are directed at persons in different positions in the housing market, in danger of homelessness due to transitions.

Evictions

The target on evictions addresses persons in danger of losing their home due to not paying their rent. There is a strong belief that establishing better routines and systems could reduce the numbers of eviction petitions and evictions. The strategy encourages collaboration between involved stakeholders to establish new routines. The collaboration project Fewer Evictions in Oslo was established late in 2004 and has been used as an example of how to work. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development arranged a peer review for the big cities on the basis of this project. Within the project they establish routines to take contact with the person in danger of eviction and establish follow up services to try to find a solution. This project is supported by the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs and the Norwegian State Housing Bank.

Other initiatives in this field are related to economic counselling, and The Directorate for Health and Social Affairs co-ordinates a separate initiative to strengthen the local authorities' work on financial and debt advice.

Release from prison

The other target is that no one shall have to spend time in temporary accommodation after release from prison. The survey of homelessness from 2005 show that ten percent of the homeless are under the correctional services and 8 per cent have been released from prison within the last 6 months (Hansen et al. 2006). The strategy encourages closer collaboration between local authorities and the correctional services (prisons) to prepare housing after release.

The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) and the Governments represented with the Ministry of Justice and Police in 2005 signed an agreement on housing after release from prison. They have made a standard agreement between municipalities and the Correctional Services to collaborate on establishing good and safe housing after release from prison. This includes both housing and social support. It is totally up to the municipalities and local correctional services if they want to make this kind of agreements to cooperate. In the agreement with the Government KS commit themselves to stimulate to and work for cooperation between the local partners. The Government commits them to inform their regional bodies through the National Correctional Services, stimulating cooperation, and contributing to communication between all governmental bodies involved.

In Trondheim, one of the largest cities in Norway there has been a collaboration agreement between local authorities and Trondheim prison since 2004. The experience from this collaboration formed the basis for a peer review this year.

Discharge from an institution

The third target is that no one shall have to seek temporary housing after discharge from an institution. The survey from 2005 shows that 15 per cent of the homeless stay in institutions and 16 per cent have been discharged from an institution within the last 6 months (Hansen et. al 2006). It is well known that there has been a lack of communication between the treatment institutions and the local authorities concerning discharge. The strategy encourages collaboration between local authorities and the regional health enterprises responsible for both psychiatric institutions and drug treatment institutions too. In addition, from 2006 there have been a closer attention to collaboration with child welfare services to establish secure housing for young people over the age of 18 who earlier were under the responsibility of child welfare.

No “template agreements” have been established for collaboration with the Regional health enterprises on this subject, nor with the child welfare services. Some local projects have established agreements with institutions under the regional health enterprises. For example some local housing projects for persons with a combined diagnosis of drug and mental illness have established agreements on counselling and treatment with the specialist health care services. The Norwegian State Housing Bank has stated that it will give priority to stimulating efforts within this area of the strategy this year.

2. Contribute to improve the quality of overnight shelters

The target on this area is that no one shall be offered overnight shelters without a quality agreement. As mentioned earlier, recent research has pointed out that all municipalities reports a need for temporary housing at times. It is known that the quality of many of the overnight shelters uses by the local authorities has been very poor. The Ministry of Social Affairs in 2003 published a guide to establishing quality agreements with overnight shelters. The strategy encourages the local authorities to establish quality agreements with providers of temporary housing. The quality agreements consist of standards of housing, fire security, personal resources etc.

3. Help ensure that homeless people receive offers of permanent housing without undue delay.

The target here is that no one shall stay more than three months in temporary housing.

It has been the Government’s policy during the last years to phase out the use of hostels and offer long-term housing instead. A recent study referred to earlier in this paper showed that the municipalities often found it difficult to achieve the goals that no one shall stay more than three months in temporary housing (Drøpping 2005). The last survey of homelessness shows that approximately one-fourth of the homeless stay in overnight shelters, and there is no change in the numbers from 2003. To achieve this target active involvement by the local authorities is necessary in order to provide permanent housing. The study of Drøpping (2005) also shows that this is a question of follow-up services and awareness about the right to housing for everybody. The study points out that one of the explanations of the employees to why some persons are staying longer than three months in temporary housing is that these persons are not able to live in permanent housing.

The government has decided to focus on this target this year and next year.

Grounding at central level

The different performance targets are placed within different jurisdictions and many stakeholders are involved. This is the reason for grounding the strategy in four different ministries; Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KRD), Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (AID), Ministry of Health and Care Services (HOD) and Ministry of Justice and Police (JD). The booklet on the strategy was up-dated in 2006 and the main difference as compared with 2005 is that one additional ministry is involved in the work, the Ministry of Children and Equality (BL). This is due to a long discussion on homelessness affecting children, and a need to include the child welfare institutions. In addition the increased focus on prevention made it natural to include the Ministry of Children and Equality. Another difference from 2005 and the former Government is the strengthening of the overall goal from combating to eradication of homelessness.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank is responsible for coordinating the efforts and creating a basis on which the municipalities can devise strategies adapted to their local situation. The Norwegian State Housing Bank will cooperate with the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs in this work. An in-ministerial group has been appointed to follow up the strategy.

From target groups to a more structural approach

One of the main changes from Project Homelessness is that this national strategy does not focus on specific target groups like drug addicts and persons with mental illness, but has a more overall perspective focusing on different positions at the housing market. From the targets in the strategy the positions under supervision are those staying in different institutions, in prisons or in overnight shelters and those living in danger of being evicted. The strategy is structurally oriented, as many of the targets relate to changes in structures and practices that could produce homelessness. In this way the focus on prevention is quite obvious.

Clear targets

The primary objectives and targets of the strategy are very clear and many of the targets are quantified. This of course will direct the efforts to certain areas and a concentration around these targets. On the other hand, these targets make it possible to carry out joint efforts and represent a possibility for exchanging experiences and knowledge. In addition quantified targets make it easier to assess the development and measure whether the targets are reached.

Conditions within the strategy

In short we can identify four conditions within the strategy. All of these conditions can be traced back to Project Homelessness, and in that way show that the project has formed a basis for the national strategy.

1. Everybody should have adequate and secure housing and no one excluded due to substance abuse, mental disorders, lifestyle etc.
2. Housing must be seen in connection social support.
3. Everybody should have permanent, long-term housing with a normal tenancy contract.
4. A coordination of services and efforts is essential.

Collaboration as a key word for the strategy

One seeks to achieve prevention of homelessness by developing good routines for cooperation between different players in the field: between different levels of governance, sectors within different levels and other stakeholders. An effort is made to prevent homelessness traps in the passages between institutions (hospitals, psychiatric institutions, drug addiction treatment, prison etc.) and municipalities, and homelessness traps due to lack of communication between sectors within the municipalities or lack of cooperation between different stakeholders / players (for example private or public letters, local authorities and the Enforcement Officers responsible for eviction petitions and evictions).

4. How to ensure local level implementation

The Norwegian policy to combat homelessness is to a large degree a top-down initiative. The policy is characterised by a massive national engagement from the government, grounded in Parliament, in a field that in principle is the responsibility of municipal authorities. If the targets of the strategy are to be achieved, the municipality has to follow up with local strategies to combat homelessness. There is a broad line of measures to ensure local implementation. The measures could be placed in two main categories: hard measures and soft measures. The hard measures are the legal measures, guidelines following money from central government and earmarking of transfers from the central government. The soft measures are the more stimulating and educational measures like funding and loans, networks and forums for communication. The categories are not totally distinct, but give a better overview of the measures available. The policy is funded on the soft measures and a strong reluctance to the use of laws or legal measures to force the municipalities to follow up on the strategy. The central government calls this an enabling approach; providing the municipalities with the measures necessary to do the work.

Hard measures

In the following we present the most relevant legal framework that places a responsibility on local authorities to provide housing and services for disadvantaged groups. In addition we give a brief overview of other relevant acts related to the topic. Thereafter we present measures that illustrate the possibilities of the central government to instruct the local and county actors.

Legal framework

There is no legal right to housing for Norwegian citizens. In 2004 a proposal was raised in Parliament to state a right to housing in the Constitution, but this proposal was turned down. The

closest Norway comes to legal protection against homelessness is the Social Service Act. This Act states a legal obligation for local governments to provide temporary housing for those who are unable to do so themselves (§ 4-5). In addition, the Act states that local governments shall help to provide housing for those who are not able to look after their own interests in the housing market (§ 3-4), but this is not formulated as a legal obligation in the same way as the obligation to provide temporary housing. The Social Service Act also states that local government shall provide different kinds of social services like information and guidance to prevent social problems, practical assistance, support and help for those who need it. This means that homeless or persons with housing problems are entitled to help and guidance from the local authorities and the welfare services in the municipalities is the right public body to seek. Relevant paragraphs from the Social Service Act are quoted below.

All municipalities have a housing service, most have houses owned by the municipality, but they also sublet private houses. To provide houses for the purpose of subletting to disadvantaged groups can be a problem. The Housing Cooperation Act states a legal right for municipalities, state or non-governmental organisations that have contract with a municipality, to buy up to ten per cent of the housing shares in a housing cooperative for subletting. The act also includes an antidiscrimination paragraph that prohibits conditions relating to belief, language, national or ethnic origin, way of living or orientation.

Another legal framework of importance for the municipalities housing service is the Tenancy Act. This act consists of regulations of rent and other payments, the duration of tenancy, inclusion of new members in the household, subletting and notice of termination etc. Paragraph 11 – 1 and § 11 – 2 make it possible to depart from current provisions in the Tenancy Act. This possibility to depart from current provisions concerns the letting of housing to persons with special housing needs of permanent (11-1) or temporary (11-2) character. This means that these renters have fewer rights in relation to the Tenancy Act. As a rule this concerns dwellings like care homes and services housing (11-1), housing that the municipality sublets, dwellings owned by private organisations (11-2). It is a premise that the tenants are made aware of these limitations in writing. The restrictions could concern the length of the renting period, notice and restrictions on taking new members into the household and premises like the obligation of the renter to receive support.

Act relating to Social Services etc.

Excerpt from the act relevant for the homeless.

Chapter 1. Section 1 –1. Purpose of the Act:

The purpose of the Act is a) to promote financial and social security, to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged persons, to contribute to greater equality of human worth and social status, and to prevent social problems, b) to contribute to giving individuals opportunities to live and reside independently and to achieve an active and meaningful existence in community with others.

Chapter 2. Section 2-1. Responsibility of the municipality for social services.

The municipality is responsible for carrying out those tasks according to the Act which are not assigned to the county municipality or to a central government body. Each municipality shall have a social service with a Social Welfare Administration.

Chapter 3. Section 3-4: Housing for the disadvantaged

The social service shall help to provide housing for persons who are unable to look after their own interests in the housing market, including specially adapted housing and housing offering aid and protection facilities for those who, because of age or disabilities or for other reasons, need them.

Chapter 4. Section 4-1: Information, advice and guidance.

The social service shall provide information, advice and guidance that can help to resolve or prevent social problems. If the social service is unable to provide such assistance itself, it shall as far as possible ensure that others do so.

Section 4-2: Services

Social services shall comprise

- a) practical assistance and training for those who are in special need of assistance owing to illness, disability, or age or for other reasons,
- d) places in institutions or accommodation with 24-hour caring services for those who need them owing to disability or age or for other reasons.

Section 4-3: Help for those unable to care for themselves.

Persons who are unable to care for themselves, or who are completely dependent on practical or personal help to manage their daily tasks, are entitled to help according to litra a-d of Section 4-2.

Section 4-5- Temporary accommodation

The social services are obliged to find temporary accommodation for those who are unable to do so themselves.

Guidelines from the central government

Money transferred to the local authorities from the government is accompanied by guidelines, but local initiatives and activities beyond legal obligations in the area are totally up to the local authorities. Because of this there are many other soft economic measures to stimulate the municipalities and other players to follow up on the strategy (see under soft measures). Earmarking is very seldom used, and has not been introduced in this area.

The central government has a much larger room for instructing when it comes to state bodies on the regional and local levels. These bodies play an important role, and can be used to initiate projects and stimulate to activities. The ministries and directorates use their letters of allocation to specify tasks and objectives for their bodies, for example the Norwegian State Housing Bank, the County Governors, the Police and the Enforcement Officers and the Regional Health Enterprises. For example the regional offices of the Norwegian State Housing Bank and the County Governors arrange workshops on the strategy, the regional Correctional Services can take initiatives to a cooperation with local authorities on housing after release from prison, the Police / Enforcement Officers can cooperate with local authorities to reduce eviction petitions and evictions.

Soft measures

The emphasis in the strategy is on soft measures; facilitating the exchange of experiences and knowledge, networks, research, education and further training, and in addition different kinds of economic measures. We will start by presenting an agreement entered with The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) last year and of great importance to get the municipalities involved in implementing the strategy.

Agreement with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)

In 2005 KS and the Government represented by the ministries involved signed an agreement on measures to prevent and combat homelessness. In the agreements the parties commit themselves to follow up and communicate the goals in the strategy “The pathway to a permanent home” to co-partners at local and national level. The partners shall strengthen co-operation between involved partners and levels of government. They shall facilitate for interdisciplinary, overall and coordinated support to persons who have problems to obtain dwellings and keep a stable housing situation. That means to see different kinds of support in connection, for example establishing a dwelling, different services needed and economic counselling.

KS has committed itself to make the agreement known and stimulate to local cooperation in relation to its members. The Government has committed them through the Norwegian State Housing Bank to facilitate local cooperation through establishing networks and forums, different kinds of funding and loans from the Norwegian State Housing Bank to stimulate the work, and funding from the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs to achieve goals in the strategy.

Annually, KS and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will make up status and the agreement will be a topic in the Consultation scheme¹⁸ between the central and the local government authorities.

Networks and forums for communication

Several forums have been established to ensure communication and exchange of experiences between the involved players. First, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional development arranges contact meetings for the largest cities, they have arranged two peer reviews within the strategy yearly and one political meeting. Starting this year the Norwegian State Housing Bank will take over arranging the peer reviews. Second, the regional offices of the Norwegian State Housing Bank are responsible for regional contact forums for state bodies in the region and representatives from the municipalities. The aim of these forums is to co-ordinate the state contribution to the municipalities and to get feedback from the work in the municipalities. Third, the regional offices of the Norwegian State Housing Bank in cooperation with the County Governors facilitates municipal networks. The aim of these networks is exchange of experience and ideas, mutual learning for the municipalities through comparing how they are working and what they are achieving through their efforts. Fourth, the Norwegian State Housing Bank and the County Gov-

¹⁸ The consultation scheme encompasses four meetings between KS and the State every year.

error also arrange experience conferences and seminars. The networks, forums and conferences are important measures for the exchange of ideas, for announcing and spreading new knowledge and keeping a focus on the objectives in the strategy.

Measures to secure knowledge and development

The ministries, the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs and the Norwegian State Housing Bank are all active in request and funding of research. This is a way to ensure research on the topics within the strategy. An important measure within this area is the frequently conducted surveys of homelessness by the Norwegian Building Research Institute. The survey provides information on the development of homelessness and draws attention to the subject.

Further training in Supported housing work has been established at three different colleges around the country.

Award for best homelessness initiative

This award was initiated last year and is the government's award to honour local initiatives within the strategy. In nominating initiatives the government emphasises creativity and new approaches to the work of including the homeless in the local society and combating homelessness. The award was handed out for the first time last year and drew a lot of positive attention to the municipality that was awarded the price. The thought is that this initiative will encourage the municipalities to new approaches and creativity in the way they work.

Involving non-governmental organisations

Collaboration with non-governmental organisations has been a goal from the start of Project Homelessness. The non-governmental organisations are viewed as an important supplement to the public work within service providing and housing. The user and interest organisations often represent an alternative approach, and this is viewed as valuable for developing different kinds of dwellings and services. There are many active players in the field and the government encourages collaboration with these organisations. The latest booklet on the strategy provides a long list of involved non-governmental organisations. The Government has stated that it will prolong an exception from the Act on public procurement to make it easier for municipalities to collaborate with non-governmental organisations in building, facilitating and running houses for homeless people.

Economic measures

The Directorate of Health and Social Affairs and the Norwegian State Housing Bank provide several economical measures to stimulate local activity within the strategy. There are both individual measures (loans and grants to the actual homeless person) and system-oriented measures. The Norwegian State Housing Bank has several economic means for financing housing and stimulat-

ing to activities to reach the goals within the strategy to combat homelessness, both individually oriented and at system-level, while the Directorate's funding is directed towards the system-level.

System-oriented funding

The Directorate of Health and Social Affairs allocates a grant aimed at strengthening or developing social support to homeless people or drug addicts. The municipalities can apply for this grant administered by the County Governor. One of the main premises for being allocated this subvention is the municipality's ability to indicate that the support and services are grounded in the local authorities in such a way that they will continue after the support from the state has ended. This specific grant is being evaluated at the moment, and one of the main objectives of the evaluation is to see whether the work in relation to homeless people is grounded in the local authorities in a way that makes it sustainable after the period with extra funding is over.

In addition the Directorate always will have different grants and funding relevant for the work to prevent homelessness. At present there are specific grants to stimulate mental health work in the municipalities, and grants for social work against substance abuse. From 2004 the Directorate have administered an extra subvention to municipalities to cover costs related to clients who are particularly resource demanding.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank administers a Competence grant. This is a grant aimed at stimulating development projects, such as new services within housing support or the organisation of services, projects to develop cooperation between different levels of government, for example between municipalities and correctional services (prisons), municipalities and treatment institutions etc. In the revised national budget this year the Government granted more money to this area.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank also administers a grant for the establishment of rental flats. The grant may cover up to 20 per cent of the investment costs in projects where homeless people are a target group. Together with an ordinary loan from the Norwegian State Housing Bank it is possible to achieve 100 per cent financing of these kinds of project. Municipalities, foundations and non-governmental organisations can apply for this grant.

Individually oriented funding

The Norwegian State Housing Bank allocates grants enabling people to buy a private home. This grant can be allocated to individuals to enable them to buy a home. The allocation is given after a total assessment of needs, economic situation and possibilities for other kinds of support. The Norwegian State Housing Bank also funds a start loan. Persons who have problems raising (owner's) capital to establish themselves can apply for this loan. The loan can be given either for the purpose of buying a home or for the refinancing of a home.

Finally, the Norwegian State Housing Bank provides housing allowances. This subsidy is a kind of consumer support to enable individuals to get a home and keep it. The housing allowances are meant to cover current expenses related to housing. There are several conditions that the individual has to fulfil to be entitled to housing allowances.

The municipalities administer all this individually oriented funding from the Norwegian State Housing Bank.

5. Results so far

The goals of the strategy are to be reached within the end of 2007, and will then be evaluated. There has not been any proper evaluation of the strategy so far and the impact of the strategy is hard to measure. The results we are presenting should be viewed in the perspective that Norway is in the middle of the period of the strategy.

At an individual level the survey of homelessness (Hansen et al. 2006) show that there are 5 500 homeless, and that there has not been a reduction in the number of homeless people since the national strategy was launched. At the same time the increase in the number since 2003 is quite modest, and there is still a large reduction of the number of homeless registered in the first survey in 1996. On the more positive side, there has been a reduction of the number of people with no place to stay the coming night, and a decrease in the number of persons experiencing homelessness as a long lasting continuous problem. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of persons facing acute homelessness and the number of homeless registered without any additional problems. On the target of evictions a status report from the Norwegian State Housing Bank¹⁹ show that there was a 20 per cent reduction in eviction petitions from 2004 to 2005. There was a 19 per cent reduction in evictions from 2004 to 2005. A peer review has been arranged in Oslo on the basis of the Collaboration project Fewer evictions. Seven different projects in various parts of the country have been established to prevent evictions.

A peer review was arranged on the basis of the experiences of the collaboration agreement between the municipality of Trondheim and Trondheim prison on housing after release from prison. A template has been drawn up for a collaboration agreement between the correctional services and the municipalities. Five different cooperation projects related to release from prison have been established. Reports to the Norwegian State Housing Bank indicate that in February of this year all Norwegian cities were in a process of drawing up such collaboration agreements.

As far as housing after discharge from institution is concerned there are no available results on the target, but there are local initiatives with collaboration agreements with the specialist health services.

Guidelines have been drawn up to establish quality agreements with overnight shelters. There are no available results on the development within this topic since the strategy was launched.

A recent survey concerning the use of temporary housing shows that the municipalities find it hard to attain the target that no one should stay more than three months in temporary housing (Drøpping 2005). The survey of homelessness shows that there has not been a reduction in the number of homeless persons staying in overnight shelters in the period since 2003.

¹⁹ Norwegian State Housing Bank. "The Pathway to a permanent home" Status report on the strategy 1/2006.

There is a growing awareness and activities in the municipalities. At the end of 2005, 80 municipalities have been allocated the grant from the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs to strengthen or develop social support to homeless people or drug addicts. 115 municipalities participate in municipal networks, and many more municipalities have taken part in experience conferences in their region.

6. Discussion

Both poverty and homelessness within the Norwegian society could be considered as quite marginal problems and the large national engagement might be hard to understand. Do an estimated 5 500 homeless persons justify a massive national engagement and the establishing of a system to combat homelessness? The national engagement must be understood in relation to Norway having one of the highest living and housing standards in the world, and in that perspective it could be considered unacceptable that some citizens lack adequate housing. The Government have stated the vision that everybody should have adequate and secure housing. The efforts to combat homelessness are a consequence of that responsibility.

On the basis of the strategy we will point out some characteristics or challenges that could be relevant for discussion:

- **National targets and autonomous local government**

The main challenge attached to the Norwegian strategy is that the strategy is a top down initiative. It is formulated by the central government and grounded in Parliament. This is an advantage because it commits the central government to follow up, but it could be a problem that the local governments do not have an immediate ownership to the strategy. There is a huge challenge to make municipalities follow up on the strategy, and formulate local strategies. The Norwegian political system emphasises independent local governance. This makes it a challenge to ensure implementation of central policy. The government has chosen an enabling strategy, providing various kinds of measures to enable and motivate the municipalities to do the job. The emphasis is on soft measures like economic funding, networks and forums for communication and mutual learning. The evaluation of the strategy will show whether this strategy is sufficient to create local engagement in all the municipalities.

- **Is there a need for better legal protection and hard measures?**

There is no strong legal protection against homelessness. A proposal to state a right to housing in the Constitution has been turned down by Parliament. No political parties want to force the local authorities through laws, earmarking or other hard measures to provide housing services. Does this approach give a sufficient legal protection for the individual and are the educational and stimulating measures enough to ensure eradication of homelessness? A relevant question is whether there is a need for more specific guidelines and requirements to the local governments on combating homelessness?

- **Social housing and municipal budget?**

In the continuation of the last bullet point an immediate challenge stems from the fact that the efforts in the municipalities will depend on the economic situation in the municipality. There is a greater understanding today that some groups of homeless need both housing and follow-up services, but are the municipalities willing to pay? This is especially a challenge concerning users with an extensive need for follow-up services. In this paper we have pointed to one of the results of Project Homelessness: that the employees working in close connection with the users were the ones who were most sceptical as to whether the projects would be continued. An essential question concerning this is whether the initiatives taken in the municipalities, with support from the central government, are sustainable over time independent of the transfers from the state.

- **How to ensure competence and quality in the local services?**

From research it is known that the welfare services in many places lack competence about especially the most vulnerable groups of homeless with the most chaotic lives. When Project Homelessness was started the idea of “housing stairs” was introduced: the homeless were supposed to move up a hierarchic stairway and gradually qualify for normal housing. This advice was stopped early on in the project. Project Homelessness contributed to a better understanding of right to housing of these groups as an independent welfare benefit. At the same time many of the dwellings established in recent years have institutional features. Is it possible to keep the focus on normalisation and limit the “institutionalisation” of the houses offered without issuing more specific guidelines and requirements to the municipalities? The strategy offered in “The pathway to a permanent home” consists in the exchange of competence, research and good examples by means of seminars, communication and network. The question is whether this strategy reaches all the municipalities and the right persons. Is today’s practice sufficient to ensure good quality and professional competence in the local work to combat homelessness?

- **Development of the housing market**

The last survey shows a larger group facing acute homelessness, and an increase in the number of homeless persons with no additional problems registered. This draws the attention to the development in the housing market. The Norwegian housing market is a free market, and there has been a steady increase in housing prices in recent years. In addition, several municipalities have sold many of their municipally owned houses. This makes it hard to establish oneself in the housing market for persons with a low or unstable income. Is it possible to eradicate homelessness without focussing more closely on the development in the housing market?

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