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17 OCT.

ERADICATING POVERTY THROUGH LOCAL & NATIONAL STRATEGIES

NORWAY

POVERTY WATCH 2025

EAPN

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EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK

Velferdsalliansen
EAPN Norway

Poverty Watch

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY IN NORWAY

2025

PREFACE

This report is published by Velferdsalliansen EAPN Norway. We are a non-commercial, politically independent and ideologically neutral collaborative partnership between voluntary organisations working in the field of poverty reduction. We work towards an active and inclusive welfare society where no one is left behind.

Velferdsalliansen EAPN Norway is dedicated to promoting welfare policy as its main objective. We serve as an active, visible and influential voice for our members and our target group on a local, national and international scale. A core aspect of our work is to ensure genuine user participation, both at the individual level and at the service and system level. We value the input from our members, who we bring to various arenas and gatherings in Norway, the Nordic region and Europe. This enables each individual in our member organisations to have a direct impact on the issues we work with and what we fight for.

We are affiliated with the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), which means that we collaborate with similar national networks in Europe, as well as European organisations. This gives us the opportunity to exchange knowledge, coordinate our efforts and increase our political influence. Through our participation in various working groups, we actively work to improve the lives of people living in poverty across Europe. We are also part of the Cooperation Forum against Poverty in Norway (SF), which consists of eight organisations consisting of people with experience of social and/or economic exclusion. SF meets with the political leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Inclusion three times per year.

In this report, we present the latest available statistics on poverty in Norway, as well as our assessments of the development of poverty in the country.

This report is based on statistics and reports from, among others, the Norwegian Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO) and Statistics Norway (SSB), but also on conversations with and experiences from our member organisations throughout the year.

ABSTRACT

The 2025 Poverty Watch provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of poverty in Norway over the last few years and shows how inequality, the high cost of living and a lack of coordination in social policy affect both individuals and society as a whole. The report points out that although Norway has eradicated extreme poverty, around eleven percent of the population lives below the persistent low-income threshold, and economic inequality in the population is increasing. Rising food and housing costs, especially after the pandemic, have created a new group of working poor – people who have jobs but are still unable to cover their necessary expenses. Poverty particularly affects single parents, immigrants, minimum pensioners and people with unstable employment, and is often characterised by shame and invisibility.

The consequences of poverty are far-reaching. Children in low-income families are at higher risk of health problems, lower education and social exclusion. Growing inequality further contributes to polarisation, distrust of the state and increased crime. The report emphasises that measures to combat poverty must be both economic and structural – including increased benefits, better follow-up of young people, strengthened debt counselling, targeted housing measures and after-school activities for children. Equally important is the participation of people with experience in poverty and cooperation with civil society to ensure that the measures reflect real needs.

The report concludes with a recommendation that Norway should develop a national strategy for combating poverty, in light of the EU's upcoming European Anti-Poverty Strategy. Such an action plan would bring together the current fragmented efforts, ensure a long-term perspective, fair use of resources and better coordination between the state, municipalities and civil society. Poverty reduction is highlighted not only as a matter of social justice, but also as an investment in the sustainability, trust and future welfare of our society.

Published by: Velferdsalliansen EAPN Norway
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Date of publications: 17th october 2025

www.velferdsalliansen.no

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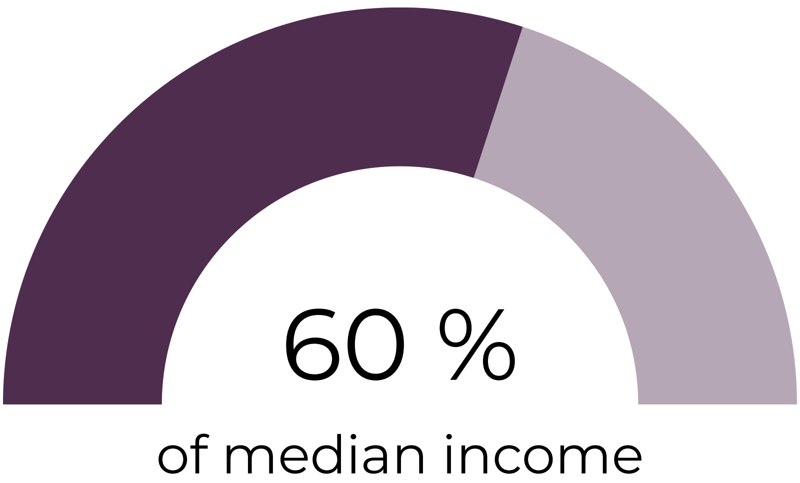
01. WHAT IS POVERTY?

Poverty is a term that is often perceived differently in various parts of the world. In Norway, the focus is often on relative poverty, while in many other countries it is still a question of meeting the most basic needs. To understand what poverty looks like in a Norwegian context, it is useful to look at the distinction between extreme poverty and relative poverty.

Extreme poverty means having so little disposable income that one cannot afford the bare necessities, such as food, clean water, shelter or hygiene products. The UN defines the threshold for extreme poverty as USD 2.15 per day; anyone below this threshold is considered to be living in extreme poverty (FN-Sambandet, 2025). This type of poverty has largely been eradicated in Norway – the country has already achieved the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 1.1 on ending extreme poverty.

When talking about poverty in more affluent countries, we are usually referring to relative poverty. Relative poverty refers to people who have enough to meet their basic needs, but whose income is still significantly lower than what is considered an acceptable standard of living in that country. There are many ways to measure relative poverty – in the EU, the threshold for relative poverty is set at 60 percent of the median income in each country. This is the threshold used by Statistics Norway (SSB) when referring to persistent low income in Norway (Hattrem, 2023). One limitation of this method of measurement is that it is based solely on income; it does not take into account household debt, inflation, or other financial burdens. For example, what happens when expenses increase faster than income? We will take a closer look at this in the next chapter.



What does poverty look like in Norway?

There is no single picture of poverty in Norway. Many people living below SSB's threshold for persistent low income experience complex and multifaceted challenges. However, some groups are more vulnerable than others:

- Single parents have only one income to live off and also have less flexibility in working life compared to families with two providers.
- Immigrants are overrepresented in poverty statistics for various reasons, such as language barriers, lack of knowledge about Norwegian working life and the welfare system, or reduced access to the labour market.
- Minimum pensioners often have incomes below SSB's low-income threshold.
- Disability pensioners receive 66 percent of their previous income, which can be very financially challenging.
- People with weak or unstable connection with the labour market generally have greater challenges in maintaining a stable income level compared to people in full-time positions.

Although some groups are overrepresented in poverty statistics, poverty in Norway is often invisible. Living in poverty in Norway is highly stigmatised, and many people therefore try to hide their situation, even from family and friends. This may be related to the perception that the welfare state's safety net functions as it should, preventing people from falling into permanent poverty and exclusion. Falling outside the system in a country with high prosperity and a strong welfare state can therefore be experienced as a personal defeat, even though the causes are usually beyond one's own control – for example, illness, unemployment, disability, increased housing costs, or even divorce.

In 2022, the Red Cross conducted a survey of how children and young people experience growing up in low-income families, and feelings of shame were a recurring theme for many. This can involve, for example, dreading going to school, quitting after-school activities because they do not want to ask their parents for money for necessary equipment, or not being able to participate in school trips (Hølaas & Karmhus, 2022). Fafo's survey of food aid services from 2023 also confirms that shame and poverty are closely intertwined. Several respondents say that they find it difficult to seek out such services, and many see this as a last resort (Fløtten et al., 2023). From other interviews with volunteers working at the help centres, we can further conclude that seeking this type of help is something many people find very shameful and uncomfortable (NRK, 2023).

The fact that many people feel ashamed due to financial difficulties also makes it difficult to highlight the experiences of people who actually live in poverty. Because few people want to come forward and talk about their situation, the debate is often dominated by figures and statistics. Although such figures are important, they rarely provide a complete picture of the daily challenges many people face when confronted with financial and social exclusion.

One person who can relate to this is Pål Hetland, who shares his story in NRK's documentary series "Den norske fattigdommen" (The Norwegian Poverty). For him, both divorce and illness have triggered financial problems, and he describes how the expectation in Norway is that people should in most cases be able to manage on their own. Even Hetland, who defies his shame and appears on national television, does not like the term 'poor', as it can be stigmatising – he prefers to use the word 'broke' instead. He explains the feeling as follows:

> *It's so easy to earn money that most people should be able to do it. So when you haven't done that, and instead have ended up on the outside, there is probably a need to explain yourself. [...] When you are one of those who don't have much money, you're a little afraid that people will perceive you as stupid or incompetent, quite simply. (NRK, 2025b).*

At the same time, Hetland emphasises the importance of openness. His wish is that more people would talk openly about their challenges, because when so few dare to share that they are struggling, many problems remain hidden and end up under the radar for most people. This is also evident in the aforementioned survey by the Red Cross, where one of the interviewees said that she was only able to put her shame behind her when she became part of a school environment characterised by openness, inclusion and diversity:

> *The fact that you could be open and talk about it, and have no shame and not be ashamed, thinking that it is shameful. I think it has helped me to let go a little, and that is what has enabled me to move on, if that makes sense. (Hølaas & Karmhus, 2022).*

02. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY IN NORWAY

In recent years, there have been both positive and worrying changes in Norway in terms of poverty, living conditions and economic inequality. According to SSB, 10.9 percent of the population lived below the low-income threshold in 2023 – that is, less than 60 percent of the median income in Norway (SSB, 2023a). In 2023, this threshold was set at NOK 285,700 after tax for a single person without children, which corresponds to approximately NOK 23,800 per month.

The proportion of children growing up in families with persistent low income has increased significantly over the last 20 years, which has been a source of concern, especially because we know that children who grow up in low-income families are at greater risk of experiencing poverty and exclusion later in life. One positive development is that the trend appears to be reversing; in recent years, there has been a decline in the proportion of children living in households with persistent low incomes (SSB, 2025b). This is probably related to a number of political measures aimed at families with children, such as increased child benefit and cheaper childcare.

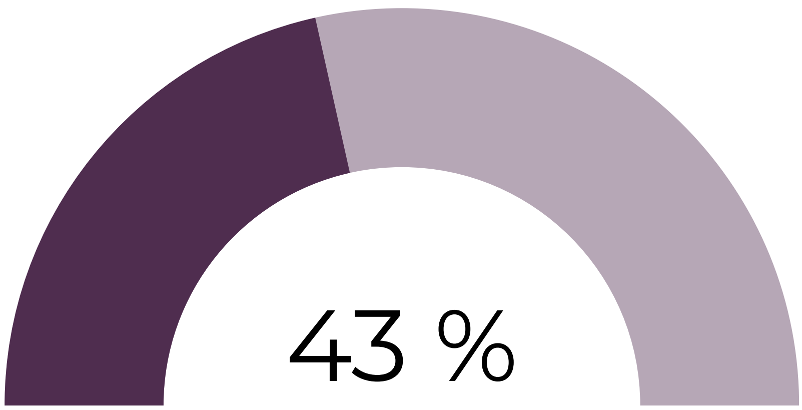
Fafo's Inequality Barometer confirms that inequality in Norway has increased over the last 20 years, particularly in terms of income and wealth (Fafo, 2024). The wealthiest households have increased their share of total wealth in Norway, while the "middle class" has shrunk. The housing market further highlights these differences, with more low-income households stuck as tenants, while those with higher incomes have greater access to the security of owning their own home – at the same time as rents are skyrocketing. In addition, lower income groups often have weaker ties to the labour market, lower rates of union membership and a poorer bargaining position. Taken together, this contributes to inequality not only growing on paper, but also being perceived as more visible in everyday life – in the housing market, leisure and consumption patterns, and through social media.

It is worth noting that the figures in Fafo's Inequality Barometer are based on data from the period 2006-2019 for income inequality and 2010-2021 for wealth inequality (Fafo, 2024). The effect of recent political measures on the Inequality Barometer, such as targeted efforts to combat family poverty, is therefore not captured in the material. Nevertheless, the analyses provide an important illustration of the development of inequality, as they reveal clear trends over time. Precisely because the findings show long-term patterns, they should be taken seriously when assessing current inequality.

The cost of living crisis is not over

Given that the consumer price index (KPI – *konsumprisindeksen*) showed that price inflation had slowed significantly towards the end of 2024, and that real wage increase was expected in the 2025 wage settlement, the consensus among commentators and economists was that the cost of living crisis was over (SSB, 2025a) (Slettholm, 2025). It is true that general inflation has calmed down, but there are still two items of expenditure that continue to rise significantly and put pressure on household budgets: food and housing. Figures from SSB show that prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 4.4 percent from June to July 2025 – an unusually sharp increase compared with previous years (SSB, 2025e). This development means that even small household budgets are under sustained pressure, as food expenditure is an unavoidable and ongoing cost. When such basic commodities increase more than the average, it particularly affects low-income families, who spend a larger proportion of their income on food.

The rental market shows a similar and even more dramatic development. Since the pandemic, rents have risen by 20 percent nationwide and 30 percent in Oslo (Eiendom Norge, 2024) (VårtOslo, 2024). This price increase is very high and is also noticeable outside the largest cities, and those who have the least are also those who are hit the hardest. In 2024, SSB determined that low-income households spend 43 percent of their monthly budget on housing expenses (SSB, 2023b). This makes it difficult for low-income families – usually young people, single people or families with children – to maintain security and stability, and contributes to increasing the differences between those who own their homes and those who rent.



of low-income households' monthly budget are spent on housing costs

This combination of high price increases for both food and housing means that economic vulnerability now affects groups that have not traditionally been considered vulnerable. In SSB's survey on living conditions, one in five respondents state that they are unable to cope with an unforeseen expense, such as an unexpected dental bill or car repair (SSB, 2025c). By comparison, as mentioned above, one in ten live below the low-income threshold. The results of the living conditions survey thus confirm that this measurement method has its limitations, as a significantly higher proportion report experiencing financial difficulties.

The Norwegian Institute for Consumer Research (SIFO) has developed a reference budget that is normally used as a benchmark for what is considered a reasonable level of consumption, based on your household composition. If you input a household consisting of an adult with an annual income of NOK 480,000 and two children aged 3 and 12, SIFO estimates a monthly consumption of NOK 25,462, of which NOK 9,780 is intended for food and drink (SIFO, 2025). An annual income of NOK 480,000 after tax places the family above the low-income threshold for this household composition, which is NOK 457,100, and gives a monthly income of approximately NOK 40,000 (SSB, 2024).

The challenge in viewing the monthly income and estimated consumption in context is that SIFO's reference budget does not include housing expenses. This means that the family has NOK 14,538 available for housing expenses if they follow SIFO's budget. In our example, we have not plotted into the calculator that the family has a car, so they will be dependent on access to public transport. In Oslo, the average rent for a two-bedroom flat is approximately NOK 22,000 per month in 2025 – an increase from just over NOK 16,000 in 2021. In Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger, the average price is also at least NOK 16,000 in 2025 (Hybel, 2025). This shows that even with an income above the low-income threshold, several factors can make it challenging for the family to make ends meet within the framework of SIFO's reference budget.

1 IN 5

CANNOT MEET AN UNFORESEEN EXPENSE

A new type of poverty

The developments presented above indicate that a new type of poverty has become prominent in Norway in recent years: the working poor. These are people who are connected to the labour market, some even in full-time positions, but who still struggle to make ends meet. 'The working poor' is a term that has long characterised the poverty debate in the United States and a number of European countries, but which has not yet been relevant in a Norwegian context, because work has largely been regarded as a guarantee of economic security. Developments in recent years, both in price inflation and in the labour market, have contributed to this can no longer be as easily determined.

Several studies and reports show, among other things, that an increasing proportion of social assistance recipients have a connection with the labour market – both full-time and part-time (Nav, 2024a) (SSB, 2025d). Some earn just enough to not be included in poverty statistics, but still have very limited financial freedom, as shown in the example above. Others earn well above the low-income threshold, but may risk economic hardship from high expenses, for example due to platform work, commuting or temporary contracts. As early as 2024, we could read in Dagsavisen about Kader Kahn, who works as a courier for the food delivery services Wolt and Foodora and earns NOK 600,000 a year – more than twice the low-income threshold. Due to a lack of job security and rights associated with platform work, he has to pay for insurance, equipment and sick pay himself, leaving him with very little disposable income (Dagsavisen, 2024).

It is often difficult to document this type of poverty, partly because of the shame and stigma associated with financial problems. Many people who can be described as working poor often have high housing costs, part-time jobs or insecure working conditions that make their finances vulnerable. This causes a lot of stress in everyday life, as unforeseen expenses can have major consequences – which in turn leaves little energy to look for a new job or negotiate wages. Situations like this emphasise that poverty is not just about a lack of income, but also about how far that income stretches in relation to expenses and obligations, and show that even work does not always protect against financial pressure.

Compared with the EU, Norway still has a relatively low proportion of the population living below the poverty line. Nevertheless, the trend in recent decades has been towards increasing disparities, with more people struggling with persistent low income. This shows that although Norway is better off than many other European countries, poverty remains a growing problem that requires political attention. The increase in inequality, particularly in the housing market and general cost of living, is exacerbating the challenges and leaving many households in a vulnerable situation despite the high level of overall national prosperity.

03. THE DANGERS OF POVERTY

The consequences of poverty vary from individual to individual, but it also entails significant costs for society, both economically and socially. It is also important to point out that the impact of poverty on individuals is linked to the high costs imposed on society. Naturally, there are more dangers associated with poverty than those discussed in this chapter, but we wish to highlight those we consider most striking in Norwegian society.

Risks for individuals

Poverty can have many, often hidden, consequences for those affected. Socio-economic exclusion, difficulties in completing education, mental health problems, illness and loneliness are some of the problems that arise in people who have experienced poverty at some point in their lives.

To get a chronological overview of the dangers of poverty, we can consider a family with children as our starting point. A child who grows up in poverty has an increased risk of developing behavioural issues and somatic health problems, in addition to language development, cognition, school performance and socio-emotional development being strongly influenced by the situation in which the child grows up. Research also shows that children with mental health problems were five times more common in low-income families than in families with average incomes (Dearing et al., 2011).

Further research presented by NTNU and UCL tells us that people who live in poverty, or have experienced it over a long period of time, have a shorter life expectancy than people with a decent income. The research shows that young people in low-income families more often struggle mentally, which affects their opportunities for further education. In addition to this, their parents often have lower than average levels of education. As the level of education among people with low income is generally lower, the opportunities to increase their income over time will also be limited, which increases the risk of 'inherited poverty'. Research from NTNU and UCL also shows that people with limited education smoke up to five times more than people with higher levels of education (Goldblatt et al., 2023).

The Public Health Report (Folkehelserapporten), published by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (Folkehelseinstituttet) (2022), also shows that depression, diabetes and cardiovascular disease are far more common among people in the lowest income quartiles. As most of the research we have on poverty indicates that living in poverty increases the chances of long-term mental and physical consequences for the individual, it is necessary to look at the ripple effects that the consequences for the individual have on the surrounding community.

The consequences of increased inequality in society

A natural consequence of poverty is that inequalities between people in society increase. In addition to this, pressure on the welfare state increases and the need for welfare schemes becomes greater. These macro consequences in turn have greater ripple effects within different societies, which manifest themselves through various phenomena.

One consequence that can result from increased inequality is increased crime. Sylo Taraku, former secretary general of NOAS and the equality, integration and diversity network, sees child poverty and inequality as a breeding ground for crime. Through various studies (Becker, 1974; Hicks & H. Hicks, 2014; SSB, 2018), Taraku (2021) shows that poverty in itself is not a trigger for increased crime, but that poverty creates increased inequality, which in turn creates greater 'gains' for criminals. Becker (1974) argues that the 'social gain' increases in line with increased inequality between groups in society, which is also confirmed by a Gallup survey with respondents from 142 countries: there is a clear correlation between income inequality and the level of crime and people's sense of insecurity (Taraku, 2021).

Another symptom that can arise as a result of increased inequality is distrust of the state and its institutions. Research by Palmisano & Sacchi (2024) on the link between distrust of the state and income inequality based on 28 European countries tells us that distrust of the state is increasing among the population in Western democracies. The benefits and policies offered by a government or state will have less credibility and impact if a large part of the population feels that these benefits and policies do not *reduce* internal inequalities.

Polarisation is another phenomenon that has influenced the development of society in a global context in recent years, and which has also gained ground in Norway. Research by Gu & Wang (2021) shows that increased inequality between those with the most and those with the least generally increases polarisation in society, which is also supported by general research on this topic. Gu & Wang (2021) also emphasise how the rapid increase in inequality we have seen in a global context has a strong impact on the political polarisation and political divide we see in individual societies and states. Political polarisation is also often seen in connection with less trust in the state and the government, and since poverty and inequality can be seen as drivers of both phenomena, it is critical that social policy address the root of the problem.

04. HOW CAN WE REDUCE POVERTY?

The most effective measures against poverty are usually targeted initiatives and support schemes aimed at particularly vulnerable groups, combined with a strong welfare state with good, universal schemes for the general population. An example of this is the aforementioned initiative aimed at families with children. The increase in child benefit in recent years has given low-income families a direct financial boost, and as mentioned above, we see that the proportion of children growing up in households with persistent low income has decreased. This underlines that universal schemes can be very important in reducing inequalities and ensuring better formative conditions for children. Equally important are services such as affordable daycare and after-school care. When families have lower childcare costs, resources are freed up for other necessary needs. At the same time, daycare and after-school programmes provide children with an inclusive community, which prevents exclusion and contributes to social equality.

An equally important key to reducing poverty and exclusion is about more than financial transfers and services, namely strengthening the voices and participation of those with experience of poverty and social exclusion. The perspectives of people experiencing poverty must be weighted and they must be given real influence, especially at the local level where the challenges are often most strongly felt in everyday life. Low-threshold schemes for participation, such as the Labour and Welfare Agency’s (Nav) *brukerutvalg* (user committees), can be an important tool, but for them to function as intended, this scheme must be significantly strengthened. When people with experience of poverty are allowed to contribute actively to the development of services and measures, it ensures that the solutions are more effective and based on actual needs rather than assumptions.

Unfortunately, evaluations of the current *brukerutvalg* scheme show that these committees often have limited influence and are in practice used more as consultative bodies than as active partners (Nyberg et al., 2021). In order to strengthen the voices of people with personal experience, these arenas should be given a clearer mandate, better resources and greater influence in decision-making processes. Experience from some municipalities shows that when representatives of people experiencing poverty are actually included early in the process, trust in Nav and in services being tailored to citizens' needs, increases (Nav, 2024b). This can help lower the threshold for seeking help, which is crucial for people who are already in a vulnerable situation.

In addition, it is crucial to involve civil society in this work to a much greater extent than is currently the case. Many small organisations, often closely linked to specific target groups, have valuable insights and experience, but are currently often overlooked in political processes. By highlighting these organisations and giving them a clear place in the cooperation between the public sector and civil society, it is possible to bring out more nuances and ensure that the measures reach those who need them most. This is not only about democracy and participation, but also about creating more targeted and effective measures against poverty.

Concrete measures

Increase benefits and raise the income threshold

In recent years, many benefits have either remained unchanged or increased less than inflation. Higher benefits and adjustments to the income threshold for receiving them will mean that more people receive real help when their expenses increase.

Make it easier to try out working life

Schemes such as work assessment allowance, disability benefit and social assistance should be designed in such a way that it is beneficial to try working, without the risk of losing all benefits. Today, the regulations are complicated, which contributes to many people being unsure of how much they can work without having their benefits reduced. The same applies to reporting hours worked while receiving benefits – the complicated system means that fewer people try to enter the labour market. In addition, the reduction often comes much later than the extra income, which can mean that the extra money has already been spent. A more predictable system could help more people to establish a lasting connection to the labour market.

Better follow-up from Nav for young people

Early and close follow-up of young people who are not in work or education can prevent temporary problems from becoming long-term. Nav's youth initiatives and cooperation with schools and health services are examples of measures that can be strengthened – but it should be emphasised that this type of initiative should not be at the expense of other vulnerable groups.

Strengthened debt counselling and debt settlement

Many low-income families struggle with debt that grows to become unmanageable. Better access to debt counselling and more flexible debt arrangements can prevent households from ending up in long-term financial difficulties.

Targeted housing measures

Measures such as start-up loans, rent-to-own models and a strengthened housing support scheme can help low-income families enter a more stable housing market. This provides a more secure framework, reduces the burden of housing costs and prevents poverty over time.

Free or affordable after-school activities for children and young people

Activity cards, sports subsidies and cultural services help children in low-income families to participate on an equal footing with others. This prevents exclusion and can break negative patterns in the long term. Free or reduced public transport for children during school holidays can also make it easier to participate in social activities, which is an important measure for promoting social inclusion.

Prevention rather than repair

Although immediate measures are extremely necessary for those who are already marginalised, it is important to maintain the preventive work that has been initiated in recent years. Measures that improve children's upbringing, for example through daycare, after-school programmes and health services, are a long-term investment in counteracting the further development of poverty and exclusion.

Cooperation with civil society

Civil society organisations often reach target groups more effectively than the public sector. Closer cooperation with and more stable financial conditions for CSOs can strengthen efforts to combat poverty and contribute to comprehensive solutions.

05. A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COMBATING POVERTY?

The EU is expected to present its first comprehensive European Anti-Poverty Strategy in 2026, which could mark an important breakthrough for a more coordinated and ambitious social policy in Europe. Although Norway, as an EEA member, is not legally obliged to comply with the strategy, developments in the EU provide incentives to consider a similar strategy at the national level.

The EU initiative raises poverty reduction higher on the European agenda and provides an important framework for social policy development. For Norway, this represents an opportunity to strengthen our own efforts through a more coordinated, targeted and rights-based approach. A nationally anchored strategy will make it easier to see measures in context, identify gaps in current efforts and ensure that both national and local authorities are moving in the same direction. The fight against poverty is not a national issue alone, but part of a broader European development – and regardless of EU membership, Norway should be an active participant in this work.

Current efforts to combat poverty in Norway

Norway does not have a single national strategy for combating poverty, but rather a cross-ministerial effort towards poverty alleviation. This effort is designed through national welfare schemes such as the social security system, educational support, labour market measures, and health and care services. Efforts to combat poverty are mainly coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Inclusion, but important schemes and instruments are also under the responsibility of other ministries and agencies. Efforts to combat poverty in Norway can therefore be said to be fragmented and sector-based. Despite having a number of schemes and measures that work well, we do not have a comprehensive, targeted effort across sectors.

As part of Norway's commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, an annual report is prepared for *Stortinget* (Parliament) that describes the status and achievement of the goals. Many of the goals have already been achieved in Norway, but there is still work to be done – especially under Goal 1, which concerns the eradication of poverty. Sub-goal 1.2 states that relative poverty should be halved by 2030, and if Norway is to achieve this goal, drastic action must be taken. Relative poverty in Norway has been on the rise in recent years, affecting approximately 10.9 percent of the population in 2023.

Goal 10, on reducing inequality within and between countries, has also been moving in the wrong direction in the Norwegian context. According to Fafo's Inequality Barometer, both the proportion of rich and poor people increased between 2006 and 2019, while the proportion in the middle income bracket has shrunk – which means that inequality in Norway is increasing (Bøckmann, 2024). The increase in inequality applies to both income and wealth inequality. In fact, a study by *The American Sociological Review* shows that Norway is one of the countries in Europe with the highest levels of inequality (Pfeffer & Waitkus, 2021). One contributing factor to the growing inequality is that the rich in Norway are getting richer; from 2021 to 2022 alone, Norway's 400 richest people increased their wealth by NOK 263 billion – approximately 22.6 billion euros (Tellefsen, 2024).

Growing inequality poses challenges for social mobility in society. Poverty is still inherited in Norway – that is, children who grow up in families with financial challenges are significantly more likely to experience financial challenges in adulthood (SSB, 2010). In recent years, the government has made a concerted effort to counteract this, with measures such as increased child benefit, cheaper childcare and free core hours in after-school care. One positive effect of this is that in the period 2021-2023, we saw a decline in the proportion of children growing up in poor families for the first time since 2011 (SSB, 2025b). Unfortunately, however, many other vulnerable groups feel that they are being deprioritised in favour of preventive measures aimed at children and young people. Although prevention is an important part of the effort to combat poverty, immediate measures aimed at those who are already struggling are just as important – but the absence of a national strategy can make it difficult to see the various challenges in context and to coordinate measures across sectors.

At the local level, there are already examples of broader and more comprehensive efforts to combat poverty. For example, the municipality of Trondheim has previously adopted a cross-sectoral action plan against poverty for 2019-2023. The municipality of Sola adopted a local action plan as early as 2016. Several municipalities also have their own local strategies aimed at children in poor families, and in Oslo, the city council has announced that a separate action plan against child poverty will be presented by the end of 2025 (Ferskaug, 2025). However, there are significant variations between municipalities in Norway – some have established solid and targeted strategies, while others have limited efforts or lack a structured approach to combating poverty. There are also significant geographical differences in poverty; in Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad, 17.9 percent of children live in households with persistent low incomes, while the national figure is 9.9 percent (NRK, 2025a). Such large differences between municipalities show that current efforts to combat poverty at the national level are insufficient – a comprehensive, nationally anchored strategy could ensure more equitable efforts and a common framework for combating poverty. Without an overarching national plan, there is a risk that efforts will remain random and dependent on local priorities and resources.

As mentioned, Norway, as an EEA member, is not obliged to follow EU standards for social policy, but the EEA Agreement nevertheless affects Norwegian social policy in several ways. The agreement allows for free movement and work across national borders, and protects EEA citizens from discrimination in Norway, for example regarding the right to certain social benefits. In addition, certain aspects of labour market policy fall under the EEA Agreement, in particular measures to prevent social dumping. In areas not covered by the EEA Agreement, the government nevertheless tends to look to the EU for a framework for major policy changes and measures.

What are the advantages of having a comprehensive national anti-poverty strategy?

The development of a national anti-poverty strategy can strengthen current efforts in several ways, by facilitating a more comprehensive, targeted and long-term approach in favour of the current fragmented approach. Compared to separate frameworks and unclear responsibilities, a unified national strategy can make the fight against poverty more effective and fair, and ensure that measures actually reach those who need them most.

Comprehensive and coordinated efforts

Anchoring the work in a common strategic direction opens up for better coordination across sectors. Today, efforts are often characterised by 'silo thinking', where health, education, work and welfare operate without sufficient coordination. A national strategy can establish a clear division of responsibilities and binding cooperation between actors.

Clear goals and priorities

At present, there are no overarching, binding targets for combating poverty at national level, apart from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. This can pose a challenge, as the Sustainable Development Goals are not adapted to the national context. A Norwegian strategy with clearly defined goals, sub-goals and indicators will strengthen social policy efforts and provide a basis for systematic follow-up.

More efficient use of resources and better results

Measures can be viewed in a broader context and evaluated collectively, rather than being implemented through scattered individual projects with a short time horizon and limited lasting effect. This increases the accuracy of policy and provides a better basis for learning and improvement.

Better link between local and national measures
A national strategy can serve as a framework in which local and regional initiatives can be anchored in a common goal structure. As part of a larger national strategy, local efforts are more likely to be allocated the necessary resources and follow-up, while the local context is still intact. This will also help to reduce geographical differences in efforts and results.

Participation of people with personal experience of social and economic exclusion
People with personal experience of poverty and exclusion should have a clear role in shaping the strategy. A national strategy can establish fixed forms for this kind of participation, for example in the form of cooperation with civil society, and strengthen democratic legitimacy in social policy. In addition, a Norwegian strategy that follows up on the EU strategy could open up for closer cooperation with other European countries, including the exchange of experiences on participation of people experiencing poverty. This will give Norway the opportunity to both learn from and contribute to the development of European social policy – and at the same time draw inspiration on how to ensure the representation of vulnerable groups in national politics.

Long-term perspective and political anchoring
A strategy adopted by *Stortinget* will ensure continuity and commitment across changes of government. It also provides a better basis for long-term funding and prevents important measures from being dropped in annual budget negotiations.

Strengthening Norway's international commitments
A unified national strategy will help Norway to better comply with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 1 on poverty eradication. At the same time, it will demonstrate a clearer alignment between Norwegian social policy and EU social policy priorities. This will strengthen both the legitimacy of Norway's efforts and Norway's role as an active participant in European cooperation.

Why should a national strategy be prioritised now?

In a time marked by global crises, war in Europe and a more unstable security situation, it may seem as if the fight against poverty must give way to other priorities. But it is precisely now, in a challenging political and economic climate, it is essential to ensure social security and prevent exclusion.

Poverty is not an isolated problem that only has repercussions for those directly affected – it has consequences at all levels of society. Long-term exclusion can lead to poor mental and physical health, lower levels of education, lower labour market participation and increased use of health services and social benefits (FHI, 2022). It also affects society's productivity and trust, both of which are essential cornerstones of a sustainable welfare state. Investing in poverty reduction is therefore not only a measure for social justice – it is also beneficial for the national economy.

War and conflict in Europe and other parts of the world are leading to increased displacement and migration. This puts pressure on both national budgets and local communities that take in refugees. At the same time, as mentioned above, we are seeing an increase in social inequality and economic vulnerability in Norway. Support for Ukraine and international solidarity are crucial, but this cannot be at the expense of our own citizens who are falling behind. With a sovereign wealth fund – Oljefondet – of nearly NOK 20,000 billion, Norway has both the resources and the opportunity to fulfil both our global and national obligations (Oljefondet, 2018). Strengthening efforts to combat poverty in Norway is not a question of resources, but of political will.

With the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, there will likely be expectations that member states develop their own national strategies. A Norwegian national strategy could strengthen Norway's legitimacy in its interaction with the EU and make it easier to participate in European initiatives, gain experience, collaborate in solutions and access relevant support schemes. At the same time, we can help shape European social policy through our own knowledge and experience.

As mentioned, several Norwegian municipalities have already developed good local action plans to combat poverty. These plans show that local expertise, creativity and commitment already exist, but also that efforts are unevenly distributed and often vulnerable to budget cuts. By bringing together and anchoring local measures in a national strategy, it is possible to create better coordination, experience sharing and financial predictability for municipalities. Such a structure will also strengthen small and medium-sized civil society organisations, which currently play a crucial role in low-threshold services and preventive work, but which often lose support in times of economic downturn – precisely when the need for them is greatest (Frivillighet Norge, 2024).

A national strategy for combating poverty, in conjunction with local strategies, will ensure that efforts to combat exclusion are not governed by random initiatives or annual budget priorities, but rather by long-term, targeted and binding frameworks.

How can cooperation with the EU contribute to establishing a national and local anti-poverty strategies in Norway?

Through the EEA Agreement and other channels for European cooperation, Norway has broad access to EU policies, programmes and networks. This also applies to social policy and the fight against poverty. With the upcoming comprehensive EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, Norway has much to gain through active participation and adaptation – both at national and local level.

Exchange of knowledge and experience

One of the most concrete contributions from EU cooperation is access to knowledge, data and experience from other countries. Through the EEA and participation in various European networks, Norway gains insight into:

- how other countries have developed and implemented their national anti-poverty strategies
- which models and measures have proven to work in practice, and which have not
- which indicators and measurement methods are used to document developments over time, particularly through sources such as Eurostat, the OECD and Eurofound

This knowledge can be used not only to inform the design of a Norwegian strategy, but also to hold national authorities accountable through comparable data and measurable progress.

In addition, through participation in European civil society networks, Norway gains access to insights from civil society organisations and people with experience of poverty and social exclusion. This strengthens the quality of the measures and anchors the policy in actual needs.

Political pressure

European organisations are increasingly emphasising holistic, rights-based approaches to poverty reduction. As the EU moves towards a common strategy to achieve its goals, political pressure is also being created for collaborators, such as Norway, to establish similar ambitions.

The European initiative further provides increased legitimacy and external motivation for the Norwegian authorities to develop a national strategy. At the same time, it can strengthen the basis for municipalities and counties to develop their own local strategies, anchored in a national framework. The EU's work can thus serve as an incentive for national action and help to raise poverty eradication higher on the political agenda in Norway.

Funding and collaborative projects

Through EEA funds, EU programmes and various collaborative projects, Norwegian actors – including municipalities, civil society and research communities – can receive support to:

- try out new measures in a smaller scale
- collaborate with European partners to develop local strategic frameworks
- establish projects with a clear foundation in holistic approaches, and draw inspiration from neighbouring countries with similar social challenges

This provides practical opportunities to develop and test the content of both national and local strategies, without everything having to be financed through ordinary state or municipal budgets.

Sustainability goals and international reporting

To ensure compliance with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, especially goals 1 and 10 on poverty and inequality, a more structured and measurable follow-up is required than is currently the case. A national strategy can make it easier to document what Norway is actually doing to reduce poverty. This will in turn ensure more effective and comprehensive reporting to the UN and EU partners. This not only strengthens the policy itself, but also Norway's international credibility and opportunities for further cooperation.

In summation

Cooperation with the EU gives Norway access to a wide range of tools – knowledge, political motivation, funding opportunities and networks – which together can aid in the development and strengthening of both national and local strategies for combating poverty. Exploiting this potential will not only be in line with European expectations, but also with Norway's own needs to reduce inequality and ensure a more inclusive society.

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