

## **HUMAN SETTLEMENT COUNTRY PROFILE**

### **NORWAY**

#### **Decision-Making**

#### **Programmes and Projects**

- A. Providing Adequate Shelter for All
- B. Improving Human Settlement Management
- C. Promoting Sustainable Land-Use Planning and Management
- D. Promoting the Integrated Provision of Environmental Infrastructure: water, sanitation, drainage and solid waste management
- E. Promoting Sustainable Energy and Transport Systems in Human Settlements
- F. Promoting Human Settlement Planning and Management in Disaster-Prone Areas
- G. Promoting Sustainable Construction Activities
- H. Promoting Human Resource Development and Capacity-Building for Human Settlement Development

#### **Status**

#### **Capacity-Building, Education, Training and Awareness-Raising**

#### **Information**

#### **Research and Technologies**

#### **Financing**

#### **Cooperation**

**Decision-making:** The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for housing and building policy and the Ministry of the Environment for land-use planning. The government is responsible for legislation and for providing financial schemes for housing. The municipalities play a central role in implementing policy at local level, while construction is done by the private sector.

Important legal instruments are the Act relating to Cooperative Housing Associations, the Act relating to Housing Cooperatives, the Owner-Tenant Act, the House Rents Act, the Act relating to the Municipal Right of Pre-emption in respect of Apartment Blocks, and the Planning and Building Act. New regulations that prohibit discrimination in the housing sector entered into force on 1 January 2004.

Under the Planning and Building Act, the Government may lay down national policy guidelines relating to planning processes at local and regional levels in Norway as a whole or in parts of the country. National policy guidelines have been laid down for coordinated land-use and transport planning. Provisions on environmental impact assessment (EIA) for certain projects were introduced into the Planning and Building Act in 1990, and regulations on EIA were also adopted. The Act and regulations were revised in 1996 to meet the requirements of European Community (EC) Directive 85/337, and were updated again in 1999. The Act and regulations are currently being revised to implement the new EU directive (2001/42/EC) on strategic environmental assessment. This will integrate environmental considerations into land use planning at local and regional levels, and in certain sectoral programmes.

The Planning and Building Act also defines the overall framework for construction activities as regards health, environment, safety and building design and architecture.

### **Programs and Projects:**

A. Providing Adequate Shelter for All: A white paper on housing policy submitted to the Storting in January 2004 (Report No. 23 (2003-2004) to the Storting) focuses on three main objectives: a well functioning housing market, adequate housing for all, and good housing quality with an emphasis on environmentally sound and universally designed houses (accessibility for all).

The white paper also describes it as an important goal to provide adequate and secure housing for disadvantaged and marginalized groups. It identifies four groups that require measures at national level: the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, elderly people and people with disabilities.

The white paper proposes a national action plan with a focus on preventive measures to combat and prevent homelessness (2005-2007). The proposal includes quantified targets. One aim is to reduce the number of applications for evictions by 30 per cent and the number of evictions carried out by 50 per cent. People who are released from prison or from treatment in institutions should be ensured permanent homes. The government also intends to ensure that all temporary accommodation meets minimum standards, and that no one needs to spend more than three months in temporary accommodation. These are ambitious aims, and will require contributions from and cooperation between a wide range of state agencies, local authorities and NGOs. The action plan will involve four ministries, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, which is responsible for coordination. The Norwegian State Housing Bank will coordinate implementation at local level.

Over the last four years the government has financed a national project to develop methods and models that can be used in combating homelessness. Norway's seven largest towns in Norway and three NGOs have participated in the project, which will be concluded at the end of 2004.

Every year, 7000 asylum seekers and refugees who have been granted a residence permit in Norway need to be settled in a municipality. In June 2003, the Storting decided to establish an introduction scheme for

asylum seekers that combines an introductory programme and an introductory benefit. The aim is to integrate newly arrived refugees into Norwegian society as quickly as possible. This includes providing housing. The aim is to ensure that no one stays more than three months in a reception centre after they have been granted a residence permit. Information on different aspects of Norwegian society, including the housing market, is a central part of the introductory programme.

Immigrants more often have difficulty in entering the housing market than ethnic Norwegians do. They more frequently live in rented accommodation and low-standard housing. This means that they do not benefit from rising housing prices in the same way as house-owners.

The proportion of elderly people in Norway is increasing rapidly, as it is in many Western countries. The number of people over 66 years of age is expected to almost double by 2030. Partly as a consequence of this, the number of disabled people is also rising. The white paper on housing policy describes universal design as the main strategy for reducing physical barriers that create problems for individual users. A Programme of Action for Universal Design started in 2002. This is a interministerial effort to improve general accessibility for people with disabilities. It is coordinated by the Ministry of the Environment and involves a total of 11 ministries. The aim of the programme is to improve the functional qualities of residential environments and infrastructure, making it possible for disabled citizens to live in ordinary residential areas. Universal design is to be implemented as an important principle from the planning phase. Only 7 per cent of the Norwegian housing stock is fully adapted to the needs of physically disabled people, but 50 per cent of the housing financed by loans from the Norwegian State Housing Bank is fully adapted. The aim is to increase this share considerably and encourage private building contractors to adopt universal design in their building projects. Through the local authorities, the Norwegian State Housing Bank also provides grants to individuals with special needs for the purpose of adapting existing houses.

The Government introduced “start loans” in 2003. These are top-up loans that can be granted in cases where either the State Housing Bank or private credit institutions provide basic loans. In special cases the Housing Bank can provide loans to cover 100 per cent of the costs. Loans are given to municipalities, which grant them to individuals who document special needs. Individuals with special needs can also be granted subsidies and housing allowances to reduce monthly housing expenditures.

B. Improving Human Settlement Management: In its white paper on housing policy, the government focuses on the State Housing Bank’s role as a driving force in the sphere of housing policy through its advisory service, methodology development, experience exchange and skills for the municipalities on improving human settlement management. A special focus is on the importance of capacity-building and innovation, and cooperation with the private sector.

C. Promoting Sustainable Land-Use Planning and Management: In 2002, the Ministry of the Environment submitted a white paper on improving the urban environment (Report No. 23 (2001-02) to the Storting), which focuses on the need to achieve sustainable urban development. Many of the ideas and principles in the white paper were formulated in the Norwegian sustainable cities programme, which was concluded in 2000. The white paper gives clear guidelines for spatial planning and co-ordinated land-use and transport planning. It also refers to the forthcoming revision of the Planning and Building Act, and the need to focus on a sustainable urban development approach, which includes protecting the cultural heritage. Finally, it states that the government will develop financial instruments to promote sustainable urban development within four key areas: environmental zones, organizational models for city management and maintenance of urban centres, urban transformation and encouraging businesses to promote walking, cycling and public transport.

D. Promoting the Integrated Provision of Environmental Infrastructure: water, sanitation, drainage, and solid-waste management: See under Freshwater and Sanitation Profiles.

E. Promoting Sustainable Energy and Transport Systems in Human Settlements: The Government gives high priority at national level to the use of more energy efficient and environmentally safe technologies in industry, transport and energy production and to environmental impact assessment.

*Energy*: A new public enterprise, Enova SF, was established in 2002. Enova SF's main mission is to contribute to environmentally sound and rational use and production of energy. Enova SF's activities are financed by a fund which receives the revenues from a levy on the distribution tariff on electricity and from ordinary grants over the state budget. Enova SF supports energy efficiency programmes, promotes energy saving and supports new projects using renewable energy sources. Projects related to energy efficiency in buildings are included in these programmes. Enova SF works with a broad network of players in all sectors of the economy, including decision-makers in commerce and industry, end-users, municipalities and other public sector and regulatory bodies.

*Transport*: Two white papers by the Ministry of Transport and Communications are relevant here (Report No. 26 (2001-02) to the Storting on public transport and Report No. 24 (2003-04) to the Storting on Norway's national transport plan for 2006-2015. Both white papers stress the need to develop and enhance sustainable urban transport systems in such a way that public transport forms the backbone of urban regions. In these regions, investments should be used to upgrade and expand the capacity of public transport systems. The white papers also point out that packages of measures should be used when possible, and that it is important to agree on a common approach to decision-making processes and parking policies. In addition, the two white papers emphasise the importance of coordinating transport policy with land-use policy, particularly as regards urban development (infill, urban transformation, etc.) and parking policy. Finally, they stress the need to establish efficient financial instruments for urban regions to reinforce sustainable urban transport.

F. Promoting Human Settlement Planning and Management in Disaster-Prone Areas: Norwegian planning and building legislation requires natural conditions, including the possibility of natural disasters, to be taken into consideration. Norway has a programme for mapping areas that are vulnerable to flooding, avalanches, rock slides and mudslides.

G. Promoting Sustainable Construction Industry Activities: The EcoBuild programme (1997-2002) was intended to increase eco-efficiency in the Norwegian construction sector. It was the industry itself that took the initiative to establish the programme in order to co-ordinate environmental activities. Funding was provided equally by the industry and the Government. The programme focused on the importance of co-operation and co-ordination between the many actors in the sector, and identification of eco-efficient and at the same time profitable solutions with special emphasis on energy efficiency, material efficiency, waste, hazardous chemicals and indoor air quality. EcoBuild participated in approximately 120 projects, drew up eco-profiles for buildings (a building classification system), a design manual for sustainable buildings, guidelines for choosing sustainable building materials, a manual on technical installations, a manual on sustainable demolition and recycling of building materials, and a national action plan for waste management in the construction industry. As a summary of the experiences in the programme period, EcoBuild carried out a case study, "Eco efficiency in the building and real estate sector", as a contribution to the OECD programme on eco-efficiency.

Each ministry presents trends, results and challenges related to the national targets for the priority areas of environmental policy in its annual budget proposal. The ministries are also required to draw up sectoral environmental action plans for their own areas of responsibility. The action plan for the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development presents the environmental problems facing the housing and

building sector, sectoral targets, and measures to improve the environmental performance of the sector. A revised plan will be presented in 2004 for the period 2005-2008. As a general rule, the sectoral targets will specify reductions in environmental pressures and describe measures to be implemented.

H. Promoting Human Resource Development and Capacity-Building for Human Settlement Development: See under 'Capacity Building, Education, Training and Awareness-Raising' below.

**Status:** There is no absolute poverty in Norway, but relative poverty is becoming an increasingly important issue. Disadvantaged families are consistently overrepresented among the ill, underachievers in the educational system and in the crime statistics. In 2001, the government adopted a plan of action to reduce poverty in Norway.

At present, there are 6200 homeless people in Norway.<sup>1</sup> The definition of homeless is quite wide. In addition to those living outdoors it includes those living in temporary accommodation such night shelters, people doubling up with others, and people in prison and institutions who will be released or end their treatment within two months and do not have permanent homes. Two-thirds of the homeless live in the three largest cities. Most homeless people also have special needs related to drug abuse or psychological problems.

In Norway, 77 per cent of all households are owner-occupiers, and 23 per cent live in rented accommodation. Housing quality is generally very high: 99 per cent of all dwellings have piped water and modern sanitation facilities, and the average floor space per inhabitant is more than 50 m<sup>2</sup>. Housing prices have increased substantially in recent years, and the rise has been greatest in the largest towns. In urban areas, it is difficult for low-income households to enter the housing market for the first time.

**Capacity-Building, Education, Training and Awareness raising:** The Norwegian State Housing Bank plays a central role in capacity building in the housing sector. Since 2000, the Bank has made a great effort to encourage municipalities to draw up social housing action plans. It has focused on how municipalities can implement housing policy as laid down in various national instruments. In this work, the Bank takes a practical approach and emphasises the importance of engaging in an extensive dialogue with all stakeholders, including NGOs and community-based organisations.

The National Office of Building Technology and Administration serves as a link between the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the building industry and the public. The office provides the authorities with better insight into matters affecting the building industry and encourages cooperation between the industry and the public sector. The office is responsible for administering and interpreting national building regulations, and has the authority to administer a centralized system of approval of designers, constructors or controllers in the building industry. The office is also responsible for providing guidance and information concerning national building regulations.

Information:

Databases for energy saving programmes and indoor climate programmes have been established. Statistics Norway has information on several housing-related topics, (<http://www.ssb.no/english/>), The Norwegian Housing Bank has a website <http://www.husbanken.no/portaler/iPortEnglish.nsf>, with statistics and information on housing issues.

The National Office of Building Technology and Administration also has a website with information in English [http://www.be.no/beweb/english/english\\_top.html](http://www.be.no/beweb/english/english_top.html)

---

<sup>1</sup> This figure is from a survey in 1996. New figures will be available in summer 2004

**Research and Technologies:** Research on housing, building and human settlements is mainly carried out by independent specialised institutes like the Norwegian Building Research Institute, the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and others. This research is partly financed through the Research Council of Norway, and partly by contributions from ministries and the construction industry. The research focuses both on technical problems and social and economic issues. In 2003 a programme on living and housing conditions was concluded and a research programme on problems of urbanization will be concluded in 2005.

**Financing:** The Norwegian State Housing Bank is the government's main instrument for implementing housing policy. The Housing Bank provides loans for the building of new dwellings with moderate standard, for renovation of existing dwellings and for urban renewal. In its white paper on housing policy, the government proposes that loans to young people and to the disadvantaged should be given priority. It also proposes that priority should be given to new housing projects adapted to the needs of elderly and handicapped and/ or planned with care for the environment. The Housing Bank also provides grants and allowances to specific groups and for specific purposes.

**Cooperation:** Norway has taken an active part in multilateral cooperation in the human settlement field since the establishment of the UN Centre on Human Settlements in 1978 (from 2002 UN-Habitat) and has in recent years been one of the main financial contributors to UN-Habitat. Norway has supported the transition from a Centre to a Programme, and gives the Habitat issues high priority. Norway increased its financial support to UN-Habitat in 2003 to USD 1.4 million (NOK 10 million), and in addition allocated USD 1.7 million (NOK 12.1 million) to the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund.

Norway has also been a member of the Cities Alliance since it was launched in 1999. Norway allocated USD 1.4 million to the Alliance in 2003. The Cities Alliance is building a coalition of cities and their development partners to meet the challenges of urbanisation in developing countries, in particular the urbanisation and feminisation of poverty. Its strategy is to address slum-upgrading and inequities in the provision of basic infrastructure and services within the framework of broadbased city development strategies.

At the European level, Norway has been involved in the activities of the ECE Committee on Human Settlements, which focuses among other things on housing and sustainable planning, particularly directed towards Central and Eastern Europe. Norway is at present participating in two expert groups on housing finance and guidelines on access to housing, and in the work of developing a housing profile for the Russian Federation. Norway is also providing some financial support to the housing activities of the Committee.

The Council of Europe has completed a three-year housing programme on access to housing for disadvantaged groups and is now starting a new programme on housing issues for its member states. Norway has contributed to the housing activities of the Council from its start on these issues in 1999 and will continue to participate in relevant housing programmes in the Council.

\* \* \*