

Summary

Our knowledge of how Norwegian municipalities organise their work within the field of the social housing policy is sparse and fragmented. What is known is mainly based upon investigations of single municipalities and/or how single instruments are administered, organised and allocated. In order to facilitate an informed discussion of how the instruments of the social housing policy could/should be integrated into an ongoing reform which merges the labour market authorities and the social security system in a broad sense into one administrative body, it is important to extend the knowledge on this topic. This report aims to fill part of the knowledge gap. The work is prepared for the Norwegian Housing Bank, who also funded the work.

The main source used here is an in-depth qualitative study of 22 municipalities, supplemented by statistical information and official documents from the municipalities. There is a striking variability in how the social housing policy is organised in Norwegian municipalities. The challenge of this report is to reveal the patterns that can be found and at the same time not underestimate the degree of variability present.

Acquisition, administration and maintenance of the physical housing stock are frequently handled by the offices of technical affairs. They do also often play a role in the choice among prospective tenants. Allotment of municipal housing is most often undertaken by special teams with representatives from different municipal bodies. The social security offices most frequently have the responsibility for services and assistance to tenants in need of that, i.e. tenants in need of assisted living arrangement. Note that this kind of support is also available for people in need who are not public tenants. In many instances the social security office also administers allocation of the governmentally funded housing allowances and start-loans (start-loans are slightly subsidised loans for first-time buyers).

We use the phrase fragmented because very few, if any, municipalities have brought together all elements of the social housing policy in one administrative unit. Still many municipalities succeed in coordinating the social housing policy quite good. This is partly achieved

through formal structures, through well developed routines or through personal contacts. Most respondents report that there is (considerable) scope for improvement of the coordination and cooperation between different municipal bodies.

Even if there seems to be some degree of success in the coordinative tasks, there are in many municipalities signs of a lack of unified leadership. The lack of leadership is most clearly seen in the terms of consistency between the strategic decisions made in the social housing policy and the experiences of those who form the operative level of the social housing policy: I.e. those who meet people in need face-to-face and who are providing the services. Some of the street-level bureaucrats feel that their knowledge are not fully utilised when the strategic decisions are done.

A major explanation of the variability of how the work in the field of social housing policy is organised between municipalities, is simply that the overall organisation of Norwegian municipalities varies considerably. However, we were not able to find any systematic differences between large and small municipalities, central areas and periphery, growth or decline etc. From our qualitative interviews we see indications that historical coincidences combined with inertia and presence of personal enthusiasm among some employee(s) as probable determinants of the present models.

One particular (probable) negative consequence of the fragmented organisation of this work is that it may lack continuity. Furthermore, much of the social housing policy is difficult, and in a fragmented organisation it can be difficult to develop and maintain the necessary competence. We also see that some municipalities are very vulnerable in the sense that a well functioning organisation relays heavily on the enthusiasm and competence of one or a few persons.