



# Children and young people report to the UN on their rights

Annex to Norway's fourth report on the Convention  
on the Rights of the Child

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JÓNA HAFDIS EINARSSON*



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Norwegian Social Research  
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The main objectives are to undertake research and development projects aimed at contributing towards a greater knowledge of social conditions and social change. The institute shall focus on subjects such as living conditions, quality of life and the life course, as well as on the services provided by the welfare state.

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# Foreword

This report was prepared by Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) on commission from the Ministry of Children and Equality. The report will be annexed to Norway's fourth report to the United Nations on the Convention on the Rights of the Child which will be forwarded in february 2008. All countries that have ratified the Convention are required to report to the UN every five years on their compliance. Norwegian authorities wished to convey to the UN children and young people's own perceptions of growing up in Norway. To this end eight municipalities were invited to obtain the views of children and young people, viz. the Alna district of Oslo, Alta, Bjugn, Kautokeino, Lillesand, Sandnes, Skedsmo and Trondheim. NOVA was asked to guide the effort of the municipalities and to present the views obtained in a comprehensive report.

Have you heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child? Do children have rights? At home? At school? In the wider society? Are you happy at school? Do you have any say in the teaching? Have you been subjected to unfair treatment or discrimination? Are good leisure activities available in your municipality? Is there anyone in your municipality you can contact if you need help with a health problem or other problems? These are some of the questions asked of children and young people.

Information was obtained from school pupils and other young people in the age range 13 to 18. Information was also obtained from younger school pupils and children at day care centres. Children of different ethnic backgrounds are represented. The municipalities participating in the project also included refugee and asylum-seeking children who were clients of the child welfare services or other targeted services. A total of 1274 children and young people gave their views.

The assignment proved a stimulating and absorbing one for NOVA. In addition to eliciting children's and young people's views on the way their rights are put into practice, the survey provided insight into the municipalities' endeavour to promote children's and young people's participation.

We would like to thank the commissioner of our assignment, the Ministry of Children and Equality, our partners at the municipal level and children and young people who have shared their experiences with us. We

would also like to thank colleagues at NOVA for their important contributions.

We trust that the experiences contained in this report will prove useful in the continuing effort to promote children's and young people's rights.

Mona Sandbæk and Jóna Hafdis Einarsson

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# 1 Background and framework for the project

Norway is to deliver its fourth report on compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child in spring 2008. The Ministry of Children and Equality wanted Norway's report to the UN, this time as previously, to include the voices of children and young people (see Norway's third report to the UN of 2003 and discussion of the project 'Life under 18'). The job of obtaining the views of children and young people was anchored at the local level in as much as the municipal sector is responsible for translating the Convention into practical action. Eight municipalities were invited to take part: the district of Alna in Oslo, Alta, Bjugn, Kautokeino, Lillesand, Sandnes, Skedsmo and Trondheim. NOVA (Norwegian Social Research) was asked to act as adviser to the municipalities and to present the results of the latter's surveys in a joint report.

The report was to contain children's and young people's views on what it is like growing up in Norway, seen in relation to central articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. An aim was to ensure that the process should help to further develop municipalities' ability to obtain and act on children's and young people's views.

## Implementation of children's rights in Norway

The decision to anchor the project at the local level reflects the municipalities' key role in realising the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Implementation of the majority of rights in the Convention depends in effect on local-level initiatives and priorities. It is in the local sphere that the intentions in regard to children's political rights and co-determination in democratic processes meet the principle of local self-government. Children and young people's concrete political rights are largely formulated through the interplay between international conventions and local-level decisions (Lidén 2004). In order to understand how far children and young people are aware of their rights and see that they work in practice, it helps to get as close as possible to their everyday arenas.

At least two main sources impel the implementation of children and young people's rights in general and their participation in particular. One



such source is Norway's ratification and subsequent incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; work on transposing the Convention started shortly after ratification in 1991, and new initiatives were launched once Norway incorporated the Convention into Norwegian law in 2003. The other main source is the effort to strengthen participation and local democracy. Municipal activity in this area is wide-ranging and multifaceted (Ministry of Children and Equality 2006a, 2007). Children's and young people's right of participation is enshrined in several statutes. A number of bodies have been established to safeguard children's and young people's participation and influence at the local level. For example, three out of four municipalities have youth councils (Lidén 2003, Vestel et al. 2003, Ministry of Children and Equality 2006b).

The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (2005) points out that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is formulated in such a way that knowing when its provisions are met is no simple matter. While this poses challenges to municipalities, it also gives them ample leeway to decide for themselves how the obligations of the Convention are to be fulfilled.

## Organisation of the work

Since the participating municipalities have approached the question of children's and young people's participation in various ways, they were given much freedom to shape the project as they considered appropriate. The Ministry of Children and Equality wanted the project to include specific core themes and target groups, and the comments of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Norwegian Children and Youth Council on Norway's previous report were also drawn on in shaping the project (Ministry of Children and Equality 2005, Norwegian Children and Youth Council 2004).

In spring 2007 three meetings were held between the Ministry of Children and Equality, the participating municipalities and NOVA. In addition to these joint meetings, NOVA provided the municipalities with individual guidance as and when required. The municipalities brought the input from the joint meetings back to children and young people and other partners at the local level where the work was carried out. In other words the dialogue within the municipalities and between the various actors continued between the meetings.

## *Themes*

A common template was drawn up for themes and questions. The themes were: awareness of the Convention, schooling, leisure and health/welfare. Questions touching on ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and gender equality were to be included in these themes as far as possible, but could also be formulated on a separate basis. In addition the municipalities also selected themes themselves, related for example to specific focal areas at the local level on which they desired feedback. Children and young people were also given the opportunity to add their own themes to the agenda.

## *Target group*

All the municipalities involved obtained information from schoolchildren in the age range 13 to 18. In addition, several included younger schoolchildren and children attending day care centres. Emphasis was given to capturing the broad mass of school pupils, both sexes and children of different ethnic backgrounds. Sami children were also included in the survey. The municipalities endeavoured to speak to vulnerable groups of children and young people, for example children with disabilities, children in asylum reception centres and children who were clients of the child welfare services.

## *Method*

Two municipalities opted for qualitative interviews with various groups of informants. Six municipalities carried out questionnaire surveys. In addition to set answer options, the questionnaires contained open boxes for pupils' comments. Three out of six municipalities employed qualitative interviews in addition to questionnaires.

## *Data collection and processing*

It should be stressed that the samples of children and young people were not drawn in such a way as to ensure representativity or to permit the results to be generalised, either to the municipality concerned or to the country as a whole.

Since the municipalities had a large measure of freedom in designing their projects, achieving a mutually agreed summary posed certain problems. Where possible the findings are presented in common tables.

NOVA's analyses are based on the municipalities' reports. See further references in the bibliography.

#### ASSEMBLED OVERVIEW OF NUMBERS OF INFORMANTS

	Girls	Boys	Upper secon-dary schools	Lower secon- dary schools	Primary schools	Day care centres	No. of informants in the muni- pality
<b>Alna</b>	6	10	5	11			16
<b>Alta</b>	41	18	19	39	1		59
<b>Bjugn</b>	210	155	159	99	107		365
<b>Kautokeino</b>	28	32		60			60
<b>Lillesand</b>	32	23	2	53			55
<b>Sandnes</b>	39	43	17	23	12	30	82
<b>Skedsmo</b>	188	180		42	326		368
<b>Trondheim</b>	157	112	106	87	76		269
	<b>701</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1274</b>

A total of 1274 children and young people participated in the survey, 701 girls and 573 boys. 159 had a minority background, there were 60 Sami children from Alta and Kautokeino and 1056 ethnic Norwegians. 1139 answered the questionnaires, while 135 attended the qualitative interviews. While a large majority was recruited through schools, 32 children and young people were recruited with a basis in the following criteria:

Children and young people on assistance measures from child welfare services	2 (Alta), 3 (Lillesand)
Children and young people with mental illnesses:	5 (Sandnes)
Children with physical and mental disabilities:	5 (Trondheim)
Unaccompanied minors:	7 (Sandnes)
Children at asylum reception centres	6 (Sandnes)
Children in the care of the refugee service:	4 (Alta)

## Overview of the participating municipalities

Alna district of Oslo, Alta, Bjugn, Kautokeino, Lillesand, Sandnes, Skedsmo and Trondheim.



## 2 Awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

### *Article 42 of the Convention*

States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

This chapter presents children's and young people's knowledge of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The respondents were asked whether they had heard of the Convention and, if so, through what channel. Some were also asked what the Convention was about and whether they thought it was important to them. A further question was whether they believed they enjoyed rights in various everyday arenas such as home, school, leisure activities and in the wider society.

Table 1: Have you heard of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child? Answers in per cent

	<b>Alta</b>	<b>Bjugn</b>	<b>Kautokeino</b>	<b>Lillesand</b>	<b>Skedsmo</b>	<b>Trondheim</b>
Yes	62.3	59.5	61.6	43.1	67.3	48.1
No	37.7	18.6	38.3	33.3	12.8	28.6
Don't know	-----	21.9	-----	23.5	19.9	23.2
Total and N	100.0 (n= 53)	100.0 (n= 365)	99.9 (n= 60)	99.9 (n= 51)	100.0 (n=367)	99.9 (n=241)

Alta and Kautokeino used the answer options 'very good', 'good', 'some' and 'little'. The first three are interpreted as 'yes', the last as 'no'.

It will be seen from Table 1 that about half of the children had heard of the Convention. There was some variation between the municipalities, from 43 to 67 per cent. There were also differences within the individual municipality. The oldest pupils might perhaps be expected to be most aware of the Convention, but this was not necessarily the case. In Bjugn children at the primary school (70 per cent) had the greatest, and children at the lower secondary school (45 per cent) the least, awareness of the Convention, while upper secondary school pupils (61 per cent) were between the two. In Skedsmo, true enough, it was the 16-year olds who were best acquainted with the Convention, at close to 86 per cent, while 70 per cent of the 11 year olds, but only 56 per cent of the 13 year olds, reported being aware of the Convention.

In Sandnes, one of the two municipalities employing qualitative interviews, a minority (30 of 82) knew of the Convention. 15 to 17 year olds were more aware of the Convention than younger pupils. Up to lower secondary school age, knowledge of the Convention was confined to a minority. Few of the youngsters from the asylum reception centre knew of the Convention.

In Alna, the other municipality to utilise qualitative interviews, a preponderance of children had a minority background. About half of the participants had heard of the Convention, two of whom knew only a little about it. The Ministry of Children and Equality had issued a short version of the Convention in poster form. Two of the girls remembered seeing the poster and one said: "*Oh yes, that one! It's hanging in the classroom.*" The children at the day care centre in Sandnes also needed to be reminded of the poster on the wall. It was then that they recalled what it said, that "*all children are entitled to have fun, to play, to have a place to live and to be fed.*"

The Convention's subject matter was unknown to most of the six youngsters from the refugee and child welfare services who were interviewed in Alta. When the interviewers quoted the short version of the Convention in poster form the youngsters recognised these rights as rights which they already possessed but which were not enjoyed by many children in other parts of the world. However, it turned out in the course of the conversation that these rights, which were apparently already present in Norway, were indeed relevant to these particular youngsters.

Some municipalities asked the pupils where they had heard about the Convention. The school emerged as the most important source of information in all municipalities, followed by television and the internet. Some had also heard about it at home. One of the unaccompanied minor refugees said the police were their source.

## What is the Convention about?<sup>1</sup>

One question asked what the children thought the Convention was about. Many mentioned children's right to material items such as the right to a

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<sup>1</sup> The answers in this section are based on the qualitative interviews and on the open boxes in the questionnaires given to pupils in lower secondary school and upper secondary school which they were asked to fill in with text on what the Convention was about.

home and to go to school, although more abstract factors such as the right to safety and to be loved were also highlighted. Several mentioned children's right to voice their views. We have assembled some of the answers under the following headings: 'children's rights', 'protection of children', 'equality and fairness', 'children in other parts of the world' and 'the best interests of the child'.

### Children's rights

- *I think it says that children in Norway should be happy at school and at home.*
- *I think it's about finding out what it's like for children in Norway, and it's about children's rights.*
- *That children should have all rights like going to school, having a home, being fed etc.*
- *I think it says that children should be happy and not afraid, but feel safe.*
- *Children's rights, that all children are entitled to decide and to be fed, go to school and to be loved.*
- *It's about children having rights to have a say and to have an opinion without being punished.*
- *It's about rules for children. It's sort of a book of the rights of children.*
- *I think it's about the rights of children in countries that are members of the UN.*

These quotes show that while children linked the Convention to their own situation, several viewed it in a general perspective as something that applies to all children.

The quotes in the following box show that the respondents were aware that many children and young people are in a difficult life situation and need protection and help.

### Protection of children

- *It's about helping children who are suffering, have no food, nowhere to live and no family.*
- *How children should live and that grown-ups shouldn't do anything to hurt them.*
- *I think it's about helping orphaned children and abused children to have a happy family life.*
- *The State should help children who need help as well as some grown-ups.*

## Equality and fairness

- *It's about getting equality between children.*
- *I think it's about children's rights and that they can speak their mind. All children must be equally happy and be treated equally fairly. If there's anything unfair, children can put their foot down.*
- *Children should be seen and heard. They should be able to speak their mind. Children should have the same rights as adults.*

As is evident from the above statements, what was foremost in their minds was equality and fairness between children. The final quote suggests that some also had equal rights between adults and children in mind.

## About children in other parts of the world

- *It's about helping children who are having a tough time or are in a war.*
- *Helping children who are suffering, are without food and somewhere to live and have no family.*
- *I think the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is about children in need of help, food and clothing.*
- *Making a better day for all children in the world. Giving an education to children who have no opportunities, quite simply making the world a better place for children.*
- *I think it's about making sure that children (young people) should also have a say in the big issues affecting several countries.*

In Trondheim several children with a minority language background gave fuller answers to this question. They were personally acquainted with children in other countries who lacked the opportunities available to children in Norway. They tended not to view children's rights as a matter of course. One pupil answered: *"I don't think children in Norway realise how fortunate we really are."*

Some answers showed that children had widely differing perceptions of what the Convention was about. While one asserted that *"Children have the right to do as they wish"*, other statements were completely to the contrary: *"Just because we have a good life doesn't mean that we can demand everything we want. We also have obligations."* Although many children and young people had little awareness of the Convention, others expressed themselves in very precise terms. One pupil wrote:

*The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the law for children, it applies in all countries that have approved it. There are rules saying which ways children should be happy. There is an international law that ensures that all children have equal rights. It says that all children should thrive.*



## The best interests of the child

In the municipality of Bjugn and the Alna district of Oslo the youngsters were asked if they were aware of the phrase "the best interests of the child". Some of their answers are given below:

- *That children should have as good a life as possible and should come first.*
- *Decisions taken should be in the best interest of the child.*
- *Parents who stick together for the sake of their children.*
- *That grown-ups decide in the children's best interests, the parents are right.*
- *Used by persons who think they know what the children's best interests are.*
- *That we should have as good a life as possible, that we should prosper.*
- *If there is something in the news about parents who have done something to their children and they turn round and say they did it for the child's own good. It's used when it shouldn't be used.*
- *I'm grateful, every single day, for having a roof over my head.*

In both municipalities young people linked the phrase to the need to focus on, and give priority to, the interests of children and young people. Some statements also captured conflicts linked to the question of who effectively decides what the best interests of the child are. In Alna the youngsters drew on their own experiences, showing their appreciation of their situation through statements such as "*We have the best there is*", as an aside to their perception that "the best interests of the child" were taken care of in their everyday life.

## Significance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The pupils were asked whether they felt the Convention was important to them. This question was asked in both the questionnaire and the qualitative interviews.

Table 2. Is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child important to you? Answers in per cent.

	Bjugn	Lillesand	Skedsmo	Trondheim
Yes	48.5	38.5	67.9	40.0
No	9.2	19.2	0.3	8.8
Don't know	42.3	42.3	31.9	51.3
Total and N	100.0 (n=357)	100.0 (n=52)	100.1 (n=364)	100.1 (n=240)

Skedsmo used the following answer options: 'Agree completely', 'Don't know', 'Disagree completely'. The answers are adapted to the above table. This question was not asked in Alta and Kautokeino.

The table shows that just under half of the children felt that the Convention was important to them. While Skedsmo scored somewhat higher on the proportion of youngsters who confirmed that the Convention was important to them, this may be due to the way the question was worded: "I believe that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is important to me", while the three other municipalities asked a more open-ended question, shown in the heading of Table 2.

The reports from Bjugn and Skedsmo showed some concordance between the number who knew about the Convention and the number who considered it important to them. It appeared that the older children felt that the Convention was less important. The reason may be that they received less teaching on the Convention, but also that they regarded it as less important simply because they had grown older.

While all respondents participating in the qualitative interviews in Sandnes believed that the Convention was important to them, a general feature of their replies was that the Convention was more important for children and young people in other countries. They cited poverty, starvation, inadequate schooling, child labour, lack of food and housing, and "*the fact that children receive little love if they have no parents*", as problems faced by children in other countries.

In the qualitative interviews in the Alna district of Oslo the participants in the five groups answered *consistently yes* to the question, although here too several of them intimated that the Convention was more important for children in other countries than in Norway. At the same time some thought it was important to their own situation. Others intimated that more problems had been faced in Norway previously, and that problems still existed: "*Everything isn't idyllic the whole time*".

The project group in Trondheim believed that many respondents were uncertain about the subject matter of the Convention and its significance because their lives were so safe and secure. However, the Convention was said to be a kind of guarantee of their rights. Some also pointed out that the Convention's potential to secure the rights of other children and give them help was important for them personally:

*I feel sorry for children who are not fed and need help; that's why I feel the Convention is important to me!*

The following quotes show what aspects the respondents thought were important; these approximated closely to notions of what the Convention

was about. While some linked the Convention's significance to their own situation, a greater number linked it to the situation of other children and young people. Here too, the answers showed that the circumstances of children and young people in other parts of the world were very important to their counterparts in Norway:

- *It's good for me to know what rights I have and what rights I don't have.*
- *Yes, it's important to me that children are O.K. It makes me happy.*
- *It's important for children and young people to know what's right and wrong.*
- *Because you have to think about other people too.*
- *Perhaps because it's important for me that all other kids in the world are doing alright (even if some aren't). I'm very happy at home.*
- *You help kids grow up and help them with rights because you give them an education and that can help us go far.*
- *Children should be able to give their opinion without being shouted at or feeling threatened.*

## Rights in practice

Children and young people were asked if they had the right to give their views and to be heard or the right to make a decision in matters affecting them at home, at school, in the wider society and in their leisure time. There are several reasons why the answers should be interpreted with caution. It may not be clear whether the children's answers refer to formal or real rights. The municipalities varied somewhat in the way they formulated questions and answer categories. For example, some used the term 'rights' while others use the phrase 'right to decide'. Hence the content of the table does not lend itself to comparing results between municipalities, but it does show interesting trends when it comes to children's experience of rights in the various arenas.

Table 3. To what extent do you have the right to give your opinion and be heard / do you have the right to make a decision in matters affecting you personally at home, at school, in the wider society and in your leisure time? Percentage answering 'to a large extent'.

	<b>Bjugn</b>	<b>Lillesand</b>	<b>Skedsmo</b>	<b>Trondheim</b>
At home	86.3 (255)	78.9 (52)	85.6 (362)	84.7 (241)
At school	88.2 (255)	50.0 (52)	76.3 (360)	68.5 (241)
In your leisure time/in the neighbourhood	---	53.8 (52)	71.2 (361)	94.2 (241)
In the municipality/society	83.4 (253)	94.2 (51)	70.9 (361)	63.8 (240)

*Bjugn* and *Skedsmo* used the answer options 'agree completely/to some extent' and 'disagree completely/to some extent' to the statement: children have the right to have a say and to be heard. The figures show the proportion that was in complete agreement. *Lillesand* and *Trondheim* used a graduated scale on which pupils could tick off from 1 to 6. The table shows those who ticked off the three highest alternatives, 4 to 6. *Skedsmo* asked about rights in the neighbourhood and the municipality, while the other municipalities asked about rights in leisure time and in the wider society.

The answers show that a majority believed they had quite a large say in decision-making, although, here too, there were variations between the municipalities. In general the children felt they had a larger say at home and in their spare time than at school and in the wider society. Even so the share who felt they had some influence in the wider society was high, ranging from about 64 to 94 per cent.

In Alta and Kautokeino the question of rights was worded in more general terms: "I have the right to be involved in making decisions in all matters affecting me personally". In Alta 54 per cent were in complete agreement with this statement, compared with 78 per cent in Kautokeino.

The report from Skedsmo showed both gender and age differences. The girls confirmed their own participation in decision-making in all arenas at between 8 and 15 percentage points higher than the boys. In this municipality the 13 year olds were the ones who disagreed most strongly with the notion that they had rights at home, at school and in the neighbourhood. A possible explanation is that 13 year olds are in an intermediate position between childhood and youth, indicating that many factors need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the answers given. Where participation in decision-making is concerned, the 16 year olds were the most positive.

Pupils at the upper secondary school in Bjugn were asked to elaborate on what aspects of their lives they were free to decide for themselves. Some recurring examples are given below.

- *At home:* Decisions concerning the pupils themselves, their opinions and choices, spare time and hobbies, who they would live with in the event of divorce (from age 12 onwards), right to clothes, food and care, education, maintenance, privacy, freedom from ill-treatment and physical abuse.
- *At school:* Right to education, books and school materials at primary school, pupils' council, good teaching, safe environment, free education, good indoor climate, freedom from bullying, lunch breaks and other breaks, mother tongue tuition, right to be heard. Respectful treatment from teachers and fellow pupils, upper secondary education.
- *In the wider society:* Minimum age of consent for sexual activity, minimum age for voting, driving a motor vehicle, buying alcohol and tobacco, reaching majority and deciding one's own affairs. Being treated with respect regardless of one's culture, religion, disability or sexual orientation. The right to free schooling, school transport, medical services, personal opinions, right to personal safety, to be heard, freedom of expression. The right to express oneself and develop within the bounds of the law.

The same examples were mentioned in the qualitative interviews in Sandnes and the Alna district of Oslo. The respondents confirmed that their rights were most clear-cut at home and in their leisure time, albeit subject to certain limits: *"So long as what we do is good and not bad for us, we can do as we please."*

Some boys and girls with an immigrant background pointed to areas in which children and young people do not have the right to decide, and to differences between Norway and other countries:

*Not all children in Norway can decide which parent to live with when the parents divorce. As a rule the mother is given custody of the child, even if the child would rather live with the father. I think it's mainly on this front that children are not given a hearing.*

*No – there are many countries where it's the parents who decide.*

*There's more freedom in Norway.*

*Children at the day care centre* in Sandnes reckoned it was the grown-ups who decided at home and at the day care centre alike. They said, however, that they had the right to decide over their toys, over their room (if they were not sharing with siblings) and that they decided over themselves. Some said they

were not allowed to decide anything, while others said they were allowed to decide whether to play football or jump on the trampoline and that they decided over their desk. *"I decide over my body, because mummy says so."*

In the group comprising *unaccompanied minor refugees* one respondent said that children had the right to decide over their leisure time, but that having parents to guide them was important. According to this respondent it was old people and the politicians who decided in society.

The *four refugee children* who were interviewed in Alta said they knew little of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They appeared to have a smaller say at home than Norwegian children, although most of them could talk to their mother if they were in difficulty. Only one of the children reported having a say in decisions at school. In Alta the project group comments that it may be more difficult for immigrant children to assert their opinions on account of language problems, lack of knowledge in some school subjects and unfamiliarity with Norwegian codes to be observed to gain acceptance in a class where the pupils already know one another. Respect for the teacher is often high. Half of the children said they had no-one to talk to if difficulties were encountered at school.

In the same way *young clients of the child welfare service* felt they had few rights at home or at school. However, they did feel their voice was heard in their dealings with the child welfare service. These youngsters were highly preoccupied with good networks, with having friends and someone close to confide in. Public health nurses and teachers were important figures provided the youngsters had confidence in them.

## Respondents' perception of their situation compared with other children

Some municipalities asked the children and young people how well they were doing compared with other children. The answers showed that from a good 70 per cent to about 80 per cent believed they their situation was equal to or better than that of other children in Norway. A further question was "What problems are faced by children and young people in other parts of the world that are not faced by children in Norway?" The answers showed that children and young people are highly preoccupied with the situation of children and young people in other parts of the world. Several highlighted the lack of food, clean water, education, money, technology and health facilities. Some

answered war, orphanhood, child labour and violence. In one group the boys talked all at once, listing lack of education, clothing, food and money.

*Children in poor countries don't get what they need. They can't do everything they want to do - because no one has money - and things like that.*

*And rules! There are different rules!*

*Many people are affected by poverty and it's as much as they can do to get food and clean water, let alone get an education. There aren't even enough schools for everyone. In Norway some children have to cope with mental problems, in other countries children are struggling with deficiency diseases. Another thing we don't have in Norway is child labour.*

*The problem from many young people is survival. For example in Iraq, the Middle East and India too. They're grateful just to wake up the next day, alive, while for us to be grateful means having to have those Diesel jeans costing 2500 kroner (laughs) and a widescreen TV in our bedroom, while they're grateful waking up the next day.*

Some pointed to problems in Norway:

*There are children in Norway facing the same problems as people in other parts of the world ... not all children in Norway have a lot of money and care and attention.*

This question elicited interest. The youngsters reflected on the large number of children in Norway whose parents are divorced. Alcohol and drug problems were also mentioned.

Although the main conclusion drawn from the groups in Sandnes and the other municipalities was that that children and young people had a good life in Norway, a clear exception is worth noting: Young people from asylum reception centres took a very poor view of their situation. They experienced their everyday life as completely different from that of Norwegian young people, and believed no explanation was needed: *"Anyone can see the differences at once."* They also described young people living in asylum reception centres as poor.

There is reason to support the conclusion of the Alna report that young people are, in their own way, aware of differences in living conditions in the world, in terms of material goods as well as differing laws and rules.

### 3 Children's well-being and co-determination at school

*Article 12 paragraph 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

*Article 29 paragraphs 1 and 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
- (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

### Children and young people's well-being at school

As mentioned in the first chapter, the aim of this survey was to allow children and young people to communicate to the UN what it is like growing up in Norway. School is an important aspect of children's everyday life, and the participants in the survey were asked several questions on whether they were happy at school.

Table 4. are you happy at school? Answers stated as per cent

	<b>Alta</b>	<b>Bjugn</b>	<b>Kautokeino</b>	<b>Lillesand</b>	<b>Skedsmo</b>	<b>Trondheim</b>
Very happy	-----	-----	-----	15.7	79.3	43.2
Happy	34.6	73.7	25.4	47.1	13.5	41.9
A bit happy	50.0	20.0	40.7	13.7	5.5	10.8
Unhappy	13.5	4.4	25.4	11.8	-----	2.5
Very unhappy	1.9	1.9	8.5	11.8	1.7	1.7
Total and N	100.0 (n=52)	100.0 (n=365)	100.0 (=59)	100.1 (n=51)	100.0 (n=363)	100.1 (n=241)

*Alta* and *Kautokeino* had worded the question as a statement: 'I am happy in class.' They used the following answer options: 'agree completely', 'agree to some extent', 'disagree completely' and 'disagree to some extent'. 'Agree completely' is defined as 'happy', 'agree to some extent' as 'a bit happy', 'disagree to some extent' as 'unhappy' and 'disagree completely' as 'very unhappy'. *Bjugn* used the following answer options: 'happy', 'a bit happy', 'unhappy' and 'very unhappy'. These three municipalities did not include 'very happy' as an option.

It should be noted that the answers must be interpreted with caution across the municipalities since they employed somewhat differing questions and answer categories which needed to be adapted to the table. *Alta* and *Kautokeino* asked for example whether the children were happy in class, requiring a slightly different answer than the question of whether they were happy at school, which was the wording employed by the other municipalities.



It will be seen that a large majority of the pupils were happy at school. From just under 63 per cent to 93 per cent ticked the most positive options, which differed somewhat between the municipalities. In Bjugn, Lillesand and Trondheim the pupils were asked a similar question about whether they got on well with the pupils in their group/class. While there were no major differences compared with the results obtained on the question of well-being at school, the pupils' well-being in class was a few percentage points higher than well-being at school. Pupils' well-being at break times was a further few percentage points higher than well-being in class. This was true of all municipalities that answered the question on well-being at school. Pupils who were very happy or happy in the breaks varied from 64 per cent in Kautokeino and 72 per cent in Alta to 80 per cent in Lillesand, 86 per cent in Skedsmo and over 90 per cent in Bjugn and Trondheim.<sup>2</sup>

In Alta and Kautokeino the pupils were asked whether the school was a good, safe setting for everyone attending it. About 70 per cent said they agreed "completely/to some extent". To the question whether they had friends to spend time with at school, 98 per cent in Alta and 96 per cent in Kautokeino said they agreed 'completely/to some extent'. Hence in both municipalities pupils who said they had friends to spend time with far outnumbered those who regarded the school as entirely safe. Alta highlighted as positive the fact that almost 80 per cent said they agreed "completely/to some extent" that they had someone at school to speak to when the need arose. The figure for Kautokeino was 56 per cent.

The same tendency was in evidence in Skedsmo municipality. 86 per cent stated that they had many friends at school. Even so, more than 30 per cent dreaded to some extent going to school. A similar number confirmed that there were some pupils at school who never left them in peace. Friends offered in other words limited protection.

There is reason to emphasize that the pupils are generally very happy at school, with the breaks being the high point of the day. In Bjugn this tendency was evident in all grades. About 95 per cent in primary and lower secondary school and 92 per cent at upper secondary school were happy. In Skedsmo the youngest appeared to be somewhat more positive disposed to school than older pupils.

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<sup>2</sup> Bjugn used the following answer options: 'Agree completely', 'agree to some extent', 'disagree to some extent' and 'disagree completely'. Here we define 'agree completely' as 'very happy', 'agree to some extent' as 'a bit happy', 'disagree to some extent' as 'unhappy' and 'disagree completely' as 'disagree completely'.

Although the figures give an overwhelming impression that children and young people are very happy at school, the number who took a different view should not be overlooked. There were differences between schools, and boys were somewhat less happy than girls. Children of parents born outside Norway tended more often to answer affirmatively when asked whether they had experienced circumstances that impaired their sense of security and well-being. The reports of several municipalities commented on their intention to take a closer look at possible reasons for some pupils' unhappiness.

The qualitative interviews confirmed that relations with fellow pupils had a large bearing on well-being. Having friends was important, as was a sense of solidarity and absence of bullying. Circumstances contributing to unhappiness included spending the breaks alone and the presence of gangs and cliques in the school yard. Unhappiness and anxiety about bullying could affect concentration. Young people in Sandnes and Alna alike were concerned about the school's lack of resources. They mentioned old, worn out textbooks, and poor maintenance of the school building. These factors also affected well-being.

Relations with the teacher were both a source of happiness and unhappiness. In Skedsmo, questions on the pupils' relationship with their teachers produced the following picture: 86 per cent liked the teachers, 68 per cent could talk to their teacher about personal matters, and 67 per cent would like teachers to be stricter with noisy pupils.

Pupils in Alna saw wide differences between the teachers. Some teachers worked hard at their job and cared about each single pupil, while others were perceived as slack and did little to follow up on their pupils. One of the girls cited maths teaching to illustrate the differences:

*In the eighth grade we had a teacher who was kind where marks were concerned and was really good at explaining. In the ninth grade we had a teacher who treated the Norwegian girls differently from the foreign girls, and let the Norwegian girls cheat. I dropped from top marks to poor marks that year. And now, in the 10th grade, we have the school's strictest teacher. The differences are huge: one teacher is really kind and fair, one is unfair and one is too strict.*

Teachers guilty of discrimination in relation to marking were also a source of unhappiness among the pupils in Alna in Oslo. The interviewers asked whether pupils had complained about the marks given, but the pupils thought it was no use complaining. There was no guarantee that one's voice would be heard, and: *"Sometimes the teacher feels offended if you bring up something you're not pleased with."*

*Young people from the asylum reception centre in Sandnes* regarded frequent school changes and getting to know new teachers and pupils as a problem. They were also worried about not being able to complete their education if they were sent out of the country. *Unaccompanied minor refugees* felt it was wrong for foreign pupils to be placed in a class on their own and not together with Norwegian pupils. They felt isolated and poorly treated when placed in a separate class.

Children at the day care centre were by and large happy at the day care: some thought it was boring, others found it both fun and boring. The children highlighted activities, spontaneous play and outings as things they liked, and referred to episodes where children were unpleasant to one another, where they were not allowed to join in a game or where grown-ups were angry, as things they did not like.

Relations with teachers came up in several contexts. The teachers had a large bearing not only on well-being, but also on co-determination, which is the subject of the next section.

## Co-determination at school

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the right of the child to express his or her views, is often termed the Convention's democracy article since it confers on children and young people a right of influence and co-determination in society. The school is an important arena for children and young people when it comes to participation.

Table 5. Co-determination at school. Percentage stating they agree 'Completely/to some extent' with the statements below

	Alta	Bjugn	Kautokeino	Lillesand	Skedsmo	Trondheim
The pupils in my class have a say in deciding the teaching given	54.7 (n=53)	51.7 (n=362)	45.8 (n=59)	42.3 (n=52)	64.3 (n=361)	58.5 (n=241)
Teacher and pupils jointly draw up weekly plans and working plans	15.1 (n=53)	81.2 (n=255)	20.3 (n=59)	----	----	----
Pupils' wishes are never taken into account	22.7 (n=53)	43.9 (n=255)	56.9 (n=58)	45.1 (n=51)	----	----

*Alta*, *Kautokeino* and *Skedsmo* put the answer option 'agree completely' first, while *Lillesand* put 'disagree completely' first. *Trondheim* had worded the question differently: Do you feel you have a say in deciding any of the teaching given? The answer options were: 'a large say', 'some say' and 'no say'. 'A large say/some say' was defined as 'agree completely/to some extent'.

In most municipalities around 50 per cent felt they had a say in deciding the teaching, ranging from 42 per cent in Lillesand to 64 per cent in Skedsmo. In Bjugn around 49 per cent at the primary level and 45 per cent at the lower secondary level reported that they agreed 'completely/to some extent' that they exerted influence on the teaching, compared with 61 per cent at the upper secondary level. The project staff in Bjugn believed this indicated that the pupils were taken more seriously in upper secondary school, where some are adults, i.e. over the age of 18. Apart from in Bjugn it did not seem to be a widespread practice for teachers and pupils to prepare weekly and working plans on a joint basis. In Trondheim it emerged that pupils exerted greatest influence on working methods, but this was not the case in all subjects.

On the question of whether they had a say in the teaching at school, and, if so, in what way, all the youngsters in Alna in Oslo replied that they did exert some influence. Examples mentioned included themes they would be working on and working methods. Only two girls in the 10th grade replied with an unconditional 'no': *They say we can decide how we are taught, but it never happens.* As regards the statement on pupils' wishes being taken into account, the pupils in Alna reiterated that this depended on whether you were perceived to be a problem or teacher's pet:

*You're either a teacher's pet, or a problem child. If I bring something up, who do you think people are going to listen to, the teacher or the problem child?*

*Me and a friend of mine were outside the main hall. One of these teacher's pets kicked a ball and broke a window. We ran away, but he just stood there and said that he'd done it and that it was an accident. He wasn't scolded. But if we break a window and say it was an accident, we get a real telling off.*

*Sometimes we think, well, he's Norwegian and we're foreigners. Foreigners are always making trouble. Norwegians are well-behaved. That's how we see things.*

The interviewers in Alna were disquieted by reports that pupils only made things worse for themselves by complaining, especially in light of Article 12 of the Convention on children's right to express their views and to be heard.

In Sandnes a majority of the pupils stated that they had little say where the teaching at school was concerned, and that they favoured more co-determination. Some considered the teaching to be one-sided, asserting that some teachers needed to work on their personal motivation. Many were

preoccupied with the heavy focus on theory and tests, and said that commitment and practical work counted for little. Some youngsters from the asylum reception centre thought it was right that the teacher made the decisions. They said Norwegian pupils complained too much about the school and lacked respect for the teacher. One young person from the group of unaccompanied under age refugees said: *"No one has asked me if I want a say in decision-making. If they had asked me, I'd have wanted a say in deciding things."*

Children attending day care centre felt it was the adults who decided both at home and at day care. When asked a little more closely, it emerged that they did decide what to play and who to play with, but not always, and sometimes it was the other children who decided. The adults decided when the game was over, whether they should play outdoors or indoors, when they had to clear up and how long a get-together should last. Some children said they had to attend assemblies even though they had no wish to do so.

### *What kind of influence should pupils have?*

Whereas the questions in the foregoing identify pupils' perceptions of their current situation, they were also asked to describe an ideal situation. Almost 95 per cent of the pupils in Bjugn and about 88 per cent in Lillesand said they agreed 'completely/to some extent' that *"the pupils should have a say in assessing the quality of the teaching"*. Between 75 and 80 per cent of the pupils in Lillesand, Skedsmo and Trondheim said they agreed 'completely/to some extent' that *"teachers and pupils should draw up weekly plans, homework plans and working plans on a joint basis."* However, in the Trondheim interviews it emerged that this was dependent on age, subject and theme. A majority at primary school were of the view that pupils lacked sufficient knowledge to participate in such planning and that co-determination should be confined to selecting subject matter and working methods. Lower secondary school pupils were more concerned with co-determination in this area. However, they also stated clearly that it was the teachers who possessed the knowledge needed in this context, and that it would be difficult for pupils to see the consequences of their choices in a number of cases.

Some municipalities asked whether "Representatives of the pupils should be in the majority when important decisions are taken at school." 92 per cent in Bjugn and 80 per cent in Lillesand said they agreed 'completely/to some extent'. In Alna many replied that they agreed, but after some

reflection they moderated their views and said it depended on what decisions were at issue.

In Skedsmo and Trondheim more than 90 per cent of the pupils said they agreed ‘completely/to some extent’ with the statement that *"pupil involvement is important."* This attitude was confirmed in the interviews. All pupils said it was very important to get involved. One pupil stated: *"If we can't be bothered to get involved, then we can't make complaints."* Another said: *"It's very important to get involved, so that you care about things going on around you."* Moreover, pupils who had said there was no point in making suggestions in class committees or pupils' councils considered it was important to get involved. These pupils did not relate involvement to any formal co-determination body, but more to their personal interests, such as football.

In Sandnes more pupils wished to provide input on how the teacher could organise the teaching. They felt there was too much traditional lecturing to the pupils and that more use should be made of the outdoor environment in teaching. The pupils also wished to give more weight to social aspects and to discuss rules governing the classroom situation. Several wanted a greater say in P.E. classes, timetables and homework.

Looking at the results as a whole, the impression is that the pupils wanted a greater say in deciding the content of their school day. They wanted more influence, and the schools only met this wish part way. In their view they exerted little influence, and about half of them did not feel that the pupils' wishes were taken into account.

## Schools' tuition in co-determination

Now follows a closer look at pupils' answers to the question of what tuition they received in co-determination and influence.

Table 6. Tuition and influence. Percentage answering ‘agree completely/to some extent’ with the following statements.

	Alta	Bjugn	Kautokeino	Lillesand	Skedsmo	Trondheim
We receive good tuition in co-determination and influence at school	--	--	--	43.1 (n=51)	83.3 (n=354)	57.0 (n=237)
The teacher encourages the pupils to participate in the work of the pupils' council	69.9 (n=53)	67.3 (n=352)	61.1 (n=59)	64.0 (n=50)	75.6 (n=349)	63.4 (n=238)

As the table shows, there was much variation in pupils' perceptions as to whether or not they received good tuition in co-determination and participation, ranging from about 43 to 83 per cent. This may be because the theme comes across as somewhat diffuse and largely up to the individual teacher. There was greater agreement to the effect that teachers encouraged pupils to participate in the work of the pupils' council: between 63 per cent and 76 per cent agreed 'completely/to some extent' with this statement. Some considered that teachers facilitated pupil involvement, and made it an exciting prospect. Others believed that teachers did little more than organise elections to the pupils' council. The qualitative interviews showed that the pupils felt it was down to the individual teacher. The pupils cited a number of examples of good groundwork by teachers:

*At lower secondary schools the pupils' council had a greater say; the teacher who assisted them was very good. She listened to what we had to say and took the matter up with the school board. We exerted a lot of influence compared with pupils at upper secondary school.*

*At lower secondary school the teacher left the classroom for maybe half an hour, so we could discuss in class any problems we had concerning the teacher, or with anything else. It wasn't always easy to talk about these things with the teacher present.*

In the report from Trondheim the project staff considered that the results confirmed earlier input to the effect that 'democracy training' is rarely put on a broad, organised basis, unless one takes part in the pupils' council. Unfortunately, according to the pupils themselves, there are also instances where the pupils' council does not receive the tuition it is entitled to.

Table 7. The pupils' council has a lot of influence at our school. Percentage agreeing 'completely/to some extent'.

	Alta	Bjugn	Kautokeino	Lillesand	Skedsmo	Trondheim
Agree completely	7.7	15.6	13.6	13.5	71.8	36.3
Agree to some extent	48.1	45.6	32.2	51.9	22.4	48.3
Disagree to some extent	25.0	24.4	39.0	23.1	4.1	10.4
Disagree completely	19.2	14.4	15.3	11.5	1.7	5.0
Sum og N	100.0 (n=52)	100.0 (n=360)	100.1 (n=59)	100.0 (n=52)	100.0 (n=361)	100.0 (n=240)

Skedsmo worded the statement as follows: 'The pupils' council is heard in matters it takes up', while Trondheim asked if the pupils' council is given a large say in deciding matters at school.

Here too the table shows wide variation between the municipalities. However, apart from in two municipalities a large majority – as much as 85 per cent in Trondheim and 90 per cent in Skedsmo – agreed ‘completely/to some extent’ with the statement that the pupils’ council exerts a lot of influence. It is possible that Skedsmo received a higher proportion of positive answers on the pupils’ council’s role because its voice is more readily heard, given the municipality’s wording of the question, compared with having a lot of influence or a large say in decision-making. However it may also be the case that pupil democracy works well in Skedsmo.

Scepticism was expressed more clearly in the qualitative interviews. In Sandnes a majority of the pupils were of the view that the pupils’ council and the ‘free class discussion lesson’ did not work well. In the interviews the pupils voiced views that were also expressed in the other municipalities: The pupils had noted the free class discussion period being used for the purpose of tests, information, football etc., and that the teacher regarded the lesson as unimportant. They viewed the range of issues that could be taken up in the pupils’ council as limited. The pupils’ council was mostly used to discuss matters such as canteen food, school yard activities or class excursions.

Moreover it was pointed out that the pupils’ council met infrequently, that the matters dealt with took up too much time and that the pupils did not receive feedback on issues they had taken up. They also noted that matters they had brought up were not taken further if the teacher was opposed to them. Several groups considered that the pupils’ council worked poorly because the pupils themselves were not committed. The youngest pupils said that elections to the pupils’ council took place based on who was regarded as ‘cool’ and not based on who could present matters in a proper manner.

## How can pupils achieve greater influence?

In Trondheim the pupils were asked an open-ended question: "How can pupils have a greater say in decision-making?" Several pupils said they were satisfied with the status quo: *We are listened to as a rule!* They instructed themselves to be polite, to argue for their point of view, and to speak in a proper and respectable manner. They believed that the pupils’ council would achieve greater influence if it consisted of more than one person per class and if the teachers spent more time listening to the pupils’ wishes. They also suggested devoting specific lessons at the start of the school year to setting up



a progress plan. Other wishes levelled at the teacher and other adults emerged in the following proposals:

- *That we have a lesson in which the teacher writes up the pupils' views.*
- *If the adults try harder to understand, it will be easier for the pupils' voice to be heard.*
- *The teachers can set up individual appointments with pupils in the class so the pupils can give their views without fear of being laughed at.*
- *The teachers should ask questions more often.*

The pupils also emphasised the teachers' cooperativeness:

- *The teacher should lend a hand in improving things, but the pupils must also play their part.*
- *Everyone should be allowed to express their views and adults should accept that our views differ from theirs and should try to see things from our point of view.*
- *The teachers and (some) pupils should improve their ability to work together.*

The pupils appreciated the significance of utilising formal bodies, especially the pupils' council, but also the children and young people's municipal council, and believed that they themselves should do a better job in this respect and draw in teachers to make things work better. Various forms of preparation such as free class discussions or girls' and boys' meetings were also mentioned. The answers accorded with the impressions gained from other answers in the survey: Children and young people were eager for more influence. One respondent even suggested: *"A longer school day to make more time available for discussions."* The pupils felt that the school did deliver, but not as much as they would like.

Youth councils have been established in all these municipalities. In Kautokeino around 64 per cent said they agreed 'completely/to some extent' that the youth council was an important body for young people. In Alta almost 73 per cent expressed the same view. This was far more than those who considered that the pupils' council exerted influence at school. The report from Alta discusses whether the youth council did a better job of profiling itself in the media and in pupils' own ranks than did the pupils' councils. Both the youth council and the pupils' councils have the opportunity to participate and exert influence by virtue of their position in

various bodies, so their opportunities should be equivalent. However, the project staff said that was much room for development in this respect.

As regards participation in governing bodies, a majority in Lillesand was of the view that the pupils' council did have a part to play. The work done by the pupils' council was considered important, and the teachers were fairly adept at encouraging the pupils to participate in this work. The youth council, on the other hand, was less familiar to the youngsters. More than half of them were unaware what issues were addressed by the Lillesand Youth Council. Local conditions clearly play a part here.

In Skedsmo about 62 per cent knew of the Children and Young People's Municipal Council, and 35 per cent knew what issues the council was concerned with. In Trondheim 76 per cent answered 'yes' to the question: "Did you know that Trondheim has a Young People's Municipal Council?" 43 per cent confirmed that they knew what matters the Young People's Municipal Council was working on. In response to a further question on how the Young People's Municipal Council could be made more widely known, the respondents mentioned initiatives such as visiting schools and spreading information, utilising a dedicated web page or advertisements on TV, the internet, newspapers and brochures. Greater emphasis on pupils' rights and pupils' school environment could also attract greater support.

Several mentioned that more active use could be made of the school's representative. An idea may be to look into how this function is discharged and into schools' experience with any good ploys that could be turned to account. There was clearly room for improvement here, especially in view of the failure of the school's representative to pass on the fact that the Young People's Municipal Council has its own web page, and that it is working actively to promote pupils' rights and improve the school environment.

## 4 Discrimination and unfair treatment

Article 2, paragraph 2, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs.

Article 14, paragraph 1, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

In order to capture the degree to which articles 2 and 14 of the Convention are respected in Norwegian municipalities, the respondents were asked whether they felt they were subjected to unfair treatment and discrimination. One municipality commented in the aftermath that using the terms ‘unfair’ and ‘discrimination’ in the same question may be detrimental since they may be interpreted in different ways. Separate questions on bullying were also included. In some municipalities discrimination and unfair treatment were separated from bullying, whereas in municipalities that employed qualitative interviews the two questions overlapped. This information may usefully be taken into account when reading the results.

### Unfair treatment and discrimination at school

Table 8. Have you been subjected to unfair treatment/discrimination at school on account of any circumstances mentioned below? Percentage answering "not at all!"

	<b>Alta</b>	<b>Bjugn</b>	<b>Kautokeino</b>	<b>Lillesand</b>	<b>Trondheim</b>
Gender	86.3 (51)	90.0 (n=231)	89.8 (n=59)	68.6 (n=51)	----
Nationality	96.0 (n=50)	94.8 (n=231)	96.6 (n=59)	88.5 (n=52)	87.8 (n=238)
Religion/life philosophy	81.6 (n=49)	96.5 (n=231)	-----	88.5 (n=52)	83.6 (n=238)
Because of your views	----	----	-----	----	46.7 (n=240)
Other	75.5 (n=49)	92.7 (n=231)	94.9 (n=59)	----	----

The answer options were: ‘not at all’, ‘rarely’, ‘two or three times a month’, ‘about once a week’ and ‘several times a week’. A dash indicates that this question was not included by the municipality concerned. Discrimination on account of a disability was included in the question but was omitted due to confusion as to how the question should be interpreted. Kautokeino had not formulated clear-cut answer options. Only pupils who had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment answered the questions. The percentages are computed based on these figures.

As will be seen from the table, a large majority answered "not at all" to the question of whether they had ever been subjected to any kind of discrimination. There were fairly large differences between the municipalities as regards discrimination on grounds of gender. A recurring feature of the qualitative interviews was that the boys were more likely to feel discriminated against on grounds of gender than were the girls. This will be returned to.

The sizeable portion who did not feel discriminated against is related to the small number of respondents reporting that their mother or father was born outside Norway or that they were themselves born outside Norway, approximately 12,5 per cent (see chapter 1). As regards the portion who felt discriminated against due to their religion/life philosophy, it should be recalled that a number of different religious communities exist in Norway among ethnic Norwegians. In Alta are to be found – in addition to the Church of Norway – Laestadians, Pentecostals and Muslims. In Lillesand are to be found – alongside the state church – Jehova's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Baptists, Free Church members, Catholics and Muslims.

## Who perpetrated discriminatory or unfair treatment?

The pupils were also asked who had subjected them to discriminatory or unfair treatment. This question was put to all pupils, regardless of the answers they had given to the questions in the table above. Only Alta confined the question to those who had felt discriminated against by adding the following qualification: "If yes, by whom?" It will be seen that in all the municipalities, including Alta, this question was answered by a larger number than those reporting discrimination when the question was framed in general terms, see table 8. This probably shows that more examples came to mind when pupils were asked specifically whether they had been subjected to unfair treatment by named groups. The answers are given in the table below.

Table 9. Have you been subjected to unfair treatment/discrimination at school? Percentage answering "not at all".

	Alta	Bjugn	Kautokeino	Lillesand	Trondheim
By other pupils in the group/class	71.4 (n=21)	83.3 (n=258)	93.2 (n=59)	51.9 (n=52)	61.7 (n=240)
By other pupils at school	----	90.7 (n=258)	----	53.8 (n=52)	66.1 (n=239)
By one or more teachers	33.3 (n=21)	76.4 (n=258)	91.5 (n=59)	59.6 (n=52)	64.4 (n=239)
By other adults at school	0	94.2 (n=258)	0	73.1 (n=52)	82.1 (n=240)
Others	14.3 (n=21)	----	0	----	----

The pupils were able to tick off more than one answer. The answer options were: 'not at all', 'rarely', 'two or three times a month', 'about once a week' and 'several times a week'. Alta and Kautokeino did not include 'other pupils' as a category.

The figures show that a majority of the pupils did not feel discriminated against by other pupils, either in the classroom or elsewhere at school; between just over one half and more than 90 per cent confirmed that no such incident had occurred. Moreover, a majority reported not having been discriminated against by teachers or other adults at school, with the exception of one municipality where only one third of pupils reported not having been subjected to unfair treatment by one or more teachers at school.

Few pupils experienced such treatment one or more times a week. In Trondheim the figure was between five and nine, in Lillesand three or four. They experienced unfair treatment from all quarters: from pupils in and outside the class, teachers and other adults.

Several municipalities commented that the number of the pupils who felt discriminated against or unfairly treated by teachers was high. Bjugn considered the most dramatic finding was that more than 23 per cent considered themselves unfairly treated by teachers. The figure for Trondheim was around 36 per cent. Here 9 per cent of pupils stated that they were unfairly treated by one or more teachers two to three times a month or more. The municipalities were unanimous in their intention to take a closer look at these answers.

### *The experience of unfair treatment linked to various arenas*

The qualitative interviews clarified the nature of experiences of unfair treatment and discrimination. To the question of whether they ever felt unfairly treated at school on account of gender, nationality or religion/life

philosophy, the youngsters in the Alna district of Oslo initially gave the impression that this was generally not a major problem at school. As the discussion proceeded, the answers became more nuanced. A large majority of those interviewed in Alna had an immigrant background. Hence the focus was largely on discrimination on account of ethnicity. Some considered *unfair treatment to be a bigger problem in society than at school*:

*I too have experienced it in the community, in public offices, other places, but not at school. It's mostly about religion, not skin colour and which country I come from, it's the religion. But, as I say, not at school.*

*Many have felt it. We think like that ourselves, that foreigners make trouble. Hardly surprising that some Norwegians also think in that way.*

Many answered 'no' to the question of whether they felt unfairly treated by fellow pupils, one rationale being that there were up to 11 different nations in the class, and that this meant they had to learn to respect one another. There were, however, some who experienced discrimination *at school from fellow pupils*:

*In all honesty I feel discriminated against at school sometimes. And I'm not saying that to 'play ghetto'.*

*At my school many of the pupils are also prejudiced against Muslims, after September 11th and that, they say that Muslims are terrorists the whole lot of them and all that. Foreigners this and Muslims that. I get upset – I have feelings.*

Several linked the experience of unfair treatment to *adults at school*:

*My class teacher likes to fool around with religion and that. Once we had a test on the running track, and I told her I was fasting, and I thought she'd show a little consideration if I took the circuit a bit slower. When I got back she said "you ran well". Afterwards she asked me if wanted some water, and then she laughed. I'm not supposed to drink water when I'm fasting, so I felt a bit insulted.*

Teachers who discriminated against pupils for various reasons were mentioned in all groups in the Alna district of Oslo. The experience was linked just as much to being unfairly treated because you were a problem child as it was to ethnic background. However, several pupils reported that *being regarded as a problem child was connected with ethnic background*. Once you were perceived as a problem child it was difficult to change that perception:

*I often feel that it's because of the country I come from. It's the same thing with many foreign pupils at my school. If one of the completely Norwegian kids does something wrong, it doesn't have the same consequences. That happens a lot.*

*Yes, if you'd been a troublemaker before and you're trying to shape up, if you just make a small mistake, you're always the one that gets the blame.*

*One thing really irritated me at the beginning of the ninth year. Everyone knows that I'm a problem kid, right? Or I was. We were going to have an election for the pupils' council. There are just over 20 kids in our class, and more than 15 of them voted for me. The teachers said "No, no – you can't". The teacher said a teacher's pet with only a couple of votes should be on the council. When you think the teacher hates you, you don't want to go to school.*

The interviewers in the Alna district of Oslo found the above statements worrying. Mutual lack of respect is fertile ground for undesirable behaviour and disinclination to learn. They considered it particularly important to meet young people who want to improve in a positive manner.

### *Integration of children with disabilities*

In Sandnes the pupils took up the issue of integrating disabled children. The discussion reflected a range of viewpoints. Some felt disabled children came in for unnecessary differential treatment, while others believed the teacher exaggerated by pretending that nothing had changed when they were introduced to the class:

*The teacher can't handle it, she doesn't know how to act when she introduces a disabled pupil. She tries to be as inclusive as possible, and as a rule goes too far. The pupils don't want to be seen as somebody special – they just want to go to school like everyone else.*

One girl felt that the teachers at school took good care of disabled children and that these children took part in all activities like the others. Some pupils were concerned that disabled children received more help than their fellows and saw this as unfair. It also emerged that disabled pupils were liable to be overprotected and thereby prevented from gaining experience on their own. For example they were not always given the opportunity to make their own choice of vocational subject because the adults did not think they would cope. The main impression gained from the pupils was that it was largely the teacher or the system that discriminated where disability was concerned.

All groups that were interviewed in Sandnes were of the view that discrimination and bullying took place at school. The perception of unfair treatment was linked to themes such as *marking* where they experienced a one-sided focus on results and no emphasis on effort made. Another theme was *group composition* and the question of whether able and not so able pupils should be placed in the same group, but the biggest problem was being part of a group of pupils who were unwilling to contribute. Some felt that the *principle of not charging* for extra-curricular activities was too rigid if it meant that school trips were out of the question, at the same time as they understood the problem of pupils who were barred from outings because the parents could not afford the expense.

A majority of those interviewed, including the youngest pupils, were of the view that *foreigners were harassed and backstabbed* both by fellow pupils and teachers. One said that a 'mini apartheid' had been created at school, citing the fact that foreigners were assigned to separate classes in a separate temporary building. This issue was taken up by several groups. Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers and young people from the asylum reception centre also thought it was wrong to place immigrants in separate classes. They held that this made it more difficult to learn Norwegian and make Norwegian friends. However, one youngster from the asylum reception centre did not believe there was much racism in the municipality. "*Norwegians and foreigners do things together.*" The entire group of unaccompanied minor respondents answered 'no' to the question of whether there was unfair treatment/discrimination at school.

## Being an ethnic minority

Some municipalities asked additional questions designed to map discrimination of ethnic minorities. In Alta the youngsters were asked to comment on what it was like belonging to an ethnic minority in Alta. Not confining themselves to any particular ethnicity, they included Sami, Finnish, Swedish, Russian, refugee and 'other'. A range of different answers resulted, ranging from "*don't reckon it's a problem*" to "*there are so many people who are racially prejudiced*" and "*there's a lot of racism in Alta right now.*" One answered: "*For some, living in Alta is probably just like living anywhere else, maybe others feel it's a bit difficult. For Sami people I think it's probably fairly easy, while for others it's difficult. Perhaps it has something to do with the circle you end up in.*" This may reflect wide differences in the way various groups are met in Alta.



It appeared that the youngsters largely thought there was no problem being a Sami in Alta, but that being an immigrant with dark skin might be difficult.

In Skedsmo the youngsters were asked whether they had friends from other cultural backgrounds. Almost 69 per cent of pupils who regarded themselves as Norwegian confirmed that they had friends with another cultural background. Of those who regarded themselves as immigrants, 78.5 per cent answered that they had more friends with a Norwegian background. In general the answers provided the same picture as in Alta – that being an immigrant could give rise to very different experiences. Some experienced little or no discriminatory treatment, while others were hit hard. Many pupils expressed a negative attitude to discrimination:

- *Discrimination is daft.*
- *I think everyone who comes to Norway should have the same number of friends.*
- *Everyone is worth the same as anyone else, so what's the point of discrimination? No-one's perfect!*

Experiences of unfair treatment are reflected in the following quotes:

- *We need to employ people with the courage to put their foot down when pupils make trouble.*
- *Some pupils are unpleasant to foreign pupils.*
- *I think immigrants are bullied because of their colour and odour! I think that's quite wrong, because we're all human beings and are entitled to be treated equally! I also think the teachers behave differently sometimes towards immigrants! Even if you're dark, it doesn't mean you're dark inside... because skin colour means nothing... it's what's inside you that counts! I can understand people being sceptical because someone has a different background, but it's a good idea to get to know immigrants and try to be nice! And remember!! It's very hurtful for someone with a dark skin to be called 'nigger' or 'brown numskull' or insult their religion.*
- *It's not cool to be called 'chocolate', 'brownny' etc.*

## Children's and young people's suggestions for less discrimination

To the question of what could be done to improve the situation of victims of unfair treatment/discrimination or bullying at school, children and young people had many suggestions:

- Organise outings and do more things together. More emphasis should be given to social activities; that would prevent bullying.
- A school mediator was introduced at one school. We thought that was a good thing, but too few matters were referred to the mediator for action.
- One young person pointed out that some immigrants go around in cliques and that many of them refuse to integrate into Norwegian culture. That gives rise to racist attitudes. He suggested arranging integration courses where we can learn to live together.
- All groups considered they should learn more about different religions, other peoples and countries; learn that they are different, but not inferior. Lack of knowledge results in some people being bullied.
- Christianity, religion and life philosophy (KRL), as a school subject, was discussed by several groups. Some believed the subject should put greater focus on different religions and less on Christianity, while others thought that foreign parents were wrong to remove their children from KRL-classes, because it was important to learn about Norwegian culture.
- The youngsters believed that the adults should react immediately and put their foot down more firmly when someone was being bullied. *"Just telling them off doesn't help."*
- The pupils also believed that they could also give support and speak their mind to the bullies. However, several mentioned the dilemma involved in siding with whoever was being bullied or spent break time alone, since it could result in them losing their friends or being regarded as 'the saving angel'. Telling a teacher or the principal was not always easy either because you might become the bullies' victim yourself because you had grassed on them. Sometimes the victim insisted you shouldn't tell anyone.

## Are boys and girls given differential treatment?

Table 10. Are boys and girls given differential treatment? Answers in per cent.

	<b>Bjugn</b>	<b>Kautokeino</b>	<b>Lillesand</b>	<b>Trondheim</b>
Yes	33.1	58.6	40.4	35.4
No	52.9	41.4	30.8	45.8
Don't know	14.0	---	28.8	18.8
Total	100.0 (n= 363)	100.0 (n= 58 )	100.0 (n= 52)	100.0 (n=240)

Bjugn had the following answer options: 'no/yes', 'a little/yes', 'a lot/don't know'. In the table 'yes, to some extent' and 'yes, to a large extent' are combined. Kautokeino turned the question into the following statement: 'At my school boys and girls are treated differently', with the following answer options: 'agree completely', 'agree to some extent', 'disagree to some extent' and 'disagree completely'. We have compressed 'agree completely/ to some extent' to 'yes' and 'disagree to some extent / completely' to 'no'.

The proportion of children and young people who answered unambiguously that boys and girls were treated differently varied from around 33 per cent to almost 59 per cent. Hence a large proportion was of the view that boys and girls were subjected to differential treatment. The qualitative interviews showed that it was generally boys who felt most subjected to negative differential treatment, while the girls said for the most part that differential treatment was limited. The examples given by the municipalities were strikingly similar:

- More was expected of the boys, while the girls "got off more lightly" both in P.E. and in theoretical subjects.
- Several mentioned that boys more often got the blame and more often received negative feedback from the teachers.
- The teachers were nicer to the girls: they received less homework, better marks and less scolding.

In four of seven groups in Sandnes the respondents said that girls and boys were treated differently. It was for example asserted that the school counsellor discouraged girls from choosing 'boys' subjects', and boys were discouraged from choosing 'girls' subjects'. Male teachers gave girls preferential treatment if he liked them. Here too they highlighted differential treatment in P.E. classes. Moreover, different behaviour was expected of boys and girls. Boys got attention on account of their restlessness, they swaggered and showed off their knowledge, whereas girls were expected to sit quietly and argue their cases. Girls and boys received differing reactions to their

behaviour: Girls were more likely to get a demerit if they were late, and they were not allowed to protest. *"Girls are expected to be nice and sweet and to be angels."* In the targeted-leisure-activities group the view was that boys got more attention than girls at school.

Day care centre children were asked whether boys and girls could do the same things. Three boys answered: *"Yes, yes, yes."* Most of the children said that boys and girls could do the same things and play with the same things – *"even if girls can't do somersaults."*

The answers from the pupils were consistent in the sense that boys in all the municipalities saw themselves as subjected to negative differential treatment. It was not equally clear whether the girls agreed with these accounts or, if so, whether they viewed the discrimination as positive or negative.

## Bullying

Since no common definition of bullying was employed, it is reasonable to assume that children and young people included somewhat different phenomena in this term. The lack of a common definition is pertinent in relation to statements by the Young People's Municipal Council in Trondheim to the effect that only the person who was bullied can comment on the reasons for it. If an action is perceived as bullying then that in itself is cause to address the reason(s) precisely because it is experienced as hurtful and serious.

Table 11. Have you seen anyone being bullied at your school? Answers in per cent.

	Never	Rarely	2-3 times a month	Several times a week	Total
Lillesand	15.4	48.1	21.2	15.4	100.1 (n= 51)
Trondheim	34.9	42.9	9.7	12.6	100.1 (n= 228)

63 per cent of pupils in Lillesand and almost 78 per cent in Trondheim had never or rarely seen anyone being bullied. Between 12 and 15 per cent of respondents in the two municipalities reported having witnessed bullying several times a week. The project staff in Trondheim commented that this needed to be taken seriously. While the actual figure may be higher or lower, concealed bullying by SMS and the internet has certainly shown an increasing tendency in recent years.

Far fewer reported having been bullied themselves. Between 7 and 8 per cent reported being bullied two to three times a month/one or more times a week.

In Bjugn around 55 per cent of pupils at lower and upper secondary school answered that there was 'some' or 'a lot of' bullying at their school. The remainder answered that they did not know or that there was no bullying. In Bjugn it was assumed that those who answered 'no' or 'don't know' had not personally been bullied at school.

In Trondheim the pupils were asked whether they or adults had done anything to prevent bullying at their school. 62 per cent answered in the affirmative. Trondheim considered that the figure should have been higher in view of the schools' low threshold for reporting bullying and zero tolerance of bullying. The figures broke down on the various tiers of school as follows: primary school: 78 per cent, lower secondary school: 68 per cent, upper secondary school: 48 per cent. The project team in Trondheim wondered whether showing that one cares loses importance with increasing age.

The answers to the open-ended questions in Trondheim fell into two main categories: one in which the pupils reported a problem which was then addressed by teachers and other adults. These pupils were concerned with dialogue and with having many individuals to interact with: other pupils, teacher, headmaster and parents. Pupils in the second category believed there was no point in reporting since no one cared or solved the problem.

The main impression gained from the targeted-activities group in Sandnes was that bullying was rife at school. Some said they liked the school, while one said that given a choice he would rather have stayed at home. All groups were concerned with the issue of bullying. Many believed that bullying occurred at school, although they were not aware of it themselves. It was also pointed out that bullying occurred between different groups of immigrants.

Youngsters from the asylum reception centre were very concerned about the bullying of foreigners. Youngsters in the Alna district of Oslo stated: *"Bullying is mostly on account of skin colour. I haven't seen any Pakistanis being bullied recently. Now it's Somalis. They get bullied a lot."* Young people from the asylum reception centre also believed that bullying was perpetrated not only by Norwegians on foreigners, but also between the various nations. The youngsters said that they experienced bullying from other pupils, but that it was worst when the bullies were teachers. That was often the case. It was the same with other adults. *"Many grown-ups don't like foreigners, and they tell*

*that to their children.*" One youngster said there were no buses to the asylum reception centre because young people from the centre were unwelcome downtown. They believed that the police discriminated against foreigners and that foreigners were heavily exposed in the media. Other respondents said that bullying was perpetrated by fellow pupils and teachers alike.

### ***Suggestions made by children and young people to combat bullying***

The reports from Bjugn and Trondheim contained specific proposals to combat bullying. The proposals involved putting improved integration processes in place at the start of the school year, working on the classroom environment and getting the individual to respect and accept others as they are. The *pupils* were encouraged to take time for reflection and to care about others, actively intervene and report episodes to the teachers. *Parents* must also be prepared to listen when a child opens up and tells them about such episodes. Above all, *teachers* must be more vigilant, more attentive, and tackle the problem right from the first day at school. They need to focus their attention on concealed bullying, and take responsibility when made aware of bullying. More teachers on patrol at break time was another suggestion, along with meetings between teachers, parents and pupils, as well as calling in the 'parties' in a bullying situation. The *bullies* must be punished, and the school must make sure they are expelled, removed or split up. It was also suggested that teachers who bully should be replaced.

The group discussions in the Alna district in Oslo indicated large variations from school to school. Most respondents thought bullying had diminished as they had grown older and more mature, although some asserted the opposite, that bullying had become more serious with rising age. They believed that bullying as a phenomenon can never be entirely eradicated, but had clear views on effective counter steps.

*They should be put in their place properly, you should take your big brother along, give them a real telling off.*

– Tough luck if you don't have a big brother then?" commented the interviewers.

*He can phone me, I'll be right there!*

– Does it have to be self-policing, can't anything be done within a system? they added.

*It's not easy, people aren't afraid of the teachers.*

– Does fear have to be a factor for anything to work?

The entire panel: "Yes!"

*I've attended numerous meetings against bullying, but nothing worked. I've also seen people being bullied and fetching their big brother, and that always works. You've got to have someone who's bigger than them. But people have different views, I can't speak for everyone.*

The last conversation with the boys at the club, who believed that 'big brother' was the only thing that worked, may seem discouraging. But the answer points in the same direction as the answers of a number of respondents: A clear statement must be made to the bullies to put a stop to the bullying. The following quotation underscores the need for adults to listen to a greater degree and to understand children and young people's own experiences and strategies in relation to bullying:

*I agree, we call one another by nicknames at our school, and the teachers really stick their nose in. There's one we call Jonas the Jew. I'm called the terrorist. No one gives me any stick for that, but anyone calling out Jonas the Jew gets a demerit. They call me terrorist and nothing happens, the rules should be the same for everyone, he he. It's because I grew a beard. I think they meddle a bit too much.*

– Does he dislike being called Jonas the Jew?

*No, he thinks it's cool!*

– and do you think it's cool being called 'terrorist?'

*He, he, I think it's fun. We're creative people.*

*Pupils understand each other when they say stuff like that, but the teachers don't understand; they think it's serious.*

*Yeah, like me and Jonas the Jew, we're really good pals, even though he's a Jew and I'm a Muslim. The teachers can see where having fun. But as soon as we call him by his nickname they start meddling. As long as you don't hurt anyone with your comments, then surely you can say what you want.*

The interviewers in the Alna district of Oslo wondered why the adults did not view this as young people's way of dealing with and neutralising complex issues. They believe it is important to bring the youngsters themselves on board when drawing up methods to combat bullying.

## 5 Leisure, assistance measures and thoughts about the future

*Article 31, paragraph 1, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:*

States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

The municipalities have mapped various aspects of children's leisure time: facilities available, what facilities children and young people availed themselves of, what they thought of the facilities in their municipality and what they desired in addition. Their influence on choice of leisure activities, well-being and safety were other aspects that were illuminated. The municipalities were particularly concerned to find out what facilities young people actually made use of and to encourage them to indicate any other wishes they had as regards leisure activities. While the results of this survey are useful to the municipalities with a view to further developing leisure facilities for children and young people, the present chapter is confined to aspects of more general interest.

### Leisure facilities – what facilities are good and what can be improved?

While the type and scope of leisure facilities varies from one municipality to the next, a wide range of such facilities is available in all the municipalities, especially sports and music. Pupils in one municipality listed the following leisure facilities for children and young people: Football pitches, illuminated ski tracks, shooting range, biathlon arena, rugby pitch, bowling alley, indoor synthetic football pitch, indoor tartan athletics track, skating and curling rinks, skateboard ramp, bathing beaches, hiking trails, youth clubs, culture centre, music and art school, music workshop, riding ground, theatre group, 4H club, motorcross circuit and library. With some variations, this list gives a fair picture of municipal offerings.

In Kautokeino and Lillesand more than 40 per cent of the pupils agreed 'completely/to some extent' that they were satisfied with the leisure facilities in the municipality. The corresponding figures from Trondheim was 68 per



cent, while more than 90 per cent in Bjugn were of the view that many or some good facilities were available where they live.

To the question of there was anything they missed, examples cited included a philosophy club, rehearsal rooms for bands, dancing, riding, basketball, more figure skating/ice hockey halls or skate parks. Some thought there was too little to do for under-18s who were not involved in an organised activity. Some wanted more places to meet such as clubs, but also places where they could carry on unorganised sports. There was little opportunity for unorganised sports since the sports clubs occupied all sports facilities in leisure time. This theme also featured in the qualitative interviews.

In Alna most of the young people knew of and used the local recreational club, and they also mentioned sports activities such volleyball, table tennis, football and *"now they're building a sports hall too"*. The youngsters thought it was a good thing to have venues where they could do sports without joining a sports club.

*Since we got the synthetic football pitch there have been fewer people at the centre. Many of those who hung out previously - they've joined our football team. They've shaped up and turned into proper people. The fact that the club is open after school up to 4 o'clock, and then re-opens in the evening, also means there's less happening up there at the centre. The more activity there is here, the less criminality you get. If you've got nothing to do, you go out, wander around without purpose and suddenly you start doing silly things.*

Although they were quite well-informed about the opportunities and offerings in the area, they did not think it was easy for someone new to the district to find their bearings and suggested that information should be posted to people who had recently moved there.

Young people living in Sandnes thought there were many good leisure facilities available. They mentioned the music and art school, sports facilities, downtown facilities for young people and a variety of offerings near where they lived. Several young people none the less desired a wider range of safe places to meet and greater freedom of choice. Some also called for more non-Christian recreational clubs. Several mentioned that as they grew older they were expected to make a 'serious go of it' in order to be allowed to take part in sports activities, and that many quit for that reason.

*They're afraid of not being up to the mark - not as good as the others, and I didn't play here anymore because it's too serious and no-one's playing for fun any more.*

All they wanted was a place where they could have a nice time, and where things were not too serious. One group reckoned that Sandnes lacked good facilities for the disabled. They wanted more facilities for people interested in computing and technology.

As in the case of other themes, there was a gulf between the statements of young people resident in Sandnes and young people living at the asylum reception centre. The oldest of the young people from the asylum reception centre did not think leisure facilities in Sandnes were up to much. They had nothing to do, *"just wander around the bus station and the shopping centre"*. They knew of some leisure facilities, but didn't think there was anything to do there. They missed leisure facilities at the asylum reception centre. Transport was another problem. There were few buses to the centre. Young people wanted youth cafes, a studio they could rent, basketball, a free sports club, a youth discotheque and better transport facilities. One young person reckoned that there were no buses to the asylum reception centre because young people from the reception centre were not welcome downtown. The youngsters also said there was nothing to do in the summer holidays. They wanted to go to Kristiansand, Oslo or Bergen, or on holiday like other young Norwegians. One said:

*I've been living here for five years now, and haven't been on a single holiday in that time. There could have been activities at the reception centre, something okay here. The Norwegians are having a nice time while we have to stay here, going nuts.*

Another said: *"We're not allowed to keep animals. We're not allowed to have the internet installed because we don't have a residence permit. And we can't travel abroad because we don't have a residence permit."*

Younger young people at the asylum reception centre were more content; they mentioned leisure activities such as going for a walk, going to the cinema and the karate club. They missed a gym where they could just turn up and that was open to everyone. The group of unaccompanied minors from the asylum reception centre were not aware of any leisure activities in Sandnes; they said they rarely turned up at such activities. Several of them played cricket at the reception centre, and some said they had visited a recreational club together with staff. To the question of what they missed, several said they would like organised cricket tournaments, and some wanted to play football and volleyball and go on outings.

In Sandnes children at the day care centre talked about different things they did in their leisure time. Sometimes they were allowed to decide for themselves, e.g. go to football, karate or gymnastics, while one said that *"mum decides"*. They said both mother and father drove them to leisure activities. One said: *"I don't go to any activities, I'm just at the day care centre, at home and have a nice time."*

### ***Is it safe going out?***

In Lillesand and Trondheim, Alta and Kautokeino young people were asked whether they thought it was safe going out in the evening, to and from leisure activity venues or friends' houses. Between 86 and 91 per cent thought it was safe. In the interviews in Trondheim some cited traffic as the reason why they did not feel safe. Traffic speed and a lack of footpaths was a problem outside urban areas, said children and young people. Moreover, in Alna most of the young people said that although they travelled safely to and from the various meeting places, their parents were worried each time there was an incident of one kind or another: *"They're likely to say no you can't go there; this or that might happen."* In Sandnes the young people said that being safe mattered, both to them and their parents.

In Alta children and young people were also asked whether they had been subjected to unfair treatment/discrimination in their leisure time on various grounds. Around 95 per cent answered that they had not felt discriminated against on account of gender, disability or nationality. In relation to religion/life philosophy, the figure was 88 per cent. Although there was somewhat less discrimination in leisure time than at school, the tendency was the same: a majority stated that they were not discriminated against.

### ***Do you decide your leisure activities yourself?***

A large majority of pupils confirmed they could decide their leisure activities themselves, between 94 and 98 per cent in Bjugn and Kautokeino agreed 'completely/to some extent'. Once again this impression was confirmed in the qualitative interviews in the Alna district of Oslo and Sandnes. However it emerged that most pupils discussed their activities with their parents, and that finances, lack of transport and other obligations in relation to school and home limited the scope of activities they could participate in.

Young people at the asylum reception centre said their financial situation prevented them from participating in leisure activities. Their

parents had no money for such activities, and the youngsters themselves had no pocket money. One said:

*We want freedom, but without money we have no freedom. The only thing you're not afraid of is getting killed here.*

The young people also felt that their parents lacked information on life as a young person in Norway. School outings were unusual in their countries, and the parents failed to understand their purpose: *"It's quite awful for us"*.

One mentioned that he missed a sponsor system whereby the municipality paid the membership fee for a leisure activity for each young person. This would have been a very helpful initial offering, since that would give everyone in Sandnes the opportunity to join a leisure activity. In that way they could have tried out being part of a community: *"It creates an inclusive environment and prevents bullying and that sort of thing"*.

## Awareness of the municipality's health and social services

*Article 24, paragraph 1, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.

The municipalities have applied differing organisational approaches (interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral) to ensure that service offerings should be readily available to users. The aim is that children and young people in the municipality should have easy access to the assistance services. They were therefore asked whether they knew who to contact if they or anyone they knew needed help on account of their own health, difficulties at home or other problems.

### *Do you know who to contact?*

Between 50 and 80 per cent confirmed that they knew who to contact in Alta, Bjugn and Trondheim. In these municipalities, in the Alna district of Oslo and in Sandnes most respondents mentioned the public health nurse or youth health clinic, doctor, teacher and their own parents if it was a matter of health:

*Talk to the public health nurse at school in the first instance; she can give further advice.*

*The public health nurse, my mother... (she's good at talking about that kind of thing).*

A somewhat smaller number knew who to contact if they or someone they knew needed help with a domestic problem. Yet again it was the public health nurse and the doctor who were highlighted, but also the school counsellor, psychologist, teacher or "*an organisation focusing on children's well-being, possibly the child welfare service*".

As regards the question of who could be contacted in connection with other difficulties, it was chiefly the public health nurse and doctor who were mentioned, along with a schoolteacher or pre-school teacher.

While the above persons were mentioned repeatedly, respondents mentioned a broad range of persons and authorities. Many would contact their parents first of all, although other alternatives were the recreational club, Kirkens SOS and other emergency helplines, the family counselling service, BUP (mental health services for adolescents) or the Red Cross, friends, the police or a hospital. The suggestions depended on the degree of seriousness and type of problem, as well as local conditions and who they were familiar with. It was clear that the helpers' personality and reputation also played a part. At one school the counsellor was a person pupils could go to with any kind of problem.

*She is a very good person. Many people go and talk to her and she helps them too.*

*There's at least one person in my class who's been helped by XX, the way she was before, she skipped nearly every lesson and was really, yes, quite awful previously, but now she sits down and does her homework and she's become really good at school and it's all thanks to XX. It shows that it helps having someone like XX at school.*

But there were also some children who did not know who to contact. They produced answers like: "*No, I don't know about that*", "*No idea*" and "*Don't know anybody*".

One young person from the asylum reception centre said that if you contacted the child welfare service it only made things worse.

*No foreigner would go and say the mother or father has done something wrong - they can't do that because then they just go to the police.*

Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers reckoned they could contact the staff at the reception centre, but were uncertain who to contact once they were living in their own flat. Some suggested their list doctor or a friend. Several young people said they were not taken seriously when they phoned to ask for assistance: *"When a young person rings they reckon he's just kidding"*.

In Sandnes children at the day care centre said that if someone was sad, ill or had a pain somewhere, they should go to a grown-up. They could also ask a grown-up to phone mother or father; then they should go to home and lie down on the couch, or go to the doctor or to hospital. The children also pointed to their own role in consoling someone who has taken a tumble or is feeling sad, and help them by going to one of the grown-ups at the day care centre.

Children and young people were preoccupied with loyalty, accessibility and confidentiality:

- If a friend's health problem was serious, most of them were adamant that you had to ask that friend what it is that he or she wanted. Loyalty was at centre stage.
- The public health nurse was the most familiar adult and one that most children mentioned regardless of the problem at hand. However, many informants viewed the public health nurse as inaccessible. She was only there once a week, and that was too little. Nor were they sure which day the public health nurse was at school, and some said that it took too long to get help. One said: *"It took me three months to speak to the public health nurse"*.
- The young people were concerned with whether the adults they spoke to observed their duty of confidentiality. Adults had to be trusted in order to dare to report anything. Some would feel awkward and a little embarrassed if they were seen on their way to the public health nurse.

## Thoughts about the future

The closing questions in the interviews and questionnaires elicited children's and young people's thoughts on and views of the future. Some of the questions asked what they thought could be done to bring about a better childhood environment, what youth measures they would prioritise if they were politicians and sat on the municipal council, and how they envisaged their lives in 10 years' time. Thoughts and opinions on the future expressed by children and young people in the eight participating municipalities round off the report to the United Nations.

## ***What improvements can be made to the conditions in which children and young people grow up?***

Some of the suggestions dealt with specific improvements in the respondents' local environment, such as building a swimming pool, facilities for those not involved in sport and music, more playgrounds, more motorcross and trial circuits, better facilities for the disabled and persons in need of extra assistance, places to stay on weekend evenings, more leisure activities and a greater number of committed adults. Suggestions of a more general nature were also made such as introducing the right to vote at age 16 and measures to combat drug and alcohol problems. One respondent issued the following call: *"Spend more time listening to children and young people and what we want!"*

### **Some suggestions were related to improving schools**

- Better schools with textbooks for every pupil in every subject.
- School canteen with hot meals!
- Apprentice positions for pupils in vocational subjects.
- Less bullying at school.
- That teachers should see to it that there is a good atmosphere among the pupils.
- It is important to remember that children are Norway's future, they are the ones who will be running this country and make the wheels go round. That's why I feel it is important to make sure that the school is in a good state, getting a job must be straightforward, there must be enough leisure activities, and, in particular, a motorcross circuit must be set up.

### **Other suggestions focused on the environment**

- Better public transport and better cycle paths are important!
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions must be reduced.
- Don't litter the countryside.
- Don't build so many houses, they spoil the countryside.
- Less pollution! More woodlands and open air.
- The environment ought to be a major theme at school, if not an optional subject.

### **Suggestions of a more personal nature:**

- Make friends and be like everyone else.
- Get a residence permit.

### *Imagine you were a politician.....*

Children and young people were also asked, hypothetically, what their priorities would be if they were politicians: Imagine you are a politician with a seat on the municipal council. You are going to grant funds for youth programmes. What would you prioritise and grant funds to, if you had to choose? Various answer options could be ticked off.

**The following programmes received most support from children and young people, in order of priority:**

1. Intensified programme to combat crime and violence.
2. Intensified programme to combat hash, drugs and other use of intoxicants.
3. Intensified programme to combat racism.
4. Protection of the environment.
5. Gender equality.
6. Outdoor recreation centre.
7. Sports facilities.
8. Funds available to young people who want to do things on their own.
9. Recreational clubs
10. Locales young people can run themselves.

It is interesting to note that young people gave priority to combating crime, drugs and other use of intoxicants rather than to other favoured measures.

### *Imagine your life in 10 years' time. What thoughts do you have about your own future?*

The answers showed that many children and young people took a bright view of the future. Some had clear-cut plans as regards education and career ranging from strip cartoonist to teacher, while others wished to realise a dream of travelling round the world on a motorcycle. Some mentioned happiness and good conditions for their children to grow up in as visions for the future. But there were also children and young people with a more pessimistic view of the future. The answers are grouped under the following headings:



### **General optimism**

- I think I've got to where I wanted to be. I don't think there's any problem getting there if you just keep at it.
- I think I'll have loads of opportunities in 10 years' time. As long as we take care of what we've got. And I'll have a good life 10 years from now if there's a serious focus on the younger generation. Young people are the future.
- I have a lot of opportunities, I can nip down to a cafe, get a job, house, and I can be voted on to the municipal council.
- If things turn out as I wish, I'll be a famous star in Hollywood.

### **Pessimism and uncertainty**

- I didn't think anything would become of me since I had a teacher who treated me really unfairly. The teacher's pet was a girl, but me, a few lads and another girl were the teacher's 'pet hates'.
- I can't manage to think a great deal about it.
- I'm pretty uncertain so far.

### **Education and occupation**

- Don't really know; I would like to work at a children's home.
- I've thought of going to photography school and becoming a photographer.
- I'm planning to become a film animator or maybe strip cartoonist. I'm also planning to move abroad, to the US or Japan.
- I want to become a fireman / firewoman; there's a big chance that I'll get a job.
- Footballer.
- I'm going to university to get as high an education as possible.

### **Family and children**

- Hope I get the chance to let my own children play safely in the street and a fresh, green park near where I live. Hope that there won't be too many people moving into farming districts so we can keep our fine countryside.
- Move into my own flat and raise a family.
- I'm going to be a teacher, have five children and live here.

## 6 Summary and conclusions

Norway ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 8 January 1991. All countries that have ratified the Convention undertake to report to the UN on their compliance every five years. Norway's fourth report is to be delivered in spring 2008. As part of that report the Ministry of Children and Equality wished to communicate children and young people's views on growing up in Norway, seen in relation to some articles of the UN Convention. Eight municipalities were invited to obtain the views of children and young people. They were the Alna district of Oslo, Alta, Bjugn, Kautokeino, Lillesand, Sandnes, Skedsmo and Trondheim. NOVA was asked to provide guidance for the project and to present the results in an overall report.

### *Chapter 1, Background and framework for the project*

The chapter describes the project's organisational set-up and implementation. Information was obtained from children and young people on core themes such as awareness of the Convention, well-being and co-determination at school, various forms of discrimination and unfair treatment, leisure activities and access to health services. Six municipalities carried out questionnaire-based surveys; three of them also employed qualitative interviews. Two municipalities confined themselves to qualitative interviews with various groups of informants. The survey contains information from pupils at all levels of the compulsory school system, and, in one municipality, also day care centre children – in all 1,274 children and young people. This figure includes information from minority, refugee and asylum-seeking children and children who are clients of the child welfare service or other targeted services – In all 32 children and young people. The samples are not drawn in such a way as to ensure representativity, or in such a way that the results can be generalised, either to the particular municipality or to the country as a whole.

### *Chapter 2, Awareness of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*

The survey showed that about half of the interviewed children and young people were aware of the UN Convention. Awareness levels varied widely, however. In one municipality two out of three reported that they knew of the Convention. In one grade in another municipality almost 86 per cent

reported the same. Hence the results are somewhat better than in an earlier national survey in which about 38 per cent in the age range 15-24 answered that they knew of the Convention (Norway's third report to the UN, 2003). The number of those who were aware of the Convention was exceeded by those who knew that they had rights at home, at school and in the wider society. This is an understandable result in as much as children's rights are impelled by several sources.

Many knew little about the subject matter of the Convention, and what knowledge they possessed often came across as fragmentary. Several of the qualitative quotes and interviews none the less revealed a high degree of reflective ability, both with regard to personal circumstances and to the problems faced by children and young people in many other countries. Children and young people were particularly concerned with equality and fairness and by the fact that their counterparts in other parts of the world face a more difficult life situation than they do themselves. It is worrying that children from refugee services and asylum reception centres appeared to be less aware of the Convention than others.

The answers showed that children's knowledge of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child varied from one municipality to the next, indeed even within the same school and grade. This can reasonably be interpreted in light of differences in municipal organisation, differing priorities at schools and also among teachers. Despite the fact that awareness of the Convention and of their own rights had reached many children, there are no institutional safeguards to ensure that *all* children and young people are made aware of the Convention and their rights.

### *Chapter 3, Children's well-being and co-determination at school*

Children's and young people's answers showed that a large majority were happy at school, in their class/group and at break time, from about 60 to more than 90 per cent. This accords with findings in a series of other surveys (Bakken 2003, Kjærnsli et al. 2004). However, surveys also show that up to 20 per cent are not happy and, in the case of about 5 per cent of the latter, life at school is onerous (Nordahl 2008). In the present survey too a number of pupils struggled with various aspects of school life due to relations with fellow pupils and/or teachers. A large majority had friends and someone to talk to. At the same time the number reporting that they had friends to spend time with far exceeded the number who experienced school as a completely safe and secure place to be. In one municipality more than 30 per

cent stated that some pupils at school never left them in peace. In other words friends do not provide sufficient protection.

A majority of pupils also reported being on good terms with their teacher, and many mentioned examples of situations or teachers they were happy with. But they also reported wide differences between teachers and unfair treatment of pupils by teachers. The difficulties of rectifying circumstances they were not happy with were pointed out. They felt both that their voice was not heard and that criticism was not well received.

There were fairly large variations from one municipality to the next as regards pupils' co-determination at school. Between 43 per cent and 83 per cent were of the opinion that they received good tuition in co-determination and participation. Between about 61 per cent and 76 per cent considered that the teachers encourage pupils to participate in the work of the pupils' council. Between about 50 per cent and 90 per cent or more said they 'agreed completely or to some extent' that the pupils' council wielded large influence or that its voice was at least heard. In general it can be said that children and young people desired a say in decision-making, and that the school went some way towards complying, but not as far as the pupils desired.

The pupils' answers showed that teachers play a key role in facilitating tuition in and practice of children's rights, and it is clear from the above paragraph that many teachers are doing a good job on this front. Even so the pupils' answers indicated that fortuitousness ? or the individual teacher's personal motivation played too great a part in whether or not pupils received tuition in democratic processes, in whether or not the stage was set for a functioning pupil democracy and whether or not they were treated with respect. The pupils pointed out that their personal commitment was also needed if pupil democracy was to work.

#### *Chapter 4, Discrimination and unfair treatment*

A large majority of children and young people did not believe they were subjected to discrimination or unfair treatment at school. Given the fact that most, by far, of the pupils who took part in the survey were born in Norway of Norwegian parents, this is not a surprising finding. To a specific question on who, in the event, perpetrated the discrimination, several pupils said they were subjected to unfair treatment by pupils and teachers alike. Between 33 per cent and 76 per cent said that they were never treated unfairly by

teachers. Several municipalities were struck by the fact that from 10 to 14 per cent felt unfairly treated by teachers two to three times a month or more.

Children and young people of both Norwegian and minority background expressed the view that some discrimination was on grounds of ethnicity. In the present survey as in many others children and young people with a non-Norwegian ethnic background said they were very happy at school, even though they reported, more often than their Norwegian counterparts, that they were not left in peace and were subjected to discrimination. Based on the qualitative interviews, young people may appear to have taken over the wider society's critical gaze on themselves. When reporting experiences of discriminatory or unfair treatment, they often added comments such as *"I'm not playing ghetto, by the way!"* They levelled a similarly critical gaze at others with other ethnic origins. *"We think like that ourselves, that foreigners make trouble!"* Some highlighted bullying between different immigrant groups, a problem that has received little attention in Norway.

A group that arouses particular concern is refugee and asylum-seeking children. Not many such children participated in the present survey, but from Alta in the north to Sandnes in the south they told of an absence of friends and inclusion, the discomfort of being placed in a separate class at school, the feeling of being deliberately excluded from the society at large by lack of transport to leisure activities, and the sense of poverty and of living in conditions far poorer than those enjoyed by other children and young people in Norway. This is serious feedback.

Bullying is seen as a widespread problem at Norwegian primary schools. Like its predecessors, the present survey confirmed that bullying takes place on a substantial scale. 52 and 67 per cent in two municipalities respectively reported that they had been subjected to no bullying whatsoever, while between 7 and 8 per cent reported being bullied two to three times a month or more. The respondents considered that demands for a stop to be put to bullying and for bullying to have visible consequences in the form of penalties, expulsion or other sanctions, should be effectively enforced.

Children and young people expressed the view that differential treatment of boys and girls was frequent. Specifically, the boys thought girls were treated better and faced laxer requirements in a number of areas. It was not clear whether the girls agreed with these assessments and, if so, whether they regarded such discrimination as positive or negative.

### *Chapter 5, Leisure, assistance services and thoughts about the future*

The interviews showed that the municipalities offered a number of leisure facilities. Most interviewees were happy with the facilities available, although they did have suggestions as regards other measures they would like to see introduced. Many called for more facilities for unorganised young people such as recreational clubs, places to meet at weekends and venues devoted to unorganised sports. It is interesting to compare this wish list with the priorities they would have selected had they been politicians on the municipal council: in that position they would have granted funds to increase efforts to combat crime and violence, drugs and racism!

Several called for more facilities for unorganised youth and venues devoted to unorganised sports: *"If you've got nothing to do, you go out, wander around without purpose and suddenly you start doing silly things"* as one young person put it, referring to the drop in criminality that was seen after the introduction of more facilities for unorganised youth where he was living.

A majority decided over their leisure activities themselves, although they also discussed the matter with their parents. Some expressed the view that obligations at home took up their leisure time. Poor finances also curbed their participation. Above all, young people at asylum reception centres said they were unable to participate in leisure activities on account of poor finances.

Children and young people were generally fairly familiar with the municipality's health and social services and knew where to seek assistance if they or someone they knew had a health problem or difficulties at home. More of them knew where to turn with a health problem than with problems at home. Most of them, by far, would contact a public health nurse, although it was pointed out that she tended not to be available. Others also mentioned a teacher or school counsellor, someone at the recreational club, a doctor, psychologist or the child welfare service. It was important for the young people that the services were accessible and that the staff observed the duty of confidentiality.

## Conclusions

The survey showed that about half of the children and young people in the participating municipalities knew of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A higher proportion knew that they had rights. Teaching and enforcement of children's rights at school and in their leisure time can

without doubt be improved. The survey brought to light wide municipal variations. Hence an important conclusion is that there are no institutional safeguards to ensure that children and young people in Norway are made aware of the Convention, of their own rights and the significance to them of such rights.

Children and young people were quick to respond on the issue of deciding over their personal everyday life. One young person put it as follows: *"Just because we have a good life doesn't mean that we can demand everything we want. We also have obligations."* They were also preoccupied with combating bullying and discrimination in Norway, and children's situation in other parts of the world meant a lot to them. It will be important to build on this readiness to assume responsibility in the further planning of tuition in children's and young people's rights.

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