

# Poverty, Shame and Social Exclusion

## Work Package 3

### Norway: Media Analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

From the late 1970s until the early 2000s, the term “poverty” was nearly invisible from the general public debate and media discourse (Bay and Stang, 2009), with the percentage of mention of “poverty” in coverage of the welfare state reaching a low in 1999 of 3% (Bay and Saglie, 2003). Poverty came back into the public eye in the wake of the debate over whether or not Norway should join the EU in the late 1990s (Pedersen, 2006) and the new centre-right coalition government that came into power in 1997 made poverty a key part of their political platform and the issue of poverty was included in the political platforms of parties across the political spectrum throughout the 2000s, albeit with different perspectives on how to address the issue (Bay and Stang, 2009; Hagen and Lødemel, 2010). A “moral panic” in the early- to mid-2000s revolved around the welfare state rather than around individuals (Hagen and Lødemel, 2010). The media focus on poverty has, however, taken varying forms and been attached to differing ideas, norms, and moral judgments. In this way, media portrayals of poverty have located shame and shaming in varying arenas on the social hierarchy. The focus appeared to spike in the 2000s (Bay and Stang, 2009) and has found less coverage since 2010, perhaps due to an overriding concern with the welfare state and more universally targeted benefits.

## METHODS

This paper examines the coverage of poverty by four national newspapers in Norway.<sup>1</sup> Using the A-Tekst search engine, news articles were culled from 12 weeks selected according to a randomized design over a five-year period: 2007-2011.<sup>2</sup> For each month selected, we have narrowed our focus to one, seven-day block of time. Our A-Tekst search strategy involved four separate searches: 1) *poor\* and not (international\* or assistance\*)*; 2) *social assistance\* or social service\**; 3) *welfare\**; and 4) *qualification program\* or qualification benefit\**. Our article selection criteria excluded articles focusing on poverty or international assistance to countries outside Norway, but otherwise, our exploration of media coverage of poverty included a fairly broad scope in order to investigate in more depth issues such as hierarchies of welfare, notions of “us” versus “them, as well as issues and challenges pertaining to the larger Norwegian welfare system.

Our selection procedure resulted in a total of 201 news articles. Each was coded according to the aspect of poverty being reported on, as well as the focal point and direction of shame reflected in the article. Important to note is that while we were sensitive to the shaming – or depiction of shaming – that may have taken place via the article, we did not limit our focus to only those articles in

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<sup>1</sup> *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *VG* are papers with a focus on events nationwide, whereas the primary focus of *Dagsavisen* is on Oslo area events. All papers, however, have a national readership.

<sup>2</sup> Bay and Stang (2009) have conducted an in-depth analysis of media coverage of poverty in the first part of the 2000s and this analysis, therefore, takes the analysis into the second half of the decade. The period also covers the first years of the newly established NAV (national labour and welfare) administration and the first five years of the Qualification Programme (enacted 2007), targeted to individuals far outside or in danger of falling outside the Norwegian labour market. Finally, the period in focus also includes media coverage after and since the world economic crisis of 2008/2009.

which shaming or its depiction were present, due to our aim to substantiate the incidence of shaming or the depiction of shaming in those articles focused on poverty or poverty-related issues. We have used the themes and discourses that have emerged as the basis of our reported findings below. Also important to note is that our coding system distinguished between those articles that we judged as actively engaging in shaming of those individuals living in poverty or receiving welfare (social assistance or disability) benefits (coded as “shaming down”) and those articles that *described* acts of shaming or the shaming experience (coded as “describing shaming down”). Articles were additionally coded according to three other categories: “shaming up”, in which groups higher up the social or power hierarchy were shamed (i.e. local and national political leaders, the welfare system) and “shaming across”, in which groups shamed other groups on the same hierarchical playing field (i.e. a representative from the Socialist Left shaming the Conservative Party for a particular policy proposal). Less frequently found were articles coded as “shaming society”, in which the author shamed dominant Norwegian society for a particular understanding or practice. It was possible to attach multiple shaming to one article and thus, one article could be found to both “shame up” and “shame down”.

## **FINDINGS**

### **1. Temporally-specific themes**

Our analysis included coverage of three weeks from each of the years 2007 and 2008 and two weeks from the years 2009-2011. While our focus was limited to short periods of time within a particular week, the number of articles focused on poverty appeared to vary greatly, depending upon the particular political and economic events occurring in each period.

#### **1.1 Welfare system overhaul: 2007**

The year 2007 directly followed several remarkable changes to Norway’s welfare system, including the merger of Norway’s labour and welfare agencies into one administration as well as the start of the Qualification Programme, which offered activation programming on a broad scale to eligible social services users for the first time. News articles described troubles with the new NAV system and alternately challenged both the generosity and the demeaning process of categorization that the system encouraged. One news article suggested as a particularly problematic system failure the necessity to repeat one’s woes to a large and often ineffective audience. The article described a situation in which in order to “have their case pushed forward” users were required to “have many people listen to or be bystanders to what’s happening. This has to be fixed” (Nielsen, 2007). Representing two, week-long periods, 64 articles were analysed and 21% engaged in shaming down, 52% shamed up or across and 14% described shaming down. Given the focus on reform to the welfare system, it is not surprising that a majority of the articles engaged in shaming up or across.

## **1.2 Global economic crisis: 2008/2009**

During 2008 and early 2009 economies worldwide slowed, as credit tightened and international trade declined. While the global financial crisis was experienced less severely in Norway than in many other OECD countries, there was a significant rise in unemployment and the threat of risks tied to heightened global insecurity (OECD, 2010). Those articles analysed from winter 2008 and spring 2009 reflected the sense of threat to the Norwegian welfare system and broader economy. Articles focused on the non-Western immigrant burden to Norway's welfare system and engaged in naming and shaming of certain groups. A series of articles described a recently distributed report conducted by Statistics Norway (SSB – an independent organization responsible for coordinating official statistics in Norway). One article described this report as a sort of scorecard tallying how much “society used on welfare ordinances for immigrants” of certain groups. The article reported that “even for the most deprived immigrant groups like Somalis, Iraqis and Afghanis, income from work and capital make a higher part of income than income from welfare ordinances.” While the article noted the reluctance of SSB to perform this sort of calculation for fear of stigmatizing particular groups based on coincidental findings, the article ended with a quote from an immigrant shop owner in Oslo, who described her irritation with immigrants who didn't do their part: “There are too many immigrants in Norway who are dependent on support from the state. This makes me irritated and pissed because they destroy it for all of us who work really hard” (Johansen, 2008).

Another opinion piece described the threat as being located with the recent upsurge in a consumption society, a theme that is described in more detail below. This author argued that a focus on consumption undermined the Norway's social democratic way and gently advised readers to be guided by the spirit of the Christmas season: “It's important to ensure that values are more than just something traded on the stock market...values can't be measured in money and success” (Bakken, 2008). Representing two week long periods analysed 21 articles: 24% shamed down, 29% shamed up or across, and 29% described shaming down.

## **1.3 Norwegian Parliamentary elections: fall 2009**

Norway's parliamentary elections were held in mid-September, 2009. The reigning “red-green” coalition government was comprised of the Labour Party (LP), with the support of the Social Left (SL) and the Centre Party. During the 2009 campaign, the leader of the Socialist Left Party was the target of criticism because of a stated promise during the 2005 parliamentary election to remove poverty (“with the stroke of a pen”). Not unsurprisingly, the reigning administration failed to fulfil this promise. Rather, poverty increased nationwide. We analysed 37 articles on domestic poverty during a one-week period just prior

to the elections. This represented far more articles than any other period analysed and reflected a campaign focus on poverty. The dissonance between promise and delivery became a major theme of the campaign and, in so doing, brought poverty to the forefront of the campaign as parties sought to use the issue of poverty to shame each other for either not doing enough or for threatening to do less. The campaign season focused on policy failure and the policies necessary to strengthen Norway's work approach, ostensibly to normalize and improve lives across the political spectrum. One editorial described a "Poverty hearing 2009" that had "managed...to set poverty on the agenda." In response, the leader of the Christian Folk Party called for a "national dugnad" to address the issue of poverty (Aasheim, 2009b). More accurately, however, news articles from this period reflect a goal by opposition parties to show the glue that was lacking in the three-party administration – and specifically, to attack the SL. Thus, in this period, shaming cast across party lines was frequent. Of 37 articles: 19% shamed down, 49% shamed up or across and 32% described shaming down.

The exact nature of shaming that took place across the aisle varied according to which side one was on. From the left was shame cast by one editorial columnist at a social assistance system blamed for providing a benefit rate that was "so little that it's...nearly under the hunger line" (Aasheim, 2009a). From the right came a focus on state-managed approaches and programmes – namely, social assistance and disability schemes – that encouraged "passivity" by being too generous. As described by the leader of one right-wing think tank: "There are many (people on disability) who can and will work, but who are supported out of the labour market because of the system. I think it should be a goal that as many people as possible are self-reliant, and I think that a good welfare state can only survive if it has high legitimacy and can be financed" (Clemet, 2009). The leader of the Oslo Conservative Party supported the idea that the red-green administration had, in fact, increased poverty via the measures introduced in the past four years: "for a regime that gave the impression that all could be solved with more money, it's worth noting how little was in fact solved with more money" (Astrup, 2009).

One editorial took issue with this sentiment and criticized parties on the right for cynically using the issue of poverty to further their agenda: "On one side they push social assistance and economic policies that with large probability will result in more inequality and criminality. On the other side they crack down on this with police and prisons to deal with the problems." The columnist suggested the cynical doublespeak used by the Conservative Party (CP) via their use of catchphrases: "'It should pay to work', 'flexibility' and 'safe to go down the street', say the Conservatives. One might ask if it makes society good and safe to drive up criminality with one hand and slap it down ruthlessly with the other" (Lokeland-Stai, 2009). Interestingly, an interview with Oslo's then-new Minister of Foreign Affairs, from the LP, also, however, noted a preoccupation with "reclaiming safety ...in Oslo's streets" (Hollie, 2009).

Interestingly, party youth groups on the right engaged in especially extreme rhetoric concerning the issue of poverty and those editorials featuring young party members represented the most explicit examples of shaming and stigmatizing of individuals living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> One example: a former leader of the CP youth group castigated the Prime Minister about not being more honest about poverty, suggesting that he could say: 'there are many poor who should be more thankful that the rich have made it possible for them to live worthwhile lives' ...but he will however never say that....Why? Because we are morally bound to take care of the weakest? We are, but so are people also bound to take care of themselves. This means in practice to use your own abilities and to do the best for yourself, not to set yourself in the victim role and just take a piece of others work earnings. This is doubly shameful: (These people) make other people their slaves – and they do this out of laziness" (Stocke-Nicolaisen, 2009). It is possible that – via these youthful and less accountable voices – the parties were able to air more extreme ideas concerning marginalized groups, yet at the same time maintain the ability to distance themselves politically from more radical ideas in order to appear moderate on the issue.

#### **1.4 Local elections: 2010/2011**

Norwegian municipal and county elections were held concurrently in mid-September of 2011. Our analysis represented two one-week periods subsequent to national elections and leading up to municipal and county elections. Perhaps particular to the political dynamics possible in a strong welfare state such as Norway, rather than a race to the bottom in terms of cuts to welfare programmes and benefits the campaign season revolved around which party could more rightly claim the mantle of the "welfare party". For example, one news article described the Conservatives as "working hard and determinedly to deprive the Labour Party of the role as the clear welfare party" (Stanghelle, 2011). Here, however, the focus was on education and health. One editorial column suggested that schools and care were "the most important areas of responsibility for Norwegian municipalities" and that it was, therefore, "not especially surprising" that these were the top campaign issues (Narum, 2011).

At the same time, however, given the Norwegian practice of subsidiarity and therefore that poverty-related issues were and are locally controlled/determined, it is also surprising that poverty was not an issue in this local election. Within the context of welfare services falling on a hierarchy from universally-targeted services on top to needs-tested social assistance on the bottom (Gubrium and Lødemel 2011) this is perhaps less surprising. We analysed two, one-week periods, representing a total of 29 articles, of which 17% shamed down, 41% shamed up or across and 21% described shaming down. Similar to our analysis focused on the Parliamentary elections in 2009, the bulk of the articles in this

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<sup>3</sup> The same might also be claimed for youth groups representing parties on the left. Our particular sample of articles, however, did not consist of articles authored by LP or SL youth groups.

period engaged in shaming up or across, again, unsurprising given the campaign season.

## **2. Coverage of poverty: persistent themes**

We now move to a consideration of the most persistent themes that arose from our analysis. While the aim of this paper is to highlight the portrayal of individuals living in poverty by the mainstream Norwegian newspaper media, more specifically as this relates to shame and shaming, it is important to acknowledge the relatively low share of articles identified that reflected a negative/stigmatized/shaming view of individuals or groups living in (absolute or relative) poverty. Of our 201 analysed articles, 45% shamed up and across, 26% described shaming, 20% shamed down (but some shamed both down and up) and 17% were entirely neutral. This is a characteristic that may be clarified further in comparison with the media analyses from countries in which the media coverage of poverty is much more negative.

That said, while most of the news articles analysed did not broadly denounce “the poor” or seek to find blame in a class-laden “culture of poverty”, negative portrayals of poverty were often connected with one’s position within a welfare system hierarchy and one’s ethnic background, as discussed in section 2.1. At the same time, articles focused on a growing contrast between the Norwegian equality ideal and the rapid increase in inequality. As described in section 2.2, this discrepancy was often ascribed to a rise in consumption and a change in demographics, especially marked in Oslo.

Finally, most articles analysed were written with the presumption of individualised responsibility for poverty. Reflecting this understanding, many articles – both basic news features and editorials – focused on the work approach as the way out of poverty. This focus carried with it the idea that responsibility/agency for one’s situation lay overwhelmingly with the individual and, also reflecting this tendency, little attention was thus paid to discrimination, a difficult job market or other structural challenges. The work approach and the potential effects of the preoccupation with individual responsibility are described in more detail in section 2.3.

A note about the nature of the coverage: Coverage of poverty-related issues was frequently in the format of opinion pieces (guest columns), letters to the editor, or news journalist editorials: 34% of the articles analysed were presented in the format of opinion pieces by the lay public or journalists. Also worth noting was the relatively low level of coverage in our selected time periods of issues pertaining to social assistance or the Qualification Programme, surprising considering that we analysed 3 time periods in each of 2007 and 2008, just after the Qualification Programme had begun. Of the 201 articles analysed, only 18% pertained to social assistance and 3% to the Qualification Programme. Articles more commonly focused on poverty levels as a campaign issue,

immigrant-related poverty, and the management of incentive structures related to the use of disability pensions and sick leave.

## **2.1 Deservingness**

As suggested in our WP2 conversations with individuals living in poverty and WP3 conversations with the general public, a welfare system hierarchy of more and less “deserving” was a prominent theme in the analysed news articles.

### *2.1.1 The “deserving”*

Within the welfare system hierarchy, the recipients of universally provided welfare benefits and services – education and healthcare – were placed at the top. An opinion piece by the leader of the national CP pointed to the hierarchy of deservingness that framed the debate on welfare. She highlighted her party’s plan to direct money to “secure quality in schools and safety in the health sector”. While describing her party’s aim to develop the “best welfare ordinances that can be found”, she also referred to those individuals lower on the hierarchy, noting, “the big challenge in the coming years is to stop the growth in the number of those on disability and to decrease sick leave” (Solberg, 2010).

In addition to education and health, individuals receiving elderly care services and benefits (minimum pensions) were also described as most deserving. Discussions concerning minimum pension recipients focused on elderly women who, for varying reasons, had not earned full rights to a pension and were, therefore supported only with a minimal amount of money in their later years. For example, one article noted that this group was represented “especially by women who were homemakers before 1992” who did not earn a pension “when they had cared for children” (Nordlund, 2007). This group was described as unrightfully forced to live in a state of near poverty and were, therefore, among the “deserving” poor.

### *2.1.2 The “undeserving”*

In contrast to the elderly (especially women) and those receiving health and education services, those individuals deemed most vulnerable and furthest from the labour market – social assistance claimants – were also described in stigmatising terms. Rather than describing these claimants as individuals, however, many of the articles analysed described social assistance as a category or identity to be avoided and was certainly at the bottom of the welfare system hierarchy. For example, an opinion piece by an PR representative on the Oslo city council called for targeting improved economic support to those who he suggested deserved to receive an increase, as opposed to toward social assistance claimants, noting, “One of the most important reasons that many people have to go on social assistance is that the rates for disability and minimum pensions are too low. These are people who are too sick or old to work.



Today they are doomed to a life at the social assistance office". The representative noted that the PR had called for the income of these individuals to increase "so they could forgo visiting the social assistance office" (Kallmyr, 2007). Another editorial described the shaming of individuals on disability in the face of news articles casting suspicion on them. The author opined against the characterisation of disability claimants as "leeches" and suggested that shaming was misdirected to those in real need: "The people who become occupationally impaired are a large group who don't have the chance to fight for their own case. Many of these have congenital illnesses that mean that they can't function in work life. The national politicians don't care much about this. They put them all in the same bag to make shame absolute" (Otlo, 2007). This author suggested that disability claimants had been shamed just as much by being placed in the same category as individuals belonging to a lower tier of the welfare hierarchy as by being accused of taking advantage of the system.

The hierarchy of deserving and undeserving also included various ethnic groups. Non-Western immigrants – in particular, Somalis, but also Iraqis, Pakistanis, and Afghanis – were described as a "challenge" to the welfare state and a "problem" that had specifically beset the city of Oslo. One opinion column, written by a right-wing spokesperson and blogger, noted that the Norwegian "welfare state's generous distribution of social economic support has undeniably motivated many immigrants to claim social assistance rather than to find themselves a job" and claimed that Muslim immigrants "without a moral backbone" were "exploiting the disability budget" and thus "losing trust" for their religion as well as failing to "take control of their own lives" and thus losing the respect of "ethnic Norwegians" who would otherwise be happy to "respect a friendly, hardworking, non-nagging and result-oriented Muslim" (Herland, 2007). Instead, however, the columnist described non-Western immigrant groups as "losers" who didn't "play by society's rules" (Herland, 2007).

In 2008 and 2009, SSB reported on immigrant contribution to- versus use of the welfare system, specified according to immigrant group. A series of articles in 2008 described the first SSB study, which reported Somalis and Iraqis to be the immigrant groups with the fewest resources, with one article attributing the issue to the "low percentage of women in work" (Riaz, 2008). A series of articles in 2009 responded to a second SSB study, in which a measure of "self reliance" was attributed to particular immigrant groups, with this concept defined as managing without social assistance, housing support, disability pensions or unemployment support. For example, one article noted that a relatively low percentage of Oslo's inhabitants were "self reliant". As the article explained, "the main reason for the gloomy SSB numbers is the high number of immigrants who receive various transfers" (Johansen, 2009). The article reported that Somalis were at the bottom of the list, followed by Iraqis. The presentation of these statistics was followed by comments from members of the Populist Right (PR) and the LP, with PR representative describing the statistics as "scary" and noting the party's inclination "that Oslo shouldn't welcome more Iraqis and Somalis".

The LP also engaged in ranking immigrant groups, with an Oslo LP representative noting that “Filipinos and Vietnamese are almost more self reliant than the general population. But we have a large problem” with Somalis and Pakistanis, going on to note that Pakistani issues included “illicit work and segregation” (Johansen, 2009).

The focus on Somalis as a particularly problematic group was represented most notably in articles from 2007 and 2008 that described problems, including cheating the system, abusing drugs (khat), and worklessness. On the same day that the Herland (2007) article appeared in *Aftenposten*, another general news article appeared describing the “alarming” use of khat (a stimulant chewed like tobacco) by members of the Oslo Somali community. The article described a “vicious cycle” in which “young Somalis abuse khat because they don’t have work” and quoted a representative in the National Organization against Substance Abuse who suggested that it was “the Norwegian welfare system that made Somalis passive” due to easy money, without measures tailored to their needs and wishes (Olsen, 2007a).

More structural explanations for the seeming inability of Oslo Somalis to culturally integrate or get a job were not often present in the analysed articles. One news article in the same paper the next day, however, reviewed the challenges of high khat abuse and unemployment among Oslo’s Somali communities, but also noted there might also be structural issues at play, with one young Somali quoted as saying, “It’s difficult to get a job – we’re treated differently. We’re made to suffer for everything that a few Somalis have done” (Olsen, 2007b). Within the same article, however, the State Secretary for the Department of Labour and Inclusion acknowledged that “something had gone completely wrong” and underscored the need to locate responsibility with the Somali community itself. As she noted: “not to place requirements is to not take responsibility for people. Society has to too large a degree talked about rights, not duties. This has made many people passive” (Olsen, 2007b). In response to much of this discussion and in another rare example of a critical analysis of the situation for Oslo’s Somali community, one journalist described the public discourse about Somalis as applying an “us” and “them” discourse. The journalist questioned a media analysis that focused only on what was “wrong” with “them”: “arrogance, a waste of money, female segregation, laziness, khat chewing, their religion, and their lacking will to integrate” (Wang-Naveen, 2008).

It is worth noting that there were instances of media portrayals of non-Western immigrant groups as deserving. This more positive portrayal was especially the case when the focus was on immigrant families. For example, one article written by a national SL leader defended the broadening of parental leave provisions for new fathers via the claim that it was important that father’s receive support “for their own use when mother participates in the Introduction- or Qualification Programme. The last are important to strengthen minority women’s ties to the labour market and to Norwegian society” (Lysbakken, 2010). The other

side of this coin was, however, a more negative portrayal of irresponsible immigrant parents and their unfortunate children. As discussed below in section 2.2.2, the immigrant family – and specifically, whether immigrant mothers would take the necessary actions to ensure their children were fully integrated – were often described as a “challenge” to a demographically changing Oslo.

### 2.1.3 “Them” versus “us”

The Norwegian Vagrancy Act (*Løsgjengerløven*) – first enacted at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and originally targeted to “vagrants”, “beggars” and “alcohol and drug abusers” – was repealed in 2006. This event, along with Romania and Bulgaria joining the EU in 2007, meant that large groups of Roma were legally able to come to Norway and have the legal right to beg for money. These groups have since made up a large number of Oslo’s homeless population (Engebrigtsen, 2012).

Within the media portrayal of poverty-related issues and individuals, the Roma were clearly described as the least deserving group. It is important to note that news articles did not only portray Roma groups in stigmatizing ways: some also described and critiqued the broader stigmatizing portrayal of Roma by Norwegian society in general as well as by the media more specifically. Regardless of which was the case, both cases suggested a general public perception of Roma groups as least deserving. One commentary article, for example, suggested a hierarchy of beggars in which Roma were at the bottom. The author noted coming across a homeless drug addict asking for money and holding a sign reading, “I am a NORWEGIAN addict”. Thanks for the help!” and noted that “In the increasingly more intense street campaign for Oslo people’s generosity there’s currently one thing that counts: to not be eastern European”. The column also described a situation pervaded by widespread suspicion of and disgust over the increasing numbers of Roma beggars in the streets.

The broad agreement that the Roma were “criminals” who made the “streets unsafe” was represented in one general news article, which cited the agreement by Oslo LP politicians that it was necessary to “drive away” from Oslo these “professional beggars and thieves from East-Europe”. The article noted that in the comparison of “us” vs “them” who “they” were had changed over time, and noting that in the mid-1990s, before the arrival of Roma from Eastern Europe, there had been a campaign by “normal people” who “felt pressured to give money to threatening beggars,” at this time, Norwegian drug addicts (Lundgaard, 2008). An article running in *Dagsavisen* followed the LP line on this issue and distinguished between “deserving” and “undeserving” beggars who posed a “problem to society”. The article noted that, “the begging problem is complex. Norwegian beggars are as a rule drug users or people who have been shut out of the ordinary labour market. Many are psychological illnesses. To force them from Karl Johan (a major commercial thoroughfare in Oslo) is not a solution to the problem” (Dagsavisen, 2008). On the other hand, the column noted,

“Beggars who come from abroad, pose a problem. ...Begging isn't in and of itself illegal. ...however, aggressive and organized begging goes against Norwegian law. Concerning this sort the police should take action” (Dagsavisen, 2008).

## **2.2 Modernity versus the Norwegian equality ideal**

Our analysis reflected findings from WP3 discussions with the general public, in which individuals had bemoaned the replacement of traditional do-it-yourself and simple living Norway with the rise of new wealth and excessive consumption. As with the individuals we spoke with, the news articles analysed suggested that this shift had threatened Norway's equality ideal.

### *2.2.1 Consumption society: relative poverty in a rich country*

Several articles discussed a report released by a researcher from SSB describing increasing inequality in Norway in which “the rich receive a steadily larger part of the pie”, noting that “the upper class has doubled its part of the Norwegian national income since 1990” and adding that “richness and poverty threaten the society that most Norwegians want to have, a society with small differences between rich and poor” (Kallset, 2008).

News articles suggested a link between a recent focus on consumption, rising inequality despite the cultural norm of social equality and generous social security provisions, all resulting in a heightened squeeze felt by certain groups of people to fit increasingly difficult cultural expectations. One article quoted an SL leader in Norway's reigning red-green coalition concerning the experience of poverty in a rich welfare state. As the leader explained: “It can be difficult to be poor in a rich country where many have experienced an extreme rise in consumption” (Gjerde and Nygaard, 2007). Another editorial more explicitly tied increased inequality in Norway to heightened experiences of shame by the poor. As the author noted: “we bathe in champagne, shop more, travel more tend more to ourselves and display status symbols”. The article bemoaned the fact that, “despite promises of eliminating poverty, there has been a small increase in people under the poverty line. The poor in newly rich Norway are people who for varying reasons fall outside work life, the sick, immigrant women, and children with minority backgrounds. ...Almost everyone we see in the public sphere is successful and rich while the poor are negligibly visible. The richness glitters so much that it hides poverty. The silence about poverty makes the shame even bigger” (Dagbladet Leder, 2007).

As noted in section 1.3, much of the coverage of rising inequality in Norway also referred to the failed attempts of the current regime to lower poverty levels, as had been earlier promised. One news article reported the focus by the Christian Folk Party at their national meeting on the issue of “50,000 more poor children in the past years” and their accusation toward the current administration of having “lost focus” on the issue (Ruud, 2011). A PR representative sitting on

the committee for family affairs described the support provided to families with children as “shameful”, with the column noting that “increasingly more of these (children) live in minority families on the East side” (Ommundsen, 2011). A lead editorial in *Aftenposten* similarly described rising inequalities in Norway as two-pronged: there was both the issue of “growing up with little money in a country thought to be running with milk and honey, having the effect of being both exclusionary and discriminatory” and “the large differences” in socio-economics and health status between East and West Oslo (*Aftenposten Leder*, 2011). We discuss the portrayal of the latter issue next.

### *2.2.2 Discrepancies/inequalities East to West: Oslo*

The discussion of inequalities in Oslo and Oslo’s particular poverty problem was a running theme throughout many of the articles focusing on poverty in Norway. One article in a series titled “the new wealthy Norway” described differences in Oslo housing prices East to West, noting that one’s “housing location is extremely important for the identity of the wealthy” as well as for those with fewer resources. The article’s findings supported our findings from WP2 and WP3, which had suggested that one’s housing situation was of specific importance in determining one’s position on the social hierarchy. The article cited a social geographer at the Oslo Business School: “Some of the last things that people who become poorer give up is one’s address....It’s easier to sell one’s car and use the tram instead, that fits well with environmental activism. One can use the library and public activity offerings for children. One also chooses to get rid of expensive clothing habits before one chooses to move to a location where others with bad economies live” (Leer-Salvesen et al., 2007).

Particularly interesting in this coverage was the strategic use of the East-West division by parties on both right and left to further their particular political agenda. The head of the Oslo LP wrote a column in which he described the large socioeconomic differences dividing West and East Oslo and describing the division as “worse to live in for everyone,” “unsafe” and a “threat” to diversity. The columnist focused especially on the discrepancy of resources and opportunities for children across Oslo (Gerhardsen, 2010). The CP, on the other hand, decried the LP for stigmatising those living on the East side. Following the publication of an article similar to Gerhardsen’s, which had described the inequality between Oslo’s East and West sides and called for increased funding to be directed toward the East side, a CP representative on the Oslo board for social issues noted, “I fear that people with resources in the East won’t want to keep residing there if the East side is only portrayed as a poor of misery” and suggested that funding *not* be specifically targeted to particular areas of the city (Hauglie, 2010). As with coverage of the Roma, regardless of one’s response to the particular issue, what these articles had in common was the agreement that the East side was worse off – in terms of resources or reputation – than the West side and this then can be said to reflect a broad cultural understanding concerning socio-geographical discrepancies in Oslo.

The differences in poverty East to West were associated to a large extent with differences in population demographics between the two areas, with the West side representing a higher percentage of “ethnic” Norwegians and the East side home to a much larger share of first and second generation non-Western immigrant families. Those individuals focusing on the disparity between East and West as a problem largely belonged to more left leaning political parties. Interestingly, the discussion from the left was concerned most often with the issue of child poverty, children being a “deserving” group on which to focus the public’s empathy. An issue of *Dagsavisen* headlined with an article describing an increase in child poverty on Oslo’s East side. The front page of the paper featured a photo of two young girls – sisters – playing on an unkempt street. Both sisters had dark complexions and dark hair, thus drawing attention to the non-western ethnic dimension of the issue. Children were cast as the victims of broader social inequalities – as well as, implicitly, of the challenges that their particular ethnic backgrounds presented. For example, the featured article described the work that the Oslo LP and SL were doing to address the issue, with the Oslo SL leader quoted: “Children in poor families completely blamelessly end up in the situation they’re born into, and we have a duty to fix this for the children’s sake” (Ommundsen and Halvorsen, 2010). Oslo’s LP leader focused on the work approach as *the fix*: moving parent’s – especially mothers – into work: “the most important tack to move more out of poverty is to move more into work life so they can care for them and theirs. Then you also help the children” (Ommundsen and Halvorsen, 2010).

### **2.3 The work approach and incentive calculus**

Norway’s work approach has been informed by a more general rational choice calculus, with the presumption that it is necessary to carefully balance incentives and disincentives in order to motivate individuals to work. The calculus providing the foundation for the work approach was described succinctly in one guest editorial. Given the aim of avoiding a “poverty spiral where it doesn’t pay to replace economic support with a single income”, the author suggested that in designing welfare benefits, “the most important objection is the fear that increased rates will lead to even more people than today ending up outside work life. If support becomes higher, work becomes less profitable... This demands that the consideration for work motivation is balanced with a consideration for people’s living standards” (Fløtten, 2009). News articles focusing on the LP platform reflected this calculus and the focus on properly motivating the individual to work. One article, focusing on the upcoming Parliamentary election, described the work approach as a key part of the Labour Party platform: “The LP’s fundamental idea is that it should pay to work and that one should take care not to make social security schemes so good that it becomes more attractive with insurance (benefits) than a job” (Tjernshaugen, 2009).

The media coverage that we analysed showed a cross-political party agreement concerning the basic work approach, as well as agreement that it was most necessary to direct the approach toward non-Western immigrants and young people. The LP described the party aim of inclusion when discussing the need to target specific groups. Norway's Prime Minister (LP) was quoted as saying, "My big project is to get those who today fall outside, who don't take part in societal development, on the inside of society....These can be the unemployed, those on disability, drug addicts or ethnic minorities. I will lower the threshold for those excluded to enter work life" (Karlsen, 2009). The Conservatives blamed the red-green administration for the regime's failed work approach policies and described a successful approach as including a selective focus on the "illiterate" receiving "adult education" (referring to individuals who had been granted asylum in Norway) and "people between 18 to 25...on disability benefits". The Conservative Party approach also explicitly proposed the use of "temporary positions" in order to more quickly provide "help to those falling outside the labour market" (Jonassen Nordby, 2009). In *Dagsavisen*, an article written at the height of the global economic crisis described immigrant women as receiving the bulk of Norway's social security support (Iversen, 2008), with an immigrant policy representative from the PR describing it as "job number 1" to "move more of these women into work" and a CP representative on the Parliamentary Committee for Labour and Social Affairs noting that the party "could not sit and watch while we find individual groups who over time live passively on social support" (Iversen, 2008).

Among the leading parties, the SL was the lone (and mostly muted) voice of opposition to a strict work approach. Party leaders leaned toward a focus on eradicating broader poverty over moving people into work (Tjernshaugen, 2009) and the argument by the Norway's Prime Minister (LP) that it "shouldn't be more profitable to be one hundred percent on disability than 80 percent" was said to "wake irritation in the Socialist Left, where it was pointed out that those on disability hadn't chosen their degree of disability" (Jordheim Larsen and Strøyer Aalborg, 2011).

Among our analysed articles there was also a limited critique of the basic assumptions of the work approach. One news article noted that "Work life in Norway is becoming harder and harder, yet there's been placed stronger and stronger requirements that one has to be one hundred percent effective and productive" (VG, 2009). The article quoted the Leader of the United Organization for the Disabled, who described the explicit focus on work morals by the right as "harassment" (VG, 2009). Several editorials took issue with the near universal agreement within the media and by the leading political parties that the work approach was *the* answer to many of the issues ailing the welfare state. These authors suggested that the presumption of agency (and thus, of responsibility/blame) on the part of the individual welfare claimant and potential worker resulted in negative effects for those who were not able to match the social expectation of employment. One columnist criticized the calculus attached

to the work approach: “Yes, low benefit levels can motivate individuals to forgo disability pay. But more likely the type of low support discussed here will work in the opposite fashion. A starvation diet is more predisposed to break one’s self image, determination and energy. That’s both dumb and shameful in a rich land like ours (Aasheim, 2009a).

Finally, one opinion piece brought together several of the findings we described in WPs 1, 2 and 3, concerning the link between one’s failure to fulfil one’s duty and a heightened sense of shame. The author described this failure both in the sense of meeting broad social norms and expectations concerning quality of life (according to the big story of social mobility for all), as well as more specifically fulfilling the expectation of employment to support the welfare state. The piece, written by a social work researcher and practitioner, described the shame experienced by children who “daily felt the brutality of class differences” (Aamodt 2008). The columnist described the shame that one struggling mother had experienced as she attempted to make ends meet in a country where “there was no poverty” and the “sadness, concentration difficulties and school absences” that her children experienced as a result of their situation. The author described the dissonance experienced when being “poor among the rich”, noting, “To have little money is shameful in a society where ‘everyone’ is thought to be rich...contributes to making poverty an individual problem that must be kept secret and tackled by individuals”. Additionally, the author noted, misplaced focus on the individual and presumptions of agency also resulted in more difficulties for families: “I have little faith that...closer individual follow-up will change the living situation for these children. The mothers have had individual follow-up for many years without work life coming closer. And this is not because they’re reluctant to work or lazy” (Aamodt, 2008).

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