



Impact of emergency situation on vulnerable families in Norway and assistance to them

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Shared responsibilities



- State and municipal level share the responsibility for vulnerable groups

«Normal times»

Municipal services especially important for vulnerable children in their daily life

- Health stations (0-5)
- Health stations in schools
- Health stations for youth
- Kindergardens
- Schools
- General practitioner
- Pedagogical support
- Organised leisure activities
- Child welfare service

Other services/authorities: child psychiatric polyclinics, emergency child welfare/police

Normal times - Child welfare services

- Notifications about 50 000 children/youth in 2019
- Mainly from child welfare itself, police and schools
- Few children contact the child welfare themselves, but when they do, it is a serious situation

Changes due to Covid 19

- Changes in the services
 - Kindergartens closed, except for vulnerable children and children of parents with important societal functions, six weeks
 - Schools closed, the same exceptions as above, 7 weeks and more
 - Family advice centres closed or reduced service
 - Relief homes for children with impairment, closed or reduced service
 - Reassignment of health personnel to work with pandemic tasks – reduced or closed services like health stations
- Changes for the parents
 - Many parents prohibited from working, due to lock down of many jobs (therapist, hairdresser, servants, etc.)
 - People were recommended to use home office when possible

Vulnerable children during Covid-19

- Children already known being in need of special support/follow ups
- Families already in vulnerable situations (misuse of drugs, mental problems, violence etc.)
- Concern for new vulnerable children due to social isolation, lack of daily routines for children with impairment, higher level of conflicts in isolated families due to parents losing their jobs, closed kindergardens/schools, families staying at home in small apartments, more alcohol, mental problems etc
- Estimate: 20 % of the children (225 000 children)

Rise of vulnerability, due to lock down and measures/guidelines to reduce the spreading of virus

Changes in services due to measures to stop the virus

- Restrictions in direct meeting between people
 - ↳ Less physical meetings/observations of children
 - More home office
- Difficulties in finding and coordinating cross-sectorial services
- Increased use of digital possibilities - more flexibility –a positiv consequence!



Developing alternative ways of reaching the children

- Kindergardens: preschool teachers phoning the families regularly, offering advice/pedagogical material etc
- Schools: Digital school lessons and digital or phone contact teacher/children
- Child welfare: more variety in following up the children/families due to risk assessment
 - Outside talks, walking and talking, video meetings
- National help telephone for children 24/7

Changes in services due to cancellations/no show

- Kindergardens and schools open for vulnerable children – but resistance from parents/fear of being stigmatised
- Cancellations due to fear of infections, and probably also some times as an excuse for avoiding contact with the child welfare service
- Cancellations in order to avoid being «a burden» for the health services in hospitals and polyclinics
- Less notifications to child psychiatric polyclinics and residentials

Many cancellations probably caused by guidelines saying avoid physical consultation when possible

Changes in notifications to the child welfare services

- Some services got less notifications
 - Some got more,
 - Some status quo
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- In the coming months it will be interesting to see if there will be more notifications because kindergarden and schools have opened agein.

Vulnerable children – a shared responsibility

- Initially recommendations from an expert group
- Coordination group of six directorates
 - Follow the situation and assess recommendations within each sector and cross-sectorial
 - Status reports every fortnight (1-4), to the Minister of Child and Family:
 - ensure updates of information of vulnerable children
 - establish dialogue with the Children's Ombud and third sector to observe and discuss how the organisations may contribute

Concern from the coordination group, report 1

- difficult to observe and detect children in vulnerable families when kindergardens/schools are closed
- reduced assistance to children in need of special pedagogical assistance
- children in multi-lingual families with little digital experience, problems with staying in contact with their teacher/doing their home work
- a gap rising between pupils who get enough help from their parents to keep up with the school work, and pupils who get less help
- youth in danger of stepping into juvenile delinquency
- children with impaired functioning getting reduced support
- Reduced support for asylumseeking children living in reception centers/prolonged waiting time for a decision from the immigration authorities

Report 2 and 3: status and recommendations

- no more need for reassignments or preparations for a next virus peak
 - But, some services had still reduced services due to home office or reassignments
- a lot of services were practising stronger measures to prevent spreading of the virus than recommended from the national authorities.

Status in report 4:

- Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH):
 - The strongest measures against the virus will end before 15th of June.
 - Basic rules to prevent infection must be maintained
 - Services to children should return to normal conditions, but still following the «rules»
 - Only home office, if it does not reduce the quality of the service
 - The social distance «rules» in kindergarden and schools are revised. Different levels of the measures according to the amount of virus in the society

Report 4 – recommendations from the group

- Consequences of the infection prevention measures must not affect the services for the children more than necessarily
- If the registered virus infections rise again, the services for children must be upheld as much as possible
- Summerschool and summer activities must be of high priority

Message and reflections from KS

- The municipalities have under strong pressure done a big job in taking care of the needs of the inhabitants, at the same time following the guidelines to prevent spread of the virus
- A lot of innovations in the services in child welfare, in kindergardens etc.
- Still, there is a need for taking precautions
- In many municipalities there is not sufficient personel to do the testing and the infection tracking

The big focus upon vulnerable children and the duty to adapt the services to the needs of these children, will go on!