



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Local growth and hope for the future

The rural and regional policy of the Norwegian Government
Summary of White Paper No. 25 (2008–2009)





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FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER

In spring 2009 the Government presented a new White Paper on rural and regional policy to Parliament (Stortinget), St.meld. nr. 25 (2008-2009).

The point of departure for the Government's regional policy is the establishment and maintenance of the prerequisites that secure for Norway's inhabitants real freedom to live in the place of their choice. The Government's objective is to maintain the main features of the current settlement pattern and to further develop the plurality of historical and cultural resources deriving from it. In order to achieve this, the Government will maintain its commitment to rural and regional policy.



Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa

The Government continues to pursue an 'all-region' approach. The particular policy response adopted however needs to be tailored to the situation on the ground and to the specific opportunities and challenges faced by individual regions. Through this differentiated approach, local and regional economic growth as well as individual living conditions can be strengthened. The interplay between small and medium-sized cities and larger metropolitan zones and their surrounding areas may prove to be a stabilizing element in the settlement pattern and, ultimately, a real driving force for national and regional economic development.

Growth is a 'bottom up' process. The creative abilities of individual people permit us to exploit and process the country's resources in novel and ever more inventive ways. This notion of individual creativity remains part of the bedrock of both our cultural values and our future prosperity.

I believe in supporting the capabilities of local development and the mobilization of the creative abilities of the inhabitants in communities as a development driver. Local entrepreneurs, young people and voluntary associations have brought new life to many local communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa".



FACILITATE REAL FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN RESPECT OF WHERE TO LIVE

While Norway has to a greater extent than many other countries maintained viable communities of varying sizes across the national territory the continuous migratory pull exhibited by the urban centres represents a significant challenge to the maintenance of the historical features of its traditional settlement pattern. It is however right to acknowledge here the positive population growth experienced by many Norwegian municipalities over the last two years. New inhabitants from other countries represent an important resource and should be received and included in an open manner by both large and small communities alike.

The Government aims to facilitate real freedom of choice in respect of where to live. The comprehensive survey on the motives for migration indicates that people look for various things when they make a choice about where to live. Previously the issue of employment opportunities was the determining factor. Work is still important, but high quality housing, the availability of efficient services, proximity to family, community feeling and positive environmental benefits are all factors that now influence individual choices on where to live. Each region cannot cater to all of these wishes. The Government's aim is, however, to put in place a policy that allows people to live meaningful and fulfilled lives and to develop their innate creative abilities – wherever they reside.

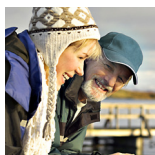
RURAL AND REGIONAL POLICY ON THE OVERALL POLITICAL AGENDA



This Government has already sought to promote the issues of rural and regional policy by allotting them a higher profile in terms of the overall political agenda. This approach has undoubtedly already contributed to increasing optimism in respect of the viability of both rural and urban



communities. The Government will thus seek to continue this rural and regional policy initiative. A well developed infrastructure is vital to positive development in a country like Norway, characterized by sparse population and long distances. An active policy response is also important in a period of economic uncertainty as is currently the case. The Government will carry on strengthening municipal economies; launch a large scale expansion of road and railway construction programmes, set new objectives for the expansion of broadband infrastructure and carry out an active and differentiated policy for growth and jobs in order to secure the goal of full employment.



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The Government believes that local challenges are most effectively met with local initiatives. We wish to support community development and the municipality as a development driver. The mobilization of local entrepreneurs, young people and voluntary associations has brought new life to many communities. We can however learn further from this approach. Inversely, many municipalities struggle in their efforts to establish effective community development programmes. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will thus seek to invite the county authorities to cooperate further in strengthening and more effectively mobilizing community development initiatives in the municipalities. The Ministry will also consider the deployment of additional funds to local and regional projects focusing on development and knowledge creation in respect of strategies designed to attract new inhabitants and stimulate the attractiveness of local communities as desirable residential destinations.



THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE COUNTY AUTHORITIES IN FACILITATING GROWTH

Political authorities at both the state and regional levels have an important role to play here in facilitating growth. In addition to robust municipalities, a strong regional level is crucial in ensuring that each individual area is able to realize its potential. The recent administrative reform has already laid the foundation for the strengthening of the role of the county authorities as regional development actors. The county authorities can often, through their adaptation of policy measures and regional cooperation, support local industry in a more targeted and coordinated manner than is possible via direct state involvement through a more traditional sector-oriented focus.

FACILITATING PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE WHERE THEY LIVE



Any modern economy's primary resource is, ultimately, the creativity and ingenuity of its inhabitants and in particular their ability to deal with socio-economic change through recourse to innovation. The Government will thus seek to maintain a policy that focuses on the employment of these resources where people live rather than forcing habitation in concentrated central areas. A good level of basic education and a well developed higher education infrastructure have historically been successful in providing Norway with competent and adaptive inhabitants. The Government will thus continue to pursue a decentralized education structure designed to meet new curricula demands in respect of quality and content. In order to stimulate innovation in both the public and the private sectors the Government will also seek to further facilitate cooperation with a wide array of research and development institutions. The maintenance of trust and cooperation in the workplace between management and employees has also helped provide the basis for the employment of individual skills in new ways. The Government will continue to support this cooperative approach.



YOUNG PEOPLE REPRESENT THE FUTURE

Expectations in respect of work and the choice of residential surroundings held by the current generation of young adults are often rather different from those held by previous generations. The Government thus acknowledges that the inclusion of these people in the prospective development of their local communities is of fundamental importance. Today's young adults represent the future, both in small communities and in larger towns and cities. Young people often also articulate new ideas on and views of development. In order to stimulate new activity, the Government will continue to place significant emphasis on efforts to stimulate entrepreneurship and a more comprehensive approach to such initiatives: a new action plan for entrepreneurship in the education system, a more systematic approach to entrepreneurship advisory services and increased funds for entrepreneurs in order to help them create new high quality jobs even in the current difficult economic situation. The Government also stresses that the resources for female innovation and entrepreneurship must be employed more effectively than at present.



BUSINESS IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY NEED INNOVATION AND RESTRUCTURING CAPABILITIES

Norwegian industry is to a large extent based on the advanced exploitation of natural resources for export to an ever more competitive and globalised market. Our country is also characterized by a distinct regional division of labour. A large proportion of the production of goods takes place in small communities and in small and medium-sized cities, while service production for the national market is, in the main, still carried out in the major cities. This division of labour ensures some level of interdependence between the various parts of the country. The Government, moreover, wishes to facilitate the innovation and restructuring capabilities of business in all parts of the country. Global challenges must



therefore be translated into global advantages. The Government stresses that the restructuring required to face the current economic situation with confidence should, ultimately, lead to the development of a more sustainable business sector based on the development and utilisation of new technology in respect of the challenges posed by climate change.

NORTHERN NORWAY FACES PARTICULAR CHALLENGES



The Government will further develop its strategy for the high north while continuing to contribute to the exploitation of the natural resource endowment of Northern Norway as a means of stimulating growth and development both in this region and in the rest of Norway. Northern Norway faces particular challenges deriving from its sparse population, long distances between settlements and small labour markets. The Government will continue its priority focus on Northern Norway through its dedicated regional and rural policy initiatives in order to promote real freedom of choice in relation to residence within the region. The Government also plans a targeted initiative over the coming 10-15 years, to stimulate the further development of the sustainable exploitation of resources in the far north, in order to stimulate land-based business development, to improve the region's infrastructure and the conditions of its indigenous people.



BALANCING EXPLOITATION AND PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Sparse settlement patterns and the exploitation of natural resources have produced a cultural landscape in Norway which, when combined with its unique natural landscape, show great potential for further development in respect of culture and tourism. The mountainous regions of Norway are characterized by valuable cultural and natural landscapes, the significant presence of agriculture and vast recreational areas. The Government thus emphasizes the need to balance exploitation and protection in order to conserve these values while enabling local communities to capitalise on their own potentials for growth.



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