**STATEMENT**

**UPR47
Review of Norway**

**4 November 2024**

 **Statement delivered by Senior Adviser Iselin HUUSE, Ministry of Children and Families**

*Check against delivery*

President/Vice-President,

As introduced by State Secretary Eriksen, I will share insights on recent processes regarding Norwegian child welfare.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to reflect on the recommendations regarding our system. The overall purpose is to provide children and their families with necessary assistance and protection.

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Since our previous dialogue in 2019, Norway has made legislative and systemic amendments in the child welfare sector.

In 2022, a care reform incentivized municipalities to focus on prevention and and early intervention. The goal was to strengthen the overall child protection system by prioritizing the protection and well-being of children and vulnerable families at an early stage.

By focusing on early intervention, we can prevent and avert problems in the families later. This is clearly in the child’s best interest, and an efficient way to protect family life.

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Over the past few years, The European Court of Human Rights has found that Norway has violated the right to family life in article 8 of the convention on Human Rights in a number of Child welfare cases.

The Court found that the care orders were justifiable, but that procedural shortcomings violated the convention. The shortcomings were related to the duty to work towards reunification of the child with the parents, and related to the assessment of contact rights *after* a care order.

The judgments from the Court, and guidelines from the Norwegian Supreme Court, have called for changes in Norwegian child welfare practice. There is a growing awareness of the duty to work towards reunification of children and parents, and the foundations and documentation from the child welfare services are more extensive as well.

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The 2023 Child Welfare Act, emphasizes prevention and to strengthen legal safeguards for both children and parents.

The Act builds on extensive human rights assessments in accordance with the convention of the rights of the child, such as the best interests of the child, the child’s right to protection and care, and family life.

The Child Welfare Act shall ensure that all children in Norway – independent of their background or origin – who live in detrimental conditions, receive the necessary assistance and protection at the right time. Norway reiterates that detrimental conditions includes serious neglect, violence and abuse. Children shall be met with security, love and understanding.

The legislation and practice builds on the principle that measures must not be more intrusive than necessary, and with the child’s best interests as the fundamental consideration. The child's own opinion is the most important consideration in this assessment.

To place a child in alternative care is always a measure of last resort, and measures shall be revoked if the conditions are no longer in place.

The aim of reunifying the child and the parents after a care order has been clarified in the new Act, and contact rights between the child and the family shall reflect this principle.

The child welfare service has an ongoing duty to follow up both children and parents after a care order, and the service must provide measures to enable parents to improve their care skills.

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Following the judgements from the European Human Rights Court, there has been an increase in the level of contact between children and parents. The Government is keeping an eye on the development. The level of contact shall not expose children to undue hardship, but be in accordance with the child’s best interest.

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President/Vice-President,

Norway remains resolute in our commitment to combat all forms of racism, discrimination and intolerance, also in child welfare, based on colour, culture, religion or ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Our legislation is crystal clear in these aspects.

Children's cultural, linguistic and religious background must be a consideration in all the work of the Child Welfare Service. This has been highlighted in the Act as an overarching principle. We are working to raise awareness and competence in the Child Welfare System in regard to diversity and cultural sensitivity.

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Finally, President/Vice-President,

The Ministry of Children and Families is currently working on a Quality Reform.

Two expert committees released reports in 2023 on legal safeguards throughout the child welfare system, and a comprehensive proposal for the future of child welfare institutions.

This spring, the Government has introduced a strategy for a new direction in institutional child welfare services, published a white paper on foster care, and conducted a public consultation on legislative amendments to the Child Welfare Act.

The quality reform, to be presented to the Norwegian Parliament in the spring of 2025, aims to strengthen legal protections for children and their families, representing a significant investment in child welfare.

Thank you.