



Husbanken



ANNUAL REPORT 2013

Everyone should have access to adequate and secure housing



Contents

About the Housing Bank.....	page 3
Organisational structure.....	page 5
Vision, goals and values.....	page 5
Interview with the Housing Bank's Managing Director	page 6
Main goal 1: Ensuring a properly functioning housing market.....	page 10
Main goal 2: Increasing housing supply for disadvantaged groups.....	page 12
Main goal 3: More green and universally designed housing, and buildings in attractive locations	page 14
Main goal 4: Efficient and user-oriented management systems.....	page 16

About the Housing Bank

Right since its foundation in 1946, the Housing Bank has had an important role to play as the government's tool in housing policy. Whereas originally its main task was to provide housing, now its role has become to contribute to sustainable housing solutions throughout Norway, above all for people who cannot access commercial credit products.

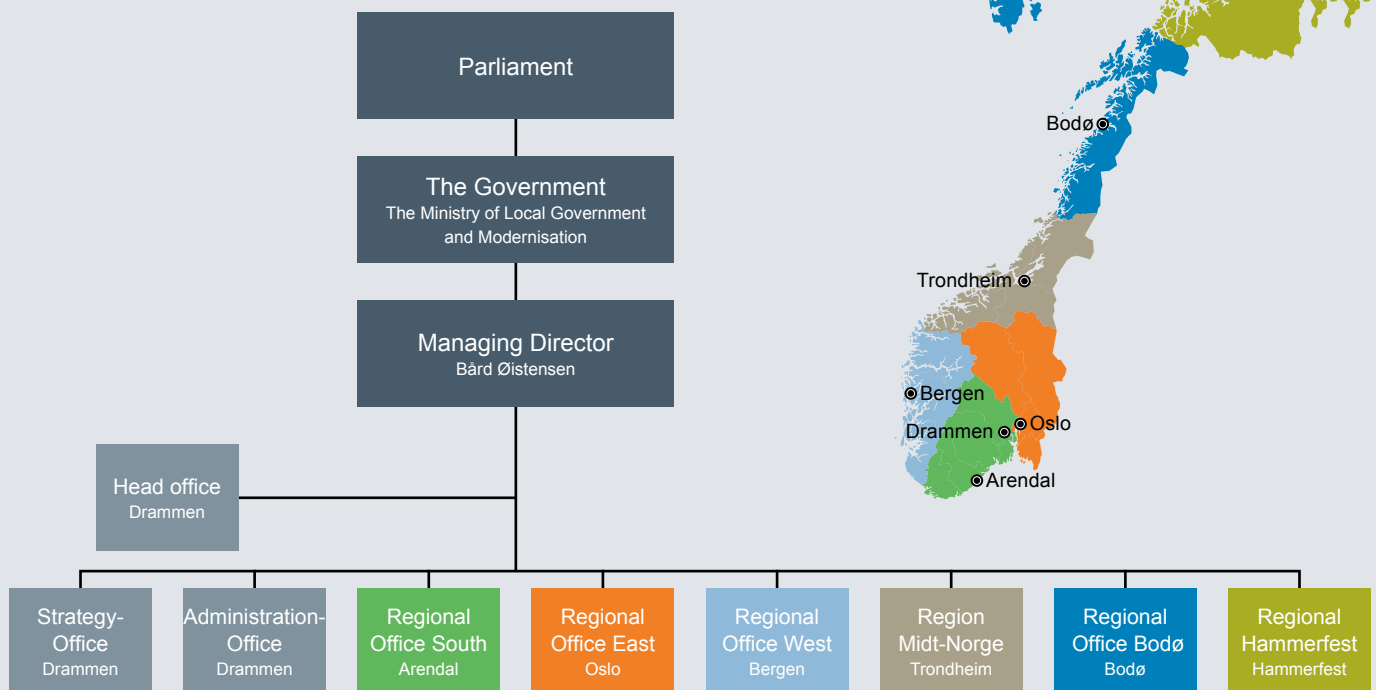
In recent years, house prices have risen sharply. The rate of housebuilding has not kept up with rapid population growth, and the housing market has become increasingly tight. The Housing Bank's role is to complement the market, and it should target its measures in ways that maximise improvements to people's quality of life.

Our key figures show that there was strong demand for our programmes in 2013. Grants for sheltered housing and student accommodation rose sharply, while grants to help people get their own homes and for rental housing also increased significantly. Basic loans were popular, while loans for building and improving homes were both at record levels. Meanwhile, loan losses remained very low.

Key figures for the Housing Bank's activities

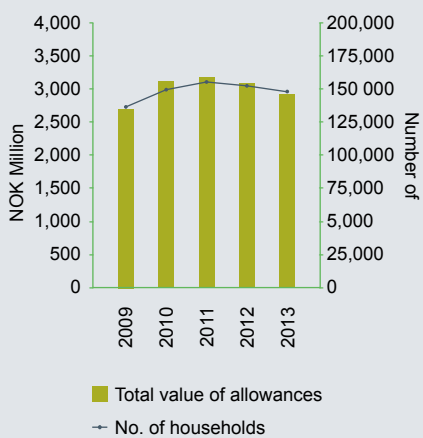
	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Housing allowances						
Amount disbursed in NOK million	2,919	3,087	3,177	3,121	2,701	2,420
Number of recipients during the year	148,300	152,600	155,500	149,700	136,708	126,090
Targeted grants for individuals						
Amount awarded in NOK million	379	319	301	266	309	308
Number of housing units	1,352	1,242	1,454	1,064	1,431	1,405
Targeted grants for rental housing						
Amount awarded in NOK million	521	432	391	411	805	235
Number of housing units	974	1,002	1,002	1,151	2,426	984
Investment grants for sheltered housing and nursing homes						
Amount awarded in NOK million	1,424	1,099	1,178	448	926	494
Number of housing units	1,378	1,165	1,128	819	1,887	1,074
Targeted grants for student accommodation						
Amount awarded in NOK million	350	242	235	192	351	176
Number of housing units	1,483	1,039	1,054	845	1,486	780
Start up loans						
Amount awarded in NOK million	6,895	7,028	6,075	5,248	4,422	4,028
Number of housing units	11,309	12,512	10,913	7,076	6,012	6,546
Basic construction loans						
Amount awarded in NOK million	14,233	9,922	10,529	6,043	12,420	8,646
Number of housing units	8,151	5,287	5,697	3,932	7,554	5,041
Basic renovation loans						
Amount awarded in NOK million	1,422	881	583	613	1,306	728
Number of housing units	3,601	2,946	2,138	1,874	4,440	3,470
Loan impairment charge						
Net charge, NOK million	10	8	14	15	14	10
Charge as a % of loan portfolio	0.008	0.007	0.012	0.014	0.013	0.010

Organisational chart

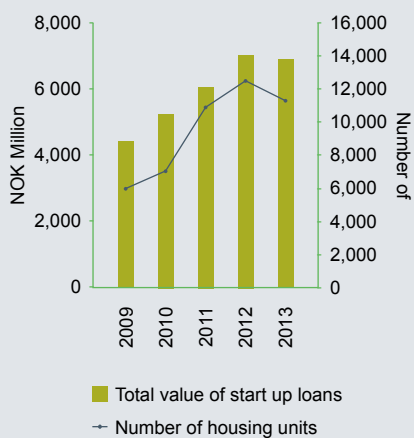


Important policy tools

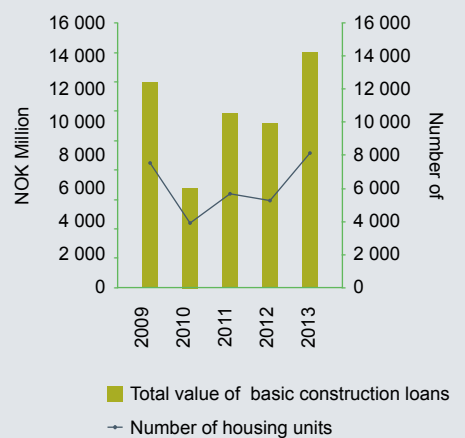
Housing allowances



Start up loans



Basic construction loans



Organisational structure

The Housing Bank is an independent civil service organisation that reports directly to the Norwegian parliament, government and Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. Parliament allocates funding through the national budget to finance both its administrative costs and the loans and grants that it awards. The Office of the Auditor General of Norway is responsible for making sure that the resources are used in accordance with current rules and parliament's wishes.

The Housing Bank has its head office in Drammen, and six regional offices in Arendal, Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Bodø and Hammerfest. The Housing Bank's organisational structure is based on the principles of proximity and delegation: the people who are closest to the end users are in the best position to provide appropriate solutions.

The regional offices implement housing policy in collaboration with municipalities and the construction industry. The Housing Bank does not normally have direct contact with the end users of its services.

Our regional structure, which is designed to ensure proximity to our customers, is an asset and a strength. However, the Housing Bank must also provide the same services to users and customers in all regions. That requires good cooperation and the exchange of information and expertise. Our internal development programme "OneHousingBank", which everyone in our organisation took part in during 2013, emphasises collaboration across offices, efficiency and equality of service.

Vision, goals and values

The vision of Norwegian housing policy is that **everyone should have access to adequate and secure housing**. The government has charged the Housing Bank with complementing private credit markets in order to provide housing to disadvantaged groups, promote sustainable housing solutions and offer financing throughout Norway.

Drawing on its values of openness, collaboration and diversity, the Housing Bank shall strive to ensure that housing policy goals are met. As formulated by the government in 2013, the main goals of housing policy are

- Ensuring a properly functioning housing market
- Increasing housing supply for disadvantaged groups
- More green and universally designed housing, and buildings in attractive location

In addition, the Housing Bank has the following general goal:

- Efficient and user-oriented management systems.

A white paper (Meld. St. 17 (2012-2013)), on housing that was published in 2013 reaffirmed the allocation of responsibilities in housing policy, as well as the Housing Bank's main goal of promoting the provision of affordable housing. Meanwhile, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy is a priority for the Solberg government, with simplification of the planning process being a key element of that policy. The government has also stressed that the Housing Bank must become more efficient in its administration and customer management, and that in principle all communication with customers should be digital.

Better collaboration and greater efficiency are the way forward

The Housing Bank has set up the SIKT programme, which aims to make electronic communication the default option for the Housing Bank's programmes.

For example, the aim is to enable customers to apply for housing allowances using an eApplication on their mobile phones. The Minister of Local Government and Modernisation has used the project to highlight how smarter working in the public sector can help to beat time thieves.

A slight economic slowdown, combined with rapid population growth, is creating challenges for our welfare system. The Housing Bank's experience is that cooperation between welfare agencies is the best way to get results. The Housing Bank is ready to take on a key coordinating role in order to achieve this.

The new national strategy for social and affordable housing will be presented by the government in spring 2014. The aim is to combine and better target government programmes aimed at disadvantaged groups. The Housing Bank will aim to implement the strategy and will encourage welfare agencies to see good housing and universal design as two fundamental aspects of welfare provision.



Photo: Morten Delbæk, Aktiv1.

More housing for the people who need it most!

In 2013, strong demand for the Housing Bank's loan and grant programmes resulted in even more high-quality homes being built, particularly for people who need help to own or rent their own home

The Housing Bank is responsible for implementing the government's housing policy. How was that affected by the change of government last autumn?

– There is high level of agreement about the general direction of housing policy amongst political parties. In practice, the new government has reinforced and further targeted our programmes. The Minister of Local Government and Modernisation's focus on greater efficiency and digitising fits in perfectly with our existing strategies, as we started working seriously on big projects in those areas in 2011. To sum up, I would say that the general message is: 'more of the same'.

The Housing Bank is not supposed to compete with private sector banks. Last year the government therefore took steps to emphasise the Housing Bank's complementary role.

– By targeting our lending at people who have long-term difficulties with getting their own home, the Housing Bank can help to achieve the vision of everyone having access to adequate and secure housing. Similarly, basic loans should be used to help municipalities buy or build rental housing, to upgrade housing for groups such as the elderly and disabled, to provide student accommodation, to build housing in remote areas and to carry out other welfare-oriented projects.

It is gratifying to see that strong demand means that we are going a long way towards reaching our aims, says the Housing Bank's MD, citing some of the things that were achieved in 2013:

In total we distributed NOK 25 billion in loans and eight billion in grants. We got a lot for our money:

- 8,200 new housing units that exceed statutory requirements for universal design and environmental standards
- 3,600 housing units upgraded to a higher standard
- 11,300 households were able to get on the housing ladder with the help of start up loans
- 17,000 home owners were given grants to cover the cost of a condition survey
- 1,350 households received grants to help them with the cost of setting up home
- 117,000 households received housing allowances to help them remain in the property that they rent or own

- 1,400 units of sheltered housing and places in nursing homes received construction grants

– The complementary role of the Housing Bank has benefited the priority areas of the housing market. Increasing the supply of student accommodation, municipal rental housing and sheltered housing also helps to free up housing for other parts of the market, including the private rental market, says Bård Øistensen.

Low interest rates – strong demand

Many people believe that the Housing Bank should be allowed to lend more money through start up loans and basic loans. You disagree; on the contrary, you think that we should become better at targeting start up loans and at prioritising basic loans. Why is that?

– The low interest rates on Housing Bank loans, combined with more restrictive lending policies in the private sector, have helped to drive up demand for both basic loans and start up loans. In spite of us being allocated an additional NOK 5 billion in autumn 2013, we therefore needed to prioritise how basic loans should be used. This prioritisation, along with the ability to reject applications when our funds for building normal homes have been used up, will allow us to further reinforce our role as a complementary force in the market. Some start up loans have been going to people with relatively high incomes, but with insufficient equity to obtain a loan from a private sector bank. The government has taken the right decision in adjusting the regulations on start up loans in order to target them at people with long-term difficulties obtaining a home. We must never become a competitor to the private sector, emphasises Øistensen.

Homelessness remains a problem

The vision of Norwegian housing policy is that everyone should have access to adequate and secure housing. The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research calculated the number of homeless people in Norway, and then carried out an in-depth study into the causes of homelessness. Does it concern you that there are still 6,000 homeless people in Norway?

– The number of homeless people is the same as four years

ago, but the number of children living in homeless families is worryingly high. However, the in-depth study shows that homelessness is a complex problem, and that the causes vary between different groups. For families with children, for example, domestic violence is frequently the cause. At a general level, homelessness in a municipality is related to population growth and the number of people on benefits. The Housing Bank's decision to focus on municipalities with the biggest concentrations of deprivation is supported by these findings. In our work on affordable and social housing, municipalities are the Housing Bank's most important customers and partners, and we can only succeed in so far as they succeed. The Housing Bank should help municipalities to implement housing policies that respond to local needs, but within the framework of national guidelines. There will probably always be some homelessness, but we must work to ensure that it is not caused by a housing shortage.

Housing expenses are rising

There were 117,000 households receiving housing allowances in December 2013. Over the course of a year, 150,000 households receive them for one or more months. You are on the record as saying that housing allowances are losing their impact. What do you mean by that?

– The number of people receiving housing allowances was slightly lower than the previous year, continuing the gentle decline that we have observed in recent years. Our figures show that housing-related costs are rising for everyone, both before and after taking into account housing allowances. Growing numbers of households have expenses that are not covered by housing allowances, because they exceed the “ceiling”. In fact, 77 percent of young people with disabilities and households

with one child have housing expenses that exceed the ceiling. In the counties with the highest population – Østfold, Akershus and Oslo – around 75 percent of households receiving housing allowances have expenses that exceed the ceiling.

– That seems too high a proportion, if housing allowances are supposed to reflect the needs of recipients. For many people, housing allowances are not sensitive to changes in housing costs. As such, it acts more as an income supplement than as a tool of housing policy.

Adapting and upgrading

Most of the houses where we will live in fifty years' times have already been built. Only a small fraction of them have a universal design. Can you see any signs of an increase in the rate at which they are being upgraded?

– Yes, two of the most positive things to happen in 2013 were a 40 percent rise in the number of grants for condition surveys, and a 22 percent rise in basic renovation loans, compared with 2012. There was also a big increase in the number of retrofitted lifts. Applications for programmes to promote upgrades are continuing to rise, which is in line with the guidelines on how the Housing Bank should allocate its lending. However, it is a challenge to ensure that grants for adapting homes reach the people who need them. There are large amounts of money sitting unused in some municipalities. These funds have replaced deductions that you used to get on your tax return. The grants can be used for a variety of purposes, and individual needs must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Grants are available for simple measures like removing thresholds in order to improve access around the home, but they can also go towards bigger adaptations depending on the applicant's level of disability. Families with disabled children are supposed to be given high priority when allocating grants. Municipalities shouldn't use fixed income caps in those kinds of cases. Financial means testing should be based on an overall assessment of the long-term financial position of the household after the home has been adapted, explains Bård Øistensen.

UPGRADING NORWAY: In the beautiful Isterdalen valley in Rauma, a detached house is being upgraded to passive house standards. It is one of the first houses to be upgraded in this way, which means that the transferability value of the project is high.



Important white paper (Meld. St. 17 (2012-2013)).

In 2013, the Norwegian government published a new white paper on housing. For the Housing Bank, this is an important document that reaffirms and reinforces our complementary role in the housing market.

– Better government coordination and creating a new national strategy for affordable housing will play an important role in increasing the supply of housing in general, and of affordable housing in particular. The Norwegian housing market is currently very tight, especially in the biggest cities. When there is a housing shortage, it becomes even more difficult for disadvantaged groups to access the market. The white paper aims to increase housebuilding. That is vital to achieving the aims of housing policy, says Bård Øistensen.

Better coordination has also been cited as the key to better housing provision. Just one year after the white paper was published, the affordable housing strategy is already in place. The Housing Bank has coordinated the joint efforts of the various welfare agencies. What do you expect from the new affordable housing strategy?

– Better coordination and a recognition that a number of sectors, as well as directorates and ministries, have a responsibility for ensuring that everyone has an adequate and secure place to live. Housing is the fourth pillar of welfare policy, but it is sometimes a struggle to get other welfare agencies to recognise this fact. Remember that our annual budget for housing allowances is almost as big as the total social security budget. Our grants and loans work best if combined with other programmes. Better coordination will hopefully lead to faster and more effective help for the people who need it.

The Housing Bank – soon to be accessible 24/7

The Housing Bank has been working to improve its application forms and to make them available electronically. Soon there will be an electronic application system for housing allowances. How do you expect this to change things?

– I expect it to make life easier for applicants, as the software will guide them through the application process, and because they will be able to apply from their living rooms, using a mobile phone, tablet or computer. The system also gives help and advice as you go along.

Does the new system also simplify the task of staff at the municipality and at the Housing Bank?

– Our conservative estimate is that we will save 50,000 hours of work a year for municipal staff, as they will no longer have to manually enter data from paper applications into the housing allowance database. We will also improve reliability by modernising this process and several other of the Housing Bank's systems. Electronic applications for housing allowances are just one part of a wider modernisation process that we initiated a few years ago and that will continue for a number of years.

– Our main goal is to provide more homes for the people who need them most. We must use our funds as efficiently and intelligently as possible, in order to provide appropriate help to the people who need us. I'm very excited about our digitisation project, because it will make our organisation more efficient, streamline housing provision and enable us to use our resources effectively.

LERKENDAL CAMPUS

612 new student rooms were completed in Trondheim in 2013. Financed by a basic construction loan and grants for student accommodation. Built to passive house standards.



The role of the Housing Bank

For many years, the roles of the main stakeholders in housing policy have remained the same:

- The government adopts laws, sets housing policy goals and provides the financial framework. The Housing Bank implements the policy, and offers loans, grants and advice.
- Municipalities plan and facilitate the construction and refurbishment of housing units, and are responsible for ensuring that disadvantaged groups have a home.
- Private sector companies build, own and manage housing.

This has proved to be a very successful division of labour, and most Norwegians enjoy housing standards that are amongst the best in the world. Nevertheless, some people struggle in the current market, and their problems have only grown as the cost of getting onto the housing ladder has risen year after year. Admittedly, prices didn't rise very much in 2013, but the increasingly stringent conditions imposed by banks have created challenges, particularly for young buyers. There is also a growing disparity between prices in central and outlying areas, leading to a concentration of disadvantaged groups in the latter.

The main task of the Housing Bank is to complement the market in order to improve quality of life. We do that by providing loans and grants that support desirable redistribution. This im-

proves both housing standards and the housing mix, not least in areas that aren't prioritised by the private credit market.

The white paper on housing that was published in 2013 states that "The Housing Bank is responsible for implementing the government's housing policy", and essentially maintains the current allocation of roles. However, the government also said that the planning process is too complex and time-consuming, and that there is a shortage of suitable building plots. In many cases the current strong market has made sites more expensive, and many owners and special interest groups make it difficult and time-consuming to obtain building permits. The new Solberg government says that it wants to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and simplify the planning process, which would benefit all stakeholders.

Housing and population trends



Housing and population trends

Stable housebuilding roughly in line with population growth would create a more balanced housing market. After the credit crisis in 2008, the number of new houses started in 2009 fell below 20,000. Meanwhile, population growth picked up. Over the past five years, annual growth has been around 60,000 people, 40,000 of whom have been economic migrants.

Economic growth has been dependent on employment growth enabled by immigration. A strong labour market and stable wage growth have made Norway an attractive destination. Immigration fell in 2013, slowing population growth. Combined with slightly more new housing starts, this reduced the gap between supply and demand. However, for housing starts to keep up with population growth, they would need to rise to almost 40,000 units, a rate last seen in the 1970s.



New and historic buildings. Photo: The Housing Bank.



Transitional housing in Haugesund – joint project between the Housing Bank, Haugesund Municipality and the Salvation Army.

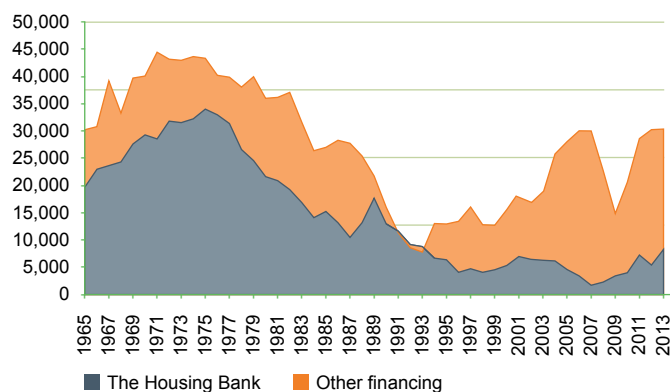
The housing market

In a deregulated housing market like the Norwegian one, prices are set by supply and demand. Factors such as demographics, income growth, credit availability and interest rates are the key drivers of demand. Meanwhile, access to land, land prices, construction costs, regulatory requirements, development conditions etc. are some of the keys to supply. The Housing Bank's role is to help in areas where the market doesn't function as well as it should. Strong growth in demand combined with a shortage of new homes has led to a sharp increase in prices. Over the last ten years, prices of flats have more than doubled. Towards the end of 2013 some uncertainty entered the market, and prices started to fall. Overall, prices only rose by one per cent over the course of the year. With a strong labour market, rising wages and a new government that wants to simplify the planning process, prices are unlikely to change significantly in the short term. Over the longer term, a number of current forecasts suggest that prices will continue to rise.

Supplying the general housing market is not the main task of the Housing Bank, but if the economy is overheating, its funds can be used to help stabilise the market. However, in order to achieve its goals, the Housing Bank has to be selective. Consequently, priority is given to sheltered housing, nursing homes, student accommodation and rental housing.

The Housing Bank is trying to target basic loans more effectively, so that they can help us fulfil our role of providing housing for disadvantaged groups, and in the future we will more strictly prioritise sustainable and modest housing projects.

The Housing Bank's share of house building starts



New and refurbished housing for drug addicts

This project, which is based on Haugesund Municipality's plan of action for social housing, is an example of constructive collaboration between the public and voluntary sectors.

The Housing Bank has maintained a productive dialogue with its partners throughout the process, and has fully financed the project through NOK 16.3 million of grants and NOK 24.4 million of basic loans. The buildings have an attractive, efficient design, and meet the needs of their target group. There are 15 units with 1,120 m² of floor space in total.

A new building behind a listed facade

The old facade is listed, so it cannot be demolished, but the structure behind it has been completely rebuilt with a new layout. A new building has also been erected, linking the renovated building to the old institution for drug addicts. The different levels of the two existing buildings made it challenging to achieve good layouts.

Lifts and lifelong living

The new building has a lift, which can be used both by residents in the new flats and by the existing institution. The new homes meet lifelong living standards, with the exception of not having space for twin beds.

Individual housing support – goals

The new housing units have been designed for residents who need a lot of support. The aim is to provide decent housing that meets the needs of people with addiction problems. Residents receive individually tailored support, which makes it easier for them to be self-sufficient. The goals are to avoid eviction, to improve ADL (everyday life) skills and to manage their addiction and health issues.

Homelessness in Norway

In 2013 the Housing Bank commissioned the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) to produce a report on homelessness. It estimates the number of homeless people in Norway, and provides background information about the people concerned and the situations that are linked to homelessness.

Since the turn of the millennium, the government has given high priority to finding suitable housing for the homeless, and housing and welfare policy have worked together. The importance of having your own home is increasingly recognised, and the “Housing first” strategy has been used successfully in many countries to help the most disadvantaged groups with complex needs.

The Housing Bank’s housing policy tools – start up loans, targeted grants and housing allowances – are aimed at disadvantaged groups in the housing market, many of whom receive the help they need to have their own home. The report found that most common form of support for homeless people is a combination of both central and local government funding.

NIBR carried out its survey of homelessness in 2012, following a similar procedure to the one pursued on four previous occasions, in 1996, 2003, 2005 and 2008. The chief finding is that the number of homeless people has remained relatively stable over that period. In 1996 there were 6,200 homeless people, while in 2012 there were 6,259. However, relative to a growing population the figure has fallen. The most important single reason for the reduction is that the number of homeless people in Oslo has been halved. Oslo has worked proactively to reduce the use of hostels, and many people who previously lived in hostels now live in municipal flats or privately rented flats.

Between 1996 and 2008 the proportion of homeless people under the age of 25 rose, reaching 24 percent in 2008. In 2012 it was 23 percent, so the proportion has stabilised at a high level. Most of them are in big municipalities, and over half stay with friends or acquaintances. Young homeless people are an area of high priority for the Housing Bank, and our work combined with a low youth unemployment rate may affect future trends.

Main findings of the report:

- 6,250 homeless people in Norway, or 1.26 per 1,000 inhabitants (1.5 in 1996)
- no increase in the proportion of young people since the previous survey in 2008, in contrast to Denmark and Sweden
- reduction in the proportion of homeless people with addiction problems
- increase in the number of homeless families with children (300 more children); foreign-born parents are overrepresented

DEFINITION:

People are classified as homeless if they do not own or rent their own home, and have to rely on casual or temporary accommodation, such as staying short-term with a close relative, friend or acquaintance. People under the care of the Correctional Service or in an institution who are to be released in the next two months and do not have a home to go to are also classified as homeless, as are people without any accommodation arrangements for the coming night.

Based on the findings of the survey, the most typical homeless person is still a single man in his mid-thirties, living on benefits of one kind or another, with a low educational level and without any work. However, the survey also found that the profile of homeless people in Norway is changing, just like the population in general. That is particularly evident in Oslo, where almost half of the homeless now have an immigrant background. Given the significant increase in the number of homeless people in both Denmark and Sweden, and the tight Norwegian housing market, it might be natural to expect an increase in homelessness in Norway. The fact that the number of homeless people in Norway is roughly the same as in 2008 must therefore be considered an acceptable achievement.

Homelessness in Norway

Year	Total number	Number per 1,000
1996	6,200	1,50
2003	5,200	1,14
2005	5,496	1,19
2008	6,091	1,27
2012	6,259	1,26

However, it is a concern that the number of homeless families with children has risen. Three quarters of these families are single mothers with children, and a majority were born outside Norway. The families reported as homeless do have a roof over their heads, so they don't sleep rough; most live with friends or family. Unlike others groups of homeless people, their situation often arises as a result of suddenly losing a home, the break-down of a relationship or violence and threats.

The Housing Bank's 2013 survey of municipalities found that ninety percent of municipalities are well aware of the families where children are growing up in difficult circumstances. This suggests that municipalities have a safety net that can look after these families. The Housing Bank has established a partnership with municipalities and other welfare agencies to implement preventive measures to reduce the number of children who are put into care. The aim is to provide local help to children and parents at an early stage, so that children can maintain their social networks and the family can stay together under a single roof.

Targeting preventive measures at young people may reduce homelessness and stop young people with limited financial resources and a lack of social networks from being dragged into a spiral of marginalisation

NIBR points out that NAV has the main responsibility for homeless people with addiction problems. Under the Social Services Act, responsibility for providing housing for people who are unable to do this themselves lies with the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration. Many of these people have serious, complex health-related problems, which create challenges for local authorities. Often they need individually tailored specialist health care, in addition to help with housing. A number of municipalities have started experimenting with "Housing first" programmes to reach this group, as traditional welfare services often fail to meet their needs.

Next steps

The government is presenting a new strategy for social and affordable housing in spring 2014, which will coordinate and streamline welfare measures in areas including homelessness. The survey of homeless people will play an important role in informing this strategy. NIBR's conclusion is that homelessness is a complex problem, and that there is no single answer as to why it occurs. It can be seen as a process of marginalisation, which often starts in the early teens. We should therefore increase our focus on early intervention, using a wide range of measures related to housing, living conditions, family, education and the social environment.



Housing association in Oslo. Photo: The Housing Bank.

Universal design – necessary for some – good for everyone

The goal of universal design is to create a more inclusive society. Rather than tailoring solutions for individuals or groups, the aim is to ensure that buildings are accessible and user-friendly for everyone.

The Housing Bank has always stipulated requirements for housing projects that it helps to finance, and in recent years accessibility and universal design have been key criteria for providing loans and grants. The latest white paper on housing emphasises the role of the Housing Bank in terms of encouraging good design and developing new ideas. Through its financial support programmes, development activities and knowledge-sharing, the Housing Bank shall promote projects that exceed current standards in the Planning and Building Act in terms of universal design, green technology, energy efficiency and architectural design.

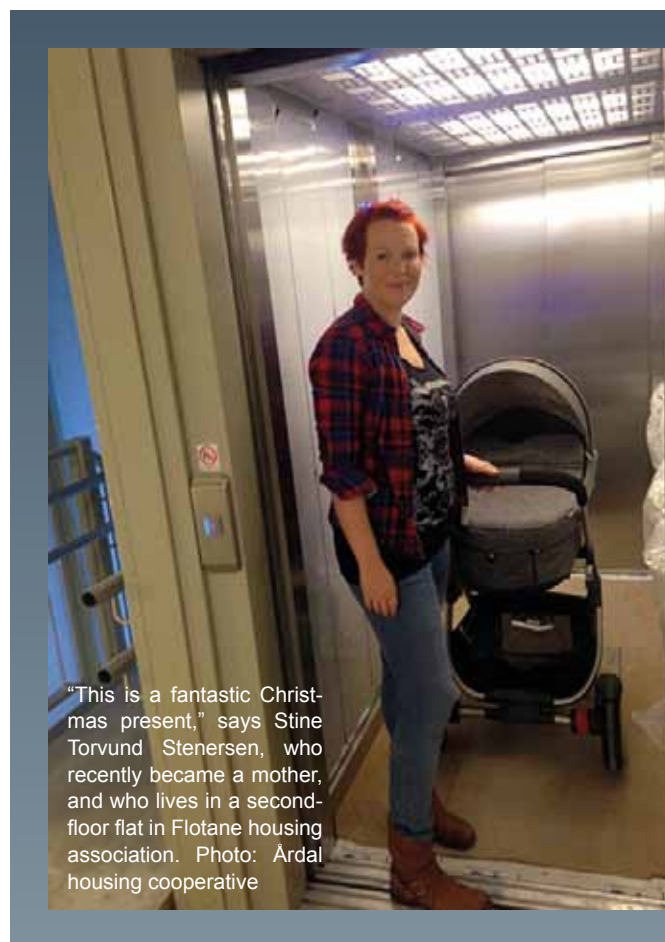
The Housing Bank prioritises work on upgrading the existing housing stock by e.g. installing lifts in apartment blocks and making necessary adaptations to single family homes. Our focus on universal design is also partly a welfare programme, as it helps to ensure that housing can be used by everyone, regardless of their income or physical condition.

The Housing Bank's plan of action for universal design includes goals, strategies and specific measures to help implement universal design. Currently, only ten percent of homes are accessible for wheelchair users, and care technology is only present in a small minority of homes. The strategy is based on cooperation, above all with municipalities. However, to encourage universal design to become a natural consideration when developing new housing, the Housing Bank also works with the construction industry, interest groups, relevant centres of expertise and housing cooperatives. A number of partnership projects have produced tangible results, such as the installation of lifts in existing buildings.

Adapting homes

As long ago as 2004, the Housing Bank and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) started working together to meet the needs of people whose homes required adaptation. The project started out as a trial in 15 municipalities in the counties of Hordaland and Sør-Trøndelag. A functioning advisory service on housing-related issues is a prerequisite for achieving goods results. That's why the Housing Bank is

working closely with NAV to ensure that all of Norway's municipalities have that. As a result of the project, grants for an assessment have been made permanently available. The NAV Assistive Technology Centre's offer of grants as an alternative to lifts/platform lifts or ramps is still in the trial stages, but has been extended to cover all municipalities. The project shows that coordinating expertise at both the municipal and central government level can successfully benefit users.



"This is a fantastic Christmas present," says Stine Torvund Stenersen, who recently became a mother, and who lives in a second-floor flat in Flotane housing association. Photo: Ardal housing cooperative

Care technology at Slettebakken in Bergen



OFFICIAL OPENING: The Minister of Local Government and Modernisation cuts the ribbon in the show flat. Resident Pål Fagerheim (left) and Councillor Filip Rygg (right) are in the background. Photo: The Housing Bank

The photo is of the show flat in the Bybo project Bjerknespass, which consists of over one hundred ordinary flats with integrated care technology. Minister of Local Government and Modernisation Jan Tore Sanner inaugurated the development in January 2014.

The 108 flats in the Bjerknespass project, which is one of the biggest of its kind in Norway, come with integrated infrastructure for care technology. This means that with the help of just a few plug-ins and apps, homes can be converted into high-tech sheltered housing whenever it may be required in the future.

The show flat has a range of technologies installed, to demonstrate the potential benefits in terms of healthcare and comfort. These allow you to control a variety of services, including lighting and heating, as well as to coordinate with providers of home-based healthcare services.

The Housing Bank has worked closely with Bybo (the private developer of the project), the City of Bergen, Fornebu Consulting, Bergen University College and healthcare provider Orange Helse.

The project is Class 1 low-energy project with a universal design. Bybo received a basic construction loan from the Housing Bank to cover 80% of the cost of the development. The project also received a grant for research and development.

This year, residents of Flotane housing association in Årdal received the perfect Christmas present

In 2013 very rapid progress was made with retrofitting lifts on the outside of old blocks of flats in Årdal, and new staircases have also been installed.

Although it is only a few days since the lifts started working, we have already had enquiries from the local council asking whether the lift in a particular section of the building is operating. They want to know on behalf of residents who are being discharged from hospital and who need to start using a wheelchair, for example, as these people need a lift to get back into their apartments," explains Greta Steinheim of Årdal housing cooperative.

This year wheelchair user Cato Johansen will celebrate Christmas with his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren in a second-floor flat in Sauekvei housing association. He hasn't been able to do that before, so he is really looking forward to it.

Many of the blocks of flats in the municipality were built in the 1950s and 60s, and installing lifts makes life easier for residents, as well as enabling them to remain in their flats for longer. Across the country as a whole, the process of installing lifts in old blocks of flats is going slowly, but in Årdal it has really taken off," says Greta Steinheim. Årdal Municipality has one of the highest ratios of blocks of flats to houses in the whole of Norway.

Sauekvei housing association in Årdal is also in the process of installing four lifts. The lifts were installed with the help of an investment grant and a basic loan from the Housing Bank.



New lift shaft. Photo: Greta Steinheim, ABBL



The project to install lifts was also covered in the local newspaper.

The benefits of entering the digital age

As part of its ICT modernisation programme, known as “SIKT”, the Housing Bank is developing electronic application forms for its loan and grant programmes, which will make life simpler for both applicants and staff. Applicants will have the convenience of being able to apply from their mobile phones, while staff will no longer have to enter data manually. This is just one example of how the modernisation programme is simplifying and improving processes.

The project to introduce an eApplication for housing allowances has received a lot of media coverage. Jan Tore Sanner, the Minister of Local Government and Modernisation, has used the project to highlight how smarter working and digitisation can help to eliminate time thieves. The project represents an important contribution towards the government’s goal of simplifying, improving and modernising the public sector.

Simpler for applicants, municipalities and the Housing Bank

All of the Housing Bank’s projects under SIKT are designed to benefit users, municipalities and our own staff. The eApplication for housing allowances is a good example of that. The new system will enable users to complete the application form and its annexes electronically, and they will also receive an electronic response. The application process will become more convenient, as users will be able to send their application forms from a mobile phone, tablet or computer. Not only that – the electronic application form is shorter and simpler than the paper version.

However, municipalities are the ones who stand to gain most from the changes. Municipal staff will no longer have to manually enter data and file physical application forms. It will also be considerably simpler to process applications, as a number of stages in the application process will either be reduced or eliminated completely. Overall, electronic applications will therefore save a great deal of time. The Housing Bank, meanwhile, will save significant costs associated with sending out letters. Its decisions will also become more reliable, as the system will automatically retrieve official information.

ICT – helping us to achieve our goals

Modern ICT systems are essential if we want to become more efficient at achieving housing policy goals. The aim of SIKT is to streamline processes for both the Housing Bank itself and its

key stakeholders: municipalities, the construction industry and society in general, with a particular focus on end users.

The following areas of focus are intended to improve the experience of the target groups: a digital by default strategy, simpler processing for municipalities, better analysis and decision-making and efficient administration. Further measures directed specifically at the construction industry will be implemented in the next phase of the programme.

In 2013, the main focus was on a digital by default strategy, better analysis and decision-making and efficient administration. For example, we developed a new comprehensive presentation tool for analysis and reporting, which puts us in a better position to assess the impact of our programmes. This will benefit the Housing Bank, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, municipalities and end users. Looking forward, projects such as “Analysis of ICT support for loan servicing”, “Internal simplification” and “New intranet” will streamline our operations by enabling more efficient support for loan servicing, eliminating time thieves by automating manual work processes and improving internal communication.

SIKT – what next?

The SIKT programme will continue until 2020, and is split into three phases.

There are nine projects in the first phase of the programme, and the first five were started or completed in 2013:

- eApplication for housing allowances
- ICT support for analysis and reporting (stage 1)
- Simplification for in-house staff
- Analysis of ICT support for loan servicing
- New intranet
- New administrative system (stage 1, concept phase)
- eApplication for start up loans (stage 1)
- A new task-oriented desktop for municipal administrative staff
- A calculator service



Stavanger cultural school and Stavanger cathedral school, Bjergsted. Winner of The Norwegian Government's Award For Good Practice In Building Design 2013. The prize was awarded to the architects Arkitekturverkstedet/Asplan Viak AS and the developers Stavanger City Council and Rogaland County Council. Photo: Jiri Havran

The eApplication for housing allowances cheats time thieves!



All informasjon som er nedskrevet på alle saksnedene i bunken skal føres inn på data. Her får statsråd Jan Tore Sanner prøve seg, godt hjulpet av saksbehandler Jenny Berndtson. E2013/0261 Omslag

Nav-ansatte bruker 50.000 timer på avskrift fra papir til nett

On 23 December 2013, the newspaper Aftenposten reported that government minister Jan Tore Sanner had tried processing housing allowance applications when he visited Jenny Berndtson at the NAV office in Søndre Nordstrand. Jenny said that on average she spends three to five minutes on data entry for each of the 1,200-1,300 applications that she processes each year. This duplicated work wastes time, but it will be eliminated by the introduction of the eApplication. As a result, people like Jenny Berndtson will be able to spend more of their time advising and helping applicants. The eApplication for housing allowances shows how digitisation can simplify processes and benefit both us and our users.

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