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COVID 19 – a challenge to the Nordic model?

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The Nordic welfare model

- “Social-democratic welfare regime” based on principles of solidarity, universalism and a decommmodification of rights*
- Ideology of reducing social inequalities
- Progressive tax system
- Universal, tax funded welfare and health services
- High degree of social cohesion
- Confidence in government/authorities

*Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) The three political economies of the welfare state. *Int. journal of Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 92-123



Challenges to the Nordic model

- The Nordic model has been challenged in recent decades, mostly because of a turn of policy in the direction of neo-liberalism with its emphasis on deregulation, privatisation, and globalisation. *
- Despite a long tradition of reducing social inequalities by introducing welfare policies and structural measures, social inequalities have increased over time in all of the Nordic countries.**

*Raphael D. (2014). Challenges to promoting health in the modern welfare state: The case of the Nordic nations. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 42:7;17; doi:10.1177/1403494813506522

**Norwegian government 2017 White Paper 29 (2016-2017).



The social determinants of health

- Focus on the social determinants of health (SDH) demands a HiAP approach: acknowledgment of the role of all sectors of society for focussing on health and reducing social inequalities (in health)
- All the Nordic countries have policies in place that acknowledge the SDH and aims for a HiAP approach*

* Fosse E. and Helgesen M.K (2019) Policies to address the social determinants of health in the Nordic countries. Report to Nordic Welfare Centre , ISBN: 978-91-88213-47-1 nordicwelfare.org/en/publication



Nordic Governments' response to COVID

- Restrictions, but a high degree of recommendations
- Focus on solidarity.
- Expected compliance with the rules and recommendations.
- Populations mainly followed the rules and recommendations.



What went well?

- In justifying the measures, governments in all the Nordic countries included a multi-sectoral approach*
- Public health and health promotion were included in the assessments
- Welfare arrangements were expanded; for example unemployment benefits
- Special concern for vulnerable groups (children, frail elderly)

Thulagant N. et al: Nordic responses to COVID-19 from a health promotion perspective (Work in progress).



What failed?

- Lack of capacity in treatment (protection equipment, test capacity).*
- Older people in care homes were not protected; high death rates, particularly in the first phase.
- Social inequalities: people in low paid occupations were harder hit.

*Finland and Iceland were better equipped than the other countries.



Explaining failure?

- Undermining of the Nordic model, particularly demonstrating increase in neo-liberal labour market arrangements.
- This was particularly demonstrated in the care homes, where many employees had uncertain working conditions.
- Lack of equipment storage was explained by the globalisation of trade.



Lessons learned?

- Acknowledgement of the importance of sustainable governance and social cohesion.
- Increased criticism against privatisation of health and care services.
- Acknowledgement of a broad approach to tackling the pandemic, including all sectors of society.
- Hopefully: Revitalisation of the Nordic welfare state model?





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