

## Norway: National Government

The Kingdom of Norway (*Norge* in *bokmål* or *Noreg* in *nynorsk*) is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic government. Citizens over 18 vote using proportional representation in a general election every four years for 169 seats in the parliament (*Storting*). There were upper (*Lagting*) and lower (*Odelsting*) chambers until a constitutional amendment in 2007 abolished the bicameral division from 2009. Seven political parties are represented, the largest being the Labour Party (social-democrat). Other parties are moderate and include conservative and very small communist parties. There are no right wing neo-fascist movements. Only 8% of voters belong to a political party. Following the general election on 14 September 2009, the majority centre-left "red-green" coalition continued in government, made up of the Labour Party, Socialist Left and Centre Party. Turnout was 76.4%, about average for Europe. Policies are more left-wing than pre-2005 with an emphasis on expenditure on social welfare, the environment and local government at home, and on disarmament, development aid and peace brokering abroad.

Royal family; King Harald V (born 21 February 1937), Queen Sonja (born 4 July 1937).

Crown Prince Haakon Magnus (born 20 July 1973), son of King Harald and Queen Sonja, married Crown Princess Mette-Marit (born 19 August 1973), their children Princess Ingrid Alexandra (born 21 January 2004), Prince Sverre Magnus (born 3 December 2005).

Princess Märtha Louise (born 22 September 1971), daughter of King Harald and Queen Sonja, married Ari Mikael Behn. their children Maud Angelica Behn and Leah Isadora Behn.

Princess Ragnhild (born 9 June 1930), daughter of King Olav and Princess Märtha of Sweden, married Erling Sven Lorentzen.

Princess Astrid (born 12 February 1932), daughter of King Olav and Princess Märtha of Sweden, married Johan Martin Ferner

<<http://www.kongehuset.no/?lang=eng>>

Prime Minister: Jens Stoltenberg, Labour Party

Seats in parliament (40% are women):

Socialist Left (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti* - SV) 11

Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet* - Ap) 64

Liberals (*Venstre* - V) 2

Centre Party (*Senterpartiet* - Sp) 11

Christian People's Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti* - KrF) 10

Conservative Party (*Høyre* - H) 30

Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet* - FrP) 41

Since 2005, opinion polls show the right of centre Progress Party is increasing its support.

The next election will be in September 2013.

<<http://www.stortinget.no/en>> for information on the parliament.

<<http://www.regjeringen.no/en.html>> for comprehensive government information in English

There is cradle-to-grave social welfare; all citizens are entitled to free education, including university (there is 100% literacy), free hospital treatment, generous holiday and maternity leave, family allowances and a guaranteed pension. The Norwegian Pension Fund is worth around £150bn (January 2007), equivalent to around £32 000 for every man, woman and child. Norway has topped the UN survey of Human Development in life expectancy (men 78 years, women 83 years), access to tertiary education and average income for four successive years. It has the highest female employment rate in Europe (74% of all adult females). 15% of the population is over 65 and despite the high level of welfare, Norway ranks only eighth among OECD countries in the level of direct taxes; income tax and insurance contributions are on average 22% and 8% respectively of a person's gross income.

Norway participates in the EU Single Market through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement. As an EEA Member, Norway implements EU Directives on trade and economic matters, and contributes financially to the EU structural and cohesion funds, but remains outside the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies. It has adopted more EU legislation into domestic law than any EU country except Denmark. Norway also takes part in police, judicial, visa and frontier co-operation through the Schengen Convention and is active in the Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Berlin Plus arrangements enable non-EU members to participate in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations and Norway contributes troops to the EU Bosnia mission under Berlin Plus. On 4 December 2004, the Storting voted to contribute Norwegian troops to an EU Battlegroup with Sweden and Finland, drawing on UK based headquarters support. The most contentious issue involves EU trade defence measures imposed on imports of Norwegian farmed salmon at the request of the UK and Ireland. Scottish producers of farmed salmon are angry that their livelihoods are being endangered by Norwegian imports to the EU at low prices that they claim are unfairly below the cost of production. The Norwegian producers dispute the EU figures and claim the EU measures breach WTO rules. The views of other member states are influenced by producer, consumer and fish-processing interests. The case has been referred to the WTO.

With other Nordic countries, Norway has been an energetic supporter of UN reform and was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2001-2002. The first UN General Secretary was the Norwegian Trygve Lie; former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland headed the WHO. Home of the Nobel Peace Prize, conflict prevention/resolution is high on the foreign policy agenda. Norway's international profile was significantly boosted in 1993 as a result of its pivotal role brokering the Middle East Peace Agreement (the Oslo Accords). Norway's discreet peace-facilitator role continues in the Middle East, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Guatemala, Colombia and the Sudan. Both sides generally trust Norway as a small country with no aspirations of superpower status, no military clout and no vested interests in the conflict. Alongside conflict prevention/resolution efforts, key policy priorities include sustainable development, human rights and promoting international good citizenship. Norway has a high overseas aid budget (\$2.954 billion donated, 0.89% of Gross National Income in 2006, exceeding the UN target of 0.7%) with half targeted at Africa. Norway is ranked fourth of the 21 richest countries in the effectiveness of its aid. Environmental issues are important too: climate change is high on the agenda as is international engagement over nuclear clean-up on the Kola peninsula in north-west Russia.

The government has continued the main lines of Norwegian foreign policy, including active membership of NATO and adherence to the EEA agreement. It will not join the EU — although the Labour Party is in favour of membership, its two coalition partners are opposed. In addition the government's priorities include strengthening the UN, contributing to peace support, disarmament, and increased development aid. Relations with its near neighbours in the High North (the Barents/Arctic Region) are a main strategic priority and in particular the need to tackle illegal fishing and co-operate with Russia and others over future oil and gas extraction. As a party to the 1920 Spitzbergen Treaty, and with strong interests in energy security and tackling climate change, the UK has an interest in co-operating with Norway to develop the region in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Over the last 50 years there has been a strong tradition of Norwegian peacekeeping and nearly 1% of Norwegian police are involved in international operations. At present Norway has around 700 troops in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Norway has also provided forces to international operations in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina and, until July 2004, 140 members of the Telemark engineering battalion worked with British forces in Basra. Iraqi officers are also being trained at the NATO Joint Warfare Centre in Norway. The government has now withdrawn all military personnel from Iraq, and has also withdrawn from the US-led

Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. It now sets a high threshold for considering the use of military force. There has been a 23% reduction in the number of armed forces personnel since the government came to power in 2005.

Bilateral relations with the UK are close and strong, reflecting long-standing trading links, geographical proximity, ties between the Royal families, connections forged during World War II, continuing shared security concerns and many cultural affinities (eg music, theatre, shopping and football). Over 3,000 Norwegians study in the UK. Military contacts remain close with low flying practice and thousands of UK service personnel involved in regular annual winter training/exercises in Norway; British troops make up about half of all NATO training in Norway. Norwegian personnel attend training in the UK. British and Norwegian ministers and other government officials meet frequently for talks. UK and Norway are jointly investigating the use of spent North Sea gas fields as potential storage for carbon dioxide.

From about 1850 there were restrictions on Sami rights and language. This was reversed after World War II and since 1988, the Norwegian Sami elect their own parliament (*Sameting*, meeting in Karasjok) every four years. Sweden and Finland have similar bodies. They belong to the Saami Council which co-operates with Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Russian governments and also participate in the Arctic Council.

## Norway: Central Government Services

Ministry of Agriculture & Food: The Food Safety Authority (*Mattilsynet*) merged from the Animal Health Authority, Agricultural Inspection Service, Food Control Authority, Fisheries' Inspectorate and Municipal Food Control Authority in 2004. A single new Food Law merged 13 previous Acts to ensure that food, drinking water and cosmetics are as safe as possible; promoting healthy plants, fish and animals; ethical keeping of animals and fish; environmentally friendly honest production, good quality and fair trade. The Ministries of Health and Fisheries are also responsible for some aspects of the Authority's work. There are eight regional and 64 district offices carrying out food law enforcement, an independent scientific board for risk assessment and laboratories.

Ministry of Defence: Annual expenditure is \$5 billion, 1.9% of GDP (2006). Total armed forces personnel is 13 100 (23% fewer than 2005): Norwegian Army (*Hæren*) 6500, Royal Norwegian Navy (*Kongelige Norske Sjøforsvaret*) including Coastal Rangers and Coast Guard (*Kystvakt*) 3150, Royal Norwegian Air Force (*Kongelige Norske Luftforsvaret*) 2700, Home Guard 750. The army has 72 tanks, 104 armoured fighting vehicles and 595 armoured personnel carriers; the navy has 6 submarines, 3 frigates and 7 patrol vessels; the air force has 52 combat aircraft.

There is compulsory military service for men aged 18 - 44 years; the 12-month service obligation is shortened to 8 - 9 months in practice and they are seldom called after age 30. For volunteers, lower age limits are 17 years for men and 18 years for women; 16 years for the Home Guard (*Heimevernet*). In wartime, the age range for all is 16 - 49 years and reserve forces can call up those aged 35 - 60. The Norwegian Military Academy was established in 1750.

Ministry of Education & Research: Expenditure is 7.2% of GDP (2005). Higher education usually follows upper secondary education, lasting 3 to 8 years. Access is also granted to those over 25 on the basis of documented formal and non-formal competence. There are no tuition fees at state run institutions (including foreign students), except for some professional courses. 26% of the adult population have completed tertiary education, but this is changing; of those under 30 it is 49% for women and 32% for men, 64% of current students are women. Women were first admitted to universities in 1884.

There are seven universities: University of Oslo (established 1811), University of Bergen (1946), Norwegian University of Science & Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim (1910), University of Tromsø (1972), University of Stavanger (2005), Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) in Ås (1859), University of Agder (2007); the four traditional universities (Oslo, Bergen, NTNU and Tromsø) are also responsible for museums.. There are six specialised institutions at university level: *Norges Handelshøyskole* (Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration) in Bergen (1936), *Norges Musikkhøyskole* (Norwegian Academy of Music), *Norges Idrettshøyskole* (Norwegian School of Sport Sciences), *Norges Veterinærhøyskole* (Norwegian School of Veterinary Science), *Arkitekthøyskolen* (Oslo School of Architecture and Design) and the private Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology.

There are 2 colleges of the arts, 29 private university colleges and also 26 state university colleges with the important role of decentralising access to higher education, particularly in rural areas where 63% of students are women. These colleges mainly offer 3-year bachelor courses (engineering, nursing, social work, etc), but also professional programmes varying from one to five years, including teacher training and business administration. Colleges also engage in research and development work and several offer master's programmes; three have the right to award doctorates in one or more subjects. The National Academies of the Arts in Oslo and Bergen (with courses in visual art and design) are state owned; the Oslo Academy also offers programmes in dramatic arts (theatre, opera and ballet). 25 of the private higher education institutions including *Norges Landbrukshøyskole* (Agricultural

College of Norway) receive public funding for all or some of their accredited programmes. The academic year runs from mid-August to mid-June. There are about 200 000 students of whom 145 000 receive grants (non-repayable if the course is completed) or loans (interest free during studies). About 12.5% of students attend the private fee-paying university colleges. Foreigners who have asylum or refugee status are also entitled to grants or loans; other foreigners who have married Norwegians or are working in Norway may apply for a study loan after a specified number of years. About 11 800 Norwegians are studying abroad, 2500 in the UK.

Students from EU/EEA and other countries can study in Norway provided they have adequate financial means; about 12 000 currently do so. Applicants must have the equivalent of the Norwegian Higher Education Entrance Qualification (*generell studiekompetanse*) and documented proficiency in Norwegian for undergraduate courses; most Masters and PhD courses are taught in English. Institutions advise on their entry qualifications. Admission to a university or a college automatically qualifies the student for annual residence permits for the duration of the studies programme. The Universities & Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) coordinates admission to undergraduate courses at all universities, university colleges, state colleges and some private colleges. Students can apply for a permit to work up to 20 hours per week with some restrictions.

Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU)

<<http://www.studyinnorway.no/>> <<http://www.siu.no/en>>

UCAS <<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/english/>>

Higher education institutions decide for themselves the courses they offer and the content, using the Bologna system for grading. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) supervises the quality of both higher education and tertiary vocational education and validates foreign education qualifications, except for accreditation/authorisation to work in the health sector which is validated by *Statens Autorisasjonskontor For Helsepersonell* (SAFH). Generally, any accreditation obtained in one EU/EEA country is recognised by other member states with no additional assessment required.

NOKUT <<http://www.nokut.no>>

Ministry of Finance: Wage-earners, pensioners and businesses pay tax (*skatte*) to the municipality, county and state. Tax consists of income tax to the municipality and county, national income tax and surtax to the state, wealth tax to the state and the municipality and in some areas, property tax to the municipality. Employers deduct tax (including national insurance contributions) from pay according to a tax deduction assessment, approximately one-third of gross pay for most people; self-employed persons pay tax on expected income in advance four times a year. Pensioners and others with low income but high wealth or capital income (including interest and property rental) also make advance tax payments. Everyone with taxable income or wealth submits an annual tax return. Municipalities decide whether or not to impose property tax (*eiendomsskatt*) and the rate of tax. Wealth tax (*formuesskatt*) is charged on net wealth, ie gross wealth (including cash, bank deposits, shares, fixed assets, private cars, assessed value of real property etc) less debt and a tax-free allowance.

The Tax Administration maintains the National Population Register and administers the taxation system, VAT system and inheritance tax system. The 19 county tax offices deal with VAT, self-employed people and supervise 99 local tax assessment offices handling registration for both tax and elections, births, marriages and deaths, address changes, statistics for municipal planning and tax returns for employees and local businesses. The Central Tax Office for Large Enterprises handles businesses active in more than one local tax area or overseas, company groups and shipping businesses. The Central Office for Foreign Tax Affairs handles foreign businesses and workers in Norway and the Petroleum Tax Office handles special oil taxes. The county tax collection offices collect VAT, inheritance tax and other state taxes.

National Insurance (*Folketrygden*), introduced in 1967: Both individuals and employers pay

contributions to provide for benefits and pensions. Those without work register at an insurance office (*trygdekontor*) for unemployment benefit (*dagpenger*), paid to job seekers for up to 156 weeks. Sickness benefit (*sykepenger*) at the employee's basic wage is paid by the employer for the first 16 days, then by the state for up to 260 days with the self-employed receiving 65% pay from the state after two weeks. Child allowance (*barnetrygd*) is paid to mothers and there are other benefits for single parent families and funerals. Maternity leave was introduced in 1915. Old age pension (*alderspension*) at a minimum of kr 85 000 (in 2000) or higher (depending on earnings and years worked) is paid to those over 67 (reduced from 70 in 1973) who have been resident for at least 40 years; there are over 900 000 old-age pensioners and total outlay of the scheme is over kr 162 billion (34.3% of the national budget). Disability pension (*uførepension*) is paid to those with an illness or injury that prevents them taking a normal job (335 800 people in 2008, 11% of the working population, two-thirds of them women) but rehabilitation help and retraining is given so that they can do suitable work if possible. 4% of the population receive social assistance (down by a third since 1995) with the average recipient on benefits for 5 months, receiving an average of kr 36 600 (2007); the number of long term unemployed is decreasing.

**Ministry of Health & Care Services:** Responsible for health policy, public health and health services with a budget of over kr 97 billion (2006); supervises municipal services, ensuring that everyone, irrespective of personal finances or area of residence, has access to good health and care services of equal standard. Public health is concerned with paediatric health care, prevention and treatment of alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, Vinmonopolet, prevention of unwanted pregnancies and abortions, prevention of contagious diseases, promoting physical activity, nutrition and food safety (including cosmetics and genetically modified organisms), drinking water, approval of medicines, environmental health including radiation protection. Hospitals are organised into five regional health authorities. They provide specialised treatment, outpatient clinics, ambulance services and are involved in research and medical training. Total health expenditure is \$5910 per capita (2005); there are 4.2 hospital beds per 1000 population.

**Ministry of Justice & the Police:** There is one integrated national police service of 11 000 employees with 27 local police districts, each with its own headquarters and some other police stations (70 in total) under the command of a Chief of Police who has full responsibility for all policing in his district. Districts are divided into sub-districts (319 in total), under command of a *lensmann*. All police officers are trained as generalists for every aspect of ordinary police work, including criminal investigation and prosecution, patrolling, managing traffic, maintaining public order, issuing permits for public events and demonstrations, controlling gun and alcohol sales/licences and co-ordinating emergency operations. Police are unarmed except for specific authorised duties and situations. Each district has its own mobile unit for terrorist incidents. In addition, there are seven special agencies directly under the National Police Directorate for rendering expert assistance to police districts, and in some cases prosecuting directly: Criminal Investigation Service, Police Immigration Service, Police Computing & Material Service, Authority for Investigation & Prosecution of Economic & Environmental Crime, Central Mobile Police Service, Border Commissioner for the Norwegian-Russian Border and the Police Security Service which includes the National Bodyguard Subsection. Oslo Police Department also has national responsibilities for the SWAT Police response unit, the Royal Police Escort and a helicopter service. There is also a Police University College.

Police operate passport control on entry to or exit from Norway; control is nominal for EEA nationals but more stringent for others; the Coastguard is also empowered to carry out such control. Police issue emergency visas and extension of an existing one, handle applications for residence and work permits (there is a fee for some nationalities), applications for political asylum, applications for citizenship and issue passports to Norwegian citizens.

The Supreme Court (*Høyesterett*) in Oslo is the highest court and the final appeal court except

for cases that can be brought before the Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg. Supreme Court justices are appointed by the King. There are six regional High Courts with juries that also hear appeals and 83 District Courts (Tingrett). Courts can impose unconditional or suspended prison sentences from 14 days up to 21 years, fines or community service. The death penalty was abolished in 1979. The King has a right of pardon but it is always exercised by the government in his name and is seldom used. Special Courts of Justice include the Industrial Disputes Tribunal for labour legislation and wages disputes, the Land Consolidation Courts for ownership disputes and issues concerning land usage. Conciliation Boards in each municipality, consisting of three laymen and three deputies elected or appointed by the municipality council for four years, mediate between disputing parties and pronounce verdicts on civil disputes; disputing parties participate voluntarily.

Ministry of Labour & Social Inclusion: Public service sector and fishery employment dominate the northern counties while manufacturing industries are significant in southern coastal counties and financial/business services in cities. 77% of men aged 16 - 74 are in work (90% of these full-time) and 71% of women (58% full-time). On average, men work 38 hours per week (44 in 1972) and women 31 hours (29 in 1972). Average full-time earnings are kr 415 200 for men and kr 349 200 for women (2008). The unemployment rate is low at 1.7% (2008). Finding work is difficult; the service industries may have vacancies for Norwegian speakers but preference is given to those from Nordic countries.

Immigration has been strictly controlled since 1975. Asylum seekers are not normally admitted but those who have been granted UN refugee status elsewhere are welcomed. Their spouses and children under 18 are also allowed entry. Non-Norwegian speakers have access to subsidised education programmes.

Citizens from other EEA countries who are financially self-sufficient have the right to look for work for up to 90 days without a permit and for a further 3 months if they both register as seeking employment at a job centre in Norway and obtain an EEA residence permit from the local police station. Citizens from the original EU countries may work during this period. For longer periods and for those from other countries, a residence permit must be obtained from the Norwegian embassy or consulate in their own country; these are available only where there is a demand for highly skilled workers in specialised occupations. Testimonials and proof of qualifications are required in Norwegian or English; some occupations may require different qualifications than the UK; previous employers and other referees are always contacted.

After finding work, it's necessary to register with the National Registry and apply for a tax deduction card; for both go to the tax office local to your place of residence. Your employer registers you with the National Insurance Service. There is equality between men and women with equal pay since 1959; anti-discrimination laws apply but in jobs where one sex is under-represented, it's permissible to prioritise that sex. There is no minimum wage legislation but in many cases there are wage agreements with trade unions. 35% of workers belong to a union but less than 20% of these take active part. The Working Environment Act covers working conditions and safety and you are entitled to an employment contract which may specify a probationary period of up to 6 months; normal working hours are a maximum of 8 hours per day/37.5 hours per week but in most jobs are less; any overtime is paid at least 40% more than the normal rate or you may be given time off in lieu; notice of termination is normally 14 days on either side. Pay is normally received monthly. The Annual Holidays Act guarantees holiday of 25 working days per year, but holiday pay of 10.2% normal pay must be earned during the previous year. The employer must be notified of any absence through sickness; a doctor's note is required after 3 days.

Children under 13 are not allowed to take paid work; up to 15 years they may work not more than 2 hours per day/12 hours per week of designated light work; above that age they can do more but not at night and there must be 4 weeks holiday per year with no work at all. Above 18 years they may take any job except selling or serving spirits for which the minimum age is 20.

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organisation (NAV) <<http://www.nav.no/English>> has an office in every municipality and merges the former state National Insurance (*trygdekontor*) and National Employment (*Aetat*) offices with the municipal Social Welfare System. It provides user-oriented services and training courses to keep people in work and off benefits. Free booklets are available in English: 'Looking for Work in Norway', 'Norway – Access to Job Vacancies' and 'A Guide to Living and Working in Norway'. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) has information on residence and work permits (including students). <<http://www.udi.no>>

Other Ministries include the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Children & Equality, Ministry of Fisheries & Coastal Affairs, Ministry of Government Administration & Reform, Ministry of Local Government & Regional Development, Ministry of Culture & Church Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Trade & Industry, Ministry of Petroleum & Energy, Ministry of Transport & Communications responsible for state road (92 500 km) and railway (4114 km) networks with 8% of all journeys by public transport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Norway: Local Government & Services

Central government has overriding authority and supervision of municipal and county administration. There is a programme of decentralisation of power from central government to the regions. The government's main representative supervising local authorities is the County Governor who co-ordinates the activities of central government bodies at the county level, eg environmental and anti-pollution regulations, and acts as ombudsman for an individual's rights at local level. Local government expenditure is 13.0% of GDP, income is 17.8% of GDP and it employs 19.8% of the working population (2006). In Troms and Finnmark, 40% of employees are in public administration as the scattered population requires more people to maintain the level of services. Over 40% of income comes from local taxes, most of the rest comes from government grants on a per capita basis biased in favour of sparsely populated areas to encourage growth and development.

Elections are held every 4 years, midway through the parliamentary term, for representatives to both municipal and county councils; non-nationals resident in Norway for the previous 3 years can register to vote in local elections. Turnout is about 60% and declining, especially among the young; more women vote than men. 38% of those elected are women and the proportion is increasing. The elections are based on proportional representation using a list of candidates put forward by registered parties and other groups. There is a minimum number of representatives elected, at least 11 for a municipality with a population under 5 000, at least 19 for a population from 5 000 to 10 000. An equivalent system determines the size of county councils. Councils may increase the number of representatives and most do so. Councils elect their chairman and an executive of at least 5 councillors from their number. The executive proposes a four-year economic plan, fiscal budget and taxes. Councils can form committees and delegate powers to them. All meetings are normally open to the public.

The country is currently divided into 5 regions and 19 counties (fylker): in north Norway: Finnmark, Troms, Nordland; in middle Norway: Nord-Trøndelag, Sør-Trøndelag; in Vestlandet: More og Romsdal, Sogn og Fjordane, Hordaland, Rogaland; in Østlandet: Telemark, Buskerud, Oppland, Hedmark, Vestfold, Oslo (which is both a county and a municipality), Akershus, Østfold; in Sørlandet: Vest-Agder, Aust-Agder. Svalbard is administered by a Governor; Jan Mayen Island (which is inhabited only by personnel at weather and navigational radio stations) is administered from Bodø. The number and size of the counties is due for revision in 2010. Counties levy income tax with education, roads and transport taking up 86% of expenditure. The county authorities' responsibilities include:

- Upper secondary schools
- Regional planning and development
- County roads and public transport
- Business development
- Culture (museums, libraries, sports)

There are 430 municipalities (*kommuner*) (747 in 1930), mostly based on a city or town with its surrounding area. Some rural authorities have no towns and over half the municipalities have less than 5 000 inhabitants. Only eight have more than 50 000. Care of the elderly and education account for 63% of expenditure. Municipalities levy individual and corporate income tax and optionally a property tax. The municipalities' responsibilities include:

- Nurseries/kindergartens
- Primary and lower secondary schools
- Medical care, care for the elderly and disabled, social services
- Local planning (land use), agricultural issues, environmental issues, local roads, harbours
- Water supply and sewers, sanitation
- Culture and business development

Education: Cathedral schools to educate priests date from the late 12th century and all market towns had a school by the late 16th century. Universal schooling was introduced in 1739. From 1889, seven years of compulsory education were provided; in 1969 this was increased to nine years and in 1997 to 10 years. Nearly all schools are co-educational. Over 900 000 children are currently in full-time education with another 1 million adults (over 20% of the population) on education courses. Literacy rate is 100% of the total population, 68% of those aged over 16 have education beyond compulsory school and 56% have upper secondary education. Primary schools registration is 98% of the age group, secondary schools is 113% (this includes adults) and tertiary education is 78% (2006). The Directorate for Education & Training develops curricula and supervises examinations and standards at primary and all secondary levels. <<http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no/>>

93% of children aged 3 - 5 attend a full- or part-time fee-paying kindergartens (*barnehager*) while parents work or study. 55% are privately run. They provide activity, play and learning for children's development with input from a parents' council.

Public schools at compulsory education levels (*grunnskoler*) comprise primary schools (*barneskoler*) for ages 6 to 12 (grades 1 - 7, average class size 13.5) and lower secondary schools (*ungdomsskoler*) for ages 13 to 15 (grades 8 - 10, average class size 15.1); tuition and textbooks are provided free. Pupils are not graded at all at primary level. School hours are usually 08.00 to 14.00; schools do not provide a meal service. Because of the scattered population, 35% of the 3100 primary and lower secondary schools have less than 100 pupils and children of different ages are taught in the same classroom. Primary and lower secondary levels are often combined in the same school. The curriculum (revised in 2006) has clear competence objectives including basic skills in oral and written expression, reading, numeracy and the use of digital tools and includes Norwegian, Mathematics, Social Science, Christianity, Religion & Ethics, Arts & Crafts, Natural Sciences, English, Food & Health, Music, Physical Education, Student Council work, Foreign Language or In-depth Study of Norwegian, Sami or English (at lower secondary level) and an optional subject; language options include Sami, Swedish, Finnish, French, German or Spanish. Parents meet with teachers twice per year.

There is a special curriculum for deaf pupils including sign language and also for Sami children to develop Sami language, culture and identity, equipping them to take an active part in the community. The University of Tromsø has responsibility for Sami language and Sami studies and textbook development in the Sami language is state funded. The Sami College trains Sami teachers.

Day-care facilities are available for children both before and after school where both parents are at work during the day. These provide facilities for play and participation in cultural and recreational activities appropriate to age, physical ability and interests, including those with physical disabilities. Fees, although subsidised, are expensive; municipalities are legally obliged to provide day-care for children attending the first four school years.

About 4.7% of compulsory schools are private with 85% government subsidy and parents paying fees for the balance; they are attended by about 4% of secondary and 1.5% of primary pupils; most are based on religious beliefs or alternative education methods.

Everyone between 16 and 19 has a right to 3 years' further education and training in one of over 450 upper secondary schools (*videregående skoler*); most are county-funded but 16% are private. They lead to basic skills or vocational qualifications or admission to higher education with students graded from 6 down to 1. Over 90% choose to continue their education: tuition is free but students pay for their own books. About 30% of men and 20% of women drop out before completing vocational courses. Curricula were revised in 2006. There are nine 3- or 4-year flexible vocational study programmes including 2 or 3 year apprenticeships leading to a specialist certificate exam: technical and industrial production; electrical and electronic engineering trades; building and construction trades; catering and food processing trades; health and social care; media and communication; service and transport; agriculture, fishing and forestry; design, arts and crafts. The academic 3-year study course leads to a general study competence qualification as the prerequisite for

higher education admission and is followed by about 48% of students; there are 6 study programmes: languages; natural sciences and mathematics; social sciences and economics; arts, crafts and design; sports; music, dance and drama. Special needs students (including those instructed in sign language or in Braille) have a right to an additional 2 years at upper secondary level to achieve their educational objectives.

Nearly 80 folk high schools are one-year boarding schools for students of any age or education level, normally taken between upper secondary school and higher education; most students are 19 and 20 year olds. They offer subjects such as outdoor life, theatre, music, media and others with the aim of giving a broader horizon, social insights and more self-confidence. There are no formal examinations but students receive a diploma detailing their achievements. The folk high school movement in Norway started in 1864.

Daytime or evening adult education is available in *videregående skoler* or as distance learning via post, phone and Internet. *Vox*, the national adult education institute, provides courses, gives advice and is responsible for adult immigrant education. Those over 30 years who never took a further education course have a right to free education and 8% of the *videregående skole* intake are adults. Following upper secondary education (or equivalent informal competence), tertiary vocational education is an alternative to higher education with courses from 6 months to two years. There are traditional schools of technical management and maritime subjects financed by county authorities, but most are privately run and accredited by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). The vocational system involves cooperation of employers and unions with a national council and vocational training boards in each county (*Yrkesopplæringsnemnda/Fagopplæringskontoret*) which approve public and private enterprises for apprentice training. Loans and grants are available for adult students.

Recognition of foreign secondary/upper secondary education is validated by the National Education Board office (*Statens utdanningskontor*) in each county. To obtain a place on a course, contact the actual school. Generally, any accreditation obtained in one EU/EEA country is recognised by other member states with no additional assessment required.

**Health & Social Services:** Municipalities are responsible for providing reasonable high-quality health care and social services to everyone, regardless of age or diagnosis. These include the general practitioner scheme, emergency clinics, midwife services, mother and child clinics, a free school health service, dental care services (free for children but adults pay in full), physiotherapy services, care of the elderly, addiction and psychiatric health. There is a shift from care for the elderly in institutions (14%) to care services at home (37%).

**Libraries:** 54% of people use public libraries which provide internet access, newspapers and magazines, music, audio and video cassette/CD loans, foreign language books, reference books and books for loan. Annual book loans total 17 million, cassette/CD loans 7 million.

**Housing:** Approximately 25% of households in cities and 18% in rural areas are rented, the remainder are owner-occupied. 13% of people live in flats, mostly in cities and large towns; flats in rural areas are rare. Rented dwellings are used primarily by young people (one-third of those under 30, and increasing) and by some of the elderly who have life-long tenancy. Most rented dwellings have private landlords (usually one unit, often attached to the owner's dwelling), a few are provided by private or public sector employers (mostly hospitals and armed forces) for their employees, some are municipal subsidised social housing and very few are multiple units owned by professional/commercial landlords. Tenancy agreements are usually valid for an initial year and for subsequent periods of five years with a mutual right to terminate. Termination notice is normally three months and tenants are usually required to pay a deposit of two or three months' rent. The amount of rent, length of tenancy and periods of notice are governed by a Rent Act.

House purchase prices are high and rising (especially in cities and for flats) owing to the demand for a high standard of construction, full insulation and heating required by the cold climate; some simpler, inexpensive housing may be found in rural areas. Purchase is

arranged through an estate agent (*eiendomsmegling*), bank or solicitor. Norwegian banks provide mortgages, holding the house/flat as collateral. Mortgage interest is relatively low compared to the UK. There is a tax advantage for owner-occupiers as mortgage interest is fully deductible; for an attached rental unit that is less than 50% of the dwelling the landlord lives in, no local tax is payable.