

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.