

Executive summary

Trust in public institutions is essential for the legitimacy and viability of democracy. Moreover, as the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated, interpersonal and institutional trust can help countries successfully navigate social and economic crises. High levels of institutional trust also improve compliance with laws and regulations and contribute to the implementation of public policies, all of which will be crucial for achieving an inclusive recovery from COVID-19 and overcoming complex multidimensional challenges in years to come.

Yet, trust is a fragile societal asset. While it takes time to establish, it can be lost quickly. Analysing what drives trust in public institutions and what actions are required to preserve it is essential for ensuring public governance systems deliver policies that improve people's lives.

This report analyses the challenges for reinforcing trust in Norway and identifies opportunities to address them. It is based on the OECD Trust Survey, which provides the citizen's perspective on government performance and public governance values. The findings of this report can assist the Norwegian authorities in designing and implementing its "Trust Reform", a new initiative to adjust the public sector management practices and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, placing greater emphasis on the knowledge, experience and capacity of civil servants as a way to improve service provision and preserve trust between people and the public administration.

Levels of public trust in Norway are among the highest in OECD countries. In 2021, 77% of the population reported trusting the government, compared to an OECD average of 47%. Law and order institutions, such as courts and the police, are trusted by 82% of people. The parliament is trusted by 69% of the population, while 65% trust the civil service and 58%, the local government. On the low end of the spectrum, only 40% of Norwegians reported trusting the media, with no distinction among different types of providers.

Several factors explain this high institutional trust in Norway. First, a robust welfare system provides high-quality services and contributes to low levels of inequality. Fiscal space is comparatively large, stemming from high levels of taxation combined with a natural endowment of oil reserves that allows for relatively high levels of public investment. The public governance culture is rooted in a long tradition of collaboration and social dialogue among government, business and unions; high levels of public sector integrity; and accountability. Finally, Norway also enjoys a strong sense of community, high rates of political participation, low polarisation and high satisfaction with democracy.

When faced with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Norwegian government was able to react at scale and speed to ensure the service provision and put in place exceptional support measures, while remaining open and maintaining fluid communication with the public. As of October 2021, 68% of the population expressed confidence in control measures in place, while 69% reported confidence in the information provided by the government.

However, high levels of institutional trust should not be taken for granted. The population is both ageing and becoming more diverse. Society is also facing uncertainty in terms of how to cope with climate change and ensure the sustainability of the welfare system. According to the OECD Trust Survey, only 46% of the Norwegian population considers that public institutions are doing enough to adapt to future challenges.

There are also persistent trust gaps, in particular in rural regions and among less educated and low-income people. How Norway responds to the challenges ahead could influence trust levels for years to come.

In Norway, the preparedness of public institutions and the reliability of policies to cope with future challenges are found to be the most important determinants of trust in the national government. At the same time, there is scope for reviewing policy-making mechanisms to improve preparedness as well as strengthen co-ordination mechanisms to cope with complexity and uncertainty. Enhancing the responsiveness of services, through greater digitisation, enhanced capabilities and skills of civil servants, and more opportunities for people to engage with the public administration, will also be important for maintaining trust.

The main recommendations of this report can be grouped into six areas: 1) Continuing to measure trust in public institutions and its drivers; 2) Achieving responsive citizen-centred services through better co-ordination, innovation and skills; 3) Enhancing preparedness and foresight for more reliable policies; 4) Simplifying access to information for all and enhancing the engagement of vulnerable groups; 5) Strengthening public integrity by preventing and anticipating integrity risks; and 6) Guaranteeing equality in service provision and improving the diversity of the administration. The following table summarises the main findings and recommendations.

Main Findings	Key Recommendations
Continuing to measure trust in public institutions and its drivers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the OECD Trust Survey, trust in public institutions is high in Norway. The institutions that are trusted the most are the courts (85%) and the police (82%), followed by the national parliament (69%), the government (65%) and the public administration (65%). The least trusted institution is the media (40%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeat the Trust Survey at regular intervals to monitor improvements or declines in trust in different institutions and to evaluate the effects of policy initiatives. Include the Trust Survey in the Norwegian Citizens Survey, which focuses on access to and satisfaction with public services, key elements driving people's trust in public institutions. Evidence from the OECD Trust Survey can provide additional guidance to improve public administration performance and benchmark to other countries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower levels of trust are found among people living in remote regions, younger and older cohorts, and those with lower levels of income and education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve representation of marginalised groups in trust surveys, including those more distrustful and that may opt out from surveys easily (e.g. people of different backgrounds, lower education, younger or older). This could be done for example through enhanced sampling techniques, focus groups, cognitive testing of questions, or user's experience random testing.
Achieving responsive people-centred public services through better co-ordination, innovation and skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 75% of the population is satisfied with the quality of services provided by central and local levels of government. This high level of satisfaction is an important determinant of trust in the civil service and the local government. 65% of the population trust the public administration in the digital use of their data. However, 20% of the population finds online services difficult to use. This rises to 30% in the case of people with only a basic level of education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the user's experience by adopting an integrated approach to service design and delivery. Enhance co-ordination across government, clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities including for innovation development and service transformation. Develop and disseminate specific guidelines on the characteristics of people-centred services, particularly through digital channels. Running pilot projects could be a first step for building the knowledge base for informing those guidelines. Further involve users in the adaptation of services, including population groups that find it hard to access those services. In addition to collecting data on satisfaction and other dimensions of services, standardise requirements and mechanisms for incorporating and reporting on the feedback received from users.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than two-thirds of the population think that innovation is not widespread in the public sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust management practices within the administration with greater focus on results than in binding procedures. Further promote and develop capabilities and skills of the senior management to generate room for innovation and experimentation, through legislative changes and training.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the balance between mission-related and reporting tasks leads ample room to front line workers for working on core tasks. Allow space for front line workers to find and apply innovative solutions better suited for the reality of the field, based on knowledge and experience. Explore mechanisms for scaling up some of these solutions that may be replicable.
Enhancing preparedness and foresight for more reliable policies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparedness to handle complex uncertain challenges is the factor that has the highest influence on the level of trust in Norwegian government. At the same time, less than half of the population considers that public institutions are doing enough for adapting to future challenges. The perception that the welfare system is sustainable in the long-term is strongly associated to trust in government and civil service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that complex topics entailing intergenerational choices such as fighting climate change, safeguarding the welfare system and ensuring social cohesion are key policy priorities, including through budgetary planning and allocations. Make sure that these issues are salient in crisis recovery strategies. Reinforce a systemic and unified approach that focuses in long-term scenarios, including actions required to safeguard the welfare system. Incorporate anticipatory innovation tools by leaving room to design scenarios, experiment with some choices, at small scale, and continuously learn.
Simplifying access to information for all and enhancing the engagement of vulnerable groups	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norway has been a pioneer in transparency policies, 72% of Norwegians think that decisions are transparent. However, information is still often presented in hard-to-understand bureaucratic language, a challenge to actual openness for some social groups Transparency, access to information and open communication were central to the government strategy for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. By October of 2021, 69% of the population reported having confidence in the information provided by the government. It was, however, difficult to reach out to some groups, particularly those with a migrant background. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the administration's efforts to use plain language, and identify the best communication channels to reach and get feedback from different groups.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity to influence policies is a key determinant for both trust in local and national government. Norwegians show record political participation figures: two-thirds of population think they have a say in what the government does and 55% have confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue investing in initiatives related to political socialisation and opportunities to pursue different strategies for reaching out to different population groups, by for instance regularly collecting people's feedback through surveys, and promoting significant engagement opportunities through social dialogue. Develop initiatives on transparency and good governance within organisations, such as promoting the accountability of leaders and democratic candidate selection procedures, as well as participative decision-making processes.
Strengthening public integrity by preventing and anticipating integrity risks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norway is among the countries with the lowest levels of perceived corruption in the world: 74% of the population partially or totally agrees that the public sector abides by laws and regulations. However, unlike other countries with similar features, integrity is one of the most significant factors influencing public trust in Norway. Whilst there is an uneven distribution of perceptions on risks of undue influence, there is no specific anticorruption agency, policy or strategy on integrity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve co-ordination and centralise efforts, for instance by the proactive institutionalisation of regular events to exchange information and harmonise initiatives at different public agencies and levels of government.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success of prevention and values-based integrity systems rely on the fact that every public official incorporates core values of public service. These values should guide them when facing ethical dilemmas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide further training to clearly identify daily ethical dilemmas and better equip public officials on how to face and tackle them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 36% of Norwegians think that various forms of corruption including bribes or greasing hands are quite common or very common at the municipal level. Close-knit networks, especially at the local level, may present corruption challenges, such as conflicts of interests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop clear stipulations to regulate how the private sector is involved in policy making. Norway could consider opening discussions on how to further transparency on the many forms and actors who influence policies, by for example, developing lobbying regulations if needed.

Guaranteeing equality in service provision and improving the diversity of the administration

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% of Norwegians believe that if they approach the authorities their application will be treated fairly. This perception of fair treatment is the most important determinant of trust in the civil service. However, only 40% of Norwegians consider likely that everyone would be treated equally in contacts with public sector employees. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the diversity of the public administration and public institutions, particularly in the senior management and at the political level to ensure that different perspectives are included in service provision, by for instance actively pursuing the inclusion of people with a migrant background as part of the civil service. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over two-thirds of Norwegians with higher household incomes and higher education attainment think that institutions are fair, whilst less than half of people with lower income and lower levels of education agree with the statement that institutions treat everyone in a similar way. Norwegians living in areas further away from the wider Oslo area trust institutions less, are less satisfied with services and do not feel their voices count as much in decision making. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further include citizens in decision making through new technologies, processes and tools including enhanced surveys. In turn, traditional social dialogue between civil society and the public institutions should continue, but could be complemented with, for instance, deliberative techniques. |
-



From:
Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Norway

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/81b01318-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2022), "Executive summary", in *Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions in Norway*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/796c2eca-en>

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.