

4 Values and trust in Norway

This chapter focuses on the core values that inform governments' actions and thereby influence levels of institutional trust. These include government's openness, integrity and fairness. It argues that high levels of political empowerment and participation in politics are key components explaining a good functioning democracy in Norway. However, it analyses some participation gaps, and, in particular, how a rural/urban divide overlap tends to affect fairness (equity in service delivery), integrity (influence at local level), and openness (in terms of participation, i.e. voter turnout). Finally, it presents some concrete policy actions to proactively reach out to those population groups that may feel left behind and strengthen social dialogue and inclusive and fair policy making in Norway.

Openness

Openness as a cornerstone of public governance

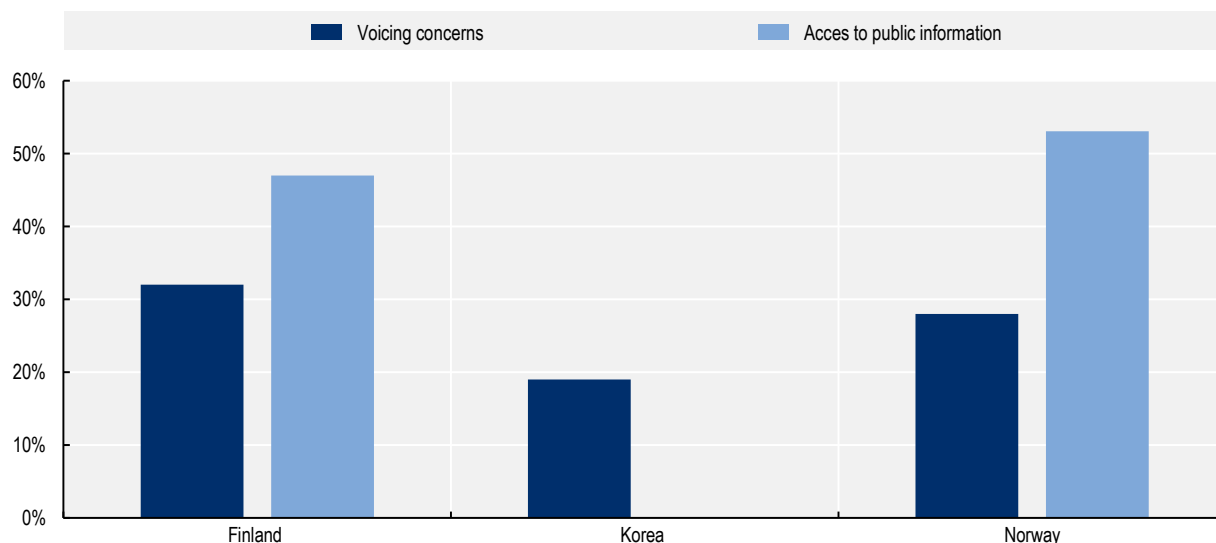
According to the OECD, open government refers broadly to a culture of governance that promotes the principles of transparency, integrity, accountability and stakeholder participation in support of democracy and inclusive growth (OECD, 2017^[1]). Opening governmental processes to the public and promoting a two-way relationship between the government and the public are key to building and promoting trust, as well as engaging citizens and furthering transparency (Bouckaert, 2012^[2]). Indeed, cross-national evidence from European countries shows that countries that invest in government openness benefit from higher levels of trust in the public system (Schmidhuber, Ingrams and Hilgers, 2020^[3]). However, the causality between trust and openness is complex: the effect of openness on public trust was found to be mediated by other elements, and although openness is necessary, it may not be sufficient with regards to trust. While openness initiatives can promote trust, citizens also need to trust the institutions that are inviting them to participate and to feel trusted by the government, believing that the invitation to participate is genuine and that they are empowered to influence political systems.

As understood among the five key drivers of public trust, openness refers to and is measured, first, on governments' mandate to inform, consult and listen to citizens, by letting people know and understand what the government does. This refers to promoting government transparency¹ by granting access to public sector information, which also strengthens accountability. Second, openness depends on the government's capacity to engage citizens and other stakeholders, including their perspectives and insights and promoting co-operation in policy design and implementation. The OECD Trust Survey module carried out in Norway includes the following two questions, which gauge the population's opinion about 1) transparency; and 2) opportunities for citizens' inclusion and participation:

- If a decision is to be made which will impact the area where you live, how likely is it that you and other local residents will be given the opportunity to influence the decision?
- If you need information about how to use a public service, how likely is it that the information in question will be easy to access?


Norway has a strong culture of openness regarding public decision-making processes and disclosure of public information (Robinson, 2020^[4]). Evidence from the OECD Trust Survey shows that 53% of Norwegians expressed that it was likely that information on how to use a public service would be easy to access when they need it, and 28% declared that it would be likely that they would be given the opportunity to influence a decision to impact in the area where they live. In this sense, although the country scores comparatively higher than other OECD countries in terms of access to public information (which is also supported by evidence at the local level from the Citizens Survey),² its figures on voicing concerns are slightly below the average (Figure 4.1). In fact, the two dimensions of openness have different impacts on public trust, whilst access to public information has a significant effect only on trust in local government, the capacity to influence policies is relevant for both trust in local and national government. Further, there is a statistically significant albeit small effect of engagement opportunities in trust in the public administration.

Figure 4.1. Citizens' expectations of their ability to access information and voice their concerns on a decision affecting them



Note: Percentage of the population that on a scale from 0-10 answered 6 or more to the questions: If a decision is to be made which will impact the area where you live, how likely is it that you and other local residents will be given the opportunity to influence the decision? and If you need information about how to use a public service, how likely is it that the information in question will be easy to access?. The latter was not asked in the case of Korea.

Source: OECD Trust Survey applied in the Norwegian Citizens Survey, in the Finnish Consumer Confidence survey and OECD/KPI.

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Norway has been a pioneer country in transparency policies. In 2004, article 100 of the Norwegian Constitution³ provides that “everyone has the right of access to documents of the State and municipal administration, as well as the right to follow the proceedings of courts and democratically elected bodies.” In 2009, Norway ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS 205) and in 2010 it was among the countries that funded the Open Government Partnership. In addition, the Norwegian Freedom of Information Act states that all documents of public administration are open by default, and aims to facilitate the re-use of public information. Since 2010, there has been an online access portal to public records (Electronic Public Records, OEP), where all government documents are registered (GRECO/Council of Europe, 2020^[5]). Indeed, according to OECD evidence, Norway is among the top OECD countries on open government data, though it has been highlighted that it has recently reduced its efforts to promote re-use of data outside the public sector (OECD, 2019^[6]).

Further, the Norwegian government and public agencies proactively provide information through media outlets, press releases, campaigns and websites. There is a “State communication strategy”, first launched in 1993 and renewed in 2009, that serves as a framework for designing local strategies and plans for information and communication. The strategy stipulates that citizens should: 1) receive correct and clear information regarding their rights, duties and opportunities, 2) have access to information regarding the State, and 3) be invited to participate in the development of policies and services.

The level of perceived transparency in political decision making is relatively high in Norway. According to wave nine of the European Social Survey fielded in 2018, 71.9% of Norwegian respondents think that a great deal or some political decisions are transparent, the highest value among 19 surveyed European countries. These results are consistent with data collected through the OECD Survey on Lobbying, which shows that Norway makes public and accessible online not only discussions within the plenary sessions in parliament, but also discussions within commissions, which provides Norwegians with opportunities to

hold their government accountable (OECD, 2021^[7]). An illustrative example from the education sector mentioned during interviews conducted for this study may support this evidence. When the curriculum process for schools was updated, the Ministry of Education set up a Commission with experts and gave them the mandate to carry out the task. All interested stakeholders could set up meetings with the Commission and participate in debates. Moreover, all questions and debates were posted online, and everyone (teachers, teachers' unions, headmasters' union, etc.) could follow the commission's work and discussions on a day-to-day basis. Afterwards, a white paper on the topics discussed in the process was developed, there was a formal hearing, the document was openly discussed in Parliament, and the curriculum was decided. Once again, within the Ministry, stakeholders, who had followed the process and had complete information on it, were involved and there were meetings with unions and the organisation of local governments. Even if not consensual, the process was completely open. Further, in order to grant access even during the pandemic, for instance, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation ensured that all political meetings in the local governments were streamed online, so it was easy for people to access what politicians were discussing.

Finally, transparency, access to information and open communication were also central to the Government's strategy to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. On the one hand, the government broadcast regular meetings with health authorities and highlighted the role of science and public health in informing the government's choices; on the other hand, the government strategy focused on informing people continuously about what strategic choices they made and why, as well as on the issues they were unsure of or had no information. The communication strategy adopted was to be open on information, advice received from experts, consequences and underlying values. Moreover, the prime minister and the Minister of Health gave press conferences at least once a week. According to research still in progress, several elements of the Norwegian pandemic communications strategy were praised as important for building trust and achieving better results than neighbouring Scandinavian countries. These elements are a) not only about sharing the data but making sure that people understand it; b) a responsible communication model where objections are presented and criticism is accepted; c) dialogue with your surroundings (e.g. scientific community) but decisions remaining at the political level. Being open about uncertainty has also contributed to building confidence among people (Øyvind, 2021^[8]). Additionally, there have been press conferences specifically for children, where they had the opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns directly to the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister showcasing the importance of choosing different channels to reach different audiences.

People feeling empowered and capable of participating in politics: The foundation of the Norwegian system

According to data from the OECD Trust Survey, people's perception that they can have an influence on public decisions affecting their lives is an important determinant of trust in government, both at national and local level (Chapter 2). In addition, a recent study using European Social Survey data found that reforms that open up organisational processes to citizens, non-governmental organisations and other external actors result in greater levels of public trust. Especially when people feel that they have meaningful opportunities for political participation, they feel empowered to participate in politics and influence what the government does (Schmidhuber, Ingrams and Hilgers, 2020^[3]). In this sense, the fact that Norwegians are highly active, politically speaking, together with the widespread feeling that they have a say in what the government does, are important factors explaining the country's high levels of trust.

Policy making in Norway follows a consensus-based style, which has a long tradition of involving civil society, different stakeholders including unions to be consulted, collaborate and participate in the development of public policies (Box 4.1). Further, political parties and voluntary organisations have strong roots in civil society, are embedded in the local and regional fabric, and are key not only for democratic governance, but also for welfare provision (Saglie and Sivesind, 2018^[9]).

Box 4.1. Mechanisms in place for people to participate and influence public policies in Norway

According to the *Instructions for the Preparation of Central Government Measures*, green papers, public reports, as well as all proposed laws, regulations, or measures that could have a major effect on society are supposed to be subject to public consultation, and open to input from the whole Norwegian population. People are asked to submit comments and are given between six weeks and three months to do so. If these consultative comments result in major amendments to a proposal, a revised version is circulated for consultation anew.

Consultations also give access to interest groups and subject matter experts, in order to ensure that different viewpoints are included in the decision-making process in political bodies such as the Norwegian parliament and County councils. They can address public service performance and development, in order to develop more user-friendly and user-oriented services, too; and can be organised in the form of written comments or meetings where the concerned parties give comments and answer questions.

Another mechanism for citizens to influence what public institutions are doing - or should be doing - are public meetings, which are organised at the County and Municipality level. Public meetings –also called town hall meetings- are widespread in 95,2% of municipalities, are intended to be open for all interested parties and citizens, and are a platform for information sharing regarding policy plans. Issues of concern range from education to County reform.

According to a recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, there are multiple opportunities provided by local governments to participate, such as contact committees for voluntary organisations, contact committee/council for immigrants or channels for citizens' participation in the budget process. In 2020, most of municipalities (67%) have established cooperation forums for the business community. Besides, 71% of municipalities obtain people's feedback through user surveys.

At the local level, the local authority is required to have three committees that give advice to local municipality before they make decisions: one for the elderly, one for youth and one for people with disabilities, which ensures that the voices of underrepresented population groups are also heard. Some municipalities also have panels of the same citizens that give advice, or a "Kafé system", where politicians invite people for dinner for listening and discussing their concerns.

Some initiatives in the use of representative deliberative processes have taken place in Norway. For example, the city of Trondheim is developing the new municipality master plan using a citizens' panel.

Finally, co-operation between employers, unions and government (tripartite collaboration) has a long history in Norwegian working life. Trade unions have a greater influence on employment than in most other countries. A huge proportion of employees become members, and the trade unions enter into collective bargaining agreements with employers, which then are binding for all employees.

Further, it is relevant to mention that children have rights to participate in decisions that affect them, such as conventional children's right, and whenever any ministry proposes policies that affect youth, they are required to organise youth panels to advise them.

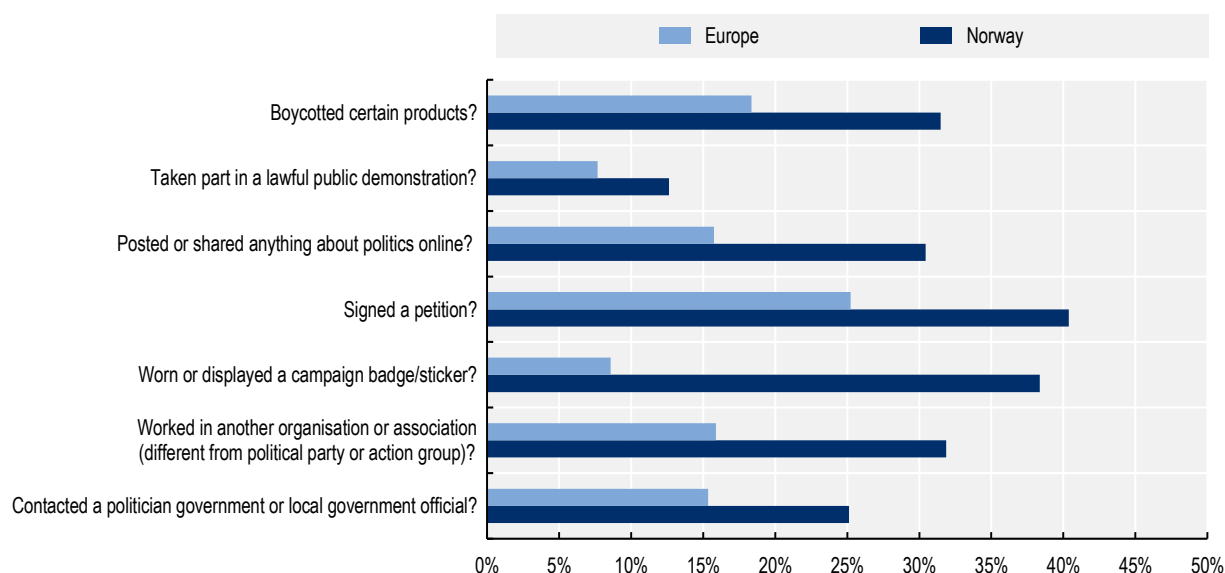
Source: Desk research for this case study and (Jones et al., 2021^[10]).

As suggested by data from the European Social Survey, people in Norway generally participate through different channels and in comparatively higher proportions than on average in Europe (Figure 4.2). Norwegians participate broadly and in many forms, which supports the argument on a pretty egalitarian

and not cumulative pattern in terms of political involvement, i.e. people use a wide arrays of channels in order to participate in civic life (Rose, 1982^[11]; Pettersen and Rose, 1996^[12]). Norwegians' involvement in decision making is widespread, they aim to politically influence decisions in a broad sense, for instance, including issues pertaining to the workplace (Lafferty, 1984^[13]). High levels of involvement fulfils one of the main democratic promises: not only to cover the political sphere, but also the social one, and extend to all places where power is exercised to make binding decisions for an entire social group (Bobbio, 1987^[14]).

Figure 4.2. Percentage of the population reporting to participate in political life in Norway and Europe, 2018

Percentages reported



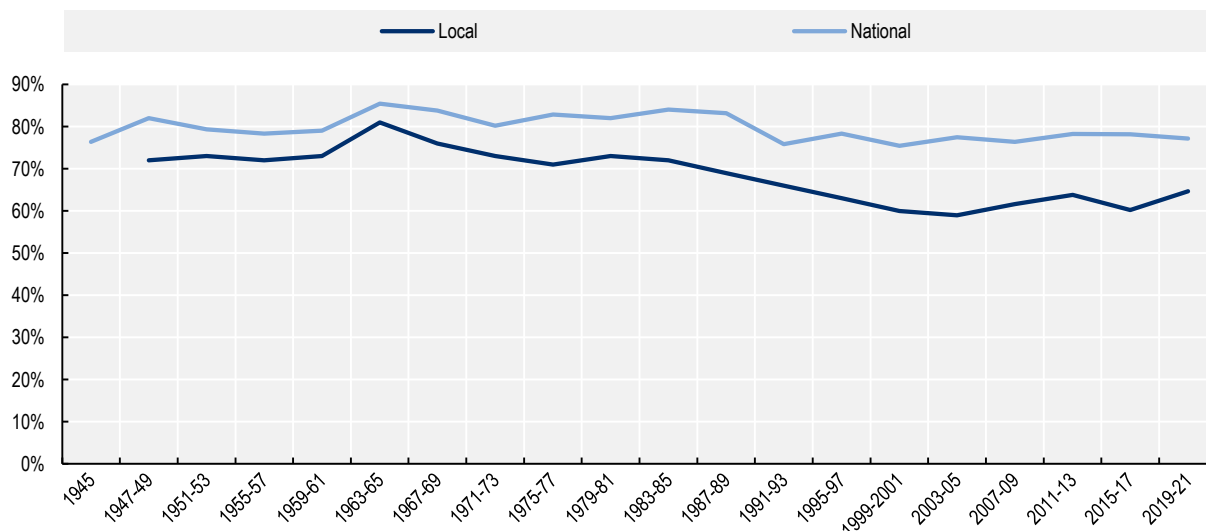
Note: weighted data reported (dweight).

Source: OECD calculations based on the European Social Survey, wave 9.

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Turnout levels in Norway are amongst the highest in the world, 77% voted in the most recent national elections, and contrary to global trends, figures haven't decreased in recent years (Figure 4.3). This could be related to the fact that voter registration is automatic, which makes it easier for Norwegians to vote, to an extended voting period⁴ and easy access to polling stations both in the advance period and on election day. Another factor contributing to high turnout is the fact that Norwegians generally have a favourable opinion of their representative institutions. These positive turnout figures though, are not replicated at the local level with a difference of about 10 percentage points over the past twenty years (see Figure 4.3). In 2019, there was an increase in local election turnout; however, electoral participation at the local level has dropped substantially in comparison with turnout in national elections, even though municipalities do have important responsibilities regarding the provision of public services (such as providing primary education, care for the elderly, etc.) (Borge, 2010^[15]). While it is common that "second order elections", such as local elections, have lower turnout rates (Marien, Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015^[16]), this pattern of diminishing turnout at the local level in Norway remains an unresolved challenge (Haugsgjerd and Segaaard, 2020^[17]).

Figure 4.3. Turnout in Norway: Trends



Note: Elections are held every 4 years. At the national level, we include the percentage of eligible Norwegians who go and cast a vote from 1945, and at the local level from 1947. For ease of visualisation, we combined the dates.

Sources: OECD calculations based on Listhaug and Grønflaten (2007^[18]), International IDEA (2021^[19]), and Statistics Norway (2021^[20]).

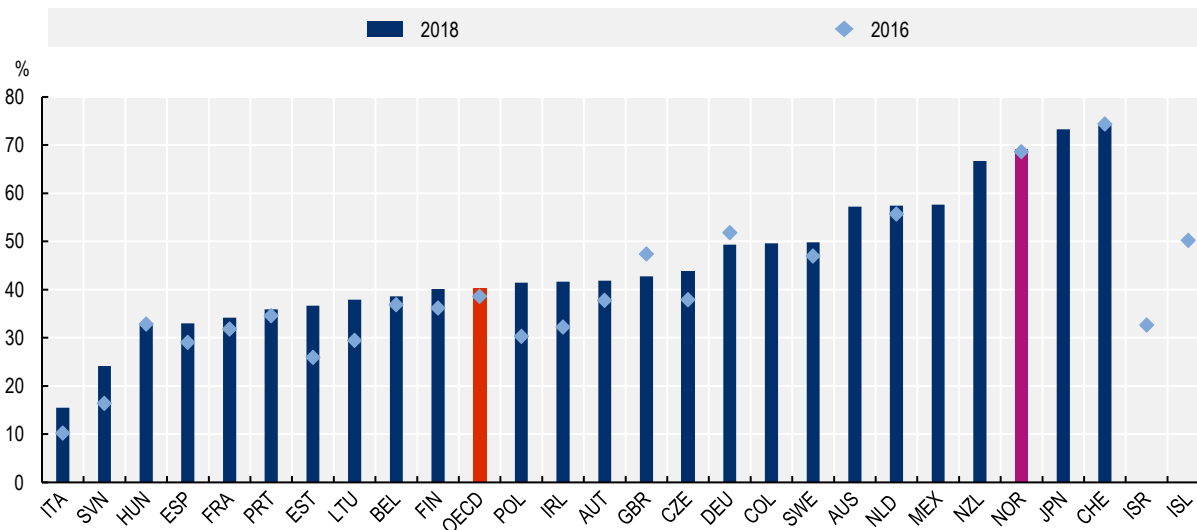
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According to the data collected in the summer of 2021 through the OECD Trust survey applied in the Norwegian Citizens Survey, the parliament is the most trusted political institution, 69% of Norwegians declared to trust it. In turn, political parties are trusted by 43% of Norwegians. These numbers are comparatively higher than in other OECD countries, where Parliaments are generally the least-trusted political institution (OECD, 2021^[21]). These percentages may suggest that people feel their interests are well represented in the country's policies and laws, which is consistent with interviews conducted for this study. As per the experts consulted, the Norwegian party system represents different groups well, established political parties are also fairly good at incorporating new topics into their agendas, and the electoral system is open enough to allow new parties to enter the political scene. For instance, in 2019 from grassroots movements against toll roads emerged a political party that got seats in several communities. Further, given the substantial public funding allocated to them, both voluntary organisations and political parties have been recently regulated to be transparent, reinforcing a trustworthy relationship with the State and the public (Saglie and Sivesind, 2018^[9]). As political parties, trade unions and voluntary organisations have a key role representing different interests, and participating in these organisations makes citizens feel they have a stake in collective endeavours, builds mutual trust and encourages a sense of belonging (Parvin, 2018^[22]). However, membership in these organisations has declined over the years, and according to the Citizens Survey, just about 6%⁵ of Norwegians declared to be active party members, and 24% to be an active member of a trade union.

Further, a little over half of the Norwegian population declared to feel they have a say in what government does. This evidence is similar to data collected through the European Social Survey, with 69% of Norwegians considering that they have a say in what the government does. Norway is above the OECD average and is among the top performers in terms of external efficacy (Figure 4.4). Likewise, Norwegian figures supports findings of a recent analysis of 30 European countries highlighting that political efficacy always has significant effects on participation. People's perception that their participation will influence what government does (external efficacy) has a positive impact on traditional forms of participation, as well as on participation within the political system. An individual's self-perception of their ability to understand political processes (internal efficacy) has a positive effect on any form of participation (Prats and Meunier, 2021^[23]).

Figure 4.4. Having a say in what the government does, 2016 and 2018 (or nearest available year)

Percentage of the population



Note: The scores reflect the percentage who answered “some”, “a lot” or “a great deal” to “How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does?”

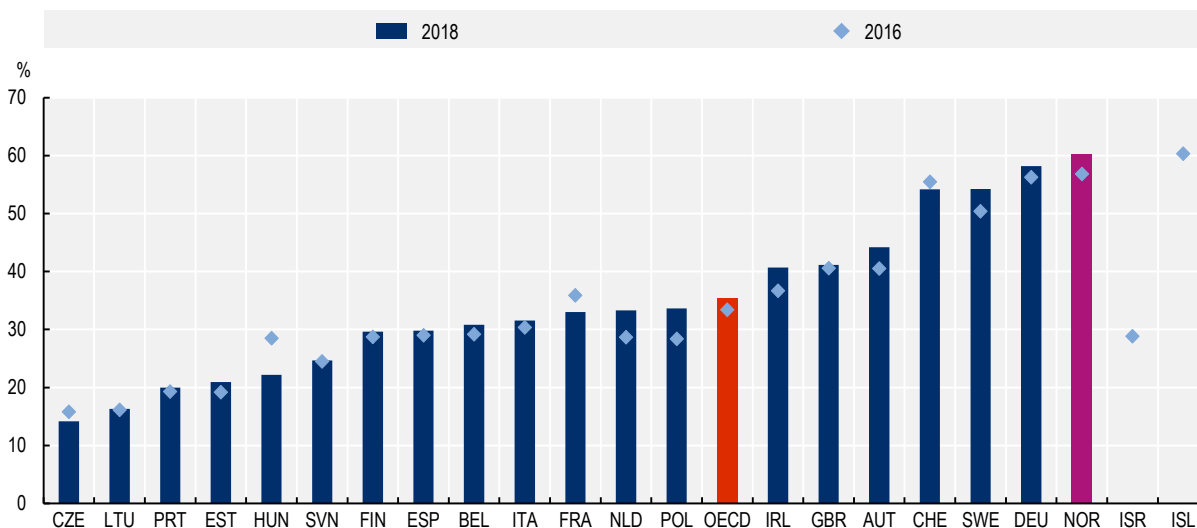
Source: OECD (2021^[21]), *Government at a Glance 2021*.

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In turn, regarding internal efficacy, according to the OECD Trust Survey, most Norwegians (55%) have confidence in their own ability to participate in politics, a figure that is comparatively higher than in most European countries (OECD, 2021^[21]). According to ESS, Norwegians display the highest levels of internal political efficacy (i.e. people’s own ability to participate in politics) of the OECD countries (Figure 4.5). This can be linked to the fact that Norway is the only country in the world where there is a national framework (and a 70-year tradition) to conduct mock elections in schools – including debates and interaction with party members from youth organisations - every other year, which is held one week before local or parliamentary elections. This familiarises students with the political realm and trains them to be active democratic citizens, which helps perpetuate the democratic system. Indeed, a study on the impact of political education at schools in Norway showed that mock elections had a positive effect on students’ willingness to vote in parliamentary elections (Borge, 2016^[24]).

Figure 4.5. People’s confidence to participate in politics, 2016 and 2018

Percentage of the population



Note: The scores for 2016 and 2018 reflect the percentage who answered “quite confident”, “very confident” or “completely confident” to “How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?” The options “not at all confident” and “a little confident” are not shown.

Source: OECD (2021^[21]), *Government at a Glance 2021*.

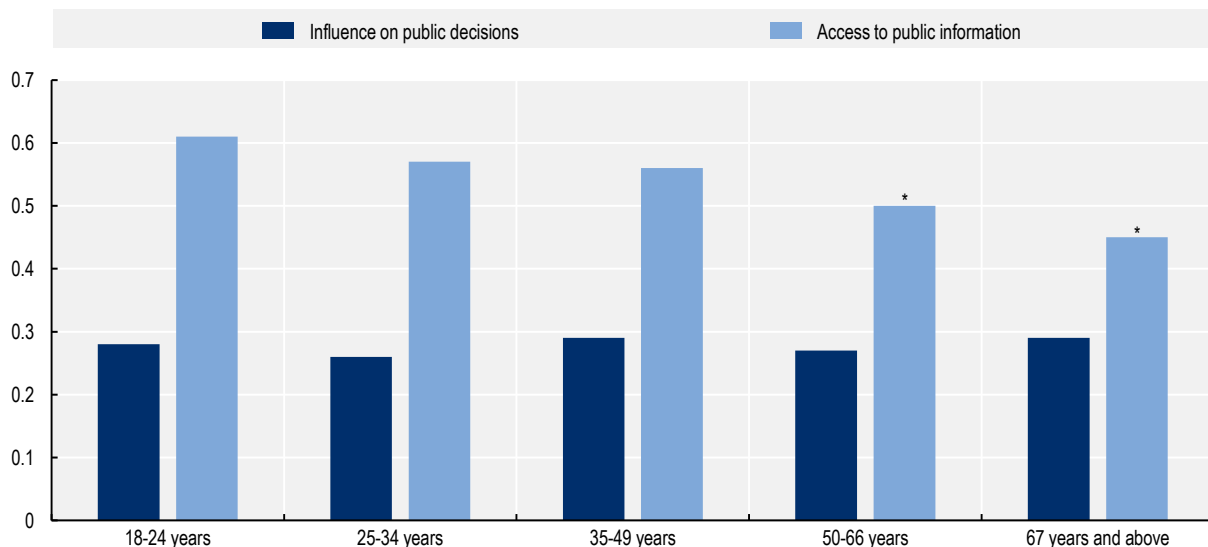
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Furthering openness and engagement of everyone and at all levels

Although Norwegians are very active politically, the country is not exempt from participation gaps and political disparities (Dalton, 2017^[25]). As such, for strengthening openness and preventing differences from becoming structural political inequalities, Norway needs to better understand who is (or feels) left behind, and what the expectations and perceptions of different groups of society are with respect to participation and engagement.

According to the OECD Trust Survey and the interviews carried out for this study, while the ability of voicing concerns does not change according to age, older people find it significantly more difficult to access information than younger cohorts (Figure 4.6). In addition, the ability to voice concerns and access information about government actions increase significantly for higher-levels of income.

Figure 4.6. Citizens' perceptions of openness by age



Note: Percentage of the population answering 6 or more to the questions: If a decision is to be made which will impact the area where you live, how likely is it that you and other local residents will be given the opportunity to influence the decision? If you need information about how to use a public service, how likely is it that the information in question will be easy to access? Other respondents were coded as 0 (having low or neutral perceptions). Weighted average values are reported. Reference group for statistical tests is 35-49 years old.

* Statistically significant at 95%.

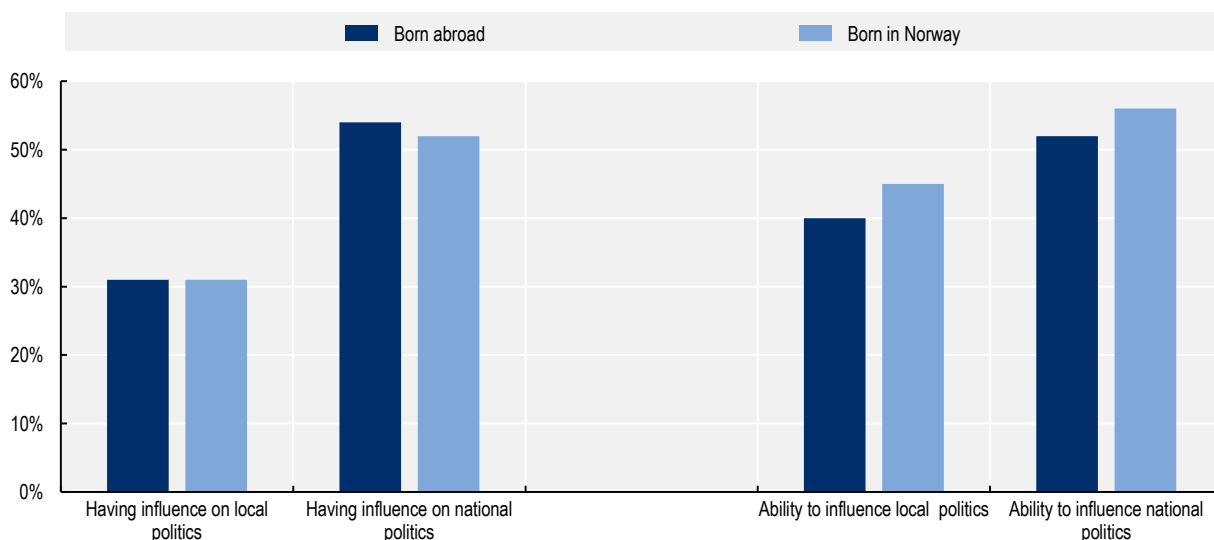
Source: OECD Trust Survey fielded in the Norwegian Citizens Survey.

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Data on the local level also suggest participation gaps across socioeconomic characteristics, which is of key relevance given that openness and external political efficacy are among the main determinants of trust (Chapter 2). Indeed, a study on participation in local politics in Norway, found that whilst young people and women in urban areas prefer to perform activities to influence public opinion (such as signing petitions or participating in demonstrations), better educated men in municipalities prefer to influence policy making more directly (for example contacting local representatives or raising issues within a local party organisation) (Pettersen and Rose, 1996^[12]). Another study also highlighted that initiatives to promote participation varied along different municipalities, with diminishing participation opportunities depending on people's residency (Bergh, Haugsgjerd and Karlsen, 2020^[26]). Participation types were also found to be affected by size of political units (Rose, 2002^[27]). For instance, proximity and familiarity in small and less populated areas make contacting politicians more common, thus facilitating civic activities, such as attending meetings. These findings could suggest that in order to increase participation, the Norwegian government could adopt different strategies according to political units, instead of promoting a general or one-size-fits all strategy at the local level.

Concerning local politics and geographical gaps, another point was raised during interviews conducted for this study: a stronger polarisation of the rural-urban divide reactivated after centralisation reforms. As Norway has a wide territory with a small and scattered population, with the exception of the capital and other large cities, the conflict between national and local interests has persistently crosscut politics in the country. Data collected by the OECD Trust Survey shows no significant differences between people born abroad and in Norway (Figure 4.7). In turn, people who do not live in Oslo and its surroundings tend to trust political institutions less, such as political parties, the *Storting* or the government (see Chapter 2). Further, they have lower levels of political efficacy (Figure 4.8). This evidence may suggest that people who live in the periphery feel left behind, and that their interests are not broadly represented by political parties. Indeed, the urban-rural cleavage and the dispute about centralisation has been highlighted as key factors in explaining political alignments and agenda.

Figure 4.7. Citizens' perception of openness by place of birth



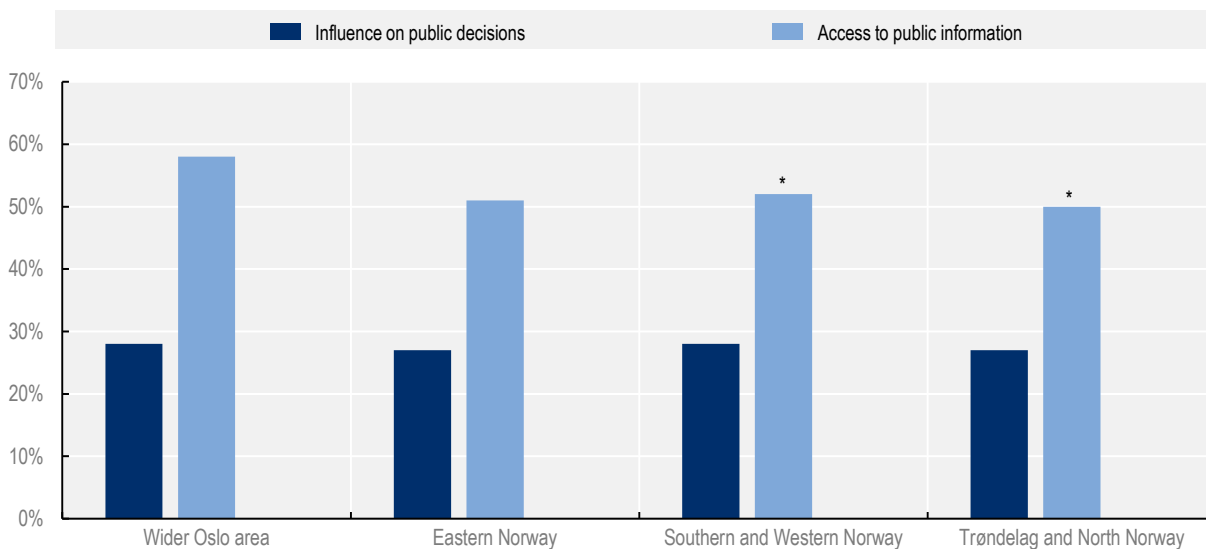
Note: Percentage of the population who answered 6-10 to the following questions: To what extent are people such as yourself able to influence the political decision-making processes in your municipality? To what extent would you say that the Norwegian political system allows people such as yourself to exercise political influence? How confident are you about your own ability to participate in politics? How confident are you about your own ability to participate in local politics? Other respondents were coded as 0 (having low or neutral perceptions). Weighted average values are reported. Reference group for statistical tests is citizens born in Norway.

* Statistically significant at 95%.

Source: OECD Trust Survey fielded in the Norwegian Citizens Survey

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Figure 4.8. Citizens' perceptions of being able to influence politics, by region of residence



Note: Percentage of the population answering 6 or more to the questions: To what extent are people such as yourself able to influence the political decision-making processes in your municipality? To what extent would you say that the Norwegian political system allows people such as yourself to exercise political influence? How confident are you about your own ability to participate in politics? How confident are you about your own ability to participate in local politics? Other respondents were coded as 0 (having low or neutral perceptions). Weighted average values are reported. Reference group for statistical tests is citizens living in the wider Oslo area.

* Statistically significant at 95%.

Source: OECD Trust Survey fielded in the Norwegian Citizens Survey.

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In order to ensure the best policy options and alternatives to address participation gaps, it is key to consider the specific context, as well as political socialisation, historic and cultural elements. Besides, citizens are found to have very heterogeneous democratic ideals. Those who favour representative democracy consider ‘accountability’ to be a central value (Bengtsson and Christensen, 2014^[28]). An experimental study on a representative sample of Norwegians indicated that regarding acceptance of policy decisions, people focus on sensitiveness to citizens’ preferences, or fair treatment beyond direct influence (Arnesen, 2017^[29]). In this regard, reaching out to the ones left behind may require a mix of solutions. A key initiative to this end is to use comprehensive, regular and representative population surveys (Box 4.2). These facilitate citizen engagement and allow the government to obtain updated feedback on their perceptions, experiences and evaluations of public governance and services (Box 4.3), thus reinforcing vertical accountability beyond votes or electoral periods.

Box 4.2. Surveying as a way to engage people and strengthen accountability on public governance

Among the many mechanisms and initiatives to promote stakeholders’ engagement and participation, surveying is a frequently used and key tool. Surveying enables governments to consult people and allows citizens to voice their opinion.

When participating in regular population surveys, citizens are invited to provide their feedback on different public governance related aspects, which allows governments to further vertical accountability beyond electoral processes. At the same time, governments and policy makers can use data collected to better inform policies, identify citizens’ priorities and concerns, as well as assess the support or impact of different initiatives. This is the case of current specific initiatives and surveys on public governance carried out in for example Norway or Australia as well as larger global initiatives to track the progress on governance development goals such as the Praia Handbook on governance statistics.

Norway’s Citizens Survey

Since 2009, the Agency of Public Management in Norway has carried out the Citizen Survey. The Survey provides a substantial knowledge base for assessing the performance of public services across sectors, and provides insights that can contribute to long-term public sector development. The survey is understood as an additional way to engage citizens apart from direct mechanisms. It addresses perceptions, expectations and areas of improvement, aiming to develop public outputs and services in a more user-friendly manner, based on citizens’ needs and expectations.

Australia’s Citizen Experience Survey

Since 2019, aiming to have a whole-of-Australian Public Service and cross-sectional view of service experience, which could complement individual agencies’ initiatives and measurements, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in Australia has carried out the Citizen Experience Survey. The regular and national survey measures public satisfaction, trust and experiences with Australian public services, supporting the public service to continually improve Australian public services.

The Praia Handbook on Governance Statistics.

Further, pursuant to the inclusion of a Goal on Public Governance in the Sustainable Development Goals (Goals 16), the handbook is an important tool to advance in the measurement of public governance. The UN Citi Praia Handbook on Governance Statistics is a comprehensive effort to map all existing measurement initiatives on public governance. It divides public governance into eight different dimensions: 1) non-discrimination and equality; 2) participation; 3) openness; 4) access to and

quality of justice; 5) responsiveness (satisfaction with services, political efficacy); 6) absence of corruption; 7) trust; 8) safety and security. The handbook sheds light on the feasibility of generating comparative evidence and measuring several dimensions of public governance through household surveys.

Source: https://www.nsd.no/nsddata/serier/innbyggerundersokelsen_eng.html; <https://www.pmc.gov.au/public-data/citizen-experience-survey>; Praia Group: Handbook on Governance Statistics (sdg16hub.org)

In addition, national and local dialogues were found to be a nodal element during crisis periods. Beyond the usual communication and participation mechanisms such as online mechanisms or institutional communication platforms, different countries' experiences highlight the importance of people-centred approaches for building institutional trust, where citizens are given the opportunity to talk about their feelings regarding uncertainties and concerns, and expectations on policy choices for the future, such as the Lockdown Dialogues in Finland (Box 4.3). Further, other countries have introduced representative deliberative processes in participation strategies as an alternative way to engage the broader public in influencing political processes. As part of these processes, a randomly selected group of people (who are broadly representative of a community) spend significant time learning and collaborating through facilitated deliberation to form collective recommendations on complex problems for policy makers. By the use of random selection and stratified sampling,⁶ these processes may bring excluded categories of people (e.g. youth, the disadvantaged, women, and minorities) into public policy and decision making (OECD, 2020_[30]).

New ways of participation and promoting engagement need to be understood as complementary instead of a replacement of traditional ones, as democratic governance requires the use of different mechanisms for different purposes to take advantage of their strengths and weaknesses (OECD, 2020_[30]). In this sense, social changes in Norway have affected the way of understanding politics and organisations, and while traditional mechanisms and institutions have been adapting slowly, there is not yet an alternative replacement of them (Panebianco, 1988_[31]; Manin, 1997_[32]; Scarrow, 2002_[33]). While some innovative processes may remove participation barriers, it is important that all members of society construct an identity as citizens (Parvin, 2018_[22]; Faucher, 2015_[34]).

Box 4.3. Engaging people in dialogues during lockdowns

A “citizen-informed” strategy has been needed to rebuild trust during crisis periods. Different countries have adopted different approaches as seen in the examples below.

Finnish ‘Lockdown Dialogues’

As part of the responses put forward by the Finnish government to monitor the evolution of COVID-19 and with the intention of capturing people’s feelings, opinions and expectations, the government initiated the Lockdown Dialogues. These dialogues have been not only a vivid testimony of the social experience caused by the pandemic in its different phases, but have also contributed to identifying issues that may require government attention and have become inputs for shaping policy responses. The dialogues started during the first months of lockdown and continued after the restrictions were lifted (renamed Finnish National Dialogues). Between April and September, over 100 dialogues were organised with over 1 000 participants, including civil organisations, individual citizens, municipalities and government offices. Information gathered during dialogues feed into the government’s COVID-19 crisis management co-ordination, as well as the exit and recovery strategies.

Citizens Panel for the recovery strategy in the Midlands (England)

Residents from across the West Midlands in England put forward their priorities and principles to rebuild the region following the COVID-19 pandemic. A citizens panel that met following the first lockdown proposed the priorities. The panel was composed of 36 local people from across the region and a range of backgrounds to learn about issues facing the region and share experiences of how the pandemic has affected them and their families. As a result, they agreed on six priorities for helping the region recover. The priorities identified by the panel were:

- **Getting back to normal safely.** Ensuring people can live safely and there is clear guidance as we move out of lockdown and to avoid new peaks.
- **Healthcare.** Making sure that patients can be treated, avoiding risk of Covid-19, and the healthcare system gets back on track to diagnose and treat people when they need it. It also means promoting healthy living to reduce demand for the NHS in the long term
- **Mental health.** Specific emphasis on making sure that anyone who needs mental health support knows where to find it and is guided to access support.
- **Education.** Preparing children to go back to an adapted school environment, ensuring their safety and wellbeing. Making sure that every child is supported to make up for lost time so children from all backgrounds are equally able to achieve their goals.
- **Employment.** Creating new jobs, with an emphasis on apprenticeships and entry-level jobs. Making sure that additional training is provided to give people the right skillsets to enter the workforce and getting people who have lost their jobs for COVID-related reasons back into work.
- **Promoting and supporting business.** Promoting and supporting business - especially smaller and/or local businesses and the self-employed (e.g. encouraging people to buy local). Providing financial and business support to help them get back on their feet and protect jobs.

Source: (OECD, 2021^[35]) based on Highlights from the OECD webinar: "The ties that bind: Government openness as a key driver of trust", 11 September 2020; [Mental health support, jobs, and training among key recovery priorities for West Midlands Citizens' Panel \(wmca.org.uk\)](https://www.wmca.org.uk)

Finally, rapidly changing media and information ecosystems – understood as the relevant governance frameworks, actors and technologies impacting how people get and share information – are affecting how people consume and share information, and in turn who and what they trust. Technology, in particular individuals' increasing reliance on the internet and social media platforms as a primary means of receiving news, is altering how people consume, transmit and share information. Such technologies have facilitated interaction, increasing opportunities for engagement and co-ordination, though at the same time have facilitated the spread of harmful and misleading content. While mis- and disinformation⁷ are not a new phenomenon, the potential for rapid spread of such content online both feeds on and aggravates a crisis in public trust. Such content can also – intentionally or not – confuse the public, threaten informed participation, pose real-world threats to policy implementation, public health and safety, and can intensify political polarisation (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020^[36]).

During interviews conducted for this study, participants repeated that COVID-19 has served as a wake-up call for the government to engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by social media, notably around reaching youth. The government has focused increasingly on the use of social media platforms: in 2015, for example, an inter-ministerial working group was formed under the Prime Minister's Office, comprised of communication advisors from Norwegian ministries, to co-ordinate and stimulate increased use of social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter at the ministry-level". As noted in the OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward, furthermore, the Government of Norway also organises weekly meetings with heads of communication to align priorities and streamline a unified digital presence.

These examples of strategic and co-ordinated approaches to promoting effective public communication and engagement with the public are important. Nevertheless, while OECD analysis found that officials value the utility of digital communication, findings also suggest there is room to ramp up the use of online tools to reach and engage underrepresented groups. Notably, only 16% of Center of Governments considered “expanding reach to specific types of stakeholders” as one of the top three priority objectives of digital communication, and only 15% have developed directives focused on using social media to support engagement. Moving forward, governments, including Norway’s, can continue to take advantage of the opportunities provided by novel information and communication technologies to reach and engage with all segments of society. Continued efforts to promote cross-government co-ordination, the provision of training and the creation of guidelines on the effective use of digital tools are examples of ways in which governments can seek to improve their communication while safeguarding the core values of the administration (see Box 4.4).

Furthermore, the OECD’s *Principles of Good Practice for Public Communication Responses to Mis- and Disinformation* propose ten principles that can help promote a whole-of-society response to the challenges presented by the spread of misleading and harmful content. The principles include practical examples and reiterate the importance of governments communicating transparently, honestly, and impartially, and to conceive of the public communication function as a means for two-way engagement with citizens. Beyond public communication, furthermore, the principles seek to help promote healthy information ecosystems via a systemic and holistic approach to support an environment conducive to effective sharing of information and data and to fostering democratic dialogue. Ultimately, the principles aim to provide practical guidance and present a range of good practices on government interventions aimed to counter mis- and disinformation, address underlying causes of distrust, and to promote openness, transparency and inclusion.

Box 4.4. UK’s counter disinformation initiatives

The Government Communication Service of the United Kingdom launched in 2019 a counter disinformation toolkit that aims to support public officials in preventing and tackling the spread of disinformation as well as in disseminating reliable and truthful information.

The RESIST toolkit is divided into five independent components that helps to:

- **R**ecognise disinformation
- use media monitoring for **E**arly warning
- develop **S**ituational insight
- carry out **I**mpact analysis
- deliver **S**trategic communication
- **T**rack outcomes

In addition to the toolkit, the UK Cabinet Office partnered with the University of Cambridge to create a game called Go Viral! (<https://www.goviralgame.com/en>). The game was designed to help the public understand and discern the most common COVID-19 misinformation tactics used by online actors, so they can better protect themselves against them. As per initial results, there have been over 207 000 digital ‘inoculations’ to health misinformation delivered through the Go Viral! Game, and the intervention was found to raise players’ ability to resist misinformation by up to 21%.

Source: UK Government Communication Service; UK’s presentation during OECD Public Governance Committee, October 2021.

Opportunities for improvements

Norway has multiple initiatives and extensive regulations furthering openness as a key value of governance. It has a sound democratic system that broadly ensures people feel represented, empowered and heard, whilst public institutions are transparent and accountable. Yet, there is still room for improvement.

Information about public administration and how to access services is still often presented in hard-to-understand bureaucratic language, which poses a challenge for some social groups. During COVID, public officials recognised that it has been difficult to reach all different groups of society, especially immigrants. In this regard, the government of Norway could expand efforts to use plain language, identify the best channels to reach different groups and to use the public communication functions as a means of supporting audience understanding and two-way communication with all segments of society. Experiences such as the film studio to reach out to young people set up by the municipality of Trondheim could be replicated elsewhere.

Concerning engagement and participation, as per the interviews conducted for this study, experts highlighted that though Norway is characterised by broad citizen participation in policy making, during the pandemic the government followed a top-down decision-making style, even, at times, to the exclusion of expert bodies. Additionally, legal experts have criticised the fact that because of emergency powers the government was able to move ahead very quickly, preventing the Parliament from being better informed and included in decision making. In order to strengthen openness, and safeguard its characteristic consensual decision-making style, Norway could improve emergency preparedness, and promote transparent and accountable procedures that could be applied amid a crisis.

In order to ensure high levels of political participation, Norway must keep investing and improving its initiatives related to political socialisation and outreach to segments of the population that feel left behind. This will also include initiatives to strengthen participation in and representation of civil society and political organisations, which have declined in the recent years. To strengthen organisations, the government of Norway may consider a more proactive approach to develop initiatives on transparency and good governance, such as promoting the accountability of leaders and democratic candidate selection procedures, as well as participative decision-making processes within organisations such as political parties or trade unions. This could allow it to better represent interests and identify people's concerns, including those of the younger generation. Moreover, drawing on survey data from "*Young in Oslo 2015*", a study on youth participation in Norway found that active involvement in socially oriented organisations is positively related to political participation especially among immigrant youth (Ødegård and Fladmoe, 2020^[37])

Finally, though it was underscored that Norwegians feel empowered and capable of participating in politics, reinforcing initiatives to further positive political attitudes can help to anticipate democratic deficits. Indeed, there are different initiatives to engage the youth and promote political socialisation. For instance, students from 13 to 19 years old can be elected as representatives to the Pupils' Common Council, which can make proposals, comments and represent students on issues related to children and young people included in the city council agenda. There are also annual meetings at the Town Hall. However, a study found that the impact of these initiatives would be stronger if organisation of councils were not only authority-driven, and if participants could have the right to take executive decisions (Ødegård, 2007^[38]). As such, the government of Norway may explore the possibility to make these initiatives real ways to influence policy makers and to fulfil expectations in order to achieve real change and enhance citizens' trust over the long term.

Integrity

Integrity is a core value of public service and perceived corruption is low

Public integrity refers to the consistent alignment of, and adherence to, shared ethical values, principles and norms for upholding and prioritising the public interest over private interests in the public sector (OECD, 2017^[39]). Fostering integrity and preventing corruption in the public sector is crucial to maintaining confidence in government and public decision making. Corruption implies abusing the trust that has been placed in a public duty; thus, by definition, it implies eroding trust in public institutions. On the contrary, integrity is a precondition for all government activities to be legitimate, trusted, as well as effective (OECD, 2017^[39]).

Most European citizens value the honesty and impartiality of their civil servants. Indeed, institutional trust was broadly found to depend on the perception of the impartiality and honesty of officials (Grönlund and Setälä, 2011^[40]). Further, a recent study of 173 European regions found that the absence of corruption – i.e. citizens expect their public officials to act ethically – was the strongest institutional determinant of citizens' trust in the public administration (Van de Walle and Migchelbrink, 2020^[41]).

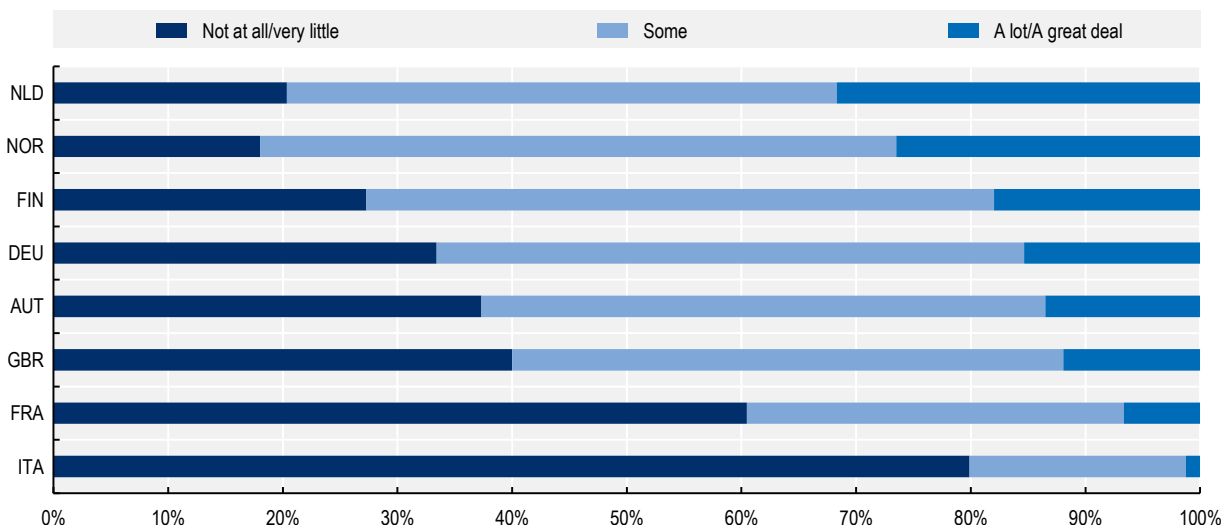
Public *integrity* is measured in relation to the government's mandate to use powers and public resources ethically, by upholding high standards of behaviour, committing to fight corruption, and promoting accountability. The OECD Trust Survey carried out in Norway includes the two specific questions below on issues of bribes, revolving doors and political influence.

- If a member of parliament (the Storting) were offered a bribe or other benefit in return for exercising their influence on a parliamentary matter, how likely is it that they would accept it?
- If a prominent politician were to be offered a well-paid job in business in return for a political favour, how likely is it that they would accept said job offer?

Norway is amongst the countries with the lowest levels of perceived corruption in the world. The Norwegian legal framework for combating corruption is strong, regulations are enforced and there are no reports of official impunity (GAN Integrity, 2020^[42]). Further, the country has an outstanding track record, implementing all recommendations throughout all evaluation rounds of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO/Council of Europe, 2020^[5]). The government is broadly perceived to take decisions in the interest of its citizens (Figure 4.9). A minority of Norwegians (24%) perceive the country to be governed by a few large players who act in their own interest (TI NORGE, 2021^[43]). According to the OECD Trust Survey, only 26% of Norwegians consider that if a parliamentarian were offered a bribe or other benefit in return for exercising their influence on a parliamentary matter, they would likely accept it. Similarly, experts consider that only on very rare occasions do public sector employees grant favours in exchange for bribes, kickbacks, or other material inducements (Vdem).⁸

Figure 4.9. People’s perception that the government takes into account the interests of all citizens, 2019

How much would you say that the government in your country takes into account the interests of all citizens?



Source: OECD calculations based on the European Social Survey 2019.

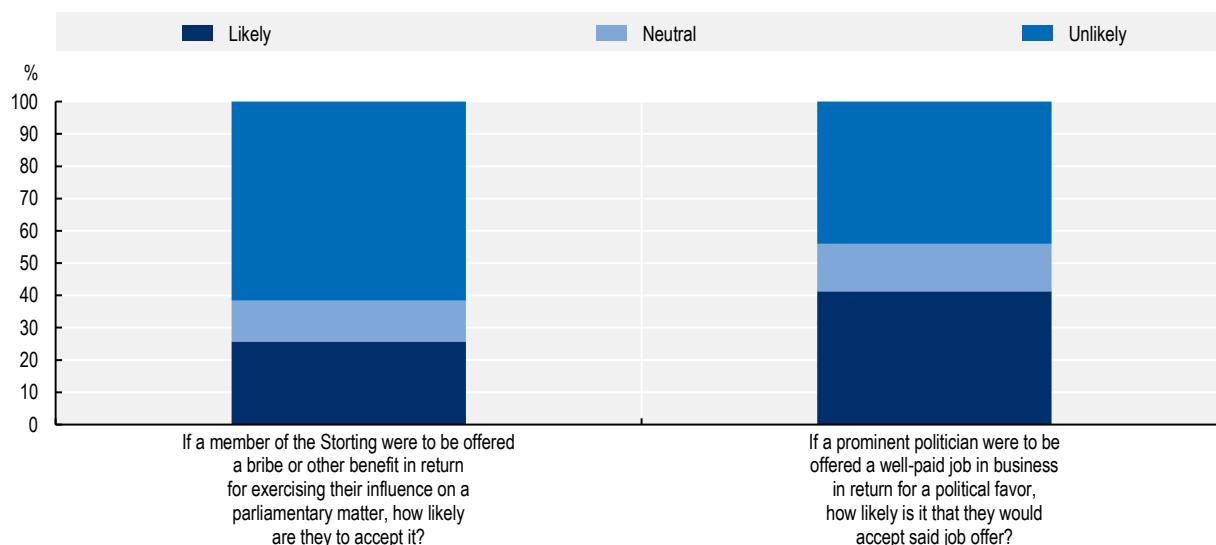
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Norway has a robust integrity system, public institutions operate in an autonomous way, free from external pressures, and corruption provisions are extensive and rigorous (Renå, 2012^[44]). Currently, there is no specific anticorruption agency or specific policy or strategy on integrity. Nonetheless, integrity is one of the top priorities of the Fourth Norwegian Action Plan for the Open Government Partnership. In addition, a co-operation Forum for Anticorruption was established by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security in 2019, and a platform for sharing integrity-related data is currently being created (GRECO/Council of Europe, 2020^[5]). Further, and as per its key role in exercising integrity, it is worth noting the role of the civil service, which is highly trusted in Norway (Figure 4.10).

The Norwegian public administration is merit-based and relies on a values-based approach, which emphasises promoting integrity instead of preventing corruption. Public employees are recruited based on concrete skills and act on a daily basis according to core principles and values that guide public service. The *Ethical Guidelines for the Public Service*, established in 2005, require all public officials to take into account the public interest, and to follow principles of loyalty, transparency, impartiality and professionalism. Based on the aforementioned strengths of the public service and envisioning greater effectiveness, a reform towards a more trust-based management of the public sector has been floated (see Chapter 1).

According to the OECD Trust Survey, only 26% of Norwegians consider that it would be likely that a member of the parliament (*Storting*) would accept a bribe or other benefit in return for exercising their influence on a parliamentary matter. In turn, 41% of respondents think it would be likely a prominent politician would accept a well-paid job in business in return for a political favour. In addition, the analysis shows that integrity is one of the main drivers of public trust in Norway, unlike other countries with similarly high performing integrity systems, such as Finland (see Chapter 2).

Figure 4.10. Percentage of the population considering that undue behaviour is likely to occur



Note: Weighted data reported. “Likely” corresponds to the percentage of the population that on a scale from 0-10 answered 6-10. “Neutral” are those who answered 5 and “unlikely” those who answered 0-4.

Source: OECD survey applied in the Norwegian Citizens Survey, 2021.

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Findings could be linked to an uneven distribution of perceptions of risks of undue influence and corruption at local level (further addressed in next section), or the fact that Norwegians have a strong “zero tolerance” position towards corruption. According to a recent survey carried out by Transparency International Norway, 94% of respondents declared that even if public authorities deliver good results they would not consider any form of corruption to be acceptable.

In this sense, though corruption cases and scandals seldom occur in the country, they can have a substantial impact on public opinion, which was the case when the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) incorrectly implemented European social security regulations for several years, events that became known to the public in August 2020. Indeed, short-term institutional trust may be vulnerable to topical occurrences (Bäck and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2019^[45]), and uncovering corruption cases may negatively expose government, leading to a drop in institutional trust, despite the fact that the government has actually done a good job.

During the interviews conducted for this study, it was underscored that when corruption cases occur, they create a lot of attention (because of their rarity and the fact that the media plays a watchdog role) and public officials are actually held accountable. For instance, the NAV case mentioned above influenced changes in the political and administrative leadership. Although relatively minor, the following story reported during the virtual fact finding mission is telling. The Prime Minister was found in violation of the COVID-19 regulations by having slightly more guests than allowed to celebrate her birthday in a restaurant. The sanction to this violation would have been a verbal recrimination. However, as it was the Prime Minister, in consideration of her rank and expectations of exemplary behaviour a fine was imposed. The Prime Minister apologised to the society and paid the fine. This shows that although societies that highly trust their government give them broader margins of manoeuvre, it does not mean that trust can be understood as a blank check. Cases of breaches by high profile figures who end up not being accountable for their wrongdoing could have noxious effects on institutional trust.

The administrative leadership in the public sector plays a key role for integrity. They are expected to be effective public managers, but also inspire colleagues, and promote ethical values (OECD, 2020^[46]). Experts and officials interviewed for this study said that trust in public institutions broadly relies on the behaviour of leaders, who must set the example in their daily actions and decisions. Moreover, they also have the responsibility to transmit values to new generations of public officials. That is why their training (see Box 4.5) and behaviour can be key for the public administration. They take full responsibility, and accept sanctions even more severe than usual in order to lead by example.

Box 4.5. Training leaders in public administration

The Flemish Public Service has a joint training programme together with the Dutch Public Service, whereby top managers are trained in coaching colleagues. This enables cross-border peer coaching, which has a number of advantages, such as allowing peers to draw on a wealth of experience from top managers of public organisations, broadening training to identify and face multiple challenges or learning how to manage common issues to avoid contextual biases.

The training is based on the idea that an external perspective may be needed to challenge perceptions and to ensure a greater sense of confidentiality and honest sharing. Through the joint coaching-training, peers also become familiar with the other country's customs and governance styles, broadening openness and tolerance, while allowing public officials to also identify common issues that affect public administrations in general.

Source: (OECD, 2020^[46])

On this last point, it is worth mentioning that last GRECO report suggests that Norway should increase its efforts to ensure formalised training⁹ and counselling channels on ethical matters (GRECO/Council of Europe, 2020^[5]). Indeed, success of systems based on promoting integrity and *preventing* instead of *reacting* to corruption, such as the Norwegian one, relies on the fact that every public official acknowledges that core values of the public sector, but that they are also aware of them when facing ethical dilemmas, and know how to manage them. Daily ethical dilemmas need to be identified, such as situations where it is unclear how a public official should proceed to resolve the situation in a good and moral way (e.g. delivering a report that is needed urgently, but is incomplete). It is also important to identify the potential risks faced by civil servants when providing further training on how to face and tackle these risks. The American government provides an interesting and practical example on ethics training that could be relevant to consider (Box 4.6).

Box 4.6. Scenario-based ethics training

The U.S. Office of Government Ethics has created a series of slide decks to help agencies implement scenario-based live training in their agencies. The slides provide public officials with practical training that is not focused on the traditional communication of guidelines, but instead present dilemmas officials may face in their daily activities.

Public agencies are provided with material to present public officials with practical situations in which they confront an ethical choice and where it is that clear that they may face a risk. The material addresses different situations, such as a social invitation, a contact made by social media or a former colleague, or receiving a gift from other employees.

The slides focus first on what public officials may think when confronted with one of these situations, the situation is described, and they are then asked to reflect on the fundamental principles or rules linked to the situation and whether they should seek advice and from whom. Then, practical actions are discussed, including how to react to these situations, and how to manage them. Finally, principles and rules relevant to the situation are explicitly mentioned, and clear guidance about how to put into practice various principles, codes, and rules that guide public officials' behaviour.

Source: U.S. Office of Government Ethics, <https://www.oge.gov>.

Close connections and personal networks may increase risks of undue influence and favouritism

Corruption refers to the abuse of public power for private gain. This abuse can take many forms: from simple bribes to more subtle ways of undue influence, that is, when some powerful groups exert influence in policy making to further their own priorities at the expense of the public interest. For instance, using personal connections to influence policy and not reporting conflicts of interest or providing decision makers with manipulated data, etc. Whilst these practices are not necessarily illegal, they may steer the decision-making process away from the public interest.

In interviews conducted by the OECD for this study, it has been identified that close networks, especially at the local level, may lead to increased corruption risks; in particular due to conflicts of interest. In addition, the empirical results of the OECD Trust Survey show that integrity is among the most relevant determinants of trust in local government. For example, according to the Citizens Survey, 59% of Norwegians believe it is common for public sector employees at the municipal level to favour family members and friends when processing cases (Citizens Survey 2021). This evidence supports findings from last GRECO report (GRECO/Council of Europe, 2020^[5]) and previous studies. In some municipalities, ties between the public and private sector are very close and therefore enforcement by authorities of integrity regulations on concerned parties is uneven (Kantar Gallup, 2017^[47]). A study from Transparency International on Norway underscored that local government officials were rarely offered bribes, but they could be offered benefits frequently, which may be perceived as being unethical though not illegal (Renå, 2012^[44]). In addition, using data from regional governments a study found that local public investments were affected by favouritism and particularism related bias (Fiva and Halse, 2016^[48]).

Taking into consideration perceptions and risks of undue influence, it is key to have clear stipulations to regulate how the private sector is involved in policy making. To this end, many OECD countries have either legislative frameworks, rules of procedure or codes of conduct to regulate interactions between stakeholders and public officials and policy makers (OECD, 2021^[7]). For instance, the Norwegian Ministry of Defence issued in 2007 the "Ethical Guidelines for contact with business and industry in the defence

sector”.¹⁰ These guidelines, revised in 2019, provide guidance for public officials to act ethically in their contact with business and industry.

Lobbying regulations are considered to be part of a broader group of policies and government efforts, such as open government, access to public information laws and integrity reforms, among others, to add transparency and accountability to political processes. However, while there are rules for ensuring that the documentation of decisions is available alongside the freedom of information act, there is currently no regulation on lobbying. The existence of transparency in decision making and a trustworthy relationship between policy makers and different stakeholders were cited as key reasons for not having lobbying regulations. However, the risk is that there are no controls, limit or sanction in case officials should forget to make transparent a meeting or contact. Norway could consider starting a dialogue on how to improve transparency on the many forms and actors influencing policies, as is the case in other OECD countries (see Box 4.7). Such a dialogue could be framed under a similar logic to the one that has been used for reforms on party financing. These reforms, rather reacting to a corruption scandal for instance, were developed under a political discourse of minimising corruption risks and preserving and strengthening international reputational considerations (Tonhäuser and Stavenes, 2019^[49])

Box 4.7. Furthering transparency on influence in policy making

In France, according to *Law No. 2016-1691 on transparency, the fight against corruption and on the modernisation of economic life*, the High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (HATVP) manages a public register, and citizens can access information about the identity of those who try to influence policies, the activities they perform in order to influence, the expenditure related to these activities, as well as public decisions targeted by them.

In Italy, the *rules of procedure of the Parliament* require that everyone who represents an interest, and interacts with policy makers, must register and report their activities, as well as disclose their interests.

In Chile, in accordance to *Law No. 20.730*, the Council for Transparency developed an online platform to give access to data on public officials’ hearings and meetings. All the information can be searched and filtered by policy maker, stakeholder, or dates, and it is possible to download the datasets to go through and/or reuse the data collected by the Council. Moreover, the online tool allows users to visualise time trends, compare information according to ministries and see infographics on companies, types of interest, etc.

Source: HATVP, infolobby.cl; 2020 OECD Survey on Lobbying.

Though 74% of Norwegians stated that they believe the authorities are transparent in the handling of COVID-19 (TI NORGE, 2021^[43]), the pandemic showed the relevance of new influence channels and of social media, as well as how these could be used to widen unequal access to policy making (OECD, 2021^[7]). Lobbyists who already had access to key decision makers and were able to sustain long-established relationships through phone calls, webinars, emails and instant messages increased the advantages linked to their access. As such, developing lobbying regulations in Norway could consider these new influencing methods to further transparency and integrity in policy making and better equip the government to insulate public policy from untoward outside interest.

Opportunities for improvement

Largely, the public administration in Norway works on a trust basis and there is widespread belief, corroborated by evidence, that civil servants behave honestly and according to the guiding principles of the civil service. Alongside high levels of competence, high standards of behaviours in the public administration are a key element in explaining high performance of the country in public governance.

However, its core values and its approach based on preventing corruption through promoting integrity could be strengthened by investing in improving co-ordination and centralisation on integrity efforts. For instance, the government could organise regular events or platforms to exchange information and harmonise initiatives of different public agencies and levels of government.

This would feed into the holistic policy approach proposed in previous chapters. Further, practical training on ethical dilemmas could better equip public officials to support the values-based integrity system. Such training should be framed under the guiding logic that greater emphasis is expected on achieving outcomes for people rather than complying with processes. New governance models also require embracing a variety of voices and inputs instead of pursuing just mission-related objectives. It is important to ensure that collective interests win out over self-interest and that integrity risks are minimised. Upgrading ethical training and guidance to new challenges will contribute to reinforcing the values of the Norwegian administration while maintaining trust as a core guiding principle.

The Norwegian system has proved to be resilient. It absorbs and rebounds from the rare corruption cases as these are made visible and the responsible public officials are held accountable. At the same time, in order to reduce risks of undue influence at the local level, Norway could start discussions on whether to develop regulations on lobbying activities, with the aim of defining fair interactions and ensuring that the public interest remains at the very heart of all public policy.

Fairness

Fairness as a dimension of institutional trust refers to whether public institutions are perceived as improving living conditions for all, providing consistent treatment of citizens and businesses, regardless of their gender, economic status, ethnic origin, etc. (Brezzi et al., 2021^[50]). Fairness of public institutions is thus related to both the outcomes and the quality of decision making. Results may include the level of income inequality (see also Chapter 2 and 3), or citizens' access to high quality social protection (de Blok and Kumlin, 2021^[51]; Lühiste, 2013^[52]). When people perceive that inequalities are high, or that opportunities are just for a few, this may lead to less support for democratic principles and achievements (Schnaudt, Hahn and Heppner, 2021^[53]) reduce compliance with regulations and ultimately reduce institutional trust (OECD, 2017^[54]; Lipps and Schraff, 2020^[55]).

In turn, a fair process matters for decision acceptance. Positive perceptions of fair treatment lead to greater trust in government, acceptance of agency decisions, better compliance with regulations and more co-operative behaviour in dealing with government agents. The reverse also holds: citizens are more likely to accept negative outcomes, such as financial penalties, if they feel that they have been treated fairly (Frey, Benz and Stutzer, 2004^[56]; Tyler, 2006^[57]; Marien and Werner, 2019^[58]). Overall, both outcomes and processes are important in shaping fairness assessments.

The OECD Trust Survey includes two questions to assess fairness in Norway, in addition to the analysis by the socio-economic characteristics of respondents. These are:

- How likely is it that everyone where you live will be treated equally in contacts with public sector employees, regardless of their social or economic status?
- If you were to apply to the public authorities for help or support, how likely is it that your application will be processed fairly?

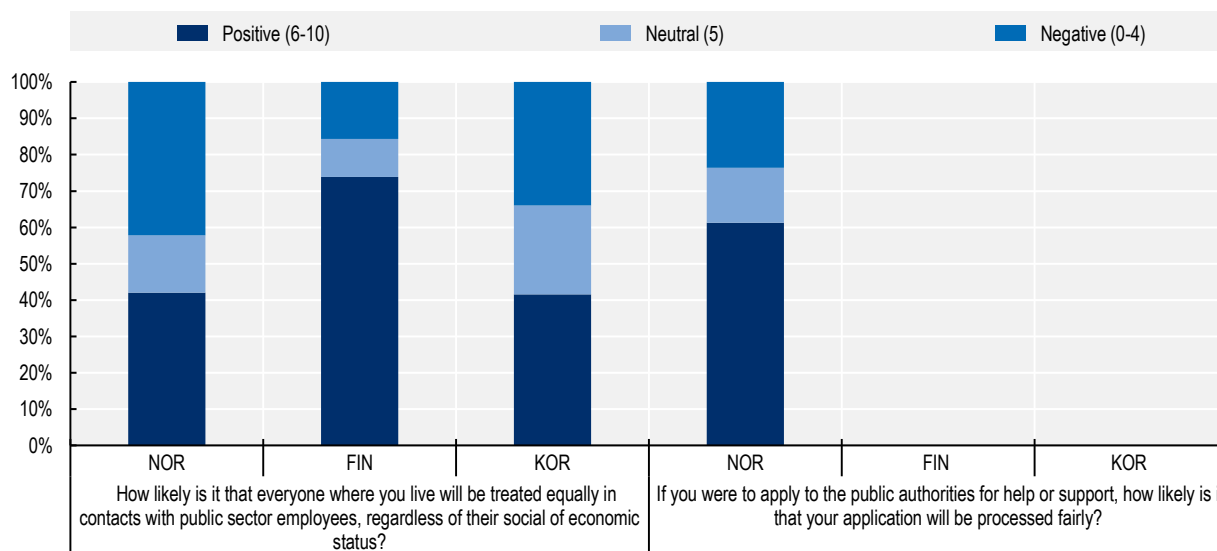
The public sector in Norway is perceived as fair and non-discriminatory, although with some significant differences among population groups. Public institutions in Norway perform comparatively well in terms of fairness, as fairness and egalitarianism are key components of its welfare model (Østerud, 2005^[59]). Among OECD countries, Norwegians are the most satisfied with their current social protection system (OECD, 2021^[60]; OECD, 2021^[61]) and, on average, are not worried about their financial security, either in their present life, or when they will reach old age. People in Norway also believe it is easy to access benefits in case they become ill or unemployed, and are highly satisfied with their education system, and their access to child care services (see also Chapter 3) (OECD, 2021^[60]; OECD, 2021^[61]).

Even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, people remained positive about their government, health services, and receiving adequate treatment (see Chapter 1). Some 71% of Norwegians think that everyone is treated with respect by public services, and 58% believe that everyone receives equal treatment. However, only about half of the respondents agree that the public sector treats all citizens, regardless of their position in life, in a similar manner.

According to the OECD Trust Survey only 40% of Norwegians consider it likely that everyone would be treated equally in contacts with public sector employees, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This is on par with results in Korea, but significantly lower than in Finland, where this figure reaches 74% (Figure 4.11). These numbers could indicate that there are divides in the Norwegian society that could influence people's relationship with public institutions.

Further, 60% of the Norwegian population considers that if they apply for help or support to the public authorities their application will be treated fairly. The sense of impartiality of treatment is the most important determinant of trust in the civil service. As per our empirical analysis presented in chapter 2 an improvement of one standard deviation on impartiality of treatment is associated with an increase of trust in the civil service of 0.43 points.

Figure 4.11. Percentage of the population answering positively, neutrally or negatively to the following questions



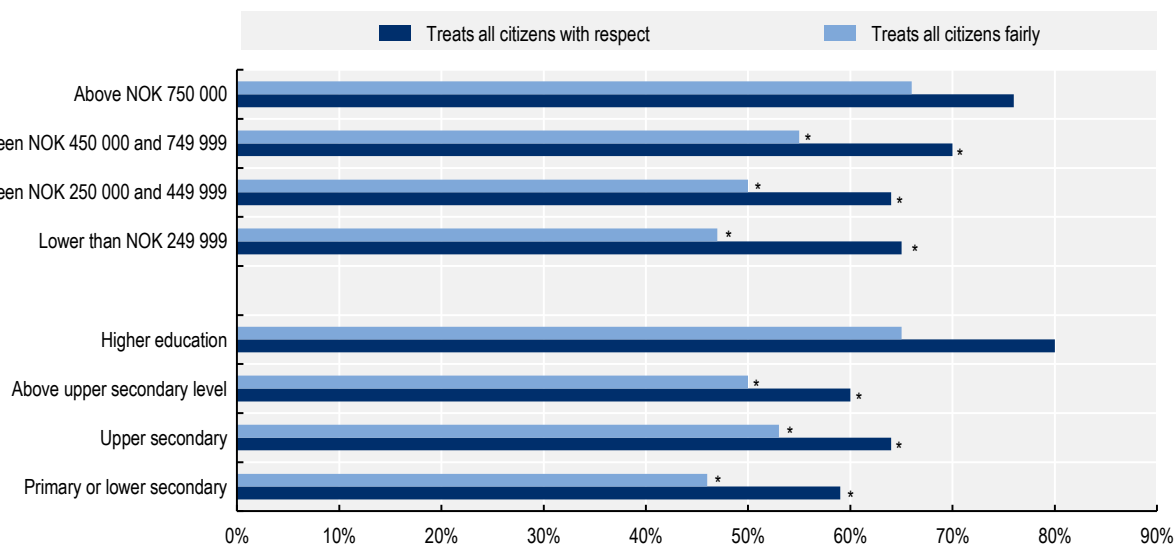
Note: The question used in Finland was the following: If an individual belongs to a minority group (e.g. sexual, racial/ethnic and/or based on national origin), how likely is it that he or she will be treated the same as other citizens by a government agency? The question used in Korea was the following: If a citizen belonging to a social minority (e.g. sexual, racial/ethnic and/or based on nationality) is the victim of discrimination, how likely is it that relevant authorities will pursue the case? The scale for Finland is 1-10, 1-4 negatively, 5 neutral and 6-10 positively.

Source: Citizens Survey DFØ, 2021.

There are, however, differences in fairness perceptions by socioeconomic characteristics. Over two-thirds of Norwegians with higher household incomes and educated 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. These differences are consistent with academic findings showing that people tend to evaluate their society as a fair one, when they themselves are doing well economically, and when they feel that they can influence the political process (Anderson and Tverdova, 2001^[62]; Shore, 2019^[63]). However, these findings may also suggest that the Norwegian institutional system is not only characterised by egalitarianism, but also by a certain level of elitism.

People born abroad evaluate the Norwegian society as fairer than people born in Norway. Migrants seem to evaluate Norway as fairer than the countries they left, which in some cases could be very difficult contexts. Gender differences are present, but show mixed patterns: women more often believe that public institutions treat them with respect, but men are more likely to believe that there is no discrimination in treatment. Finally, regarding place of residency, people living in Oslo (and greater Oslo) have more positive fairness perceptions. When it comes to fairness perceptions, divides on the basis of origin, place of residency and gender are, on the whole, less pronounced than those based on income and education.

Figure 4.12. Percentage of Norwegians considering public institutions are fair, by social status

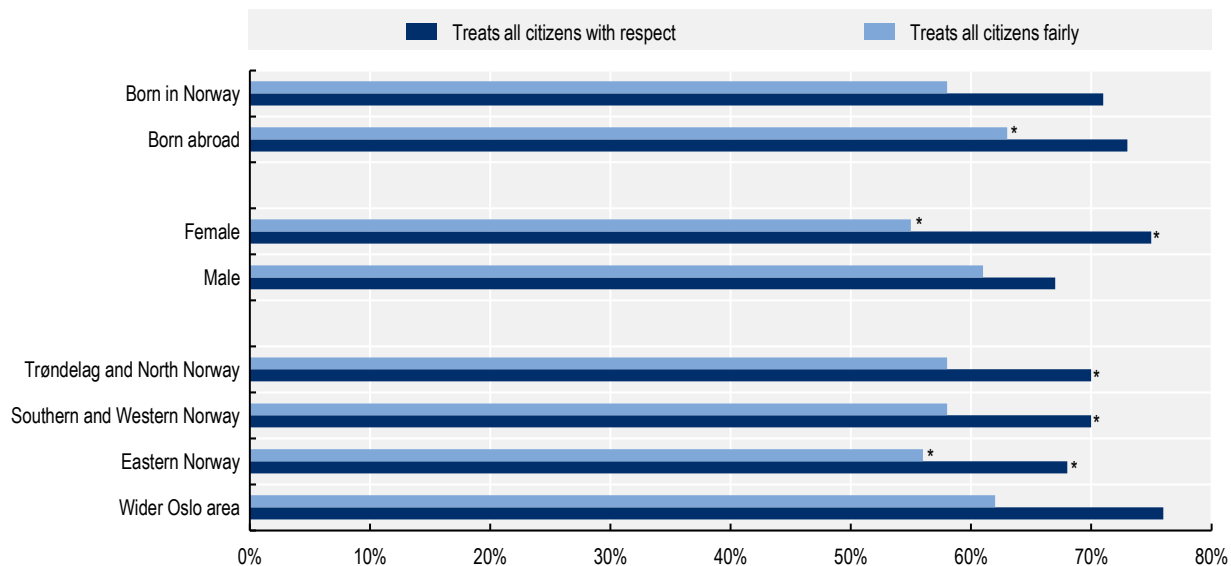


Note: based on the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Norwegian public sector (at state, municipality or county municipality level)?" The public sector... (a) treats the citizens with respect and (b) treats ...treats all groups fairly, irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or similar. Citizens answering agree, and agree strongly are coded as believing in the fairness of their institutions. The corresponding amounts in Euros are the following. Above NOK 750 000 (above EUR 76 101), Between NOK 450 000 (EUR 45 661) and NOK 749 999 (EUR 76 100); Between NOK 250 000 (EUR 25 367) and NOK 449 999 (EUR 45 660). Lower than NOK 249 999 (EUR 25 367). The reference group for statistical tests is higher educated and highest income group.

Source: Citizens Survey DFØ, 2021.


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Figure 4.13. Percentage of Norwegians considering public institutions are fair, by origin, gender and place of residence



Note: based on the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Norwegian public sector (at state, municipality or county municipality level)?" The public sector... (a) treats the citizens with respect and (b) treats ...treats all groups fairly, irrespective of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or similar. Citizens answering 'agree', and 'agree strongly' on these questions are coded as believing in the fairness of their institutions. Reference group for statistical tests is citizens living in the Oslo area, men and born in Norway.

Source: Citizens Survey DFØ, 2021.

StatLink  <https://stat.link/l5nfmz>

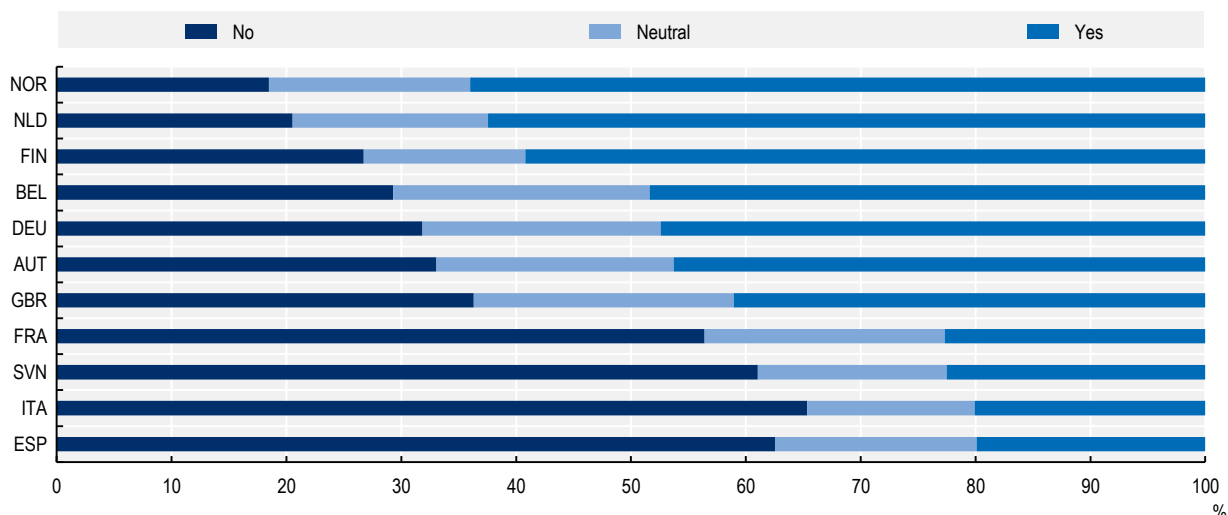
Fairness in policies and policy making

Slightly less than two-thirds of Norwegians believe they have a fair chance to participate and influence decision making (i.e. without being discriminated on the basis of origin, etc.), which puts Norway at the top of the subset of European countries including the Nordic ones (Figure 4.14).

Figure 4.15 displays fairness perceptions in the education sector. Almost 85% of Norwegians believe they could pursue the type of education they want to follow. These results outperform other European countries in the selection (neighbouring Finland is closest, with 77% of Finns agreeing with this statement). In turn, parental background has only a very limited influence on educational performance in Norway, which is in contrast to patterns in most OECD countries. Nevertheless, gaps between the performance of migrants and native members of the population, as well as boys and girls, remain present, which is an important challenge for the fairness of the education system ahead (OECD, 2019^[64]; OECD, 2020^[65]).

Figure 4.14. Citizens’ perception that everyone has a fair chance to participate in politics in Norway, as a percentage

Fair chance to participate in politics



Note: This Figure is based on the following question: How much would you say that the political system in [country] ensures that everyone has a fair chance to participate in politics? Answers were recorded such that respondents answering “not at all” or “very little” are coded as negative, respondents that answered “Some” were coded as neutral, and respondents that answered “a lot” or “a great deal” were coded as positive. Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018).


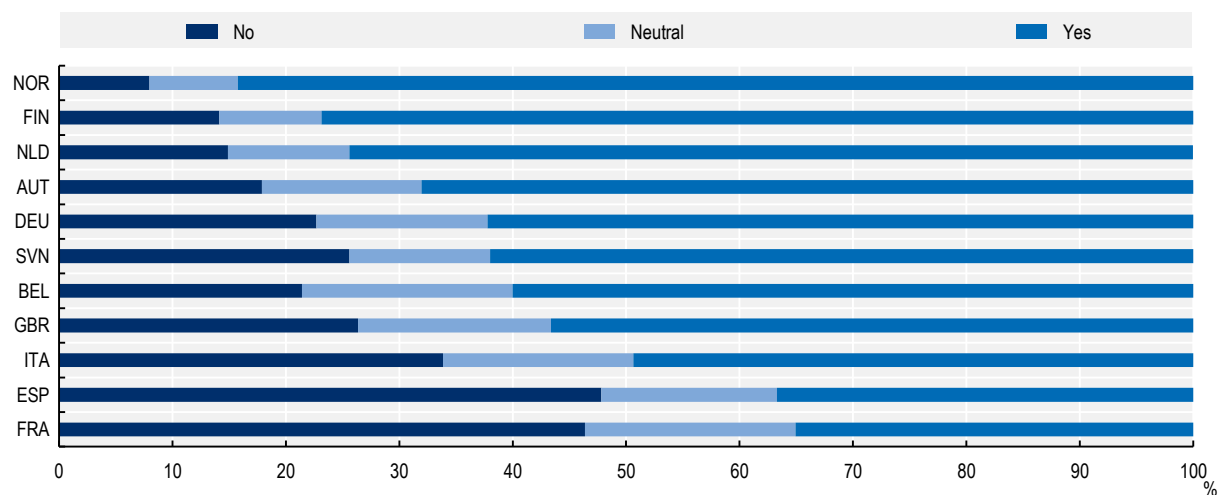
StatLink  <https://stat.link/wg84th>

Figure 4.15. Citizens’ perception that everyone has a fair opportunity to achieve the level of education they want, expressed in percentages

Fair chance to get the education you want



Note: This Figure is based on the following question: Overall, does everyone in [country] have a fair chance of achieving the level of education they seek. Answers were recoded such that respondents answering “does not apply” (0-4) are coded as negative, respondents that answered 5 were coded as neutral, and respondents that answered that this applied to their country (6-10) were coded as positive. Weighted data reported (dweight).

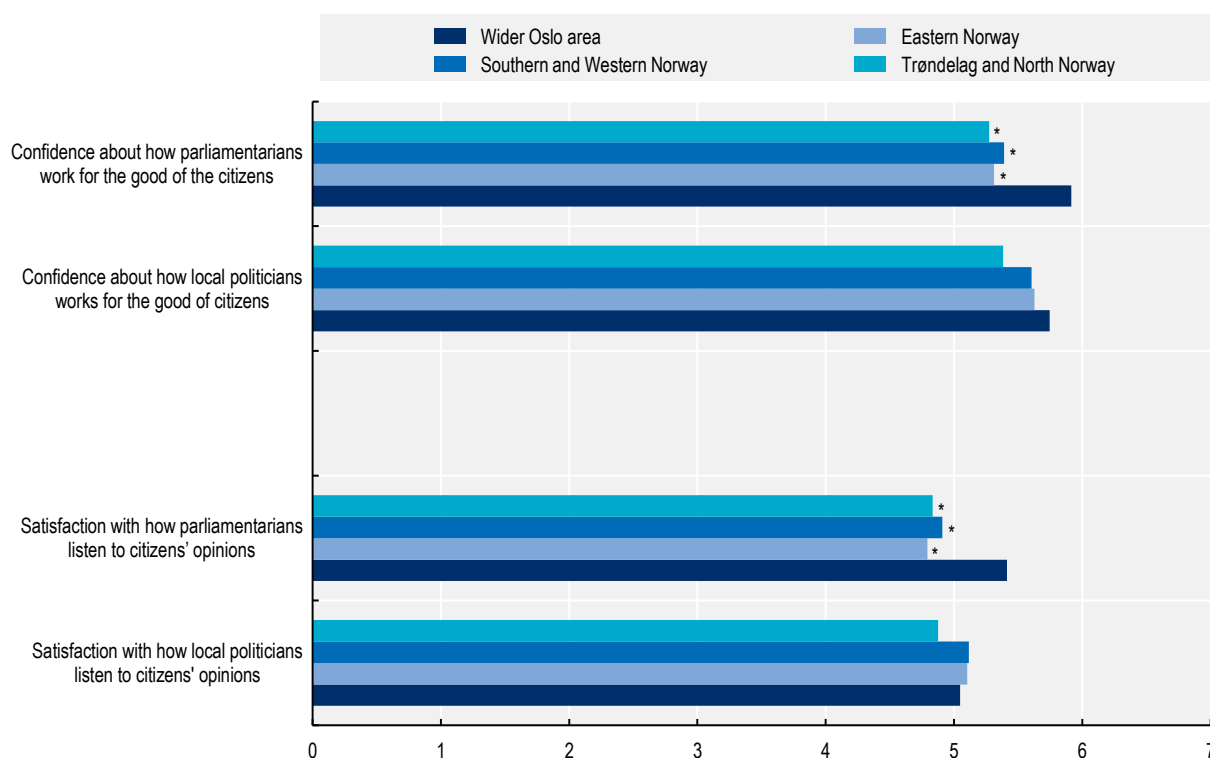
Source: European Social Survey, wave 9 (2018).

StatLink  <https://stat.link/ajygsb>

Norwegians have a higher opinion of the competence of their local politicians and services (Haugsgjerd and Seggaard, 2020^[17]; Stein, Buck and Bjørnå, 2019^[66]). Respondents in all regions are equally likely to believe that their local politicians are motivated to work for the benefit of all citizens. However, Figure 4.16 shows that people living in more remote regions are on average less likely to think that members of the Parliament (Storting) take their opinions into account (Figure 4.16), while respondents in all regions are equally likely to believe that their local politicians are motivated to work for the benefit of all citizens.

Figure 4.16. Procedural fairness evaluations in Norway, do citizens feel that citizens' voices matter in decision making

Average values reported



Note: questions were asked on a 0 to 10 point-scale (0: very dissatisfied/low confidence, 10: very satisfied/high confidence). Weighted data reported. Reference group for statistical tests is the greater Oslo area.

Source: Citizens Survey DFØ, 2021.

StatLi <https://stat.link/y0wheo>

Further, research from democratic innovations has argued that through better design of policies, and more inclusive policy making, fairness perceptions can increase (Marien and Werner, 2019^[58]). Norway still has scope to deepen citizens' inclusion in decision making through democratic innovations (e.g. through citizen assemblies, participatory budgeting, the organisation of referendums, etc.) particularly at the local level and in more rural regions (Haugsgjerd and Seggaard, 2020^[17]). This does not replace the traditional civil society dialogue, which remains a strength of the Norwegian democracy, but rather adds to it.

Increasing diversity within the administration

Another area associated with Norwegians' fairness perceptions relates to whom is actually representing and acting on behalf of the citizens. People should feel represented by their parliament and government, as well as by their public administration. Having diverse groups of people in public life, including the young and elderly, those living on the periphery, women, and citizens with a migrant background, will lead to more responsive policy making, and increased perceptions of fairness (Nolan-Flecha, 2019^[67]; OECD, 2020^[68]).

A more diverse workforce leads to better performance, reduces group think, and ensures that outsider perspectives are more widely integrated. In other words, increasing diversity in the public administration could improve public services and distributive justice perceptions. Procedural fairness perceptions are also improved because citizens perceive that decisions are made by people representing them, and feel that there is room for people like them in those groups. Finally, from an ethical angle, public services are paid for by tax services, and should thus adequately represent the societies they govern (Nolan-Flecha, 2019^[67]; OECD, 2020^[68]).

In Norway, challenges remain in terms of ensuring a diverse administration that, in turn, could also contribute to improving trust in the public administration. Norway is a top performer in gender equality within the OECD. In fact, women are overrepresented in public sector employment: 70% of employees in the public sector are female (OECD, 2021^[21]). While representation of women in political positions has improved, following the 2021 election 45% and 53% of members of parliament and cabinet are women respectively. However, the percentage of women at senior management positions in central government has completely stagnated at 43% (when comparing 2020 with 2015 data). The pay gap between men and women persists, and especially so in more senior level positions (Statistics Norway, 2020^[69]). These imbalances imply that both men and women have objective reasons to assume that their public institutions are not operating in a fair way. Further attention and initiatives should thus be taken to ensure an inclusive working environment for both groups, as well as a more equal access to leadership functions in the administration, as well as in the parliament.

Second, there are almost no members of parliament without a higher education degree. In a similar vein, while Norway is ageing, the elderly are less likely to turn out on election day, and members of parliament have become younger, on average (qualitative interviews of March 2021; (Bergh, Haugsgjerd and Karlsen, 2020^[26]; Heidar, 2005^[70]). The parliament of Norway contains the highest percentage of young members of parliament (i.e. aged 40 years or younger) in the OECD (2021^[21]). Equal participation for all socioeconomic groups remains a political challenge in Norway, and political parties in particular should make an effort to ensure that their rank-and-file members come from all socioeconomic classes in Norway.

At the community level, diversity had no discernible effect on generalised trust (McLaren, 2012^[71]), but international studies (including Norway in more comprehensive analyses) have found a negative relationship between migration concerns and institutional trust (McLaren, 2012^[71]).

In the interviews carried out for this study it was also signalled that people with a migrant background are underrepresented in politics, as well as the public administration and the media. According to Statistics Norway, in central government services, only 12.7% of employees had a migrant background in 2020. Municipal and county government services do slightly better, as 14.7% of their employees had a migrant background. The inclusion of migrants in public administration could contribute to ensuring that they feel represented by these institutions, and may contribute to better policy making (Nolan-Flecha, 2019^[67]). In turn, the private sector and public companies do better: 19.9% of employees are migrants, which corresponds to the actual share of migrants in the Norwegian population and suggests that migrants face structural barriers to entering the public administration (Statistics Norway, 2021^[72]). Taken together, this suggests that room for further action exists to actively pursue the inclusion of people with a migrant background in public administration.

Opportunities for improvement

Although Norway performs comparatively well in terms of fairness, there are differences across social groups regarding their perceptions of fairness and egalitarianism, which suggests there is still room for improvement. The centre-periphery divide is persistent in Norway. There is additional room for including citizens in decision making through new technologies, processes and tools. Traditional social dialogue between civil society and public institutions should continue, but may be complemented with additional tools such as deliberative processes particularly at the local level and in regions farther away from the centre.

It is important to 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 represented in service provision. This could happen by, for instance, actively pursuing the inclusion of people with a migrant background in the public administration and in political institutions such as political parties.

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Notes

¹ Transparency refers to stakeholder access to, and use of, public information and data concerning the entire public decision-making process, including policies, initiatives, salaries, meeting agendas and minutes, budget allocations and spending, etc. Information and data disclosed should serve a purpose and meet citizens’ needs.

² 60% of the population considers that it is easy to get information from municipal employees and 69% that it is easy to understand information provided by the municipality.

³ https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1814-05-17#KAPITTEL_3

⁴ Early voting starts as early as first of July for an election taking place in mid-September.

⁵ According to other surveys such as Norwegian Survey of Living Conditions EU-SILC this figure amounted to just 2% in 2020. The EU SILC survey includes two different response categories member of a political party amounting to 8% of the population and active member of a political party signalled by the referred 2%. As the Norwegian Citizens Survey only asks about active party membership, amounting to 6%, without previously asking for just membership it is likely that it captures a combination of both EU-SILC response categories.

⁶ Even after stratifying certain groups, it is difficult to ensure that the ones answering within the groups are the most representative persons.

⁷ Mis-information is information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm. Dis-information is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country. Mal-information refers to information that is not based on reality and used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country.

⁸ Norway scores 2.45 on the public sector corrupt exchanges indicator (0-4). Experts are asked “How routinely do public sector employees grant favours in exchange for bribes, kickbacks, or other material inducements?” Responses range from 0 (Extremely common. Most public sector employees are systematically involved in petty but corrupt exchanges almost all the time) to 4 (No. Never, or hardly ever).

⁹ In Norway there are e-learning platforms providing training that all civil servants are supposed to go through. This is “dilemma-training” and the seven duties that the civil service must perform related to the relationship between the civil service and political leadership.

¹⁰ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/01cd500717fb4a61ba179646f10b59c0/ethical-guidelines-for-contact-with-business-and-industry-in-the-defence-sector.pdf>



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