

## Youth Partnership

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Partnership between the European Commission  
and the Council of Europe in the field of youth



# COUNTRY SHEET ON YOUTH POLICY IN NORWAY

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# 1. Context of national youth policy

## 1.1 Context of national youth policy

No single policy document covers all aspects of Norwegian youth policy. The Government's youth policy is expressed through various policy documents that target different aspects of young people's lives within different sectors as well as through relevant draft resolutions and bills that form the basis for the Parliament's consideration. The Government's 2015 Plan on child and youth policy initiatives [Trygghet, deltakelse og engasjement – regjeringens arbeid for barn og unge] provides a broad overview of initiatives and investments in children and adolescents aged 0-24 years, with emphasis on the age group 0-18 years.

## 1.2. Principles of national youth policy

The Government's 2015 Plan on child and youth policy initiatives is based on the following goals and principles:

- A safe upbringing in family and in the local community
- Equal rights and opportunities
- Participation and influence
- High quality services for everyone

Norwegian youth policy is cross-sectoral with emphasis on collaboration and coordination between local and central authorities, and with the voluntary sector. In addition, children and young people's participation is emphasised.

## 2. Statistics on young people

Number and percentage of young people (15-29) in global population (Statistics Norway):

Young people (15-29) in global population	
Number	Percentage
1 030 374	19

Number and percentage of young people (15-29) by gender in global population (Statistics Norway):

Young people (15-29) by gender in global population	Number	Percentage
Young women	500 485	9
Young men	529 889	10
Total	1 030 374	19

Number and percentage of young people (16-29) with a different nationality (Statistics Norway):

Young people (16-29) with different nationality	Number	% of young population (16-29)
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Young women	54 279	
Young men	56 716	
Total	110 995	11.5

### 3. Actors and structures

#### 3.1. Public authorities

##### 3.1.1. National public authorities with competencies in the youth field

The responsible authority for overall youth policy is the [Ministry of Children and Families](#). However, strategies and measures affecting different aspects of young people's lives may lie with other ministries or are often devised and implemented cross-sectorally. The following ministries are the most important ones regarding youth policies and services affecting youth:

- Ministry of Culture
- Ministry of Education and Research
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Health and Care Services
- Ministry of Justice and Public Security

The division of tasks and responsibilities demands cooperation and coordination between Ministries and among different levels of administration. The Ministry of Children and Families and its underlying agency the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs play an important role in promoting better cooperation and coordination of state efforts for children and youth.

#### Directorates

The following directorates play an important role in the implementation of youth policy goals:

[The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs](#) is the Norwegian governmental office for the welfare and protection of children and families. Its main objective is to provide services of high and accurate quality to children, young people and families in need of assistance and support regardless of where in Norway they live.

[The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training](#) is responsible for the development of primary and secondary education. The Directorate is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. In this capacity the Directorate has the overall responsibility for supervising education and governance of the education sector, as well as the implementation of Acts of Parliament and regulations. The objective of the Directorate is to ensure that all pupils and apprentices receive the high-quality education they are entitled to.

[The Norwegian Integration and Diversity Directorate](#) implements the government's integration policies. The directorate is tasked with strengthening the municipalities, sector authorities, and other collaborative partners competence in the field of integration and diversity.

Some of the directorate's key responsibilities include:

- Resettlement of refugees
- Facilitating to assist immigrant participation in the labour force and in local communities
- Efforts against negative social control, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation
- Provide professional and knowledge-based recommendations for further development of integration policy and ensure good coordination in the field of integration

- Manage grant schemes aimed at municipalities and voluntary organizations
- Produce and disseminate research, analysis, statistics and good practice

[The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration](#) administers one third of the national budget through schemes such as unemployment benefits, work assessment allowances, pensions, sickness benefit child benefits and cash-for-care benefits and counts the entire population as its users. The local authorities and central government cooperate to find good solutions for users through 456 NAV offices in municipalities and city boroughs. Each local authority and NAV agree on what local authority services their office should provide. The services provided by a NAV office will thus vary from local authority to local authority.

### **Ombudspersons**

[The Ombudsman for Children in Norway](#) is charged with promoting the interests of children and young people in both the public and private spheres. One of the Ombudsman's most important duties is to ensure that the authorities in Norway comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is enshrined in Norwegian law. The Ombudsman is professionally independent but is administratively subordinate to the Ministry of Children and Families. The office of the ombudsman may initiate action on its own or respond to issues referred by others.

[Anti-bullying and Secondary Education ombudsmen](#) are appointed by the regional politicians and are independent from the local and regional school authorities. The ombudsmen are charged with promoting the interests of children in kindergartens, pupils and apprentices. The ombudsmen give lectures, hold training courses to help the schools and students prevent bullying and know their basic rights in accordance with the Norwegian Education Act.

[The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman](#) has its mandate and role stipulated under the Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Ombud Act. In addition, the Ombud can provide guidance on how to bring a case to the [Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal](#), which was established in 2018. The Tribunal is a complaints body and makes final, legally binding decisions on harassment and discrimination cases. It can also award compensation. The Ombudsman is professionally independent but is administratively subordinate to the Ministry of Culture.

[The Consumer Authority](#) is an independent administrative body with the responsibility of supervising measures in the market and seek to exert influence on traders to observe the regulatory framework.

[The Norwegian Data Protection Authority](#) is an independent authority to protect the individual right to privacy. The authority is administratively subordinate to the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. The main legislation directing the Authority's work is the Personal Data Act.

The Standing Committee on Family and Cultural Affairs is concerned with family, children, youth, gender equality and consumer issues as well as sports, religious communities, culture and cultural heritage.

The Sami Parliament's Youth Policy Committee seeks to enhance young Samis' co-determination and influence on Sami parliamentary policies and help the Sami Parliament to shape its present and future policies relating to young people. One of the main objectives is to plan and host the Sami Parliament's youth conference. The committee consists of members aged 16-28 from all parts of Norway.

### **3.1.2. Regional and/or local public authorities with competencies in the youth field**

Norway is divided into 11 counties and 356 municipalities. Practical implementation of national child and youth policy priorities lies primarily at the municipal level through the provision of services. The main responsibilities of the municipality relating to youth are primary education (until 10th grade), youth health stations and school health services, outpatient health services, unemployment and other social services and economic development.

Many national youth policy goals are not enshrined in legal regulations and do not trigger earmarked funds. Therefore, the municipalities have much freedom in how they implement and finance national policy goals, such as in the area of youth work. Child and youth organisations are important collaborating actors at the municipal level. Important sectors within NGOs and youth organisations are sports, arts, school/education, politics and international exchange.

## **3.2. Youth welfare services (comprising public and/or non-public actors)**

In Norway, the age of majority is 18. From this age young people have the same rights as the overall adult population to welfare services, including financial support such as unemployment benefits and social assistance.

Local youth health stations and school health services are statutory services provided by the municipalities, designed to safeguard physical and mental health and provide health-promoting and preventative services for children and young people. The school health services are found in all primary schools, secondary schools and upper secondary schools and may consist of a health nurse, school physician, psychologist and physiotherapist or others. Youth Health Stations provide free and multidisciplinary services for young people up to the age of 20. The service can consist of a health nurse, doctor and psychologist, and is usually open in the afternoons.

Parents are responsible for providing care and protection for children and young people below the age of 18. However, if the parents are unable to do so, the Child Welfare Services is obliged by law to provide whatever help necessary to ensure that children and adolescents receive the care they need. All municipalities or inter-municipalities must have a Child Welfare Service that provides help and support to children, adolescents and parents who are experiencing challenges or difficulties within the family. The Child Welfare Services may also get involved if an adolescent needs help for other reasons, such as behavioural issues connected to drugs or alcohol. The Ministry of Children and Families is responsible for the administration of The Child Care Law and the Child Welfare Act and ensures that laws and regulations are correctly applied. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs is responsible for interpreting the law, for research and development and international cooperation in child welfare cases across national borders. The Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs consists of five regional child protection agencies and the County Governor is responsible for the supervision of the Child Welfare Services.

### 3.3. Non-public actors/structures and youth services with competencies in the youth field

#### 3.3.1 Youth Councils

From 2019 and with the implementation of the new Local Government Act it became mandatory with formal consultative bodies/youth councils for youth at municipal and county levels. Youth council members are elected to represent youth in their municipality or county. The councils have a term of office of up to two years. Members shall not have reached the age of 19 at the time of election. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has developed a [guide](#) for youth councils.

The Government has also declared that it will strengthen youth participation in democratic processes at the national level. Ministries are establishing ad hoc youth panels to advise the government on various policy issues. Currently two panels have been established:

- 1) The Ministry of Local Development and Modernisation has set up a panel focusing on regional policy development
- 2) The Ministry of Children and Families has set up a panel focusing on measures for children and youth growing up in low income families

There are plans to set up more panels on different policy topics.

#### 3.3.2 Youth NGOs

The Ministry of Children and Families provides basic support to voluntary youth organisations. Grants to youth organisations are administered by the Grant Allocation Committee, whose secretariat is at the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

The Norwegian Children and Youth Council [Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner] is an umbrella non-governmental organisation representing 98 youth associations. LNU administers several grant schemes on behalf of various ministries and is regularly consulted by national authorities on issues related to youth. LNU works in partnership with county level youth councils to build the capacity of local youth councils and contribute to favourable policy environments for regional and local youth led organisations.

The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities [Unge Funksjonshemmede] is an umbrella organisation representing 37 organisations for children and youth with disabilities or chronic disease. With the aim of ensuring participation and social equality for young people with disabilities and chronic illness, the organisation works to influence policy makers in society at large and decision makers in educational institutions and working places.

Youth Work Norway [Ungdom og Fritid] represents young people, employees and volunteers in municipal-supported youth clubs and youth centres. Youth Work Norway is recognised as a leading source of information and expertise on youth work. The organization trains youth workers, sets quality standards, contributes to research on youth work, and works with policy makers, educators, and employers to promote youth work.

#### 3.3.3 National network(s) for knowledge on youth linking all actors in the field (policy makers, researchers, young people and their organisations, NGOs)?

The youth NGOs described in section 3.3.2 represent national networks for knowledge on youth linking actors in the field. In addition, Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) at the Centre for Welfare and Labour Research at OsloMet (Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences) develops multi-disciplinary research on youth in Norway. NOVA edits the only journal of youth research in Norwegian, Tidsskrift for ungdomsforskning, and participates the Nordic network for qualitative longitudinal youth research. NOVA is also responsible for the national coordination of a cross-national data collection scheme ([ungdata](#)) which is financed through the national budget.

## 4. Legislation

There are no specific references to youth in the constitution, but the rights of children below the age of majority are specifically mentioned in the Norwegian Constitution (§ 104).

Norway does not have a specific youth law, and there is no legal classification of youth. The following laws relate specifically to the rights of children and adolescents under the age of 18, and in some cases up to the age of 24:

- The Children's Act [Barneloven] covers legislation on parenthood, parental responsibility, attendance and maintenance obligations. The Act also contains rules on parental mediation and the handling of parenting disputes in the courts.
- The Guardianship Act [Vergemålsloven] applies to persons under guardianship and their right to take legal action or to dispose of their own funds. The Act also applies to guardians of persons under guardianship and the competence of the guardian to take legal action or to dispose of funds on behalf of the person he or she is guardian of. However, for guardians of minors, the law applies only to the extent that the competence is not covered by the parental responsibility under the Children's Act.
- The Child Welfare Act [Barnevernloven] relates to the Child Welfare Services.
- The Education Act relates to rights pertaining to primary and secondary education.
- In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has been embedded in Norwegian legislation in the Human Rights Act, cf. Item 2.

## 5. National Policy Programmes and Action Plans on Youth

There is no single strategy that covers all aspects of Norwegian youth policy. Most ministries are responsible for measures affecting youth, either directly or indirectly. The ministries cooperate in many areas, and have put forward joint initiatives, through action plans, strategies and parliamentary announcements. The Government's 2015 Plan on child and youth policy initiatives referred to in section 1.2 was drawn up in collaboration between by the Ministry of Children and Families, Ministry of Health and Care Services, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Justice and Public Security and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It presents the overall goals and focus areas of the Government's children and youth policy but does not include all measures. Relevant policy developments, strategies, plans and programmes across sectors are elaborated below.

### *Education*

A committee was set up in 2017 to assess the strengths and weaknesses of higher education as well as propose changes in the structure, organization and professional composition. This resulted in two Official Norwegian Reports; one assessing whether upper secondary education has the structure and content to ensure that as many as possible complete upper secondary education. The second report considered various models for upper secondary education and proposes concrete changes in structure and subject composition. The reports form the basis for public consultations and consideration by the Government and Parliament.

### *Gender equality*

Two Official Norwegian Reports on gender and young people were released during 2019; one describes gender differences in school performance and educational attainment, another overall gender equality challenges among children and young people. The reports propose various measures to address identified issues. The reports form the basis for public consultations and consideration by the Government and Parliament.

### *Health*

The Government's strategy on young people's health 2016 – 2021 [#Ungdomshelse – regjeringens strategi for ungdomshelse 2016-2021] covers the age group 13–25 years and sets out several goals related to mental health, healthy lifestyles and sexual health among youth. Young people's own



views and experiences were central in the development of the strategy. Measures that have been undertaken to achieve the goals in the strategy include:

- A national programme for public health run by the Directorate of Health which aims to strengthen mental health and substance abuse prevention among young people as part of the municipalities' public health work. An important aspect of the programme is to strengthen municipalities' capacity to develop, implement and evaluate knowledge-based measures.
- A cross sectoral National Plan for children and young people's mental health (2019–2024) which covers measures to ensure that more children and young people between 0-25 experience good mental health and a good quality of life, and that those who need it should receive appropriate and effective treatment. The plan contains both health-promoting, preventative and treatment-oriented measures.
- A national grant scheme administered by the Directorate of Health to promote mental health and well-being among students in higher education and prevent problems related to drug use. Universities, colleges and vocational colleges as well as student organizations can apply for project grants.
- A Sexual Health Strategy (2017-2020) which includes activities for increasing young people's knowledge and skills to safeguard their own sexual health.

The Government has also initiated a drug reform process with the goal of transferring responsibility for society's response to the use and possession of illegal drugs for personal use from the justice sector to the health sector. A committee was set up to prepare for the implementation of the reform and has handed over an Official Norwegian Report to the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. A reform will potentially have significant implications for policies and measures relating to young people and drug use.

#### *Social inclusion*

As a follow up to the Government's strategy against child poverty for the period 2015 – 2017 a new collaborative strategy for children and young people growing up in low-income families is being developed. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs is leading the work in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Care Services and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization. An advisory youth panel has been set up to provide insights and proposed measures for the strategy.

The Government has initiated a collaborative effort between municipalities, the voluntary sector and top-level authorities to ensure that all children and youth, regardless of their parents' social and financial situation, can participate regularly in recreational activities. In addition, the Government has initiated a 'Recreation Card' trial, with the aim of giving children and young people 6 to 18 years the opportunity to participate in organised leisure time/recreational activities regardless of economic resources. The aim is to develop a national universal scheme.

#### *Culture*

The Government is developing a White Paper on children and youth culture which will be presented jointly by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research. [Arts for Young Audiences Norway](#), an agency of the Ministry of Culture, involved children and young people regarding several of the topics that will be addressed.

## **6. Budget / Public expenditure allocated to youth**

Initiatives and measures directed at youth are integrated within the overall national policy measures across different sectors. This is reflected in the annual budget proposals by ministry. In Norway the youth population is often described as those aged 13-26, but this may vary according to the issues being addressed, or by sector. As many services, initiatives and measures target children and young people as one group and because young people over the age of majority enjoy rights and access to welfare services as adults it is not possible to report on a separate budget/public expenditure for youth specifically.

Ministries allocate grants to municipalities to carry out projects targeting the child and youth population. The Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs spent approximately NOK 684 million in grants to municipalities in 2019, out of which the largest grant was NOK 365 million for the strengthening of municipal foster homes. The grant scheme run by the Directorate of Health which aims to strengthen mental health and substance abuse prevention among children and young people as part of the municipalities' public health work had a budget of NOK 77 million in 2019. In the 2020 national budget NOK 422.1 million was allocated to a grant scheme aimed at strengthening and developing municipal health stations and school health services.

Support to youth organizations provides another indication of the overall commitment to youth. In 2019 the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs spent NOK 153.6 million for youth organizations and NOK 224 million for organizations representing persons with disabilities. 13 of 15 ministries provide grants to voluntary organizations annually, many of them youth organizations or organizations with projects aimed at or run by youth.

## 7. European dimension of youth policy

### 7.1. Council of Europe youth sector strategy and programmes

Norway is represented in the European Steering Committee for Youth and the Joint Council on Youth which is the decision and policy-making body for the Council of Europe's governmental and non-governmental partners in the Youth Department.

The activities organised by the Council of Europe youth sector, such as trainings for European youth workers, study sessions, intercultural language courses and others are open to members of Norwegian youth organisations. Norwegian youth organisations also make use of the funding schemes of the European Youth Foundation (EYF).

### 7.2. European Union youth strategy and programmes

Erasmus+ supports transnational partnerships among Education, Training, and Youth institutions and organisations to foster cooperation. DIKU hosts the national office [Erasmus+ national agency for education and sports](#), while the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs hosts the national office for [Erasmus+ Youth in Action](#).

## 8. Further sources of information on youth policy

The official [Norwegian Government webpage](#) provides information on overall policy developments as well as a [search engine](#) to find official documents such as draft resolutions and bills, white papers, plans and strategies according to topic. The Government or a ministry may constitute a committee and working groups who report on different aspects of society. A report can either be published as an Official Norwegian Report, or as a regular report, such as those relating to youth mentioned in chapter 5.

The Ministry of Children and Families provides some information on government policy related to [child and youth participation](#).

[ung.no](#) which is run by the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs is a public website on which young people can receive information about their rights and public services.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has declared a cross-sectoral strategy for children and young people and the [website](#) provides information about the policy areas and initiatives in which the Nordic countries cooperate.

## 9. References

### Online Resource on youth population

[Statistic Norway](#)

### Strategies and plans

Trygghet, deltagelse og engasjement – regjeringens arbeid for barn og unge, Barne-, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2015

Barn som lever i fattigdom: Regjeringens strategi mot barnefattigdom (2015 – 2017), Barne-, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, 2015

Snakk om det! Strategi for seksuell helse (2017–2022), Helse – og omsorgsdepartementet, 2016

#Ungdomshelse – regjeringens strategi for ungdomshelse (2016-2021), Helse – og omsorgsdepartementet, 2016

Opptappingsplan for barn og unges psykiske helse (2019–2024), Helse – og omsorgsdepartementet, 2019

### Official Norwegian Reports

NOU 2019: 26 Rusreform – fra straff til hjelp

NOU 2019: 25 Med rett til å mestre — Struktur og innhold i videregående opplæring

NOU 2019: 19 Jenterom, gutterom og mulighetsrom — Likestillingsutfordringer blant barn og unge

NOU 2019: 3 Nye sjanser – bedre læring — Kjønnforskjeller i skoleprestasjoner og utdanningsløp

NOU 2018: 15 Kvalifisert, forberedt og motivert