

Norway

Short cultural policy profile

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1. Facts and figures

Political system: Parliamentary, representative democracy and Constitutional monarchy. Executive power is exercised by the Council of State. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the legislature, the Storting, elected within a multi-party system. The judiciary is independent of the executive branch and the legislature.

Official language(s): Norwegian and Sami

	2019	2016
Population on January 1st	5 328 212	5 109 056
GDP in million EUR	341 759	325 996
GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU27_2020 = 100)	64 141	63 808
General government expenditure (in % of GDP)	49.1	51.5
Public cultural expenditure in million EUR	2 502	2 200
Public cultural expenditure as % of GDP	0.73 %	0.67 %
Public cultural expenditure per Capita	470	431
Share of cultural employment of total employment	3%	3%

Sources: Population on January 1st, latest data available / <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data-browser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>

GDP in million EUR, latest data available / https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data-browser/view/namq_10_gdp/default/table?lang=en

GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU27_2020 = 100), latest data available / <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00114/default/table?lang=en>

General government expenditure (in % of GDP), *latest data available* / <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00023/default/table?lang=en>

Public cultural expenditure / Public cultural expenditure as % of GDP / Public cultural expenditure per Capita: see also chapter 7.1.1 of the national Compendium profile

Share of cultural employment of total employment / *latest data available*:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/cult_emp_sex/default/table?lang=en

2. Cultural policy system

2.1 Objectives

The main objectives of Norwegian cultural policy were defined in the latest white paper on culture (link: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-8-20182019/id2620206/?ch=1>):

A free and independent cultural sector that:

- produces artistic and cultural expressions of the highest quality
- fosters education and critical reflection
- protects and disseminates cultural heritage
- creates and disseminates a cultural offering that is viewed as relevant, and which represents the population
- is available to everyone and encourages each person to experience and participate in cultural activities
- provides meeting places and builds communities
- transforms itself and shows an ability to transform
- has an international impact and fosters intercultural understanding
- strengthens the Norwegian language, the Sami languages, the national minority languages, and the Norwegian sign language as fundamental bearers of culture

Despite changing governments, the main objectives of Norwegian cultural policy have been steady for the last 20 years or more. There are few controversies about these objectives in public debates.

2.2 Main features

Like the other Nordic countries, Norwegian cultural policy is both centralised and decentralised. On the one hand, the basis for cultural policy is mostly provided by the state, although considerable responsibilities for the shaping and implementation of cultural policy are delegated to local and regional authorities.

State level

At the state level, the decision-making apparatus is relatively complex. Considerable authority is centred in the political and administrative body of the Parliament, the government and the ministries. Formally, the main framework of cultural policy is determined by the Storting (the parliament), while the *Ministry of Culture* prepares documents for the Storting. All legal, financial, organisational and information means are applied in order to achieve political goals. However, the national budget is the most important instrument.

Other Ministries concerned with cultural affairs are the *Ministry of Climate and the Environment*, which is responsible for cultural heritage and cultural environments. The *Ministry of Education and Research* is responsible for artists' education, as well as music and culture schools for children. The Ministry of Education and Research is also responsible for academic libraries and university museums. The *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* has been given the responsibility for the presentation of Norwegian arts and culture abroad. Other ministries are also relevant to cultural policy but play a more modest role.

A considerable amount of authority is also delegated to arm's length institutions. *Arts Council Norway* retains a largely independent position and is therefore characterised as an arm's length body. The *Norwegian Film Fund* is responsible for administering all national support for film production in Norway.

A large share of the cultural budget is also directly allocated to cultural institutions such as The Norwegian Opera and Ballet and Oslo Philharmonic.

Regional level

All counties established cultural boards and administrations during the 1970s. These are independent regional and local cultural administrations responsible to the county councils.

The responsibilities of regional authorities include self-defined initiatives and subsidies for regional cultural activities and subsidies for regional institutions, which are partly state-funded and regulated by formal agreements on a shared responsibility.

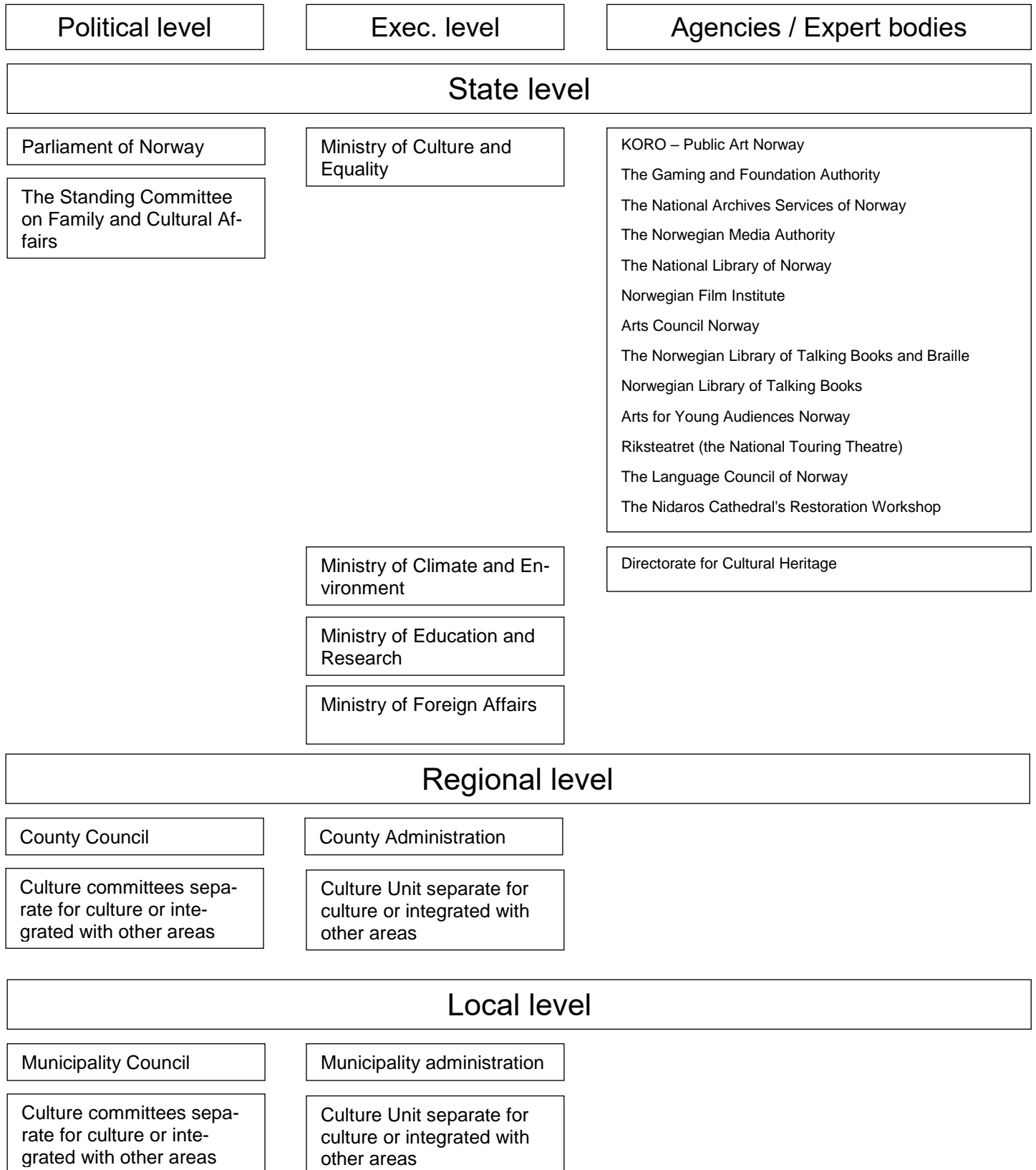
In 2020 regional reform reduced the number of counties from 19 to 11. As part of the reform, one aimed at providing the regions with increased responsibility for cultural policy. This has not yet happened. In fact, some of the merged regions will be separated in 2023.

Municipality level

Most municipalities also hold independent cultural boards and administrations, sometimes combined with other areas of policy such as business, leisure or education.

The responsibilities of local authorities include self-defined initiatives and subsidies for local cultural activities, including shared responsibility for cultural institutions. However, the most important areas of local cultural policy includes local cultural schools, libraries as well as infrastructure for culture and sports.

2.3 Governance system: Organisational Organigram



2.4 Historical background for the past 70 years

During the post-war period, a considerable emphasis was laid on the democratisation of culture. Arts and culture were considered as both an important measure for the welfare of the entire population and as a useful tool for public education. In order to democratise culture, the state established important arts institutions (theatres, music, visual art etc.)

In 1965 Arts Council Norway was established in order to defend the Norwegian culture and language. During the sixties, a significant range of support schemes for artists was also introduced.

During the 1970s, major efforts were made to decentralise the cultural policy and the cultural administration system in Norway. Cultural affairs committees were established in most municipalities, and the municipal authorities gradually appointed directors and secretaries of cultural affairs. A similar system was developed at the county level, and new grant schemes were introduced. In this way, substantial responsibilities were decentralised in order to bring decision-making closer to the general population. Closely linked to this reform was an expansion of the culture domain in order to include the cultural interests of various parts of the population, which incorporated a renewed interest for amateur cultural activities.

While the public culture budgets had expanded considerably during the post-war period, budget cuts and efficiency improvements characterized the 1980s and 1990s due to the stagnation of economic development in Norway. However, cultural expenses, not least at the municipality level, increased significantly in the 1980s.

In 2005, the centre-left government proclaimed an ambition to increase the share of the national budget allocated to culture to 1% by 2014 and that all arts form should benefit from this. Between 2005 and 2013 the governmental spending allocated to culture thus expanded from NOK EUR 625 million in 2005 to EUR 1,2 billion in 2013. The level of governmental spending has remained at approximately the same level even though the expansion has stopped.

During the pandemic, the Norwegian government spent more than EUR 700 million in extra allocations to the cultural sector.

3. Current cultural affairs

3.1 Key developments

Norwegian cultural policy has been very stable over the last 20-30 years despite changing governments. Generally, there has been few debates and few major changes in the cultural budget.

Nevertheless, digitalization has created new challenges to cultural policy in Norway as in the rest of the world. This includes debates on support and regulations for the new media landscape. During the last decades political parties have also debated the arm's length principle. Despite a general agreement about the main principles of cultural policy political parties have also disagreed somewhat about the level of public support to culture.

In addition to this, recent cultural policy has emphasised culture policy as a tool for safeguarding freedom of expression. The latest white paper on culture [<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-8-20182019/id2620206/?ch=1>] states that:

Art and culture are expressions that build society, and cultural policy must be based on freedom of speech and tolerance. The cultural sector and civil society are prerequisites for an educated and enlightened public, and thus an investment in democracy.

Compared to the last white paper on cultural policy (2003), where the main goals were public access to culture of high-quality art and culture, the recent white paper describes a more fundamental task for the culture sector, namely to safeguard democracy. This change has also a juridical backdrop. In 2004, the paragraph on press freedom in the Norwegian constitution was changed from "There should be freedom of press" into "There should be freedom of expression". The paragraph was further expanded with the governmental responsibility of providing the foundation for an "open and informed public discourse". The paragraph underlined the government's responsibility to ensure a framework for production and distribution of expressions.

Regionalisation of culture has also been a topic within the last years. A regional reform has decreased the numbers of municipalities from 428 to 356 and the number of regions from 19 to 11. One aim of the reform was to transfer state

responsibility down to regional and local governments, also within the culture sector. This led to several debates. Currently (2022) few changes in responsibility have been made and some of the merged regions and municipalities will even be separated in 2023.

Since 2000, there has been a major establishment of new infrastructure for culture, both in Oslo and elsewhere in the country. In several cities, large cultural centres, and a concert hall (kulturhus) has been built. Within the last two years, the new National Museum (of art) and the Munch Museum moved into monumental new buildings in Oslo.

A rather small change that has caused huge changes in the culture budget is a funding change for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) where a license based payment has been exchanged with a tax payment. The change has not caused much public debate and the budget of NRK has not changed considerably. However, expenses for NRK are now visible in the state budget for media.

3.2 Key themes

The key themes of Norwegian cultural policy are currently:

- Freedom of expression
- Cultural sustainability
- Post pandemic situation of the cultural sector

Especially the field Art and culture is the driving force for sustainable development in the Nordic region. [The Co-operation programme on culture policy 2021-2024](#) describes the most important priorities for the Council of Ministers for Culture in the period 2021-2024.

3.3 International Cultural Cooperation

The Ministry of Culture and Equality is responsible for Nordic and multilateral cultural cooperation, whilst the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for bilateral cultural cooperation and promoting Norwegian arts and culture abroad.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the key platform for Nordic cultural cooperation. Culture and the arts are the very cornerstones of the Nordic community.

State-funded institutions and professional organisations particularly aim at stimulating artistic exchange and promoting Norwegian artists and works of art, not least through the administration of specific grant schemes. The following organisations administer support programmes on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

- *The Norwegian Film Institute (NFI)* works to preserve, support and distribute Norwegian and foreign films so that film as an expression of art and culture becomes more visible. The NFI also distributes and markets Norwegian films abroad and administers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' support programme for the promotion of Norwegian films.
- *NORLA – Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA)* plays an important role in providing information on Norwegian literature and Norwegian authors of fiction and non-fiction. NORLA facilitates contact between Norwegian authors and publishers, translators, universities and others interested in Norwegian literature abroad. In addition, NORLA provides translation subsidies to publishers of Norwegian literature abroad, offers travel grants for Norwegian authors and their translators and provides promotional subsidies for sample translations and presentations of authors.
- *The Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA)* was founded by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2001. The main aim of OCA is to develop collaborations in contemporary visual art between Norway and the international visual art scene. OCA supports Norwegian contributions to major exhibitions abroad, the international activities of Norwegian artists and curators, and foreign curators and critics who wish to carry out research in Norway.
- *Music Norway* is the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' formal advising organisation on music matters. They act as an adviser for the political establishment and serves as a facilitator and enabler for the entire Norwegian professional music scene.
- *Performing Arts Hub Norway (PAHN)* works to facilitate independent theatre and dance activity in Norway. PAHN administers the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' tour support programme in this field.
- The MFA's advisory-organization within design and architecture is *Norwegian Centre for Design and Architecture (DogA)*. DogA was established in 2014, when the Foundation for Design and Architecture in Norway and the Norwegian Design Council merged. Prior to that, the advisory role was carried out by the Foundation for Design and Architecture in Norway, an organization established at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture in 1992.

4. Cultural Institutions

4.1 Overview

In general, it is hard to distinguish between public and private cultural institutions in Norway. There are some few strictly commercial theatres and concert halls in the large cities, otherwise most institutions are partly financed by one or several public authorities. Most institutions are organised as foundations.

Cultural heritage: The Norwegian museum sector consists of approximately 106 different museum organisations running more than 500 museum sites. In later years several museums have merged as part of a public reform.

Visual arts: There are both public art galleries and art museums in Norway. Some of the art museums are organized within the 106 museums mentioned.

Performing arts: There is one large opera house and 16 large producing theatres with a combination of state, regional and local funding. In addition to this, there are approximately 100 fringe theatres partly financed by Arts Council Norway.

Libraries: Public libraries in Norway are owned and financed by the municipalities.

Audiovisual: The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation is the only state owned broadcasting organisation in Norway.

Interdisciplinary: Most cities hold their own culture house primarily owned and financed by the municipality. Such culture houses may include a cinema, one or several stages for performing arts, art galleries, libraries or sport venues. In recent years, many of these houses have been built.

4.2 Data on selected public and private cultural institutions

Table 1: Cultural institutions, by sector and domain

Domain	Cultural Institution (Subdomain)	Number (2019)	Number (2016)
Cultural Heritage	<i>Cultural heritage sites (recognised)</i>		
	<i>Archaeological sites</i>		
Museums	<i>Museum institutions</i>	106	119
Archives	<i>Archive institutions</i>	11	11
Visual arts	<i>Public art galleries / exhibition halls</i>		
Performing arts	<i>Scenic and stable spaces for theatre</i>		
	<i>Concert houses</i>		
	<i>Theatre companies</i>	16	16
	<i>Dance and ballet companies</i>	2	2
	<i>Symphonic orchestras</i>	7	7
Libraries	<i>Libraries</i>	356	
Audiovisual	<i>Cinemas</i>	205	
	<i>Broadcasting organisations</i>		1
Interdisciplinary	<i>Socio-cultural centres / cultural houses</i>		
Others (please explain)			

Source:

Kulturstatistikk 2019

[<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2019>]

Kulturstatistikk 2014

[<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2016>]

5. Cultural Funding

5.1 Overview

Public authorities have played a crucial role in the financing of culture in Norway, with the state level and the municipality level being the most important. In the autumn of 2005, the government stated that one of its primary ambitions in the cultural field was to increase the amount of the national budget allocated to culture to 1 % by 2014. This led to a considerable increase in government spending on culture within this period of time. Since then, the allocations have been rather stable.

Total public expenditures to culture in 2019 was NOK 23.7 billion (2.5 billion EUR). Of this, the central government allocated 12.6 billion NOK (1.3 billion EUR), county councils spent 1.8 billion NOK (185 million EUR) and municipalities spent 9.3 billion NOK (1 billion EUR).

There exists good data in Norway on cultural funding on all three levels of government. It is also worth noting that cultural expenditure by other ministries is not included in the table.

Approximately 10 % of the state budget for culture is allocated through Arts Council Norway. The largest share of the budget is allocated to cultural institutions (museums and performing arts).

Non-public funding for culture is scarce in Norway and there exists few data on the amount of such funding. However, there are some important foundations, mainly based profit from banks.

5.2 Public cultural expenditure by level of government

Table 2: Public cultural expenditure by level of government, in NOK and in EUR, 2019 and 2014

Level of government	Total cultural expenditure in 2019			Total cultural expenditure in 2014		
	In NOK	In EUR	% share of total	In NOK	In EUR*	% share of total
State (central, federal)	12 570 000 000	1 328 523 300	53 %	10 324 000 000	1 208 837 160	55 %
Regional (provincial, Länder, etc.)	1 756 000 000	185 591 640	7 %	1 337 000 000	156 549 330	7 %
Local (municipal, incl. counties)	9 344 635 000	987 634 473	39 %	7 128 405 000	834 664 941	38 %
TOTAL	23 670 635 000	2 501 749 413	100 %	18 789 405 000	2 200 051 431	100 %

Source:

Kulturstatistikk 2019

[<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2019>]

Kulturstatistikk 2014

[<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2014>]

5.3 Public cultural expenditure per sector

Table 3: Public cultural expenditure: by sector, in national currency and in EUR, 2019 and 2014. State level. Sport and religious communities not included.

Field / Domain	2019			2014		
	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR	% share of total	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR*	% share of total
Cultural Heritage	112000000	11837280	1 %	62000000	7259580	1 %
Museums	1885000000	199225650	123 %	1391000000	162872190	13 %
Archives	430000000	45446700	28 %	387000000	45313830	4 %
Libraries and language	891000000	94169790	58 %	786000000	92032740	8 %
Performing Arts	2927000000	309354630	192 %	2730000000	319655700	26 %
Grants for artists	555000000	58657950	36 %	449000000	52573410	4 %
Audiovisual and Multimedia	1528000000	161494320	100 %	1224000000	143318160	12 %
Interdisciplinary Socioculture, Cultural Rel. Abroad, Administration, Cultural Education	3733000000	394540770	244 %	2994000000	350567460	29 %
Cultural infrastructure	509000000	53796210	33 %	301000000	35244090	3 %
Totalsum	12570000000	1328523300	823 %	10324000000	1208837160	100 %

Public cultural expenditure: by sector, in national currency and in EUR, 2019 and 2014. Regional level. Sport and religious communities not included.

Field / Domain	2019			2014		
	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR	% share of total	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR*	% share of total
Museums	545300000	57632757	31 %	386000000	45196740	29 %
Libraries and language	156400000	16529916	9 %	147500000	17270775	11 %
Interdisciplinary Socioculture, Cultural Rel. Abroad, Administration, Cultural Education	683800000	72270822	39 %	515500000	60359895	39 %
Not covered by the above domains	370500000	39158145	21 %	288000000	33721920	22 %
Total	1756000000	185591640	100 %	1337000000	156549330	100 %

Public cultural expenditure: by sector, in national currency and in EUR, 2019 and 2014. Local level. Sport and religious communities not included.

Field / Domain	2019			2014		
	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR	% share of total	Total expenditure in national currency	Total expenditure in EUR*	% share of total
Museums	618782000	65399070	7 %	379129000	44392215	5 %
Libraris and language	1655787000	175000128	18 %	1424210000	166760749	20 %
Audiovisual and Multimedia	56631000	5985330	1 %	65540000	7674079	1 %
Interdisciplinary Socioculture, Cultural Rel. Abroad, Administration, Cultural Education	3639909000	384701982	39 %	2945722000	344914589	41 %
Cultural infrastructure	1428064000	150932084	15 %	941504000	110240703	13 %
Not covered by the above domains	1945462000	205615879	21 %	1372300000	160682607	19 %
Total	9344635000	987634473	100 %	7128405000	834664941	100 %

Source: Kulturstatistikk 2019 [<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2019>]

Kulturstatistikk 2014 [<https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/artikler-og-publikasjoner/kulturstatistikk-2014>]

6. Legislation on culture

6.1 Overview of national cultural legislation

There are two articles in the Norwegian Constitution related to culture: Firstly, *Article 100* which guarantees freedom of expression, and secondly, *Article 108* of which deals with the responsibilities vis-à-vis the Sami people.

There is no general legislation regulating the division of cultural competence between the national, regional, and local levels in Norway. Most of the culture priorities of the municipalities and counties are self-defined. Important exceptions are the responsibility of the counties and municipalities for public libraries determined by the *Act on Public Libraries* (1947) and the responsibility of the municipalities for music and culture schools that was brought into the *Act on Education* in 1997.

The ordinary rate of VAT is 25% (2022). However, some cultural services have an exemption from VAT (tickets to performing arts), while others (cinema, museums, galleries and sport events) benefit from low (12%) VAT. Charity institutions and organisations are also exempted from VAT when selling various goods and there are also tax deductions on gifts to voluntary organisations.

There is no legislation on labour or social security directly related to cultural workers.

On 1 August 2007, a new general *Culture Act* entered into force in Norway. The *Culture Act* is simple and contains no detailed regulations of financing, priorities or organisation of the field of culture for the state, counties and municipalities. The Act leaves room for local autonomy. At the same time, the Act aims to ensure that the counties and municipalities provide economic and organisational measures that promote a broad spectrum of cultural activities at the local and regional level. The *Culture Act* also aims at facilitating a national cultural policy in a more globalised world.

In addition to the Culture Act, there are several sector-specific legislations on culture.

6.2 Overview of international cultural legislation

Norway is a member state of the Council of Europe, UN, UNESCO, and the OECD. Norway is not an EU member, but most EU legislation (European Union Law) has been adapted through the EEA agreement including the Treaty of Rome and the European Union competition law.

Since Cultural policy schemes to some extent interfere with the free market, several Norwegian cultural policy schemes need approval from the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA). During the pandemic, several extraordinary support schemes was aproved as an exception to EU competion law.

Most EU-directives related to cultural policy have been adopted into Norwegian law. Currently the Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market is about to be implemented into Norwegian law.

The following selection comprises culture-related treaties that were adopted by the Norwegian state. The years between brackets refer to their date of adoption:

- UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1972)

- Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (1996)
- UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1977)
- Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (2017)
- UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2007)
- UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (2007)
- UNESCO Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (2016)
- Council of Europe European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (revised) (1992)
- UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2007)
- Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2008)