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The main functions of county municipalities and municipalities in Norway

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Introduction

As of 2000 Norway is divided into 435 municipalities and 19 county municipalities. Oslo is classified as being both a county municipality and a municipality.

The municipalities vary significantly regarding size, topography and population. More than half have less than 5 000 inhabitants, eight have more than 50 000 inhabitants.

The county municipalities and municipalities have the same administrative status whilst central government has the overriding authority and supervision of county municipal and municipal administration.

Most of the welfare services provided are produced by the county municipalities and municipalities. Local government services represent 2/3 of Norway's production of public services and are as such an important factor in the country's economy.

The framework for the activities of the county municipalities and municipalities is laid down by the parliament (Storting) through legislation and decisions regarding local government financing. The Storting determines the division of functions between the different levels of government, i.e. central government, county municipalities and municipalities. Government can only assign new functions to local government by means of legislation or decisions made by the Storting. However, it is an important principle that county municipalities and municipalities voluntarily may assume tasks or functions that have not been assigned to others by law.

Thus the present distribution of functions is partly the result of decisions made by the Storting and partly of initiatives taken by local government.

This brochure does not provide a complete description of the functions of central and local government. In describing the division of functions between counties and municipalities the emphasis will be on the main areas of expenditure in the national budget.

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The distribution of functions and responsibilities

Central government is responsible for higher education and universities, the National Insurance Scheme, the armed forces, the national road network, railways, labour market training schemes, courts and the police force, prisons, foreign policy, policy regarding refugees and immigrants, and two of the main hospitals; the National Hospital and the Norwegian Radium Hospital.

The county municipalities are responsible for upper secondary schools, hospitals and specialist health service, child welfare institutions and institutions for the care of drug and alcohol abusers, county roads, transport and museums.

The municipalities are responsible for nurseries/kindergartens, child welfare, primary and lower secondary schools, public libraries, primary health care, financial support for welfare clients, care for the elderly and disabled, fire departments, harbours, municipal roads, water supply, sewage, garbage collection and disposal, organisation of land usage within the municipality e.g. the laying out of land for industrial or commercial use or housing.

Since the 1960s considerable changes have been made to the distribution of functions between the three levels of government. The largest of these changes has been the transfer of authority and functions from the county municipalities to the municipalities. The responsibility of care for the elderly was transferred from the county municipalities to the municipalities in 1988, making the latter fully responsible for this area. The responsibility for the care of the mentally disabled was transferred in 1991.

The main functions of county municipalities and municipalities are reflected in the chapter headings of their accounts. Below is shown the largest items of expenditure of county municipalities and municipalities.

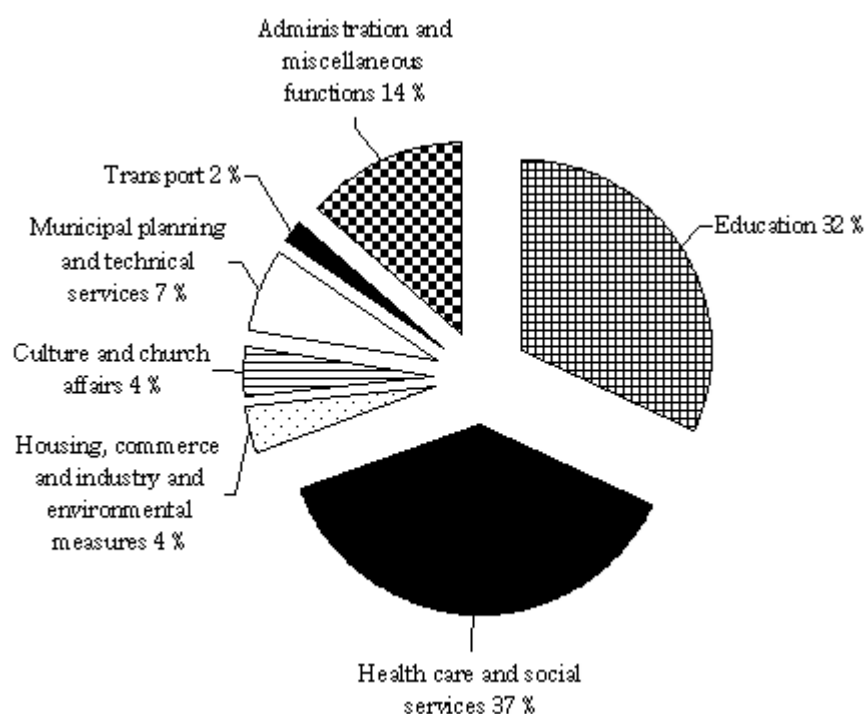


Figure 1 Operating expenses according to the main chapters of the internal accounts. Municipalities 1998.

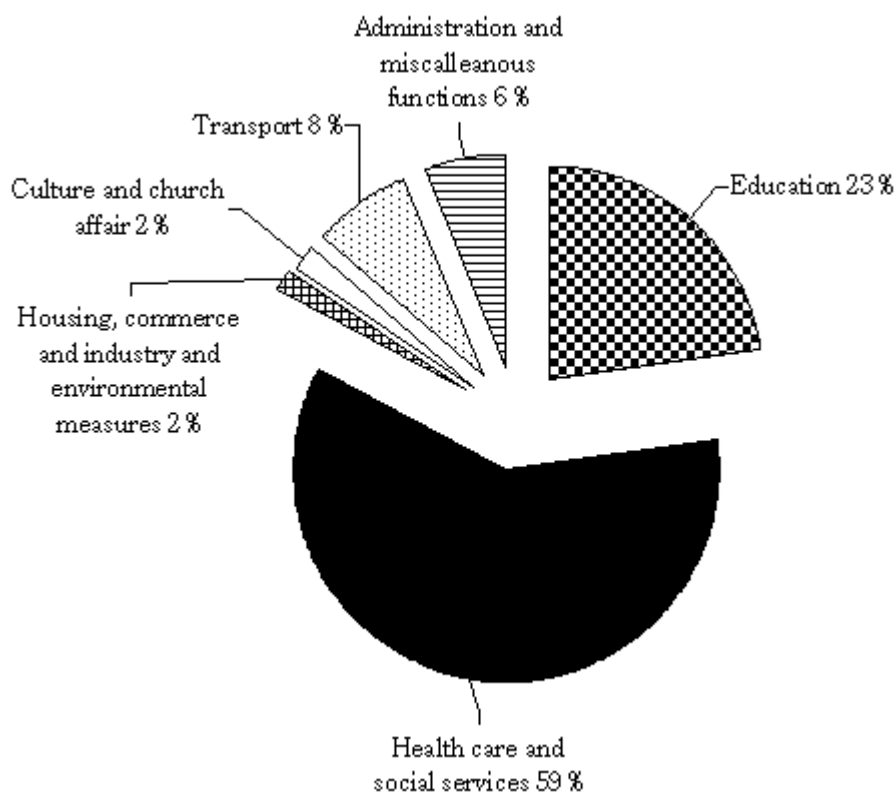


Figure 2 Operating expenses according to the main chapters of the internal accounts. County municipalities 1998.

0 The main functions of the municipalities

0 Education

The educational amenities provided by the municipalities cover a broad field; kindergartens/nurseries, preschool, primary and lower secondary school and adult education.

According to the act regulating primary and lower secondary education the municipalities are to provide ten years of education for everyone. The education has to follow basic principles laid down in the act as well as curriculum guidelines for primary and lower secondary education.