



Norwegian Ministry  
of Local Government and Modernisation

Summary

Meld. St. 18 (2016–2017) Report to the Storting (white paper)

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*Recommendations of the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation 17 February 2017,  
approved in the Council of State the same date.  
(Solberg Government)*

Sustainable urban and strong rural areas are mutually beneficial. Resources are available throughout the country. Cities generally grow from high birth rates and immigration, and urbanisation provides opportunities for the country as a whole. Cities provide greater access to expertise, capital, infrastructure and services. Rural areas hold significant resources and provide a basis for industry and growth. Fisheries and aquaculture have enjoyed strong growth in recent years, and provided new activity in many sparsely populated areas and villages along the coast of Northern, Central and Western Norway. At the same time, knowledge-intensive service industries, often located in cities, benefit from the strong, resource-based industry in rural areas.

In this white paper, the Government presents new objectives for its regional and rural development policy. All citizens in Norway are to have equal living conditions, wherever they live. The Government emphasises how the population will have access to basic services, irrespective of where they live. Access to more specialised public services will depend on the location of the services on offer.

A well-functioning business community is imperative for welfare, living conditions and quality of life in all types of communities, in both urban and rural areas. We need active and profitable businesses that innovate and create jobs. At the same time, the composition of the population is important for future growth and development. Policies must facilitate development that safe-

guards resources for future generations, while ensuring minimal differences between the regions in Norway. This will help maintain the main features of the current settlement pattern. The Government attaches particular importance to the long-term resilience and competitiveness of industry and trade. Increased commitment to infrastructure and innovation, growth-promoting tax cuts and the rationalisation of the public sector will stimulate growth in business and industry. In addition, the Government aims to:

- give priority to policy instruments that boost long-term competitiveness and potential for regional growth
- prioritise policy instruments that encourage businesses to apply research in their development work
- provide incentives for increased and more effective interaction between the tertiary education sector and labour market, industry and society by emphasising such cooperation in the funding of the sector
- strengthen collaboration and coordination at the regional level through further development of regional strategies for growth and access to skills
- ensure balanced localisation of government jobs and make use of competencies available in various parts of the country
- ensure that the Ministry considers the use of agreements between sectoral authorities and local/regional governments to meet particular challenges in specific areas

- ensure that the Ministry reviews responsibilities for handling acute restructuring challenges
- enhance advice on planning in coastal areas
- develop Northern Norway as one of the most creative and sustainable regions of the country

Access to efficient transportation systems is important for business development and resilience throughout the country. Efficient infrastructure between freight transport hubs is pivotal for market access in many industries. Sustainable land use and transportation systems encourage economic activity, are climate- and environment-friendly, and promote social integration. Better land use and environment-friendly transport are key elements of the «green shift» in urban areas. State guidelines for coordinated residential planning, land use and transport planning form the basis for policy development in this White Paper.

In order to succeed, the Government aims to:

- be an active partner in planning for future-oriented, climate-friendly development of cities, towns and villages throughout the country, with emphasis on high land use around public transport hubs
- collaborate with urban regions on Urban Growth Agreements to ensure coordination between land use and investments in transport systems
- ensure that the localisation of governmental public services and public-oriented government institutions supports urban development and transport hubs
- continue simplification of legislation that allows for faster housing construction. In order to meet the housing shortage, it is particularly important to consider how building development can be made faster, cheaper and easier in complex areas of densification and transformation.
- contribute knowledge, methodology and experience from development work to ensure that necessary considerations of health and quality of life, and therefore social sustainability, are safeguarded in coordinated housing, land use and transport planning

The design of our physical surroundings plays a significant role in everyday life and well-being. Well-functioning public spaces and meeting places can promote interaction between people and are important to social life. Green areas and corridors allow for recreation, physical activity and the experience of nature. By preserving our cultural

heritage and environment, we enhance the distinctiveness and identity of our towns and villages. Architecture, historic buildings and the urban environment also help to create identity and experiences in urban centres. These are all resources that local authorities can make use of to develop attractive, climate and environment-friendly town and village centres for their residents, businesses and tourists. The Government is concerned with how to avoid the increasing inequality between segments of the population and the creation of healthy, inclusive communities. Innovative working methods and models developed through area-based initiatives will provide learning and input to the design of new governmental policies. In order to achieve its goals, the Government aims to:

- encourage the development of healthy, inclusive communities with an emphasis on social sustainability in vulnerable urban areas through area-based initiatives. Strengthen and develop child and youth services, employment services and qualities of the local community, and support voluntary work that prevents loneliness and promotes social inclusion
- continue to work with existing area-based initiatives and consider cooperation with other towns with considerable challenges on an ongoing basis
- support local authorities and other actors who wish to try out new solutions and tools for voluntary commitment to cooperation in order to improve town centres
- allow a property holder who has an approved decision for temporary change of use to return to the original use of building/premises without having to apply again. The government will consider whether it is possible to make more changes to national regulations that may make it easier to get temporarily approval for use of empty premises for other purposes than obliged to, and assess the need for better guidance in the area.
- improve guidelines for quality and attractiveness in residential areas to enhance quality of life and ensure a good life for everyone, regardless of age or ability
- increase awareness and strengthen efforts to ensure that cultural heritage and other environmental benefits a resource in the work to improve towns and villages, through recommendations on how conservation, use and development can enhance local communities.

The Government is strengthening rural areas through an active rural policy. A number of sectors



are imperative to an active rural policy, such as general industrial and transport policy. However, small labour markets face greater restructuring challenges than larger labour markets, due to smaller local markets, longer distances, fewer industry players and a lack of financial institutions and expertise. This necessitates additional national effort. In rural areas, the Government will:

- uphold supplementary support to business and industry in areas with particular challenges, in addition to general policies aimed at the country as a whole. The differentiated employer contribution scheme is a key element of this policy.
- give priority to financing schemes such as investment support and business development grants
- extend incubator and coworking space programmes as an important regional policy instrument
- simplify the management of uncultivated land to facilitate sustainable business activities based on natural resources in uncultivated and mountainous areas
- reinforce guidelines for planning in uncultivated and mountainous areas
- ensure that fundamental commercial services are offered in sparsely populated areas through the Merkur Programme
- promote local development in rural areas through initiatives for business and industry development, and initiatives that encourage the inclusion of new residents

Planning based on the Planning and Building Act is key to sustainable development throughout the country. The planning system obliges local and county governments to manage their development in collaboration with regional and local stakeholders. They are to base their work on regional and local preconditions and challenges, as well as national frameworks and objectives, and arrive at strategies and measures that will develop society in the desired direction. Use of new technologies in planning and community development will encourage forward-looking and sustainable development. The planning processes must accommodate the coordination and balancing of different interests and considerations. This will secure long-term ownership of decisions, and ensure that plans are carried out. Planning is one of the most important tools for governmental bodies at local and regional level. Elected officials must therefore exercise leadership in the plan-

ning processes and their implementation. In order to achieve this, the Government aims to:

- work for further harmonisation and coordination of the Planning and Building Act and legislative acts in related sectors
- enhance community planning in municipalities through better guidance, and consider measures that enables prompt updates of the society part of the municipal master plan
- enhance participation of citizens in the entire planning process, for example through supporting the use of digital solutions
- continue efforts to strengthen coordination in planning processes with measures that will contribute to early dialogue, better coordination of different interests and better handling of conflicts
- continue the pilot project on coordinating central government objections to local plans and clarify how to follow this up
- make statistics on land development in municipalities and counties more accessible by launching «land profiles» as a new planning tool
- continue work on the digitisation and simplification of planning and building processes as a particular area of focus

Local government is the foundation of Norwegian democracy, the most important planning authority and is at the forefront of local development. Through close contact with citizens and companies, municipalities procure local knowledge that enables them to be a driving force in social and economic development. The Government is in the process of strengthening local democracy by shifting power and responsibility to local government. The forthcoming White Paper on local government reform, which places emphasis on larger and stronger welfare authorities, is a key component of a new urban and rural policy.

In White Paper No. 22 «Renewing the regional governmental level – role, structure and responsibilities», the Government proposed a regional reform to be implemented from 2020, in hand with the local government reform. The aim of the Government is to ensure a county level government that interacts well with central and local government, that can meet key challenges in society, and that can facilitate development and growth in all parts of the country. In spring 2017, the Government is proposing a new structure of the county level, based on the decision in White Paper No. 22 to provide the regional governmental level with

new responsibilities and a more pronounced role in the development of society.

This White Paper has been prepared through an open process allowing anyone to come forward with suggestions. The suggestions are available on the website [www.byerogdistrikter.no](http://www.byerogdistrikter.no). Local and country government, private individuals, businesses and member and interest organisations

have submitted 56 suggestions in total. In addition, ten input meetings were organised around the country, convening participants from large and small enterprises, public administration and the education sector and allowing them to meet the Minister of Local Government and Modernisation and other ministry staff.

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