# The Norwegian Model:
# A Framework for Public Service Interpreting

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In an increasingly diverse society, language barriers can pose significant challenges to public services. Norway has systematically developed a robust framework for public service interpreting over the past decades to ensure effective communication between public institutions and non-Norwegian speakers. With immigrants now accounting for 20.8% of the population in 2024[1]—a 13% increase since 2003—the demand for professional interpreters has grown significantly. In fact, by 2014, the need for interpreters in more than 100 languages had already been documented[2].

To address this challenge, Norway has pioneered a structured and legally supported model for public service interpreting. This model not only ensures quality and accessibility but also establishes a clear framework for professionalizing the field. The **Interpreting Act**, enacted in 2022, is the world's first legislation of its kind, consolidating all legal provisions related to interpreting and mandating that public bodies use qualified interpreters across all sectors.

## The Core Pillars of the Norwegian Model

The success of the Norwegian approach to public service interpreting is built on four key pillars:

### 1. Qualification and Professionalization of Interpreters

A strong qualification system is fundamental to ensuring that interpreters meet high professional standards. Norway has developed a multi-tiered qualification framework that includes formal education, ethical guidelines, and licensing. The system comprises five key certification pathways:

- **Tospråktesten[3] (Bilingual Proficiency Test):** An oral test assessing a candidate's ability to understand and accurately translate content between two languages.
- **30-ECTS University Course in Public Service Interpreting[4]:** A one-year foundational program for bilingual or multilingual candidates to acquire interpretation skills for institutional settings.
- **Bachelor's Degree in Public Service Interpreting (180 ECTS)[5]:** A three-year program offering in-depth training in interpreting methodologies and professional ethics.

[1] Statistics Norway, (2024n) – 931,000 immigrants and 221,000 residents who were born in Norway of immigrant parents.
[2] https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a47e34bc4d7344a18192e28ce8b95b7b/no/pdfs/nou201420140008000dddpdfs.pdf
[3] https://www.oslomet.no/om/lui/tospraktesten
[4] https://www.oslomet.no/studier/lui/evu-lui/innforing-tolking-offentlig-sektor and https://www.hvl.no/studier/studieprogram/tolking-i-offentleg-sektor/
[5] https://www.oslomet.no/studier/lui/tolking-offentlig-sektor

- **National Certification Exam in Interpreting[6]:** A rigorous examination consisting of written and oral proficiency tests for experienced interpreters.
- **Introductory Training in Interpreting Ethics and Techniques (TAO)[7]:** A mandatory course on professional conduct, the interpreter's role, and the legal framework governing interpretation.

By integrating these qualification measures, Norway ensures a professionalized and accountable interpreting workforce.

## 2. The National Register of Interpreters

The **National Register of Interpreters[8]**, established in 2005, serves as a central database of qualified interpreters. Accessible to all public sector employees, it provides a transparent and tiered system categorizing interpreters based on their qualifications. As of March 2025, the register includes approximately 2,200 interpreters across 78 languages.

To comply with the **Interpreting Act[9]**, public institutions must exclusively use interpreters listed in the register. The tiered categorization ensures that the most qualified interpreters receive higher visibility and preference, encouraging continuous professional development.

## 3. Raising Awareness Among Public Officials

Effective communication with interpreters requires more than just language proficiency—it demands an understanding of the interpreter's role and professional boundaries. Awareness-raising initiatives help civil servants recognize the impact of high-quality interpretation on public service delivery and legal safeguards for non-Norwegian speakers.

By implementing internal guidelines on booking and working with interpreters, public institutions can enhance the efficiency of interpretation services and foster smoother interactions with minority-language speakers.

## 4. Research-Driven Policy Development

A commitment to evidence-based policymaking has been instrumental in shaping Norway's public service interpreting model. Continuous research, surveys, and data collection provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current policies and highlight areas for improvement.

Mapping interpreter usage across different sectors has informed long-term strategies, ensuring that Norway remains at the forefront of interpreting service development.

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[6] https://www.oslomet.no/om/lui/autorisasjonsprove-tolking

[7] https://www.oslomet.no/studier/lui/evu-lui/kurs-tolkens-ansvarsomrade-tao

[8] https://www.tolkeregisteret.no/

[9] There is, however, a dispensation from the requirement to use qualified interpreters until 31 December 2026, which can be extended by the King.

# The Interpreting Act: A Milestone for Professionalization

Enforced in January 2022, the **Interpreting Act**[10] mandates public bodies to provide qualified interpreters whenever needed. The law serves a dual purpose:

1. **Safeguarding the rights of individuals who cannot communicate effectively with public authorities.**
2. **Upholding professional standards within the interpreting field.**

Still 34% of all interpreting assignments in the public sector are conducted by individuals outside the National Register[11], raising concerns about quality and professionalism. The system is designed to incentivize interpreters to pursue higher qualifications, leading to better compensation and more professional opportunities.

Certain sectors, such as the judiciary, already prioritize highly qualified interpreters (A and B categories). However, shortages in specific languages present challenges, making continuous investment in interpreter education crucial. With a **Bachelor's Degree in Public Service Interpreting taking four years to complete**, building a skilled workforce is a long-term commitment—but one that is essential for societal integration and legal fairness.

# A Global Benchmark in Public Service Interpreting

The Norwegian model stands as a benchmark for countries seeking to establish structured and legally supported interpreting services. By combining **education, certification, accessibility, awareness, and research**, Norway has created a system that upholds the rights of non-Norwegian speakers while ensuring the efficiency and integrity of public services.

As immigration trends continue to shape society, Norway's commitment to professionalizing interpretation services remains a cornerstone of its inclusive and well-functioning public sector.

[10] https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2021-06-11-79 and in English https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2021-06-11-79

[11] https://arkiv.imdi.no/contentassets/fc5484854c474319b6dfc232b871a804/rapport-imdi-tolkemonitor-lov-2022.pdf