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**Food distribution
– an established service in the welfare society**





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This report presents findings from a follow-up study of food distribution in Norway, conducted two years after the first nationwide survey of food distribution services. The 2023 study documented that food distribution schemes were established across large parts of the country and that many food recipients shared characteristics with population groups at high risk of poverty in Norway.

The follow-up study addresses the following research question:

What characterises food distribution services in Norway today, two years after the previous mapping? Have there been changes in provision, or in the number and composition of people accessing food distribution services?

Although the study is not designed to establish causal relationships, it examines whether developments in the economy and employment are reflected in the scale and composition of food aid recipients. It also explores indications of whether political measures may have influenced who accesses food assistance.

To answer these questions, two components of the original study were replicated:

1. A digital survey of food distribution organisations.
2. A mapping of food aid recipients at a selected sample of distribution sites during a defined time period.

To ensure comparability with the 2023 survey, most of the questions in the organisational questionnaire were retained. However, the instrument was revised to capture both the current situation and developments since the previous study. Of the organisations invited, 256 consented to participate, corresponding to a response rate of 49 per cent.

The questionnaire used to map food recipients was identical to that employed in 2023 and was available in Norwegian, English, Arabic, Ukrainian, and Russian. Data was collected from recipients at 31 distribution sites across the country, and a total of 1,906 individuals completed the mapping form.

In this study, food distribution refers to the regular provision of groceries.

Results

Food distribution services in Norway appear to have stabilised at a high level. At least as many organisations distributed food in 2025 as in 2023, and demand for food assistance has not declined. Food distribution therefore appears not as a temporary crisis response, but as an institutionalised and enduring feature of the Norwegian welfare society. Services are available throughout the country, still most concentrated in large cities, but with a greater presence in smaller municipalities than previously.

The organisations providing food distribution vary considerably. Nationwide non-profit organisations account for nearly half of the services, while local initiatives, faith-based organisations, and volunteer centres also play important roles. Most food distribution services have been operating for several years.

Most organisations report approximately the same number of recipients as in the previous two years. However, a slightly higher proportion than in 2023 report fewer than 50 recipients on a typical distribution day.

Food scarcity is widespread. Six out of ten organisations report that they are unable to meet the food needs of all who seek assistance, and one third of these state that they sometimes have to send people away without a food bag. The share of food distribution services applying eligibility criteria has increased substantially since 2023. The most common criteria are that food is only provided to defined target groups and that recipients collect the food themselves.

The 2025 mapping shows that food aid recipients constitute a highly heterogeneous group, representing many nationalities and diverse life situations. Compared with 2023, the recipient group more clearly resembles population groups traditionally at high risk of poverty.

Most food recipients are outside the labour market. The share in employment was 14 per cent in both 2023 and 2025, with most working part-time or intermittently. Overall, recipients appear to have weaker attachment to the labour market than in 2023, as a smaller share report having been employed at any time during the past five years.

A large proportion rely on public income support schemes, most commonly means-tested social assistance. Many also receive long-term benefits, such as disability benefits or old-age pensions.

There are more single-person households in the current mapping than in the previous one. There are somewhat fewer families with children, but this decline is observed among couples with children rather than single-parent households.

Three quarters of recipients are also in the 2025 mapping born outside Norway, and the recently arrived refugee groups are overrepresented.

The proportion who has received food aid for more than two years has increased from 22 to 38 per cent, while the share of new recipients has declined from 50 to 32 per cent. Overall, this indicates that the need for food aid is persistent for many recipients. There is also an increase in the share collecting food on a weekly basis, which may reflect both increased economic pressure and more established patterns of use.

One objective of the follow-up study was to assess whether the widespread provision of food distribution was primarily a response to a temporary crisis and would decline as economic conditions improved. The findings provide little support for this assumption.

Overall, the results indicate that food distribution has become an established form of support for some low-income groups. This points to a need for further discussion of how existing policy measures reach those facing the greatest economic hardship in Norway, including the adequacy of integration policies, the effectiveness of efforts to prevent child poverty, and, not least, the role and function of voluntary organisations within the welfare state.

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