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Access to paid-for online news in the Nordic countries

According to the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, Nordic news consumers stand out for their comparative willingness to pay for news on digital channels. This factsheet looks at the share of individuals paying for or using online news in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. We use survey data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*.

Historically, the newspaper industries in the Nordic countries have had a strong position in the national and local media markets, with a high degree of household coverage and with limited competition from other media. However, the news industry has been affected in several ways by digital development. Access to media has gone from being quite limited to abundant. With the rise of major players in the online advertising market, such as Google and Facebook, the newspapers have faced problems when it comes to making their online products profitable. One solution to the problem of declining revenue has been to implement paywalls on online news sites. This factsheet looks into the share of individuals paying for online news across Europe, with a special emphasis on the Nordic countries (except Iceland, which unfortunately has not participated in the *Digital News Report*).

The development of paywalls and how they are designed can look very different. Essentially, a paywall is a mechanism that restricts access to content – especially news – on digital platforms. Despite the name, not all paywalls require a monetary transaction. For example, some publishers may offer access to digital content in exchange for an e-mail address. This factsheet, based on data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, includes any kind of digital news readership where a monetary transaction has taken place. The answers to the online survey are based on the following question: “Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year?” Given the way the question is designed, it is important to note that it also includes those who accessed online news behind a paywall but may not have paid for it themselves. In the following, “access to paid-for online news” is used when analysing the results from this particular survey question.

About the Digital News Report

The *Digital News Report* is an annual survey on news habits in different countries from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. The report contains country comparisons of, for example, news consumption, trust in the media, and payment for news.

Annually, data collection takes place at the end of January and the beginning of February via YouGov’s web panel. This means that the question of whether one paid for news during the last year refers to the twelve months before the survey was conducted. The population for the survey is individuals aged 18 years old and above.

The survey methodology involves obtaining responses from an invited group of Internet users, and then weighting these responses in line with demographic information. This means the survey is not based on a random selection, but is weighted for representativeness regarding age, gender, geography, and social class.

It is also important to mention that surveys capture people's self-reported behaviour, which does not always reflect people's actual behaviour.

Furthermore, the sample ($N \approx 2,000$ in each country) reflects the proportion of the population that has access to the Internet, which might be above 95 per cent in the Nordic countries. In most of the countries measured in the survey, the percentage with access to the Internet is between 80 and 90 per cent.

Between 2016 and 2020, respondents who did not access online news in the last month were sorted out from the statistics. As of 2021, respondents who say they use news less than once a month are not excluded. According to the Reuters Institute, those excluded between 2016 and 2020 typically comprised 2–3 per cent of the sample. The new approach started from 2021 may affect the time series and the data comparisons. In this factsheet, only Table 1 shows the years before 2021. In tables where data are shown according to sex and different age groups, only data from the last three years are presented.

For further considerations about the survey's methodology, see the [Digital News Report](#).

Accessed paid-for online news per Nordic and European country

Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark take first, second, third, and fourth place, respectively, when ranking the percentage of who accessed paid-for online news in 23 European countries, according to the *Digital New Report 2023*.

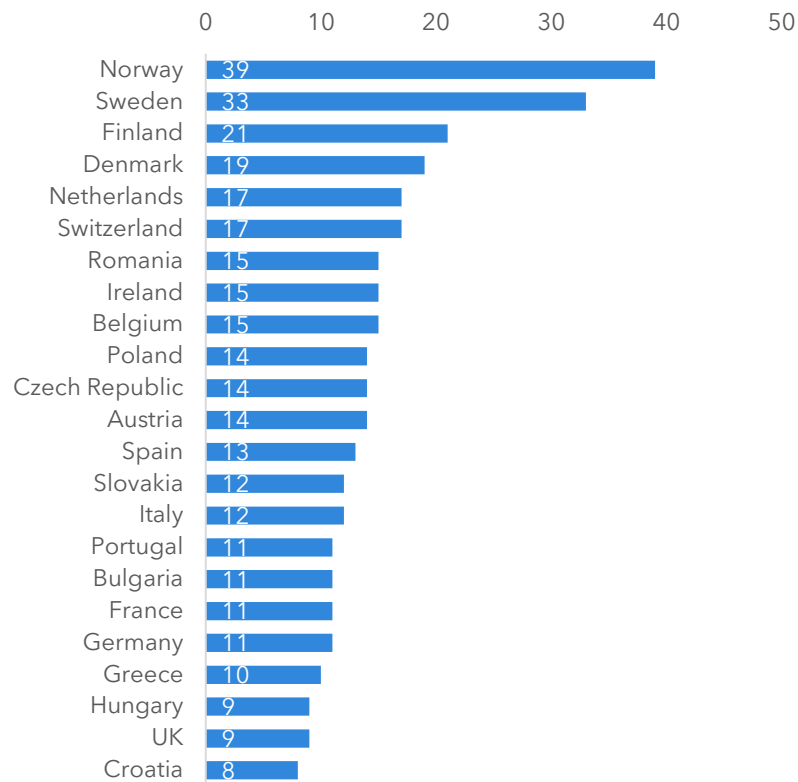
The Nordic countries have traditionally had high media consumption and Nordic citizens are diligent newspaper readers, television viewers, and radio listeners. The countries are also at the forefront of digital development. Through an almost total connection to the Internet and extensive digital competence, the Nordics have experienced strong growth towards digital media. The media companies are on the digital platforms and the population's media habits are increasingly digital. At the same time, the consumption of media on traditional platforms is declining.

Based on the survey results presented here, Figure 1 shows that Nordic media users stand out from some countries in both Central and Southern Europe. In 2023, Norway has the highest proportion of users accessing paid-for online news (39%), and second highest is Sweden (33%). In Finland and Denmark, the proportion of people who accessed paid-for online news is slightly higher than the average in the compared countries. 21 per cent in Finland and 19 per cent in Denmark have accessed paid-for online news in the last year. Among the European countries in this study, Croatia has the lowest level of access to paid-for online news (8%) along with the UK, Greece, and Hungary (9% each).

Comparing results across Europe, there are many differences between the Nordics and other European countries. These differences may relate to the strong Nordic

culture of subscriptions to printed news, which has relatively easily been transferred to digital subscriptions, maybe through free trial periods.

Figure 1 Accessed paid-for online news per Nordic and European country, 2023



Comments: Total sample in each country $\approx 2,000$. Data are based on the research question: "Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)".

Source: Digital News Report, 2023

The development from 2016 to 2023

With household budgets under pressure, the 2023 report showed signs that the growth in online news payment might be levelling off after the increase of access to paid-for news associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Among the 23 European countries in the study, an average of 15 per cent had accessed paid-for online news during the last twelve months – the same figure was 16 per cent the previous two years.

The share of those who paid-for digital news has grown slowly in several countries from 2016 to 2021. But the growth has been uneven in most countries. The shares reached during the pandemic have, however, remained at stable levels in most countries. Table 1 confirms that a process of increasing digital news payments is underway, but it is slow, with ups and downs.

Table 1 Proportion that accessed paid-for online news in the last year per Nordic and European country, 2016–2023

Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Norway	27	26	30	34	42	45	41	39
Sweden	20	20	26	27	27	30	33	33
Finland	15	14	18	16	19	20	19	21
Denmark	15	15	15	15	17	16	18	19
Netherlands	12	14	12	11	14	17	17	17
Switzerland	10	11	12	11	13	17	18	17
Romania	-	13	11	10	16	20	16	15
Ireland	9	9	11	12	12	16	16	15
Belgium	12	12	14	11	12	16	19	15
Poland	20	16	16	16	20	18	14	14
Czech Republic	7	8	8	7	10	13	12	14
Austria	7	7	8	9	11	12	14	14
Spain	10	9	11	10	12	12	12	13
Slovakia	-	12	11	8	12	13	14	12
Italy	16	12	12	9	10	13	12	12
Portugal	9	9	9	7	10	17	12	11
Bulgaria	-	-	8	7	10	15	12	11
France	11	10	11	9	10	11	11	11
Germany	8	7	8	8	10	9	14	11
Greece	7	6	6	7	11	12	11	10
Hungary	8	10	8	7	10	14	11	9
UK	7	6	7	9	7	8	9	9
Croatia	-	8	7	6	7	7	8	8
Median	10	10.5	11	10	12	15	14	14
Average*	12	11.5	12	11.5	14	16	16	15

*Average across 19 countries in 2016, 20 countries in 2017, and 23 countries in 2018–2023.

Comments: Data are based on the research question: “Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)”.

Between 2016 and 2020, respondents who did not access online news in the last month was sorted out from the statistics. As of 2021, respondents who say they use news less than once a month are not excluded.

Source: Digital News Reports, 2016–2023

Table 1 indicates an increase in people accessing paid-for online news content in the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic compared with the previous years. After a year of news coverage with coronavirus updates, some countries have seen a rise in payments and in others a small decrease can be noticed. These fluctuations may be a consequence of publishers experimenting with different paywall strategies. Other factors are, of course, changes in levels of digitalisation in specific countries and the economic situation and the ability to pay for news.

National results

A closer look at the specific Nordic countries' results from the past three years indicates differences between the countries and highlights the differences between sex and age.



Denmark

Among the Nordic countries, Denmark has the lowest number of people who paid for online news in 2023. According to the survey data, there has been a small increase from 16 per cent who accessed paid-for online news in 2019 to 19 per cent in 2023.

The willingness to pay is higher among men than among women. However, an increase is noticed among women rather than among men. When looking at the patterns in different age groups, a certain instability is noticeable in the response patterns over time. However, a general pattern is that, even if younger people typically are more accustomed to new media channels like mobile apps, in Denmark this does not coincide with a higher payment rate for these formats compared with older age groups. In Denmark, people over the age of 55 have paid for news to a slightly higher extent than younger people. In the oldest group, a slight increase is noticeable in terms of the proportion who accessed paid for news.

When comparing the Danish results with results from the other Nordic countries, it is important to bear in mind that the Danish newspaper landscape differs from the rest of the Nordics, in that there has traditionally been a large proportion of local newspapers published free of charge. This means that Danes are used to free news at the national as well as regional and local levels.

Although Danes show somewhat lower numbers than especially Sweden and Norway when it comes to consuming paid-for online news, the percentage who avoid news is lower in Denmark than in the other Nordic and European countries. In Denmark, 19 per cent said they sometimes avoid news. In the Nordics, Norway has the highest percentage of news avoiders (23% in 2023). In Greece and Bulgaria, the highest percentage of respondents stating that they avoid news is noticeably high (57% in both countries).

Table 2 Proportion that accessed paid-for online news in the last year in Denmark, 2021–2023

Group	2021	2022	2023
All, 18+	16	18	19
Men	21	22	22
Women	11	13	15
18-24	12	19	19
25-34	14	22	18
35-44	13	13	16
45-54	17	9	13
55+	18	20	22

Comments: Data are based on the research question: "Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)".

Source: Digital News Report, 2021–2023



Finland

Based on the statistics reported here, the proportion of people who accessed paid-for news within the last year was 21 per cent in 2023. The changes have been small in the last three years, but the proportion has increased from 2016 (as shown in Table 1), when 15 per cent of Internet users accessed paid-for online news.

A slightly higher proportion of men (23%) than women (19%) say they accessed paid-for online news. Looking at different age groups, the youngest (18–24 years old) have accessed paid-for online news to a greater extent than older people. The figures even indicate an increased interest in paying for online news in this group in recent years.

Since the willingness to pay for news also tends to covariate with trust in news, it is interesting to notice that while more and more people tend to avoid news and trust them less, in contrast with other countries in this survey, in Finland 69 per cent said they trust the news in 2023. This is the same level as in 2016. Also, according to the report, Finns tends to use printed sources for news to a slightly higher degree than in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Table 3 Proportion that accessed paid-for online news in the last year in Finland, 2021–2023

Group	2021	2022	2023
All, 18+	20	19	21
Men	22	19	23
Women	19	20	19
18-24	22	24	30
25-34	30	22	22
35-44	19	22	23
45-54	19	23	19
55+	18	16	19

Comments: Data are based on the research question: "Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)".

Source: Digital News Report, 2021–2023



Norway

Norwegians have a high willingness to pay for online news. As seen in Table 1, in 2021 the amount who accessed paid-for online news content peaked when 45 per cent answered that they had accessed online news in the past year. 2022 showed a slight decrease to 41 per cent, and in 2023, 39 per cent said they had accessed news that required payment. Still, the proportion of people who have access to paid-for online news is higher in Norway than in the other countries.

Access to paid-for news is higher among men than among women, but it is among men that the percentage has decreased the most. With respect to different age groups, the ages above 34 years old paid to a greater extent than those under 35 years old. The proportion who accessed paid-for news has fallen since 2021 in most age groups. Only among the youngest (18–24 years old) do one-third still say they have accessed paid-for online news in the last year.

There are no simple explanations for the high numbers in Norway compared with other countries. However, it is worth pointing out that the Norwegian news audience never has, as in Denmark and partly in Sweden, had access to free multi-day newspapers.

Other results from the survey in Norway indicates that social media as a source for news has declined since 2020 (when 37% used Facebook for news) to 2023 (when 29% stated that they used Facebook as a news source). On the other hand, listening to news podcasts shows a small upturn.

Table 4 Proportion that accessed paid-for online news in the last year in Norway, 2021–2023

Group	2021	2022	2023
All, 18+	45	41	39
Men	47	45	40
Women	42	37	38
18-24	32	40	33
25-34	44	40	35
35-44	43	40	40
45-54	49	44	42
55+	48	40	41

Comments: Data are based on the research question: "Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)".

Source: Digital News Report, 2021–2023



Sweden

In Sweden, one-third (33%) have accessed paid-for online news in the past year, which is the same level as a year earlier. In the 2016 survey, as shown in Table 1, the proportion of those who accessed paid-for news was 20 per cent.

Men have paid for news to a greater extent than women, and it is also among men that the percentage has increased compared with 2020.

The proportion who accessed paid-for news was relatively even between different age groups in 2021. In the 2022 survey, an increased proportion was noted among those 18–24 years old. In Sweden, like in Finland, young people (18–24 years old) are more willing to pay for online news than other age groups. The share of payers under 25 years of age is 40 per cent; this is a higher level than in the other Nordic countries. Only in 2022 did 40 per cent of the young people in both Norway and Sweden access paid-for online news in the past year.

Other interesting facts when it comes to accessing news are that the highest levels of podcast listening in Europe are taking place in Sweden and Ireland (44% in each country). However, in Sweden, 17 per cent said they listened to a news podcast (in Ireland it was 14%).

Table 5 Proportion that accessed paid-for online news in the last year in Sweden, 2021–2023

Group	2021	2022	2023
All, 18+	30	33	33
Men	32	37	37
Women	28	30	29
18-24	28	40	40
25-34	28	34	34
35-44	34	30	32
45-54	32	34	32
55+	29	33	32

Comments: Data are based on the research question: “Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service _in the last year_? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)”.

Source: Digital News Report, 2021–2023

Summary

- Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark take first, second, third, and fourth place, respectively, when ranking the percentage of who accessed paid-for online news in 23 European countries.
- Norway has the highest share of people accessing paid-for online news across the 23 European countries measured in this study. But the share has decreased somewhat in the last two years, from 45 per cent in 2021 to 39 per cent in 2023.
- In Sweden, like in Finland, young people (18–24 years old) are more likely to access paid-for online news than other age groups.
- Unlike Sweden and Finland, people in Denmark over the age of 55 have accessed paid-for news to a slightly higher extent than younger people. In the oldest group, a slight increase has been noticeable in terms of the proportion who accessed paid-for online news.
- The *Digital News Report 2023* shows signs that the growth in payment for online news may be levelling off after the increase of payment associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

More about the Digital News Report

The *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford is an annual survey on news habits in several countries (of the Nordics, data from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are included). The report contains country comparisons of news consumption and trust in the media. Data collection takes place at the end of January and the beginning of February via a web panel. The statistics are calculated on the population aged 16 years old and up. Data are presented based on gender, age, education, employment, income, and city or rural residence. The study is presented both as a report and in an interactive web tool. The fieldwork is performed by YouGov using a web form. In Denmark, Finland, and Norway, media researchers also publish national analyses with data from the *Digital News Report* (links below):

- [Digital News Report](#)
- [Centre for News Research, Roskilde University: Danskernes brug af nyhedsmedier 2023 \[Danes' use of news media 2023\] \(in Danish\)](#)
- [Research Centre Comet, Tampere University: Reuters Institute Digital News Report - Key Findings in Finland \(in Finnish\)](#)
- [Media Use Research Group, University of Bergen: Nordmenns digitale nyhetsbruk \[Norwegians' digital news use\] \(in Norwegian\)](#)

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