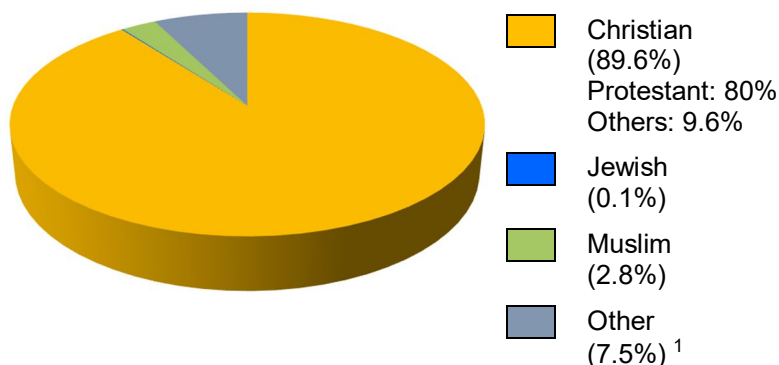


NORWAY



Area:
323,759 km²

Population²:
5.0 million

Political system:
Monarchy³

Major Language(s):
Norwegian
(Bokmål/Nynorsk), Sami⁴

Legal Framework of Religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees the right to the free exercise of religion, to choose, or to change one's religion. The penal code covers violations of the right to religious freedom, including disrespect for religious beliefs or religious groups, as well as discrimination on the basis of religion.⁵ The Ombudsman for Equality and Anti-Discrimination is charged with enforcing legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion.⁶

A constitutional amendment separates the Church of Norway from the state, but the Church of Norway continues to receive state financial support. All registered religious and spiritual communities are granted state subsidies, in proportion to the number of members reported to the government. In order to register, a faith or spiritual organisation must provide specific information about its creed and doctrine, activities, and governing rules. The Norwegian Humanist Association is the largest spiritual group registered with the government. If a group does not register, it will not receive financial support from the government, but its activities will not be restricted.⁷

In June 2014, after consultation with Jewish and Muslim groups, parliament adopted the Act on Ritual Circumcision for Boys, requiring that the procedure be conducted under the supervision of a licensed doctor. However, many doctors and hospitals are reluctant to perform the procedure, which is traditional in the Jewish and Muslim communities.⁸ Ritual slaughter practices not preceded by stunning (including halal and kosher practices) are illegal. Religious symbols, including headgear, may be worn with military uniforms, but not with police uniforms. The government permits individual schools to decide whether to implement bans on religious clothing that covers the face, such as burqas or niqabs.⁹

Religious instruction on Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information, Evangelical Lutheran theology, Christian studies, and world religions is compulsory in public schools. The curriculum includes world religions and philosophies while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs, as well as for atheism. Parents may request that their children be exempted from participating in specific religious acts, such as attending church services.¹⁰

According to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) 2014 hate crime report (the most recent available), officials have not disaggregated hate crimes by motivation in their hate crime figures for

2014. The report does not indicate any law enforcement submissions for incidents with a religious motivation.¹¹

Incidents

With respect to reports of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim activity, it should be noted that, because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it might be difficult to determine whether an incident is motivated by racism or by religious intolerance.

Related to Christianity

In November 2015, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) told private Christian facilities scheduled to receive asylum seekers to remove crosses, images of Jesus and other religious symbols.¹² After a backlash against the “religious neutrality requirement,” however, UDI reversed its decision.¹³

Also in November 2015, the Norwegian child protective services (Barnevernet) removed five children from a Romanian Pentecostal family, including an infant, after privately interviewing the family’s two oldest daughters at school. The parents, a Romanian-Norwegian couple, admitted to occasional use of corporal punishment (which is banned in Norway), but, despite extensive investigation, Barnevernet was unable to find any evidence of abuse. Instead, lawyers for the family pointed to Barnevernet’s concerns about religious indoctrination of the children, suggesting that religious discrimination had also played a role. After an international outcry, Barnevernet dropped the charges and the children were returned to their parents in June 2016.¹⁴

Related to Judaism

Synagogues in Norway have received protection from police, based on incidents from previous years. In March 2015 and May 2016, police bomb squads investigated suspicious items left in front of Oslo’s synagogue. In both instances, the items were harmless.¹⁵

In November 2015, a 35-year-old man was sentenced to 45 days probation and a fine of 5,000 kroner (US\$749.36), after he incited racial hatred on his blog, mostly against Jews, but also against Africans. On his blog he referred to Jews as pests and parasites, and claimed that Jews were importing Africans as part of a war against the white race.¹⁶

In April 2014, vandals painted numerous swastikas and racist insults at a school and sport facility in Skien. In September 2014, the day after the premiere of a Jewish puppet theatre performance, unknown perpetrators carved a swastika into the glass doors of the Trondelag Theatre.¹⁷

Related to Islam

In January 2015, activists affiliated with the Norwegian Defence League (NDL) and Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN) organised marches in support of the German anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant PEGIDA (“Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident”) movement. The first pro-PEGIDA demonstration in Oslo in early January was estimated to have been attended by 190 people marching in the snow and carrying Norwegian flags.¹⁸ Subsequent marches were less successful, however, as numbers dwindled to around 20 supporters with counter-demonstrators significantly outnumbering the PEGIDA marchers.¹⁹

According to the Ankara-based Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research's (SETA) 2015 European Islamophobia Report, Norwegian Muslims reported increased levels of intolerance and harassment in the wake of the January *Charlie Hebdo* attack, as well as following the November Paris attacks. An example reported by SETA included a man being stabbed in November after being asked whether he was Muslim and “whether he recalled Paris.”²⁰

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

While it appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review, the evidence suggests that there is an increased risk of social intolerance against both majority and minority religions. Some of this may be a backlash against global terrorism or against geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as a reflection of anti-immigration sentiments in Norway.

¹http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_170_2.asp and http://www.indexmundi.com/norway/demographics_profile.html

²<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17743896>

³<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/no.html>

⁴Bokmål Norwegian, Nynorsk Norwegian (official), Sami and Finnish-speaking minorities <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/no.html>

⁵<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238418>

⁶<http://www.ldo.no/en/>

⁷<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238418>

⁸<http://www.newsenglish.no/2015/01/22/doctors-defy-new-circumcision-law/>

⁹<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238418>

¹⁰<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238418>

¹¹<http://hatecrime.osce.org/norway>

¹²<http://www.varldenidag.se/nyheter/i-norge-ska-korsen-bort-fran-kristna-asyloboenden/cbbokD!WGaRBBF6@6ZBJqKjkPqLg/>

¹³<http://www.thelocal.no/20151130/norway-remove-cross-refugees>

¹⁴<http://thefederalist.com/2016/06/06/under-international-pressure-norway-reunites-seized-children-with-family/>

¹⁵<http://www.thelocal.no/20160513/oslo-police-possible-bomb-synagogue>

¹⁶<http://www.rbnett.no/ntb/innenriks/2015/11/18/Mann-d%C3%B8mt-til-45-dagers-betinget-fengsel-for-j%C3%B8dehets-11824641.ece>

¹⁷<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238418>

¹⁸http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_NORWAY.pdf

¹⁹<http://www.thelocal.no/20150120/anti-islam-group-loses-support-in-norway> and

<http://www.thelocal.no/20150210/pegida-norway-a-dead-project>

²⁰http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_NORWAY.pdf