



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Norway

#### Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2006](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
March 6, 2007

Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy; King Harald V is head of state. With a population of approximately 4.6 million, the country is governed by a prime minister, a cabinet, and the 169-seat Storting (parliament) that is elected every four years and cannot be dissolved. Free and fair elections to the multiparty parliament were held in September 2005. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces.

The government generally respected the rights of its citizens, and the law and the independent judiciary provided effective means of addressing isolated instances of abuse. During the year there were incidents of anti-Semitism and the government made efforts to combat violence against women and trafficking of women.

#### RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

##### Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

###### a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

###### b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

###### c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

##### Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions generally met international standards, and the government permitted visits by independent human rights observers; however, no such visits took place during the year.

Juveniles aged 15 to 18 were held separately from the general prison population. Social welfare authorities generally cared for those under the age of 15.

###### d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention, and the government generally observed these prohibitions.

##### Role of the Police and Security Apparatus

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security; however, the police may call on the armed forces for assistance in times of crisis, such as internal disorder or natural catastrophe. In such circumstances, the armed forces are under police authority. The Ministry of Justice and Police oversees the police forces.

The police force was generally effective, and corruption was not generally a problem. Adequate measures were in place to investigate police abuses. An independent police complaint commission investigates reports of corruption within the police force.

##### Arrest and Detention

The law requires warrants for arrests, and police generally arrested a person based on a warrant authorized by a prosecutor. Police must file

charges against detained persons within four hours, and detainees generally were promptly informed of the charges against them. An arrested suspect must be arraigned within 24 hours, at which time the arraigning judge determines whether the accused should be held in custody or released pending trial. This legal provision was respected in practice. Arrested persons were allowed prompt access to a lawyer of their choosing or, if they could not afford one, to an attorney appointed by the government. Arrested persons were generally allowed access to family members.

There is no bail system or similar mechanism. Defendants accused of minor crimes were routinely released pending trial. Defendants accused of serious or violent crimes remain in custody until trial.

New prison facilities were under construction; however, current space was scarce, and the authorities maintained a waiting list for those convicted of minor offenses to serve their sentences.

#### e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected this provision in practice.

The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the appeals selection committee of the Supreme Court, six appellate courts, and a number of district courts, which hear both civil and criminal cases. District court rulings may be appealed by either party, but the appeals selection committee refers only cases of great importance to the Supreme Court. There are also specialized courts, including the labor court and the land ownership severance courts.

#### Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Trials are public, but juries are only used in criminal cases heard by the court of appeals. Charges are stated clearly and formally, and defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence. Defendants have the right to be present, to have counsel (at public expense if needed), to confront and question witnesses, to present evidence and witnesses, and to appeal. Defendants and their attorneys have access to government-held evidence relevant to their cases. The law extends the above rights to all citizens. There are no military courts. Military crimes are tried in a civilian court, with the addition of a military judge to assist the civilian judges in trying the case.

#### Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

#### Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

There is an independent and impartial judiciary in civil matters.

#### f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, and the government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

### Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

#### a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and of the press, and the government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press.

#### Internet Freedom

There were no government restrictions on access to the Internet or reports that the government monitored e-mail or Internet chatrooms. Individuals and groups could engage in the peaceful expression of views via the Internet, including by electronic mail. Seventypercent of citizens had Internet access, and of these, 80 percent had broadband connections. Slightly more than 70 percent of citizens accessed the Internet at home and over 45 percent accessed the Internet at their workplace.

#### Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

#### b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights in practice.

#### c. Freedom of Religion

The constitution and law provide for freedom of religion, and the government generally respected this right in practice.

The state church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which was supported financially by the government. The constitution requires that the king and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church. Other denominations operated freely.

A religious community is required to register with the government only if it desires financial support, which is provided by the government to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

The law provides that "religious knowledge and education in ethics" be taught as a subject in public schools. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. The course is mandatory, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. The government lost a case on this issue before the UN Human Rights Committee in 2004, which led to a number of changes in 2005. Despite curriculum changes intended to meet the concerns of non-Christians, parents and the Humanist Association (an atheist organization) continued to contest the legality of the law mandating the course. The same petitioners who filed the case with the UN had earlier filed a similar case with the European Court of Human Rights in 2002. That case was still before the court at year's end, but since it was based on the circumstances as they were in 2002, analysts were uncertain whether the court would comment on the legality of the current system.

The law permits private or religious schools and day care centers to ask persons seeking employment whether they will respect and teach the denomination's beliefs and principles. Employers may reject applicants on the basis of their responses; no statistics were available on how frequently this occurred.

#### Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The Jewish population is relatively small, with about 1,000 members. There was an increase in the number of reports of anti-Semitic incidents during the year. There were several incidents of vandalism of Jewish cultural property (synagogues and cemeteries). On July 15, in Oslo three men physically attacked and verbally abused a Jewish citizen. Around the same time, the Jewish community reported threatening phone calls and e-mails. On July 19, a man defecated on the stairs of a synagogue, and then threw stones at it, causing minor damage, including two broken windows. At year's end there were no arrests in either the assault case or the act of vandalism (despite video evidence).

On September 17, the synagogue in Oslo was hit by automatic weapon fire, causing minor damage and igniting a nationwide debate on the rising level of anti-Semitism. The police charged four men in the synagogue attack; they were in custody, and their case was pending at year's end.

Articles, reports, and political cartoons appeared in the media that vilified and demeaned the Jewish people and community and minimized the Holocaust, particularly during the July-August conflict involving Israel and the terrorist organization Hizballah in Lebanon. One caricature appearing in a major Oslo newspaper showed Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as a Nazi concentration camp commander. Jostein Gaarder, a prominent Norwegian author, published an article entitled "God's Chosen People" that many within and outside the country considered anti-Semitic for its tone and biblical interpretations.

The government supported organizations that worked on combating discrimination. Among them were the Organization against Public Discrimination and Norwegian People's Aid. The government also supported the foundation called "The White Buses," which took students from Norway to Auschwitz to educate them about the Holocaust. Part of the mission of the Ministry for Children and Equality was to combat discrimination.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2006 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

#### d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the government generally respected them in practice. The law prohibits forced exile, and the government did not employ it.

#### Protection of Refugees

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice the government provided protection against *refoulement*, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution. The government granted refugee status or asylum, and accepted refugees for resettlement.

The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 convention and the 1967 protocol, and provided it to 3,908 people.

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting

refugees and asylum seekers. The government contracted with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to provide information to asylum seekers in their native languages and to educate them about the asylum application process. Several NGOs offered additional legal counsel to persons whose initial applications were denied. To better communicate with a diverse group of asylum seekers, reception centers employed speakers of a wide range of languages.

In accordance with the Dublin Convention, the government required asylum seekers to make their claims in safe countries through which they traveled or had residence. The government used a "fast track" system to process asylum claims from nationals or permit holders from "safe countries" within 48 hours of application.

### Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The constitution provides citizens the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

#### Elections and Political Participation

Free and fair parliamentary elections held in September 2005 resulted in the formation of a coalition government of the labor, socialist left, and center parties. Labor Party leader Jens Stoltenberg was named prime minister following multiparty negotiations.

There were 61 women in the 169-seat parliament and six women among the 19 Supreme Court justices. Women headed nine of the 19 government ministries. There was one member of a minority in parliament. There were no minority ministers or Supreme Court justices.

#### Government Corruption and Transparency

There were no reports of government corruption at the federal level during the year. The law provides for public access to government information, and the government provided this access in practice.

### Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were generally cooperative and responsive to their views.

### Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, or social status, and the government generally enforced this prohibition in practice, although violence against women and trafficking in persons were problems.

#### Women

Violence against women, including spousal abuse, was a problem.

The law provides for higher penalties for violence in cases of severe domestic abuse, and the government enforced the law in practice. In 2005 police registered 4,150 cases of domestic violence. The penalty for domestic violence is generally one to six years in prison, with an increased prison term in more severe cases.

The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, and the government enforced the law. The penalty for rape is generally one to 10 years in prison depending on the severity of the assault, the age of the victim, and the circumstances under which the crime occurred. Although the number of rapes reported to the police has risen in recent years, with 689 reported rapes in 2004, the country has experienced a decrease in the number of rape convictions, with only 25 convictions in 2004. In that year the chief prosecutor's office convened a task force to examine this trend; the task force had not yet reported at year's end.

The government and the police have instituted special programs to prevent rape and domestic violence and to counsel victims. There is a domestic violence coordinator in each of the country's 27 police districts to provide victims with responsive and knowledgeable assistance. Coordinators aided domestic violence victims in identifying the various services and institutions available to assist them. Public and private organizations ran 50 government-funded shelters and managed five 24-hour crisis telephone lines. The shelters provided support and counseling for victims, and helped them gain access to social services, doctors, lawyers, and housing authorities. Each of the country's 19 counties had several shelters. In 2005 the country's shelters registered 52,004 overnight stays by 2,287 women.

Prostitution is legal, but organized prostitution and pimping are illegal. NGOs and the government estimated that 2,500 to 3,000 persons sold sexual services. A few of these were men, and NGOs reported that a few persons selling sexual services appeared to be under the age of 18, although they generally claimed to be older. An estimated 70 percent of the country's prostitutes were foreign women.

Trafficking in women for sexual exploitation was a problem (see section 5, Trafficking).

The law provides that "employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other unseemly behavior," and the government effectively

enforced this provision in practice. Employers who violate this law are subject to fines or prison sentences of up to two years, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

Women have the same legal status as men and enjoy identical rights under family and property laws and in the judicial system. The office of the gender equality ombudsman was generally effective in processing and investigating complaints of sexual discrimination. In 2005 the office received 430 complaints.

The law protects the rights of women and provides that women and men engaged in the same activity shall have equal wages for work of equal value. According to the office of the gender equality ombudsman, which monitors enforcement of the law, women generally received 10 to 15 percent less in pay and benefits than men for equal work.

In 2003 the parliament passed a resolution mandating that 40 percent of publicly listed companies' directorships be held by women by mid-2005. However, as of June, only 21 percent of all directorships were held by women. New legislation on gender quotas was implemented that gave companies established before January 1 two additional years to meet the 40 percent requirement. Corporations established after January 1 must meet the requirement before they can be registered as a company.

#### Children

The government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of education and medical care.

The government provides free education for children through the postsecondary level. Education is compulsory for 10 years, or through the 10th grade; most children stayed in school at least until the age of 18. The school attendance rate was virtually 100 percent; parents lose a direct stipend of approximately \$300 (970 kroner) per month per child if their children fail to attend school.

The government provides extensive, free medical care for children.

In 2005 child care services investigated 21,000 cases and intervened in 22 percent of them--those that authorities considered to constitute child abuse or failure to care for a child. An independent children's ombudsman office within the Ministry of Children and Families is responsible for the protection of children under the law. The directorate for children, youth, and family affairs provides assistance and support services. With five regional offices and 26 professional teams, the directorate is the government's principal agency for the welfare and protection of children and families. The directorate's activities include providing family counseling, managing foster homes and child welfare institutions, and administering funds to NGOs focusing on children.

#### Trafficking in Persons

Although the law prohibits trafficking in persons, there were reports that persons were trafficked to and through the country. The maximum sentence for trafficking in persons is five years, with a maximum sentence of 10 years for aggravated cases; those are determined by several factors, including the victim's age, the use of violence or coercion, and any proceeds derived from exploitation. Traffickers can also be charged with violating pimping, immigration, and slavery prohibitions. Victims may sue their traffickers for compensation without impediment.

The Ministry of Justice and Police coordinates and implements antitrafficking measures. At year's end seven police districts were investigating 35 trafficking cases.

The government cooperated with foreign governments, Interpol, and Europol in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases. The country's collaboration with other Scandinavian countries was particularly strong.

Police identified a number of possible victims trafficked by organized criminals for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Most of these suspected victims were women from Nigeria, Russia, Albania, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic countries. Suspected victims were often reluctant to press charges, making it difficult for police to identify and assist them and to prosecute traffickers.

Government officials believed that organized crime groups were responsible for most trafficking. Traffickers used threats, violence, rape, and confinement to enforce victims' compliance. Government authorities suspected they may also confiscate travel documents and subject victims to debt bondage.

Although trafficking victims may be prosecuted for violating immigration laws, no such prosecutions occurred during the year. Deportation decisions concerning victims of trafficking may be suspended for a 90-day reflection period (the period was extended from 45 days during the year) to provide time for practical assistance and counseling to the individuals concerned.

Government officials sought to improve public awareness of trafficking by raising the issue in speeches and other forums. NGOs conducted outreach programs to provide trafficking victims with information on their legal rights and available health and other services. Foreign victims of trafficking have the same legal rights as other foreigners to apply for residency, asylum, welfare, social aid, and emergency health care.

The government operated an assistance program for trafficking victims that featured support centers, shelters, and a 24-hour hot line. The government also ran a national network of crisis centers where trafficking victims could seek assistance finding shelter, work, and education.

Police working on trafficking issues are required to attend a two-day training seminar.

## Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, access to health care, or in the provision of other state services. The law mandates access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, and the government generally enforced this provision in practice.

The section for disabled persons in the Ministry of Labor and Social Inclusion was responsible for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities; that office coordinated relevant national policy and managed the social benefits system for disabled persons. The section's budget sharply increased in 2005 and 2006, and it was therefore able to increase grants for persons with disabilities by \$14 million (90.6 million kroner) and to provide additional support to individual agencies for more enterprises, better transportation, better building access, and increased access to parks.

## Indigenous People

The rights of the indigenous Sami were protected by the government, which provided Sami language instruction at schools in their areas, radio and television programs broadcast or subtitled in Sami, and subsidies for Sami-oriented newspapers and books. A deputy minister in the Ministry of Labor and Social Inclusion deals specifically with Sami issues.

In addition to participating freely in the national political process, the Sami elect their own constituent assembly, the Sameting. The law establishing the Sameting stipulates that this 39-seat consultative group is to meet regularly to deal with "all matters, which in [its] opinion are of special importance to the Sami people." In practice the Sameting has been most interested in protecting the group's language and culture and in influencing decisions on resources and lands where Sami are a majority. The law requires that a report on the activity of the Sameting be submitted annually to parliament, and a report on the main principles of Sami policy every four years. The 2005 report stated that the situation had improved in the last year, with the Sameting having an increased role in government decisions, and that they successfully completed their fifth election cycle since the Sameting was created in 1989.

## Section 6 Worker Rights

### a. The Right of Association

The law allows workers to form and join unions of their choice without previous authorization or excessive requirements, and they exercised these rights in practice. Approximately 56 percent of the workforce was unionized.

### b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

All workers, including government employees and military personnel, have the right to organize and bargain collectively, and they exercised this right in practice.

The law provides for the right to strike, and workers exercised this right in practice; however, the government may, with the approval of parliament, compel compulsory arbitration under certain circumstances. During the year the government invoked compulsory arbitration once in response to a strike planned by bank and finance sector employees. When the employer organizations threatened to impose a lock-out, the government regarded it as a threat to the country's security, and intervened.

There are no export processing zones.

### c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred in connection with trafficking in persons (see section 5).

### d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

The government implemented laws and policies to protect children from exploitation in the workplace. Children 13 to 18 years of age may be employed part-time in light work that will not adversely affect their health, development, or schooling. Minimum age rules were observed in practice and enforced by the directorate of labor inspections. There were no reports of illegal child labor during the year.

### e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislated or specified minimum wage, but wages normally fall within a national scale negotiated by labor, employers, and the local government. Negotiations between these parties led to wage increases of approximately 3.3 percent in the first half of the year. The average daily wage provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Approximately 200,000 people lived below the country's poverty line.

The law limits the normal workweek to 37.5 hours and provides for 25 working days of paid leave per year (31 days for those over age 60). The law mandates a 28-hour rest period on weekends and holidays. The law provides for premium pay for overtime and prohibits excessive compulsory overtime.

The law provides for safe and physically acceptable working conditions for all employed persons. Specific standards are set by the Directorate of Labor Inspections (DLI) in consultation with nongovernmental experts. Under the law, environment committees composed of management, workers, and health personnel must be established in all enterprises with 50 or more workers, and safety delegates must be elected in all organizations. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health, but no statistics were available on whether they exercised this right in practice. The DLI effectively monitored compliance with labor legislation and standards.

Although foreign workers were provided the same legal protections, the media reported complaints from children of immigrants that they were excluded from mainstream society and that they had fewer and inferior job opportunities than did ethnic majority citizens.