

NORWAY 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The law on religious freedom and affiliation specifies the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion.

There were some reports of discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government and engaged with a diverse set of religious groups. The special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism visited the country and had meetings with government officials and civil society to discuss religious freedom and anti-Semitism. The embassy also held interfaith events promoting societal respect for religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 4.7 million (July 2013 estimate). Norway's national statistical agency estimated the national population at 5.08 million as of July. An estimated 79 percent of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC).

Various Christian denominations (313,000 registered members) make up 57 percent of all registered members of religious groups outside of the ELC. Of these, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest and, because of recent immigration, has increased to an estimated 121,000 registered members (from 57,000 in 2010), while the Pentecostal Church has approximately 39,400 registered members. Membership in Muslim congregations is 120,900 and comprises 22 percent of all members of religious groups outside of the ELC in the country. Muslims are located throughout the country, but the population is concentrated in the Oslo region. Membership in Jewish congregations is 788. There are two official Jewish congregations, one in Oslo and one in Trondheim.

Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus together constitute less than 5 percent of the population.

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Immigrants make up the majority of religious groups outside of the ELC. Large immigrant populations from Poland and the Philippines have increased the Catholic population. Immigrants from Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Somalia, have contributed to the growth of Islam. Both of these groups have higher populations in cities more than in rural areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides that “all inhabitants are free to have and express religion.” The law on religious freedom and affiliation further specifies the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Any person over the age of 15 years has the right to join or leave a religious community. While parents have the right to decide their child’s religion before age 15, the views of children over seven years must be taken into consideration and, when over 12 years, the child’s opinion must be given emphasis.

The constitution provides the right to practice religion, but some laws conflict with practical lifestyle aspects of certain religious groups. According to the law, the slaughter of an animal must be preceded by stunning or administering anesthetics, which conflicts with kosher slaughter requirements and some interpretations of halal meat preparation requirements. The law effectively bans the production of kosher meat in the country, thus requiring the Jewish community to import it.

The penal code covers violations of the right to religious freedom. It specifies penalties for expressions of disrespect for religious standpoints or followers, and for public discrimination on the basis of religion. Individuals citing conscientious or other objection to military service may apply to serve in a civilian capacity.

The Ministry of Defense allows employees to wear religious symbols, including headgear, with military uniforms. A ban remains on wearing religious symbols, including headgear, with police uniforms.

The ombudsman for equality and anti-discrimination is charged with enforcing legislation prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion and other personal characteristics. The ombudsman publishes non-binding findings in response to complaints that a person or organization has violated a law or regulation within the

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ombudsman's mandate. The ombudsman also provides advice and guidance on anti-discrimination law.

A constitutional amendment separates church (the ELC) and state. The government does not appoint bishops, priests, and church clerks, although church staff are still considered public employees. The ELC receives some benefits not available to other religious groups. The state supports the ELC financially and the law regulates clerical salaries and pensions.

Other religious groups may register with the government to receive state financial support. The government provides financial support to all registered denominations in proportion to their formally registered membership.

Foreign religious workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

The Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) course is offered in grades one through 10 (generally ages six to 16). CKREE reviews world religions and philosophies while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs. Citing the country's Christian history, the CKREE course devotes extensive time to studying Christianity, but includes discussion of other religious groups. The course is mandatory, and there are no exceptions for children from other religious or non-religious groups. Students, however, may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts during the course, such as attending Christmas church services.

The law does not permit religious organizations to inquire about an applicant's sexual orientation or discriminate on the basis of gender, unless differential treatment is shown to have a legitimate purpose. Religious organizations retain the right to use discretion in their hiring processes, however, as "legitimate purpose" is broadly defined.

Schools nationwide observe Holocaust Memorial Day January 27 as part of a National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination. High school curricula include material on the deportation and extermination of Jewish citizens from 1942 to 1945. The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Government Practices

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The government permitted individual schools to determine independently whether to implement policies banning religious garb such as burqas or niqabs.

The government continued to support The White Buses, an extracurricular program that took some secondary school students to the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland and to other Nazi concentration camps to educate them about the Holocaust.

An opinion poll in August found that 40 percent of Norwegians approved of former Minister of Culture Hadia Tajik, making her the most popular Minister of Culture in the past decade. Tajik was the first Muslim ever appointed to the cabinet.

The national police unit for combating organized and other serious crimes maintained a web page for the public to contact police regarding online hate speech. The Norwegian Center against Racism issued a report criticizing the police for being too lenient in handling hate crimes against Muslims. In the report, the center noted that Oslo police dismissed 30 out of 48 reports of hate crimes against Muslims in 2012.

The government continued monetary grants to increase security for the Jewish community and to combat anti-Semitism in schools. The grants included funding for security at the Jewish Religious Community's (DMT) facility and synagogue in Oslo. The Ministry of Justice and Public Security maintained a dialogue with the DMT, the Police Security Services, and the Police Directorate aimed at ensuring that the DMT's facilities were properly safeguarded. The Ministry of Education granted six million kroner (\$1 million) in 2012 for programs that included training about anti-Semitism in schools over the course of three years. The Ministry of Government Administration and Church Affairs continued to provide the Jewish community with support to lessen the burden of importing kosher meat due to the ban on kosher slaughter. This included waiving import duties and providing guidance on the bureaucratic import process.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were media and nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize

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many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. There were four reports of religious discrimination made to the equality and anti-discrimination ombudsman as of December, and the police had filed 21 reports of crime with a religious motive by the end of August.

The newspaper *Dagbladet* published an anti-circumcision political cartoon that depicted robed, bearded men chopping off the toes of a baby, telling police officers it was required by their religion. Many stated that the images were offensive to Muslims and Jews. The cartoonist said that he was not targeting a specific belief group but was criticizing all religions.

The Islamic Council of Norway reported three separate threats made against mosques in one week in September. The World Islamic Mission mosque reported receiving an email from a group threatening to set mosques afire; someone hung an anti-Muslim poster outside a mosque in Frederikstad; and a pig's head was left at the entrance to the Central Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat mosque in Oslo.

Although they are permitted by law, a poll revealed that 75 percent of Norwegians were opposed to religious symbols, such as headgear, being permitted in workplaces.

Commentators, terror experts, and government officials expressed concern that extremist views have increased among second-generation Muslims, particularly in the Oslo region, after a number of youth allegedly traveled to fight in the Syrian civil war throughout the year. Some mosques cooperated with the police and municipality youth workers in an effort to counter such views. The head of the ELC traveled with Muslim and Jewish leaders to Israel in order to promote interfaith tolerance and understanding.

Societal organizations combating anti-Semitism included the Norwegian Center against Racism and the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, both of which received financial support from the government.

The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues domestically and internationally. Among its priorities was facilitating teaching about tolerance and religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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The Ambassador and embassy officers engaged with the government, NGOs, and community leaders on religious freedom. The embassy regularly sponsored speakers and hosted events to highlight religious freedom, including an Eid celebration, an interreligious introduction to the Passover holiday, and an interreligious Thanksgiving meal. The special envoy for combating and monitoring anti-Semitism met with government officials and members of civil society to encourage their increased engagement on religious freedom and anti-Semitism.