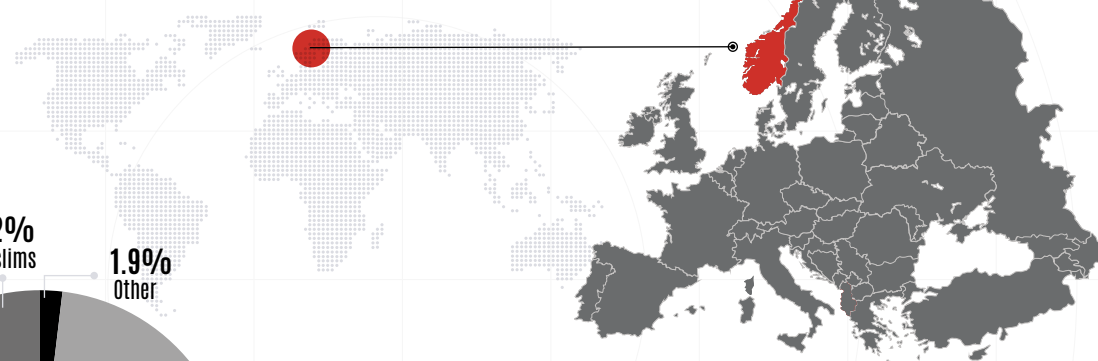
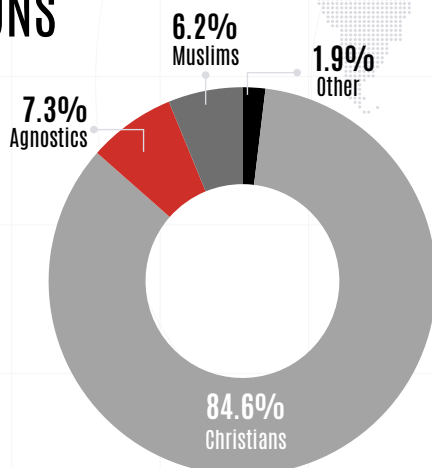




# NORWAY

## RELIGIONS



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Article 16 of the Constitution of Norway guarantees the right to free exercise of religion.<sup>1</sup> While there is a separation between the Church of Norway (Evangelical-Lutheran) and the state, the Church of Norway still receives support from the government. The Constitution specifies that “all religious and belief communities should be supported on equal terms”.<sup>2</sup>

In April 2020, the parliament passed the Religious Communities Act (effective January 2021).<sup>3</sup> This law, which consolidated three acts regulating religious and life stance communities,<sup>4</sup> continues to require that a faith or spiritual organisation register with the government to receive financial support (Chapter 2, 5). To register, the community must be “permanently organised” and have at least 50 registered members who are residents of Norway and not members of another religious or life stance community (Chapter 2, 4). Grants to registered communities may be denied on several grounds, including engaging in violence or coercion, violations of rights and freedoms (including children’s rights), and accepting contributions from coun-

tries that do not respect the right to freedom of religion or belief (Chapter 2, 6).

The law prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of religion or belief.<sup>5</sup> Public statements or symbols, including threats, insults, promotion of hatred or contempt for another person based on religion or life stance are illegal.<sup>6</sup> Complaints concerning discrimination on the grounds of religion are made to the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman.<sup>7</sup>

Ritual slaughter practices not preceded by stunning are illegal, but halal and kosher food may be imported.<sup>8</sup>

Teachers, students, and employees are prohibited from wearing face-covering clothing, including burqas and niqabs, in all private and public educational settings.<sup>9</sup> Passport photograph regulations were changed in October 2020 to permit religious headwear to cover ears after objections primarily from Sikhs and Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

The Education Act mandates instruction on “Christianity, Religion, Philosophies of Life and Ethics” (KRLE) in primary and lower secondary schools (Section 2, 3).<sup>11</sup> KRLE “must not involve preaching” and must promote understanding and respect while presenting “different world religions and philosophies of life in an objective, critical and

pluralistic manner” (Section 2, 4). Parents may request exemptions for their children from parts of the curriculum to which they have a religious or philosophical objection (Section 2, 3 a).

In September 2020, the government announced its Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination on the Grounds of Ethnicity and Religion 2020-2023.<sup>12</sup> It includes the renewal of the existing anti-Semitism action plan,<sup>13</sup> and the creation and implementation of an action plan against discrimination and hatred of Muslims.<sup>14</sup>

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

For the year 2019, the government reported 73 hate crimes motivated by a bias against members of religions or other beliefs to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, but did not disaggregate the data by religion.<sup>15</sup> For 2018, 112 such hate crimes were reported, again without disaggregation.<sup>16</sup>

In its annual hate crime report, the Oslo police noted that most religiously motivated incidents (including hate speech) were directed against Muslims or suspected Muslims. The agency reports anti-Semitism under ethnicity rather than religion in consultation with Jewish community leaders.<sup>17</sup>

In August 2019, a gunman broke down a locked door at the Al-Noor Islamic Centre mosque in Bærum and opened fire.<sup>18</sup> Although no one was killed, he testified at trial that his aim was “to kill as many Muslims as possible” and that he had been inspired by the mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.<sup>19</sup> In June 2020, he was sentenced to 21 years in prison for the earlier murder of his stepsister and the terrorist attack against the mosque.<sup>20</sup>

In June 2019, the Supreme Court of Norway declined to hear the Oslo Catholic Diocese’s appeal against a 2019 judgement in which it was ordered to repay state and municipal support due to inflated membership numbers.<sup>21</sup>

In November 2019, a Christian street preacher was attacked by a group of four Muslim men who reportedly threatened him with death if he did not convert to Islam.<sup>22</sup>

A man was arrested in March 2020 for arson and attempted arson involving two churches. He admitted setting the fires because he was “angry ... because he heard that a Norwegian man set fire to the Koran without police having done anything about it.”<sup>23</sup>

A case related to the 2015 removal of children by Norway’s child welfare agency, the Barnevernet, due to “indoctrination” by their Christian parents, is pending in the European Court of Human Rights and is scheduled to be heard in January 2021.<sup>24</sup>

In-person religious services were suspended from March to May 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

During the period under review, no significant changes have been made to government restrictions on religious freedom. Nevertheless, intolerance against minority religions within Norwegian society has been a focus of government policy.

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