

NORWAY 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects the right to choose, practice, or change one's religion. It declares the Church of Norway is the country's established church, and the government continued to provide it with exclusive benefits, including funds for salaries and benefits of clergy and staff. A hate crime law punishes some expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs. After concerns expressed by religious and life stance groups, the government revised a draft law governing these groups, which, among other changes, would establish a minimum threshold of 50 members for groups to be eligible for government funding. Parliament did not vote on the law by year's end. The government continued to implement an action plan to combat anti-Semitism, particularly hate speech, and said it would renew it for five more years; it announced it would develop a similar plan to combat anti-Muslim sentiment. A state television station broadcast an anti-Semitic cartoon. The government continued to provide financial support for interreligious dialogue.

During the year police received 144 reports of religiously based hate crimes. Police arrested a man for an attempted mass shooting at an Islamic center in an Oslo suburb. Several groups reported anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic sentiment remained prevalent among extremist groups and internet hate speech against Jews and Muslims increased during the year. A court sentenced a man to 60 days in prison for sending 1,300 anti-Semitic emails in 2016.

U.S. embassy staff met with officials from the Ministry of Children and Families (MCF) to discuss the draft law on religion, public financing for faith and life stance organizations, and financial preferences for the Church of Norway. Embassy staff discussed with officials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the government's efforts to prosecute religiously based hate crimes. Embassy staff continued to meet with individuals from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), numerous faith groups, including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, and humanists to discuss issues including religious freedom and tolerance and integration of minority groups. The embassy routinely used social media to share messages of religious tolerance and highlight religious groups celebrating religious holidays or events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.4 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to Statistics Norway, the official government statistics office, 70 percent of the population (June 2019 figure) belongs to the Church of Norway, an evangelical Lutheran church, a decline of 3 percentage points over the previous three years.

Statistics Norway, which assesses membership in a religious group using specific criteria based on registration, age (15 years and older), and attendance, reports registered membership in other religious and life stance communities is approximately 12.6 percent of the population (December 2019 estimate); 6.7 percent belongs to other Christian denominations, of which the Roman Catholic Church is the largest, at 3 percent, and 3.2 percent is Muslim. There are approximately 21,000 Buddhists, 11,400 Hindus, 4,000 Sikhs, and 800 Jews registered in the country. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) states it has approximately 4,600 members.

According to Statistics Norway, approximately 1.8 percent of the population participates in life stance organizations, nonreligious or philosophical communities with organizational ethics based on humanist values. The Norwegian Humanist Association reports approximately 94,000 registered members, making it the largest life stance organization in the country.

Immigrants, whom the statistics bureau defines as those born outside of the country and their children, even if born in Norway, comprise the majority of members of religious groups outside the Church of Norway. Immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Philippines have increased the number of Catholics, while those from countries including Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia have increased the size of the Muslim community. Catholics and Muslims generally have greater representation in cities than in rural areas. Muslims are located throughout the country, but mainly concentrated in the Oslo region. Most of the Jewish community resides in or near the cities of Oslo and Trondheim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all individuals shall have the right to free exercise of religion, and all religious and philosophical communities shall be supported on equal terms. The constitution also states “the King shall at all times profess the

Evangelical-Lutheran religion,” national values “will remain our Christian and humanistic heritage,” and the Church of Norway shall remain the country’s established church and be supported by the state. The law further specifies the right of individuals to choose or change their religion. Any person older than age 15 has the right to join or leave a religious community. Parents have the right to decide their child’s religion before age 15, but they must take into consideration the views of their children once they reach the age of seven and give those views priority once the children reach the age 12.

The penal code specifies penalties, including a fine or imprisonment for up to six months, for discrimination based on religion or expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs or members of religious groups.

By law, the government provides direct financial support to the Church of Norway through an annual block grant that covers the cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of Church employees. Contrary to prior years, municipal governments phased out most support to individual Church of Norway congregations, although they still provide funding for the Church and occasionally other religious groups, to maintain facilities of shared religious responsibility, such as municipal cemeteries (which are open to the general public) and preserve public parks, and historical churches, cathedrals, and other buildings of cultural value.

All registered religious and life stance organizations are eligible to apply for financial support from the government. Nearly 800 such organizations receive state support, based on the number of each group’s members.

To register, a faith or life stance organization must notify the county governor and provide its creed and doctrine, activities, names of board members, names and responsibilities of group leaders, operating rules – including who may become a member – voting rights, and the processes for amending statutes and dissolution. A group registers nationally only once in one county but reports its national tally of members annually. If a religious group does not register, it does not receive financial support from the government, but there are no restrictions on its activities. Most religious organizations and life stance communities register and receive government funding. By law, life stance communities, but not religious groups, must have a minimum of 500 members to qualify for government funding. Under the law, churches may not include children younger than age 15 as registered members.

Public schools include a mandatory course on Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) for grades one through 10. State-employed instructors teach the CKREE course, which covers world religions and philosophies while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs, as well as for atheism. Up to 50 percent of the CKREE course content is devoted to Christianity. Students may not opt out of this course. Schools do not permit religious ceremonies, but schools may organize religious outings, such as attending Christmas services at a local Church of Norway church. At their parents' request, children may opt out of participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as a class trip to a church. The parents need not give a reason for requesting an exemption. Students may apply to be absent to celebrate certain religious holidays, such as an Eid or Passover, but there is no celebration or observance of these holidays in public schools.

The law bans clothing that mostly or fully covers the face at educational institutions. The prohibition applies to students and teachers wearing burqas or *niqabs* in schools and day-care centers.

Passport regulations allow applicants to wear religious headwear in passport photographs, as long as the applicants' face and ears are visible.

Police are responsible for investigating criminal cases of discrimination, including those involving religion, such as hate crimes. The government-funded but independent Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombudsman reviews noncriminal discrimination and harassment cases, including those involving religion.

Individuals may apply for a full exemption from the required registration for a year of military service for religious reasons and are not required to perform alternative service.

According to the law, an animal must first be stunned or administered anesthetics before slaughter, making most traditional kosher and halal slaughter practices illegal. Halal and kosher meat may be imported.

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

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In June the government presented to parliament a revised draft law governing religious life, which has been under debate since 2017. The government revised the draft with significant input from the Church of Norway and other religious and life stance communities. The previous version would have required religious groups, not just life stance groups, to have at least 500 registered members to be eligible to receive government funding. The revised draft would establish the threshold for government funding eligibility at 50 members for all religious and life stance groups and count children younger than 15 as members.

Under the terms of the revised draft, the government would provide the Church of Norway an annual grant based on its number of members, identical to the formula used for all other registered religious and life stance organizations. The annual per capita grant would be in lieu of a block grant paying the full cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of Church employees. The government would also provide additional funding to the Church of Norway for maintenance of cemeteries and religious buildings. In addition, the draft law would set limits on policies and restrictions the government could impose on a religious organization as a condition to receiving state funding. The Norwegian Humanist Association and the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL) stated these changes would make it easier for these groups to qualify for government funding and addressed the concerns of their members, which viewed the previous version of the law as possibly limiting their autonomy, as well as providing preferential financial treatment to the Church of Norway.

Parliament did not vote on the law by year's end, but according to the MCF and STL, the proposed legislation had broad support, and parliament would likely enact it in 2020.

In March the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal filed by the Catholic Church to overturn rulings by the Borgarting Court of Appeal and the Oslo District Court that stated the Catholic Church had received more government funds than it was entitled to because it had inflated the numbers of its membership rolls. As a result, the court ordered the Catholic Church to refund the government 40 million kroner (\$4.6 million), payable over a five-year period.

The government continued to implement its action plan to counter anti-Semitism, funding projects carried out by government and academic institutions and the Mosaic Community (DMT), the country's principal Jewish organization. The plan emphasized data collection, training and education programs in schools, research

on anti-Semitism and Jewish life in the country, and efforts to safeguard Jewish culture and space. For example, the government funded the Dembra program at the Holocaust Center, an independent research and educational center associated with the University of Oslo, which developed a series of online educational resources to assist schools in creating programs and plans for teaching about and addressing anti-Semitism. Also under the plan, police authorities continued to revise their training curriculum to improve the reporting, processing, and investigation of religiously based hate crimes and continued to collect statistics on hate crimes, including on anti-Semitic incidents.

In September, describing the action plan against anti-Semitism as a success, the government announced it would renew the plan for another five-year period commencing in 2021. Leading NGOs involved in religious freedom such as the STL, the Center against Racism, and Amnesty International Norway endorsed the government's decision to extend the plan, as did Ervin Kohn, the leader of the DMT. One of the Holocaust Center's lead researchers said the plan's renewal was evidence of its success.

In August, following a shooting at an Islamic center in the Oslo suburb of Baerum, the government announced it would accelerate implementation of a similar plan to counter anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, to launch in 2020. The Ministry of Education and Research indicated that many of the grants and programs designed to address anti-Semitism and hate speech would serve as models for developing components in the action plan against anti-Muslim sentiment. Media reports cited broad support for both action plans across the political spectrum.

The government continued implementation of a separate strategy to combat hate speech. The strategy contained elements that addressed anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate speech using educational programs, provided support to religious and civil society groups engaged in promoting religious tolerance, expanded efforts to encourage reports of hate crimes by victims, and called for more focused legal efforts to investigate and prosecute hate crimes.

The police continued to prohibit officers from wearing religious symbols, including religious headwear, with police uniforms. Other uniformed organizations allowed the use of religious headwear. The military provided some religious headwear that conformed to military dress regulations.

The United Sikhs of Norway and Young Sikhs again objected to passport regulations which allow the use of religious headwear in passport photographs but require applicants' ears to be visible. According to government officials, the requirement allowed for enhanced accuracy of facial recognition software and manual photographic examination. The Sikh representatives stated showing the ears was unnecessary and offered only a negligible improvement in facial recognition. They also stated, except for France, no other European or North American nation set this requirement for religious minorities.

In January the United Sikhs and the Young Sikhs challenged the photograph requirement at the UN Human Rights Committee in a case involving the denial of a passport renewal application of a Sikh man who refused to comply with the regulation. In a private meeting with Prime Minister Erna Solberg, representatives of the United Sikhs pressed for a change in the regulation and later submitted a written proposal to the government to do so. Sikh representatives described the meeting as "positive." At year's end, the government was still reviewing the proposal, and the photograph requirement remained in place.

Christian, Muslim, and humanist chaplains served as officers in the military. Religious and humanist groups provided chaplains at their own expense in hospitals and prisons.

In July a satirical website operated by the government-funded National Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) published an anti-Semitic cartoon with a derogatory caricature of an Orthodox Jewish man playing Scrabble with another man who had constructed the word *jodesvin* (Jewish swine) with his tiles. After widespread criticism from the Jewish community and organizations such as the STL and the Center against Racism, NRK removed the cartoon from its website and issued a public apology.

In March, after a criminal investigation, Director of the Norwegian Prosecuting Authority Tor Aksel Busch said the Prosecuting Authority would not prosecute Norwegian rapper Kaveh Kholardi, against whom several Jewish organizations filed criminal complaints in 2018 for using the phrase "[expletive] Jews" during a concert. Busch said the phrase in question could be considered "legitimate criticism" of Israeli policies. Critics responded that during the incident, Kholardi did not mention particular policies or actions or use the words "Israel" or "Israeli." The group With Israel for Peace, one of the original complainants against Kholardi, said Busch's decision not to prosecute was "alarming because [he] finds ambiguity where there is none."

NGOs and religious communities worked with police and other government agencies to facilitate more reporting of hate crimes and cooperation on public education measures to counter discrimination and build trust between government agencies and religious and ethnic minority communities subject to discrimination.

The Oslo Synagogue, in coordination with the DMT, worked with the National Police to coordinate security, funded by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, for the synagogue and Jewish heritage sites and acted as an intermediary between the Jewish community and police to facilitate timely reporting and monitoring of hate crimes.

The Muslim Dialogue Network (MDN) worked with the National Police to provide outreach and education to encourage Muslims, some of whom were members of immigrant communities that MDN said distrusted law enforcement, to report discrimination and hate crimes to authorities. Police and security services provided additional protection for mosques following the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand in March. Authorities increased security further after the shooting at the Islamic center in Baerum in August.

The Center against Racism continued to provide training and advisory services to police on detecting, investigating, and prosecuting both racial and religiously motivated hate crimes. Police continued to assign personnel to support and coordinate these efforts, including providing resources to maintain hate crime investigators in each of the country's 12 police districts.

The National Criminal Investigation Service continued to maintain a website for the public to contact police regarding hate crimes and hate speech, including religiously motivated incidents.

The national CKREE curriculum continued to include a component on Judaism and teaching about the Holocaust. The Ministry of Education and Research completed a review of the curriculum during the year and announced that Holocaust education would remain. In addition, the ministry continued grants for school programs that raised awareness about anti-Semitism and hate speech, including religiously motivated hate speech. The government also continued to fund a Jewish life module through which young Jews engaged with high school students about Judaism and being Jewish in the country. In many instances, these grants were provided as part of the government's action plan against anti-Semitism.

Schools nationwide observed Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27. The government and local schools continued to support extracurricular programs that took secondary school students to Nazi concentration camps and other sites to educate them about the Holocaust. The trips, which generally lasted three to five days, were primarily arranged by two Norwegian NGOs – Hvide Busser (White Buses) and Aktive Fredreiser (Travel For Peace). The government allocated 15 million kroner (\$1.7 million) to support these efforts, and the schools facilitated fundraising activities among the students as well. According to the NGOs involved, approximately 15,000 Norwegian students per year participated in these programs.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food continued to waive import duties on halal and kosher meat and provided guidance on import procedures to both the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Beginning in January, the government shifted responsibility for religious affairs and the funding of religious institutions from the Ministry of Culture to the MCF. According to the STL and the MCF, the transfer had a negligible impact on day-to-day administration of religious affairs, since the civil servants assigned to this portfolio simply moved from one organization to another.

State support to religious and life stance organizations from both the national and municipal governments totaled approximately six billion kroner (\$683 million) during the year. The government provided approximately 2.5 billion kroner (\$285 million) to the Church of Norway for salaries and operating expenses during the year, including for pensions and benefits of church employees and clergy. The MCF stated the grant to the Church would continue at a high level in order to cover the costs of Church employees and retirees after the removal of those employees from the state payroll following the Church's separation from the government in 2017. The government provided other registered religious and life stance organizations approximately 344 million kroner (\$39.2 million) in total or 1,300 kroner (\$150) per registered member. The Church of Jesus Christ continued to be the only major religious community choosing to decline government funding as a matter of policy. Some representatives from these groups, including the STL and Norwegian Humanist Association, stated the size of the grant to the Church of Norway was not only based on the size of its membership, and that the Church's privileged relationship with the state continued. The criticism particularly concerned continued state and municipal funding for maintenance of Church

property such as church buildings and cemeteries, which other religious communities have to fund on their own.

Consistent with previous years, the MCF provided two million kroner (\$228,000) to religious umbrella organizations such as the Christian Council of Norway (500,000 kroner [\$56,900]), MDN (500,000 kroner [\$56,900]), and STL (one million kroner [\$114,000]), among others, to promote dialogue and tolerance among religious and life stance organizations.

The government continued to fund workshops and other intervention programs targeting practitioners working with groups that included members of religious minorities to promote their economic and social integration into society. Efforts focused on youth education and engaging local community stakeholders. For example, the government provided financial support to the Forum for Integration and Dialogue, an NGO. Founded by the Muslim Union, this organization worked to integrate youth from different ethnic and religious backgrounds and encourage positive relationships among diverse groups in Kristiansand, a city in the southern part of the country. The government also funded the program for Democratic Preparedness Against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Undemocratic Attitudes, which provided speakers, resources, and training to teachers working with at-risk youth to advance these objectives.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

During the year police received 144 reports of religiously based hate crimes, a 28.6 percent increase from 2018 when there were 112 reports in the same category. Religiously based hate crimes constituted 17 percent of all hate crimes reported to the police in 2018. Police statistics did not cite specific examples of these crimes or provide details on which religious communities were targeted.

On August 10, the first day of Eid al-Adha, Philip Manshaus, armed with two shotguns and a pistol, shot his way into an Islamic center in Baerum, a suburb of Oslo. When Manshaus entered the center, there were three elders of the mosque inside, including a retired Pakistani military officer who subdued him without any shots fired. The man who subdued Manshaus sustained minor injuries. Police apprehended Manshaus and opened an investigation, which continued at year's end. Also at year's end, Manshaus remained in pretrial detention and had not been

formally charged. Authorities said his case would likely go to trial in 2020. Prior to going to the center, Manshaus shot and killed his stepsister. According to police, Manshaus had been active in online forums for white supremacists, praised Vidkun Quisling, head of the Nazi collaborationist government in World War II, and had been inspired by other mass shootings, including those at a mosque and Islamic Center in New Zealand in March and at a synagogue in California in April. Prime Minister Solberg and all political parties in parliament condemned Manshaus' attack, and political and religious leaders jointly attended a ceremony of solidarity with members of the Al-Noor center and the country's Muslim community the day after the incident.

The Holocaust Center and the leader of the DMT reported anti-Semitism remained prevalent among far-right and far-left groups. They also said groups widely considered anti-Semitic, and in many instances also anti-Muslim, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), with an estimated 100-200 members in the country, were well funded and maintained a strong online presence. According to the investigative news site Filter Nyheter, Nordiske Styrka, a new splinter faction of the NRM, was also active in the country.

Police and NGOs such as the Holocaust Center, Defense Research Institute, Amnesty International, DMT, and Center against Racism said religiously motivated hate speech, particularly online, remained prevalent. The NRM, Document.no, Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN, with 2,500-3,000 members), Resett.no, and Vigrid were among the most active.

Police and NGOs also stated there was a small but active minority of persons who participated in online chat rooms, message boards, and forums such as 4chan, 8chan, and EndChan, which regularly featured anti-Semitic and/or anti-Muslim content. In November Filter Nyheter published an article describing an active online community that routinely amplified and shared articles and viewpoints from anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sources. Among the chat forums cited in the article were Iron March, whose slogan is "Gas the Kikes! Race War Now! 14/88 Boots on the Ground," referencing gassing Jews, race war, a neo-Nazi slogan, and actions all at once. Some of the participants, according to the article's authors, used instant messaging networks such as Skype or Telegram to develop direct links to right-wing extremist organizations, such as Atomwaffen.

As in previous years, the DMT expressed concern about what it viewed as continued tolerance for anti-Semitic expression in national media and stated online anti-Semitism increased again during the year. It said there were websites operated

by SIAN, NRM, and Document.no that tended to espouse an extreme, far-right ideology, including anti-Semitic and racist positions associated with the Nazis.

The Holocaust Center also stated anti-Muslim organizations such as SIAN, Human Rights Service, and Document.no again increased their activity during the year, including by writing articles online or in print media. The Holocaust Center stated the groups were relatively small but maintained a strong and well-organized presence on the internet. In many instances, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant views were closely linked.

In June, according to press reports citing Turkish news agency Anadolu, Anna Braten, leader of SIAN, delivered a speech in Drammen, stating that Islam had no place in the country and that all Qurans must be destroyed. Braten reportedly took out a Quran to deface it and threw it on the ground when police intervened to stop her. Police shut down the event and ordered participants to leave the venue. Braten was not charged.

In June Tore Tvedt, leader of Vigrid, was convicted in the Aust-Agder District Court of racism and hate speech after sending 1,300 emails, mostly in 2016, to schools and day-care institutions in which he stated that schools “brainwashed children into worshippers of Jews” and referring to Jews as “reptiles” and “parasites” on his blog. Tvedt was sentenced to 60 days in prison.

On November 2, the Danish group Scandza Forum, frequently characterized as anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim, organized a conference in Oslo featuring several U.S. and European speakers known for their anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim viewpoints. Shortly before the event, the Police Security Service arrested one of the scheduled speakers, a U.S. citizen, on the grounds that he was a foreigner who could influence others to commit violence. Authorities deported him two days later. The man’s attorney stated that he intended to take legal action seeking compensation for unlawful detention and violation of his freedom of speech. Police also arrested 28 counterprotesters who disobeyed police instructions and attempted to storm the conference.

The Holocaust Center continued to conduct programs on the Holocaust and to combat anti-Semitism, with financial support from the government. The center developed instructional materials on tolerance of religious diversity and distributed them to high schools nationwide. It published numerous articles and books documenting anti-Semitism and the persecution of religious minorities throughout the world. The center operated a website that provided a comprehensive overview

of anti-Semitism and served as a foundation for the center's educational efforts. It also screened materials used in public schools for anti-Semitic content. In addition, the center continued to operate a museum and library supported by its research organization and offer a wide range of educational materials, programs, exhibitions, and publications. For example, in December the center deployed an online history of the Holocaust for schools and children. The center also developed a program to highlight the importance of Holocaust Remembrance Day and organized a memorial ceremony at the Oslo monument to the victims of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust Center continued to play a significant role in the action plan against anti-Semitism by developing educational materials and online platforms for the Ministry of Education and Research and monitoring anti-Semitic (and anti-Muslim) attitudes throughout society. It conducted research on Jewish life in the country and on anti-Semitism in Scandinavia, religious extremism and radicalization, and hate crimes, both on its own initiative and on behalf of parliament and government ministries. It advised the STL. The center's staff frequently spoke out in the media as legal, policy, or historical experts about the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, religious issues, and ethnic/religious oppression and genocide internationally.

The STL continued to foster interfaith dialogue by holding joint meetings with all its member communities. Its mandate was to promote the equal treatment of religious and life stance communities and respect and understanding among all individuals and religions and life stance communities through dialogue. It received support from the government, as well as financial and in-kind contributions from its member organizations. The STL announced it would play a coordinating role in developing the action plan against anti-Muslim sentiment, with a primary role in facilitating input and participation by Muslim organizations.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy staff met with officials from the MCF who worked on religious issues. The discussions centered on the proposed law on religion, public financing for faith and life stance organizations, and perceptions by some religious groups of financial preferences for the Church of Norway. Embassy staff regularly met with the special envoy for freedom of religion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy representatives also met with officials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security to discuss efforts to track, investigate, and prosecute religiously based hate crimes.

The embassy used social media to honor a range of religious holidays celebrated by different faiths in the country and, in the aftermath of the attempted mass shooting at the Al-Noor Islamic center, posted messages of condolence and support for the Muslim community.

Embassy staff engaged a wide range of religious and civil society groups to discuss religious freedom, integration of minority groups, life as a religious person, and their efforts to promote religious tolerance in the country, as well as their concerns about religious discrimination and perceptions of government favoritism for the Church of Norway. These groups included the STL, DMT, MDN, Catholic Church, Church of Norway, the Church of Jesus Christ, Islamic Community Center – Norway, Humanist Association of Norway, Amnesty International, Sikh and Uighur groups, and the Holocaust Center, among others.