

# NORWAY 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination and protects the right to choose, practice, or change one's faith or life stance (belief in a nonreligious philosophy). It declares the Church of Norway is the country's established church. The government continued to provide the Church of Norway with exclusive benefits, including funds for salaries and benefits of clergy and staff. The government enacted a new law governing religious life in April that outlines how faith and life stance organizations with at least 50 registered members may apply for state subsidies, which are to be prorated as a percentage of the subsidy received by the Church of Norway based on group membership. A hate crime law punishes some expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs. On June 11, the Oslo District Court sentenced Philip Manshaus to 21 years' imprisonment for the attack on an Islamic cultural center and the killing of his stepsister in 2019. In March, the Director of Public Prosecutions declined to bring a case to the Supreme Court after a court of appeals acquitted three men of hate speech charges arising from a 2018 incident when they raised a Nazi flag outside the site of a World War II Gestapo headquarters. The government continued to implement an action plan to combat anti-Semitism, particularly hate speech, and released a similar plan to combat anti-Muslim sentiment. The government continued to provide financial support for interreligious dialogue.

A total of 807 hate-motivated crimes were reported during the year, of which 16.7 percent were religiously motivated. This was the first decline following a period of strong increase. Several groups reported that anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic sentiment remained prevalent among extremist groups and that internet hate speech against Jews and Muslims increased during the year. On September 27, Yom Kippur, three members of the Nordic Resistance Movement handed out hate propaganda outside an Oslo synagogue. Stop the Islamization of Norway (SIAN) held a number of rallies during the year in different cities that received widespread media attention.

U.S. embassy officials met with officials from the Ministry of Children and Families to discuss the draft law on faith and life stance communities and public financing for faith and life stance organizations. In addition, embassy officials 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 as well as to promote religious freedom. The Charge d'Affaires hosted

religious leaders from the Church of Norway, Roman Catholic Church, Jewish community, and Muslim Dialogue Network (MDN) at an event to promote interfaith dialogue. Embassy representatives continued to meet with individuals from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and numerous faith and religious minority groups, including Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Uighur Muslims, and humanists, to discuss issues such as religious freedom and tolerance and the integration of minority groups. The embassy routinely used social media to share messages of religious tolerance and to highlight religious holidays and events.

### **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.5 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to Statistics Norway, the official government statistics office, 69 percent of the population (December 2019 figure) belongs to the Church of Norway, an evangelical Lutheran denomination, a decline of 2.8 percentage points over the previous three years.

Statistics Norway, which assesses membership in religious groups using criteria based on registration, age, and attendance, reports registered membership in religious and life stance communities other than the Church of Norway 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 1,500 Jews registered in the country. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) has approximately 4,600 members.

According to Statistics Norway, approximately 1.8 percent of the population participates in life stance organizations. The Norwegian Humanist Association reports approximately 100,000 registered members, making it the largest life stance organization in the country.

Immigrants, whom Statistics Norway defines as those born outside 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 in the country, 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 are 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 faith or life stance. Any person older than age 15 has the right to join or leave a religious or life stance community. Parents have the right to decide their child’s faith or life stance community before age 15, but they must take into consideration the views of the children once they reach the age of seven and give those views priority once they reach age 12.

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

By law, the national government and local municipalities provide direct financial support to the Church of Norway. The national government provides an annual block grant that covers the cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of Church employees. The national government may provide additional support for other projects. By law, municipal governments provide financial support to the Church’s local activities, including maintenance and operation of Church buildings, as well as to public but Church-related properties, such as cemeteries and parks.

All registered faith and life stance organizations are eligible to apply for financial support from the government. The government pays prorated subsidies to nearly 800 such organizations based on their membership numbers, as compared to membership numbers of the Church of Norway.

In April, parliament enacted a new law governing religious life that included suggestions from the Church of Norway and other religious and life stance communities. The law was scheduled to go into effect on January 1, 2021.

According to its provisions, faith and life stance organizations with at least 50 registered members may apply for state subsidies. The government shall pay prorated subsidies to organizations based on their membership numbers, as compared to membership numbers of the Church of Norway. Faith and life stance organizations must provide annual reports detailing activities, opportunities for children and youth, the use of the state subsidies, marital law administration, and gender equality, as well as any funds received from abroad. The government shall continue to provide the Church of Norway with an annual block grant that pays the full cost of salaries, benefits, and pension plans of Church employees. The government must provide additional funding to the Church of Norway for maintenance of cemeteries and religious buildings.

To register, a faith or life stance organization must notify the government 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. According to a 2020 amendment to the Law on the Faith and Life Stance Communities, faith and life stance organizations no longer need to register with local municipalities. Per a new law adopted during the year, faith and life stance organizations no longer register with the county (state equivalent) governor. A group must report 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 except that faith and life stance communities that practice or give support to violent activities or receive funding from abroad may lose financial support following an assessment by the state. Most religious organizations and life stance communities register and receive government funding. By law, a faith or life stance organization must have a minimum of 500 members to qualify for government funding.

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 and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs, as well as for atheism. 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 acts related to religion, such as a class trip to a church. 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 such holidays in public schools.

Members of minority religious groups must apply for annual leave from work in order to celebrate religious holidays; many Christian religious holidays are official holidays.

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

Police are responsible for investigating criminal cases of discrimination, including those involving religion, such as hate crimes. The government-funded but independent Equality and Antidiscrimination 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 be stunned or administered anesthetics before slaughter, making most traditional kosher and halal slaughter practices illegal. Halal and kosher meat may be imported. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food routinely waives import duties on halal and kosher meat and provides guidance on import procedures to the Jewish and Muslim communities.

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

### **Government Practices**

On June 11, in a combined case, the Oslo District Court sentenced Philip Manshaus to 21 years in prison for the attack on the al-Noor Islamic Cultural Center and the killing of his stepsister in 2019. Manshaus must serve a minimum of 14 years before he can apply for parole, the strictest sentence ever given by a Norwegian court and the maximum allowed under the penal code. According to law, he may be required to serve more than 21 years if on review of his case it is determined that he remains a threat to society. Manshaus was also ordered to pay restitution to his stepmother for the death of his stepsister and to three al-Noor members who were present on the day of the attack.

Antiterror police extradited a man to France who had lived in the country since 1991 for links to a Palestinian group that carried out a 1982 attack on a restaurant in Paris' predominantly Jewish Marais quarter that killed six and injured 20 individuals. Norway had rejected a 2015 extradition request by France.

The government continued to implement its 2016-20 action plan to counter anti-Semitism, funding projects carried out by government, academic institutions, and the Mosaic Community (DMT), the country's principal Jewish organization. The plan emphasizes 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 provided 400,000 kroner (\$46,900) to the Dembra program of the Holocaust Center, an independent research and educational center associated with the University of Oslo, for a 2020-21 program to collaborate with teacher training institutions to counter prejudice and internal discrimination. Under the plan, police authorities continued to revise their training curriculum to improve the reporting, processing, and investigation of religiously based hate crimes and to collect statistics on hate crimes, including anti-Semitic incidents.

On September 23, the government released a multiyear plan to combat discrimination and hate toward Muslims. The plan responded to recent studies showing an increase in negative attitudes and actions toward Muslims in the country, including the 2019 attack against the al-Noor Islamic Center, and the increasing threat from right-wing extremists, as reported by the Police Security Service in its annual threat assessment. The plan contained 18 measures that focused on research and education, dialogue across religious communities, and police initiatives, such as registration of hate crimes towards Muslims as a separate category in crime statistics. The plan also outlined a new grant scheme outlining security measures for religious and life stance communities and steps to raise awareness about discrimination and racism in the business community.

During the year, the Department of Justice received proposals for a five-million-kroner (\$586,000) annual fund to enhance physical security for religious and life stance communities considered potential targets by the Police Security Service's annual national threat assessment. The fund will be administered by the Norwegian Police Directorate. The Islamic Council criticized the funding amount as too little.

The government's 2021 budget set aside 10 million kroner (\$1.17 million) to build awareness of, and support research on, hate crimes as a part of its 2020-2023

*Action Plan Against Racism and Discrimination on the Basis of Ethnicity and Religion.*

In June, the Director of Public Prosecutions declined to bring a case to the Supreme Court after a court of appeals acquitted three men of hate speech charges arising from a 2018 incident in which they raised a Nazi flag outside the site of a World War II Gestapo headquarters.

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.

In October, the government eliminated a requirement introduced in 2014 that citizens must show their ears in official passport and national identity photographs, thereby allowing turbans and hijabs to be worn in such photographs.

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

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

The Center Against Racism continued to provide training and advisory services to police on detecting, investigating, and prosecuting 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 to report hate crimes and hate speech, including religiously motivated incidents.

The national CKREE curriculum continued to include components on Judaism and the Holocaust. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Research 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 the Jewish Pathfinders, a 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.

The government introduced a new curriculum beginning in the fall 2020 semester. According to the Norwegian Humanist Association, the new CKREE curriculum, introduced in September, better reflects the breadth of religions and philosophies, although it continues to prioritize Christianity.

Schools nationwide observed Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27. The government allocated 15.5 million kroner (\$1.82 million) to support extracurricular programs that took secondary school students to Nazi concentration camps and other sites on three-day tours to educate them about the Holocaust, but it did not conduct these tours during the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two NGOs with primary responsibility for these programs, Hvite Busser (White Buses) and Aktive Fredsreiser (Travel For Peace), continued providing teaching materials, entrance fees, guided tours, and tour guide expenses for students who took day trips. Schools facilitated fundraising activities among the students as well.

State support to religious and life stance organizations from both the national and municipal governments totaled approximately six billion kroner (\$703.4 million) during the year. The government provided approximately 2.215 billion kroner (\$259.7 million), or 587 kroner (\$69) per registered member, to the Church of Norway for salaries and operating expenses during the year, including for pensions and benefits of Church employees and clergy. The government provided other registered religious and life stance organizations approximately 414.9 million kroner (\$48.64 million) in total. The Church of Jesus Christ continued to be the only major religious community choosing to decline government funding. The Norwegian Humanist Association continued to criticize state and municipal funding for the maintenance of Church of Norway property, such as Church buildings and cemeteries, which other religious communities had to fund on their own.

Consistent with previous years, the government budget provided 5.1 million kroner (\$598,000) in subsidies for Church of Norway buildings and 14.9 million kroner (\$1.75 million) to religious dialogue and umbrella organizations, such as the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL) and the Norwegian

Humanist Association, to promote dialogue and tolerance among religious and life stance organizations.

The government continued to fund workshops and other intervention programs that featured practitioners who worked with 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 Minotenk, an organization that provided opportunities for young members of minority groups to publish books that were distributed to schools to raise awareness on issues related to minority communities, including minority religious communities.

Culture Minister Abid Raja spoke out against the anti-Muslim group SIAN prior to an August 29 rally in front of the parliament building, calling on counterdemonstrators not to give SIAN the attention it sought by appearing at the rally. The Vestland Police District initiated criminal investigations against SIAN leader Lars Thorsen, his deputy Ellen Due Brynjulfsen, and secretary Fanny Braten under the hate speech law following a SIAN rally in Bergen in August, but it dropped almost all charges after determining that the remarks did not rise to the level of hate speech under the law. At year's end, one person remained under investigation for hate speech and awaited a final determination by the public prosecutor on whether the case would move forward.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

A total of 807 hate-motivated crimes were reported nationwide during the year, of which 16.7 percent were religiously motivated. The number showed the first decline following a period of strong increase.

The Kristiansand Superintendent of Police, who also serves as Violent Extremism Coordinator, reported two main religious freedom concerns: the anti-Semitic Nordic Resistance Movement and increased anti-Muslim activity by individuals.

Representatives of the MDN, which represents 30,000 Muslims in the country, said that since the shooting at the al-Noor Islamic Center in 2019, fear of violence was a greater contributor to low attendance at mosques than COVID-19.

A Muslim woman working at the national hospital in Oslo told the newspaper *Aftenposten* in June that one patient screamed at her that “all Muslims were terrorists” and grabbed her hijab. The elderly patient reportedly stated that he “hated hijabs” and that the woman should “go home.”

In June, the Institute for Social Research, on behalf of the Immigration and Diversity Department, released its *Study on the Attitudes to Immigration and Integration in Norway – Integration Barometer 2020*. In this national survey, 63 percent of the 2,968 residents polled responded that the reason for problems with integration were that “many immigrations have a religion or culture that does not fit in Norway.” Almost the same number, 60 percent, believed discrimination hindered integration. Almost two-thirds believed there would be more conflict between religious groups in the country in the future. Fifty-two percent responded that Islam is not compatible with fundamental values in Norwegian society. The number that responded that Islam is not compatible with Norwegian society has hovered between 40 and 50 percent over the last 15 years in the same survey. Forty-five percent said they were skeptical of persons who practice Islam, while 53 percent said they were not skeptical of such persons. Seven of 10 respondents were skeptical of individuals with a strong Muslim faith.

The Holocaust Center, DMT, the Center against Racism, University of Oslo, and Institute for Social Research reported religiously motivated hate speech, particularly online, remained persistent. A leader in both the DMT and the Center against Racism said that anti-Semitism was trivialized in society; the leader criticized a lack of media reporting after three members of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) handed out hate propaganda outside a synagogue on Yom Kippur in September. Media reported that the NRM conducted a series of anti-Semitic actions on Yom Kippur in coordination with NRM groups in Denmark and Iceland. As in previous years, the DMT expressed concern about what it viewed as a continued tolerance of anti-Semitic expression in national media, and it stated online anti-Semitism had increased again during the year. It said there were websites operated by SIAN, NRM, Human Rights Service, and *Document.no* that tended to espouse an extreme, far-right ideology, including anti-Semitic and racist positions associated with the Nazis. They said that the NRM, with an estimated 100-200 members in the country, continued to maintain a strong online presence. The NRM, *Document.no*, SIAN (with 2,500-3,000 members), *Resett.no*, and Vigrid were among the most active, according to the DMT.

Police and NGOs also stated that a small but active minority continued to participate in online chat rooms, message boards, and forums such as 4chan,

8chan, and EndChan, which regularly featured anti-Semitic and/or anti-Muslim content. Police maintained mechanisms to receive tips on online hate movements, said the Kristiansand Police Superintendent.

The Holocaust Center 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. SIAN held a number of rallies in different cities that received widespread media attention and that also included larger groups of counterprotesters. Oslo police arrested SIAN secretary Fanny Braten and approximately 20 counterdemonstrators who broke through police barriers after Braten tore pages out of the Quran and spat on them in front of the parliament building on August 29. A number of religious groups raised concerns regarding the difficulty in enforcing provisions of the hate speech law that target religion.

In a June conference hosted by the Foundation Dialogue for Peace, an organization that described itself as working for peace, reconciliation, and the promotion of respect in areas of conflict, Imam Nemat Ali Shah, leader of the Imam Council of Norway, representing approximately 200,000 Norwegian-Muslims, presented a letter to Prime Minister Erna Solberg, who was attending the conference. The letter stated, in part, “On behalf of the Norwegian Imam Council, we are very concerned that the development of hatred and discrimination against Muslims in Norway is increasing sharply. We see that groups that increasingly spread hatred and xenophobia against Muslims in Norway are increasingly being formed by burning the Qur’an and spreading misinformation.”

In October and November, the Norwegian branch of the U.K.-based charitable organization Islamic Relief Worldwide accepted the resignations of two of its three trustees following media reports of their anti-Semitic and pro-Hamas postings on social media.

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 the 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 to offer a wide range of educational materials, programs, exhibitions, and publications. The center also organized a memorial ceremony at the Oslo monument to the victims of the Holocaust, in collaboration with the DMT.

The Holocaust Center continued to play a significant role in supporting the government's 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, 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 also advised the STL. Media frequently cited the center's staff as legal, policy, or historical experts on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and religious issues, as well as on ethnic/religious oppression and genocide internationally.

The STL continued to foster interfaith dialogue by holding joint meetings with all its member communities, including virtual events when COVID-19 restrictions barred most public gatherings. Its mandate was to promote the equal treatment of religious and life stance communities and respect and understanding among all individuals and faith and life stance communities through dialogue. It received support from the government, as well as financial and in-kind contributions from its member organizations.

Minotenk said it believed that more research and knowledge about how Muslims live their lives in different parts of the country was important in developing a broader picture of the challenges faced by the Muslim community. Minotenk criticized the fact that only 10 of 428 communes in 2019 had action plans against discrimination against minorities. In the wake of the al-Noor attack in 2019, Minotenk highlighted the importance for mosques of local police contacts, since there were several large mosques in the greater Oslo area. Minotenk also requested that all police districts publish a report on hate crime statistics that was similar to the Oslo Police District's annual report.

In September, the Church of Norway's Bishop of Oslo expressed support for the country's move toward equality for all faiths and life stances under the law following the government's transfer of the Church Council and the Bishop's

Offices from government supervision to a newly independent and separate Church of Norway in 2017.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

Embassy officials met with officials of the Ministry of Children and Families who worked on religious issues to discuss the law on religion and public financing for faith and life stance organizations. Embassy officials regularly met with the Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss threats to religious freedom. They also met with officials from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, as well as the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman, to discuss efforts to track, investigate, and prosecute religiously based hate crimes.

The Charge d'Affaires hosted four religious leaders from the Church of Norway, Roman Catholic Church, Jewish community, and Muslim Dialogue Network at an event to promote interfaith dialogue on September 24. He underscored the importance the United States places on religious freedom, citing the President's June 2 Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom, and shared the significant persecution of religious adherents he personally witnessed during his diplomatic work in the former Soviet Union and more recently in China.

The embassy used social media to honor a range of religious holidays celebrated by different faiths in the country. In January, the embassy commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day with digital events. The government held a drive-in Eid al-Fitr feast in May that was livestreamed by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. The embassy promoted the feast and similar virtual events on social media.

During the year, embassy officials traveled to areas of historical tension for religious minority groups, including Kristiansand, to gather information on issues faced by ethnic and religious minorities, where they met with representatives of the joint Somali and Pakistani mosque.

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 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, Church of Jesus Christ, Humanist Association of

Norway, Amnesty International, Sikh community, Uighur Muslim representatives, Center for Holocaust Studies and Religious Minorities, Minotenk, Norwegian Church Youth Project, Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Norwegian Christian advisory council (an umbrella organization for Christian churches in Norway), Stefanus Alliance (a Christian missions and human rights organization), Buddhist community, and Foundation Dialogue for Peace.