



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **88.1%**
- Agnostics : **6.7%**
- Muslims : **3.4%**
- Others : **1.8%**

5.272.000

386.194 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Norway's constitution guarantees the right to freedom of religion as well as the right to choose or change one's religion. Under a constitutional amendment, there is a separation between the Church of Norway and the state. However, the Church continues to receive financial support from the government. The constitution specifies that all religious and philosophical communities will be "supported on an equal footing".<sup>[1]</sup>

All registered religious and spiritual communities are granted state subsidies in proportion to the number of members reported to the government. To register, a faith or spiritual organisation must provide specific information about its creed and doctrine, activities and governing rules. Unregistered groups do not receive financial support from the government, but their activities are not restricted.<sup>[2]</sup>

The law prohibits discrimination and harassment on the basis of religion or belief. This includes expressions of disrespect for religious beliefs or members of religious groups and covers violations of the right to religious freedom.<sup>[3]</sup> Complaints concerning discrimination on the grounds of religion are made to the Ombudsman for Equality and Anti-Discrimination.<sup>[4]</sup>

Ritual slaughter practices not preceded by stunning are illegal, but halal and kosher food may be imported.<sup>[5]</sup>

Religious symbols, including headgear, may be worn with military uniforms, but not with police uniforms. The government permits individual schools to decide whether to implement bans on religious clothing that covers the face, such as burqas or niqabs.<sup>[6]</sup> However, in June 2017 the government proposed a ban on full face-covering clothing, including burqas and niqabs, in nurseries, schools, and universities. Headscarves would continue to be permitted.<sup>[7]</sup>

Circumcision of boys is legal, so long as it is performed with a physician present. In May 2017, a party in the ruling coalition adopted a resolution to ban circumcision for males under 16 but was met with criticism from both Jewish and

Muslim leaders.<sup>[8]</sup>

Religious instruction on “Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information” is compulsory in public schools. The curriculum includes the study of world religions and philosophies, as well as atheism. While students may not opt out of the course, parents may request that their children not participate in specific religious acts, such as Church services<sup>[9]</sup>

In October 2016 the government launched an 11-point “Action plan against anti-Semitism 2016-2020”. Measures include training and education programmes, increased funding for Jewish cultural activities, police statistics targeting anti-Semitism as a separate form of hate crime and research on anti-Semitism in Norway.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Incidents

The Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation responded to incidents seen as anti-Semitic by funding security for the Jewish synagogue in Oslo.<sup>[11]</sup> In September 2016, two “stumbling blocks” (bricks with brass plates naming a Holocaust victim) in front of the Jewish Museum in Oslo were vandalised with graffiti.<sup>[12]</sup>

A survey on attitudes toward Jews and Muslims in Norway carried out in 2017 by the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities indicates that anti-Semitic views are more common among Muslims than in the general population: 28.9 percent of Muslim respondents living in Norway for at least five years hold negative views of Jews, compared to 8.3 percent for all respondents.<sup>[13]</sup> When asked whether violence and harassment of Jews was justified based on how Israel treats Palestinians, 12 percent of all respondents agreed, with 20 percent of Muslim respondents agreeing with this. Two out of three Jewish respondents to the study said they have had to conceal their religion in public to avoid negative reactions.<sup>[14]</sup>

According to the same survey, 39 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture” and 31 percent believe “Muslims want to take over Europe”.<sup>[15]</sup>

A hairdresser was found guilty of discrimination in September 2016 for refusing to serve a Muslim woman wearing a hijab. According to court documents, she told the woman she would not serve “people like her” and that she should go to another salon.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Prospects for freedom of religion

While there was no significant change in governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review, an increased intolerance against minority religions within Norwegian society can be detected. This may, at least in part, reflect a backlash against global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiments in Norway.

## Endnotes / Sources

[1] ‘Article 16’, Norway’s Constitution of 1814 with Amendments through 2016, [constituteproject.org](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Norway_2016.pdf?lang=en), [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Norway\\_2016.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Norway_2016.pdf?lang=en), (accessed 21st February 2018).

[2] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, ‘Norway’, International Religious Freedom Report for 2016, U.S. State Department, <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>, (accessed 21st February 2018).

[3] Ibid.

[4] ‘We’re here to help you’, Likestillings-og diskrimineringsombudet (Equality and anti-discrimination Ombudsman), Ministry of Children and Equality (Norway), <http://www.ldo.no/en>, (accessed 20th February 2018).

[5] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[6] Ibid.

[7] 'Norway to ban full-face veil in nurseries, schools and universities', BBC, 12th June 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40251760>, (accessed 19th February 2018).

[8] R. Revesz, 'Norwegian ruling party votes to ban circumcision for men under 16 years old', The Independent, 8th May 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/norwegian-ruling-progress-party-ban-circumcision-men-under-16-years-old-vote-annual-conference-a7723746.html>, (accessed 19th February 2018).

[9] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[10] Action plan against anti-Semitism 2016-2020, Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation (Norway), <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/dd258c081e6048e2ad0cac9617abf778/action-plan-against-antisemitism.pdf>, (accessed 21st February 2018).

[11] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, op. cit.

[12] M. Wasvik, 'Snublesteiner vandalisert' (Stumbling blocks [Stolpersteine] vandalised), Antirasistisk Senter, 6th September 2016, <https://antirasistisk.no/snublesteiner-vandalisert/>, (accessed 26 February 2018).

[13] S. Prestegård, 'Vil ha felles front mot muslimhets' (You want a common front against that of the Muslims), Da Dagsvisen, 6th December 2017, [https://www.dagsavisen.no/innenriks/vil-ha-felles-front-mot-muslimhets-1.1066616#cxrecs\\_s](https://www.dagsavisen.no/innenriks/vil-ha-felles-front-mot-muslimhets-1.1066616#cxrecs_s), (accessed 26th February 2018).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] 'Norwegian hairdresser who threw woman out of salon for wearing hijab found guilty of discrimination', The Independent, 12th September 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/norwegian-hairdresser-who-threw-woman-out-of-salon-for-wearing-hijab-found-guilty-of-discrimination-a7238246.html>, (accessed 12th February 2018).