

Religious and Life Stance Guide for Refugees and Asylum Seekers



Å leve med tro og livssyn i Norge
– en guide for mennesker som arbeider med flyktninger
og asylsøkere



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About this brochure

The majority of asylum seekers that come to Norway already come with one form or another of religious belief or life stance. For many of them their religion and culture influence many aspects of their lives, for instance when it comes to family organization, the relationship between men and women or between adults and children. For others these are not so important.

Sometimes religious and cultural practices come into direct conflict with Norwegian common practice and law, and in other cases these are in a grey zone that can create the basis for misunderstandings. In every case there is a need for greater competence and more conversations about religion and life stance. The purpose of this brochure is to provide some knowledge and advice as well as discuss some of the most common misunderstandings, such that refugees are best equipped and motivated to grapple with issues in their own integration. It is also intended as input for conversations and dialogue and is based on the understanding that integration is a two-way process between society at large and the individual.

What do we mean by Norwegian common values? In the school's mission statement it is stated thus: "(...) respect for human values and nature, for freedom of spirit, love of one's neighbour, forgiving, equality and solidarity, values that are also expressed in different religions and life stances and which are enshrined in human rights".

This brochure has been written with the following target groups in mind: teachers and information consultants and others who, in different circumstances, deal with the transfer of knowledge to refugees and asylum seekers. It will additionally be considered as the basis for short theme-based booklets.

This brochure includes some practical advice as well as a brief overview of the development of religion and life stance both in law and in practice. This has been included because it has been requested although is not considered as necessary reading in order to benefit from the texts that deal with the more practical questions connected to religion and life stance.

This brochure is produced by The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (STL) with financial support from the Department of Culture. It is based upon STL's experience as well as knowledge provided by resource and research environments both within and outside Norway.

We hope that this brochure can contribute by offering concrete advice and by triggering conversations at receptions and other arenas of integration.

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (STL) was formed in 1996 and includes 14 Religious and Life Stance communities in Norway. This also includes the Norwegian Humanist Association. Humanists are not religious but choose to be members of a life stance community based upon humanist values and human rights.

Fact box: We generally distinguish between religious and secular life stances. A life stance provides the answer to questions relating to a view of life, human beings or the question of what is right or wrong. A religion usually contains belief in on or more deities. A secular life stance does not involve any divine presence. This means that all religions may be considered as life stances although not all life stances are necessarily religions. This is why the expression “Religious and Life Stance Community” is used because it expressly includes both religious and non-religious communities.

One important backdrop to the creating of STL was the increased immigration to Norway in the 1980's and 1990's. Many of those arriving had religious backgrounds that were different from Christian traditions. This new diversity triggered an array of critical debates about immigration in general and ultimately about the tension between the Norwegian common cultural values and the new citizens' religious and cultural traditions. The increased religious diversity contributed also to a greater visibility of the arrangements favouring the Norwegian State Church, in a manner not previously known. Criticism of the State Church arrangement was by no means new. Those churches that were not affiliated to the State Church had worked for generations to achieve equality and equal treatment. The new religious and life stance diversity contributed mainly to increase awareness of the imbalance of the State's treatment of the various religious and life stance communities.

The specific reason to create STL was the proposed new and obligatory school subject about religion, life stance and ethics, later known as «Knowledge of Christianity, Religion and Life Stance» (KRL). Several religious and life stance minorities collaborated with a common protest. Their criticism related to two specific points, that the KRL subject placed most emphasis on Christianity and that it was obligatory for all pupils. These protests did not prevail and KRL was duly introduced. However Norway was later made to reverse its position on this following demands made by both UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and The European Court of Human Rights (UCHR). However a consequence of this common effort was the establishment of STL.

STL's mandate is to work towards the state treating all religious and life stance communities on an equal footing, both according to the law and in practice. But the dialogue between different religious and life stances within STL also has the aim of preventing conflicts. Building trust and good relations across the different religious and life stances has been shown to be important when conflicts do arise. This was the case in 2006 with the eruption in several countries of the Muhammad cartoons conflict. Norwegian Muslims experienced that other religious and life stance communities offered them support in the public debate that raged at the time.

PART I:

Introduction

Many of those coming to Norway have heard stories about how religion and life stances are practiced in Norway. Several stories describe Norwegian laws and practices in a manner that is not always correct and which might even contribute in the creation of uncertainty and concern. Some may only have heard a small part of the story and therefore are not presented with the whole picture.

These may be stories about Norway's history as a «Christian» country. Others may have heard that neither Norwegian men nor women attend church or believe in God. What does it mean for people coming here that have completely different religious and cultural traditions? Can one raise his children according to his own values and life stance? Can one use religious symbols and items of clothing at a Norwegian place of work? What does freedom of religion and life stance mean in practice in Norway, whether one is religious or not?

These are just some of the questions arising in conversations with refugees and asylum seekers that are living in receptions. This brochure attempts to offer some answers as to how religion and life stances are practiced in Norway, as well as where the boundary lies between the individual's practice on the one hand and Norwegian law and common values on the other.

Briefly about Norwegian religious and life stance communities today

Norway of 2016 is a society characterized by a large diversity of religions and life stances. Norwegian religious and life stance politics is rooted in human rights, through which practical politics has been developed that mostly enables an equal treatment between the majority church (Norwegian State Church) and the other religious and life stance communities.

The Norwegian Church is the largest religious community in Norway and until recently represented the state's religion and church. This is a church belonging to the Lutheran tradition and has been such since the first half of the 16th century. Today almost 75 percent of the population are members of the Norwegian Church.

About 11 percent of the population are members of other religious or life stance communities. After Lutheran Christianity, Islam (2,7 percent of the population) and Catholic Christianity (157,000 as of February 2016) are the largest religions in Norway. Other minority communities are part of the ethnic Norwegian population, for example several Christian communities (protestant free church and the Catholic church – together 5,7 percent of the population), a small Jewish community (fewer than 1500 persons) and a relatively large group of humanists (about 2 percent of the population).

The Catholic Church in Norway is organised into three dioceses, of which the Oslo Catholic diocese (Okb) is the largest by far. The various communities of Okb number 85 percent of all Catholics in the country. The Catholic Church is, to a great degree, an immigrant church in which more than a quarter of its membership were born outside Norway. Of those born in Norway many are second or third generation immigrants.

The Christian churches in Norway are grouped together in an umbrella organization Norwegian Christian Council (Norges Kristne Råd). Within this community are also found various orthodox communities that are increasing in number.

The Norwegian Humanist Association was formed in 1956. Humanists are not religious but are organized in a common life stance community with own ceremonies, such as name-giving celebrations for newborns, confirmations, weddings and funerals.

Another important religious and life stance actor in Norway is the Norwegian Islamic Council (Islamsk Råd Norge – IRN). IRN is a country-wide umbrella organization that was founded in 1993. The aim of IRN's work is to assure contact and dialogue with society at large and to inform about Muslim matters. IRN numbers 43 mosques and Islamic organizations that number about 60,000 members. IRN represents about half of the Muslims in Norway and, as yet, there are no additional Islamic umbrella organizations.

About 13 percent of the population is not affiliated to any Religious or Life Stance community. Amongst these are found many with a particular religious background. For example only about one half of Norwegian citizens with Muslim background are members of a Muslim religious community. According to the Buddhist Association they have approximately 14,000 registered members although the number of Buddhists is estimated to be much greater, approximately 40,000 (based on the census from Central Bureau of Statistics).

The fact that many people opt to remain outside a Religious or Life Stance Community does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in religious and spiritual questions. For example there exists a large alternative movement that religion researchers often describe as new religious or new spiritual. The term new spiritual is often preferred because the term religious often implies a relationship to established traditions that do not form part of this new thought. Some believe in soul wandering. Others seek medical help from healers or from alternative medicine. In this alternative movement the division between religious and secular is often removed, thus a fitness studio can offer courses in yoga and mindfulness with roots in Buddhism and oriental meditation. In other words many people may be seeking spiritually although they may not be religious as traditionally understood. The Holistic Association is a life stance organization that takes new spiritual considerations seriously. This Association is based upon human rights and ecology, separating it from religion and spirituality, while simultaneously being a community for spiritual seekers who fall outside religious dogmas. The Holistic Association is also a member of STL.

In Norway there are also indigenous people, namely the Sami, who have traditionally lived in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The majority of the Sami, as the rest of Norwegians, are

members of the Norwegian State Church. Norwegian national minorities include Kven / Norwegian Finns, forest Finns, Romany people / taters and Jews. These are defined as own groups because they have a long history connecting them to the country, spanning at least 100 years. Norwegian politics concerning these national minorities has, through the years, been characterised by a demand to adopt Norwegian and unilaterally adapt to society at large. In other words it has taken a long time, with many discussions and white papers being produced, in order to develop an inclusive minority policy in Norwegian society.

Fact box: The Norwegian Constitution and Sami Constitution form the basis of the government policy assuring the Sami people of the right to develop its language, culture and participation in society. Norway is committed to the Sami people through several international conventions, for example the UN Convention on Civil and Political rights and the ILO-Convention on indigenous and tribal people in independent states. With respect to the protection of minorities Norway ratified the Council of Europe's framework convention on the protection of minorities in 1999.

The increased immigration from countries outside Europe from the 1970's and until the present day is one of the most important reasons for the increased diversity in religious and life stance in Norway. As time went on a larger proportion of immigrants took up membership in a religious or life stance community. This development has been gradual. In 1980 there were about 1,000 members of the Islamic religious community, fewer than 10 percent of all immigrants with a Muslim background. In 2011 membership in Islamic communities reached 110,000 or 60 percent of all immigrants with a Muslim background.

Figures from 2015 indicate a continued growth in membership in Islamic religious communities, the number now being in excess of 141,000. The Buddhist religious community has just over 14,000 members and the Hindu community around 8,000. In 1970 the Catholic Church in Norway numbered approximately 10,000 members and had the most significant growth of membership in recent decades, first and foremost due to a high level of labour immigration from Poland. In 2011 its membership numbered approximately 80,000, in 2016 approximately 157,000. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics the population with orthodox Christian background has also greatly increased, from between 5,000 and 6,000 members in 2006, to just more than 17,000 members in 2015.

The decision to become a member in a religious or life stance community may be made by any individual who is 15 years or older. This freedom of choice is freedom of religion and life stance in practice. In a job interview no person has the right to ask another person about their religion or life stance, or whether they are affiliated anywhere. The exception to this rule is if one is applying for a position in a religion or life stance community or at a place of work connected with a specific religion or life stance.

Secularism

Although the majority of the population is a member in a religious or life stance community Norway is considered, in many ways, to be a secular society. Secularism is not a unique term but deals with different aspects of the position of religion in society. Secularism can, to a certain extent, describe religion's formal position and function in relation to the state, but can also refer to the decline in man's religious belief and practice or the transition from an institutionalized to a more private way of practicing religion.

Since 2017 Norway no longer has a State Church and from 2017 priests in the Norwegian Church are no longer employed by the State. This means that the long process to remove the close connections and ties between the Norwegian State and its Church has more or less come to an end. There are still, however, some areas of public service where this separation is not yet complete. This is the case of the military which still maintains a special connection to the Norwegian State Church through activities such as prayers and saluting on parade, field services with an own religious field corps, and several chapels that are dedicated for religious services. Religion surveys carried out in the past twenty years, concerning the religious faith and its practice among Norwegian men and women, indicate that Norway has become a more secular society also when it comes to the religious faith and practice of its citizens.

The development in the Norwegian Church illustrates this change in society. Many of its members have a relatively loose connection to the church, this being manifested by low attendance at religious services and church activities. The member registry indicates that the share of the population that is a member of the Norwegian church is in decline. Fewer attend services, fewer baptize their children, and the number of 15 year-olds that are confirmed in Church is also declining. But we do also see that there has been an increased participation in other church activities and cultural functions, including everything from baby and infant singing, to concerts both with or without religious content. Many celebrate the festivals and religious holidays and attend church on Christmas Eve, or hold weddings and funerals in the Norwegian church.

In parallel to this development we see that there has been an increase in religious interest in the Norwegian public sector, especially in relation to conflicts among immigrants where there are different backgrounds and different religious and life stance practices.

Secularism has brought about major changes in the daily life of many people, for instance in the family organization. One example: Today many Norwegian couples choose to cohabit without being married – in other words as common law husband and wife. Until as recently as 1970 this would be considered immoral by most people and not in accordance with the norm of values held at the time. Today most people accept cohabitation. This example indicates that Norway is a society that has experienced great changes during the course of only a few generations, especially in family matters and gender equality. It is also important to point out that even though certain actions may be considered immoral they are not necessarily in breach of the law and therefore not punishable. There is clearly, in other words, a difference between law and personal morals. Most people would agree that marital infidelity is immoral, yet both the law and most people also recognize that marital infidelity is legal in strictly judicial terms.

The fact that many couples choose to cohabit without being married may be viewed in connection to another important development in Norway. In Norway most adolescents leave their parental home before they are married, often in connection with their finishing secondary school. Many view this as an important preparation for adult life. The young adults learn to be independent, take responsibility for their own economy, experience new relationships – in short make their choices and take the consequences of these choices.

Irrespective of each citizen's religion or life stance there is a broad understanding in Norway that religious interpretations should not form the basis of political decisions. This is based on a general understanding that the relation between God and believers is the responsibility of religious institutions, whereas politics regulates the laws and public goods that need to be shared without heeding religious learning.

From the point of view of the State it has, at the same time, been important to facilitate a society that is diverse and with an open life stance. This is done, first and foremost, to ensure freedom of religion but also because it is believed that this will contribute towards a more tolerant society that is a better place to live in. When public institutions provide significant economic support to religious and life stance communities in Norway this is based on the understanding that these are important supporters of culture that fill the needs of the individual and the community. For many, religion provides both a meaning and a sense of belonging in society. Additionally religious and life stance communities are a central part of Norwegian civil society that resolve many important social missions. This could be running a kindergarten, nursing home, youth club, or leisure activities such as scouts, choir and so on.

When diversity is a challenge

Although immigration has been the subject of political debate since the 1980's and 1990's these discussions have become more polarized in recent years. The terror acts of 9th September 2001 have had enormous consequences as to how religion, especially Islam, is debated and understood both in international politics and in Norway. The crisis resulting from the Mohammed cartoons also shows that the world has shrunk. People and information move across regions and countries, and events in one part of the world impact the debates and political decisions in completely different parts of the world.

In other words religion has now, for better or worse, found a place on the political agenda. Even though debates are often conflict-filled many discussions have actually succeeded in raising the awareness of important issues and informing the political decisions. In short one may say that parts of the public debate on these issues are now more informed although other parts, specifically those being played out in the social media, often appear prejudicial and polarized.

This impression is reinforced by surveys carried out on people's attitude to immigration and integration. It appears that the population is divided in its view of immigration and integration: Surveys show that the number of those that believe that immigration is good for Norway is falling, yet the share of those that believe that Norway should accept more refugees has

increased. At the same time almost half of the population is positive to immigration (Integration Barometer 2014 and IPSOS 2016).

As far as radicalizing and extremism in Norwegian Muslim environments Norway has had many of the challenges that face other Western countries. According to Police Security Services (PST) about 50 persons have traveled to Syria. PST presumes that the actual number is probably greater than this since not all those that travel are discovered.

Most of those that travel from Norway are young men without family ties in Syria. Many are born and raised in Norway. Some converts (including women and minors) have also traveled to this region. The majority of those that travel are poorly educated and with little connection to the work force. Many also have connections to criminal elements.

The numbers of those traveling to Syria is in decline. This is, not least, due to several measures designed to prevent recruitment to radical / extreme Muslim environments. Measures include far more than security and police work. PST itself stresses that it is community responsibility with many participants: school, child protection, local police, as well as members of civil society such as religious and life stance communities.

Religious and Life Stance communities have a large measure of freedom when defining their faith and practice. At the same time it is well known that some religious and life stance communities wield strict social control over its members without society at large able to see what is actually being practiced. This can be problematic, especially in relation to children, although adults may also be subjected to significant control, stigmatising and discrimination by a Religious and Life Stance community that is mirrored in the members' family and social relationships.

In other words, society at large needs to have a certain insight in order to prevent harmful or illegal practices from taking place. It is equally important that Religious and Life Stance communities are in contact and maintain a dialogue with the society in which they live and function.

These are challenges one finds amongst all Religious and Life Stance communities, irrespective of ethnic and national background. At the same time there are reports of treatment of girls and women in some minority environments that are characterized by strict social control and discriminatory attitudes. Public interest in these matters has contributed to greater openness, also in many Religious and Life Stance communities and many have become involved. One Christian missionary leader describes the challenges in the following manner:

I myself have seen this in organizations over a number of years: A few persons often wield a power that they abuse. But in recent years I have thought a lot about family as a closed room. The Bible and Church have always spoken

warmly about the nuclear family. (...) Yet from the media and court rooms we know that there much abuse of power, both physical and mental, behind every curtain. We must do something. As a church we must deplore all abuse of power in the family. We need to open the curtain and let the light of day into the home. We must make sure that whatever goes on can tolerate the light of day. (Jørn Lemvik in Dagen newspaper, 4.6.2014).

PART II:

Human Rights

The United Nations (UN) and human rights are highly regarded in Norway, both in the law, politics and among most of the population. One could say that because human rights are so highly regarded in Norway, they are considered to be a part of the commonly accepted political norm. This is reflected, not least, in the values concerning equality, tolerance and democracy that are recognized by all political parties as well as the vast majority of the people. Also most of the Religious and Life Stance communities recognize human rights. Simultaneously it might be in relation to religious feelings and interpretations that certain human rights are challenged.

On occasion human rights may actually come into conflict with one another. An example of this is in women's rights which are strongly protected in Norwegian law, being clearly designed to prevent discrimination against women. Norway also provides strong protection against discrimination towards gays and lesbians. At the same time the state recognizes that some Religious and Life Stance communities have views on the relation between women and men and homosexuality that differ from secular values of equality. For example, although a Christian community might, on the basis of religious freedom, refuse to employ female priests it might, upon appointing a caretaker or finance manager, defer to the law against such discrimination.

UN and the meaning of human rights in Norway

Norwegian citizens pay tax and send their children to school, and there is universal conscription for both sexes. These are examples of individual obligations to the public in order to ensure both the development and macro security of the Norwegian community model and welfare society.

This is a part of the Norwegian society contract. At the same time human rights are universal and apply independently of one's faith, political opinion, sex, ethnic background and so on. Human rights are also widely supported in Norwegian society, both in politics, civil society and by the majority of people.

Why is it that UN and Human Rights have traditionally received such broad support in Norwegian politics? As a small country with strong neighbours Norway has been especially dependent upon international cooperation and the international conventions which the UN stands for. In addition Norway supports human rights and the values that form the basis of the UN. There is a general understanding among the people and political leadership that human rights are designed to protect human dignity and basic common values. The first UN General Secretary, Trygve Lie, was also a former Norwegian foreign minister. UN Day (24th October) is celebrated in Norwegian schools by informing schoolchildren specifically about the UN and human rights.

In 1953 Norway ratified the European Convention on Human Rights. This, together with several UN human rights conventions, has been given precedence in Norwegian law. In 1999 the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) introduced the “Law on strengthening the position of Human Rights under Norwegian Law”. This law involves the incorporation of five conventions, passed by the European Council and UN and all ratified by Norway, to be included into Norwegian law. These are The European Human Rights Convention, UN Convention on civil and political rights, UN Convention on economic, social and cultural rights, UN Convention on children, and UN Convention on women. The Norwegian Constitution also received an additional chapter concerning Human Rights in 2014.

These take precedence over other Norwegian laws and demonstrate in practice Norway’s strong commitment to international human rights. It also demonstrates how strongly Norwegian society values freedom of the individual and its equality. This is independent of gender, age, ethnicity, religious background or sexual preference.

Freedom of religion

In 1964 the Norwegian Constitution was amended to ensure the freedom of religion for all citizens. This means that any individual is free to practice his faith, to convert or to renounce his religion.

In addition there is a law regulating and defining the frame for religious and life stance diversity in Norway. This law provides all registered religious communities with the right to Council and State financial support based on the registered number of members. This is a specifically Norwegian arrangement designed to achieve the greatest equality between the Norwegian State Church (which still maintains a special arrangement) and the other religion and life stance communities.

The freedom of religion and life stance protects the individual person and community’s right to its faith and to practice its religion and life stance. This is considered to be a basic human right. Freedom of religion and life stance also implies that nobody is to be coerced or nobody’s freedom is to be violated with respect to their choice of religion or life stance. This is also true for children. At the same time the UN Convention on civil and political rights (article 18, point 4) states that the state is obliged to respect parents’ freedom to ensure that their child’s religious and moral upbringing complies to their own convictions. This means that the state recognizes a parent’s right to continue the religion and culture of the family. More of this follows below in the section on Parent Rights.

Freedom of religion and freedom of expression

Freedom of thought, freedom of religion and life stance, freedom of expression are all basic rights. These are rights that are closely related and which may come into conflict with one another.

In recent years some of the larger debates in Norway have been about just these issues, namely the tension between freedom of expression on the one hand and the right to protect against hate speeches and ethnic, religious or other forms of persecution on the other hand.

This was seriously debated in Norway in 2006 as a result of the Muhammed cartoons which caused riots throughout the world. This conflict had certain similarities with the so-called Rushdie case that resulted after the publication in 1988 of Salman Rushdie's book "Satanic verses".

Fact box: In 1989 a fatwa (Islamic legal injunction) was declared by the then supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini. He accused Rushdie and the publishers of Satanic Verses of blasphemy and demanded that both author and publishers should be executed. The book was burnt on bonfires by Muslim demonstrators all around the world. In Norway Norwegian Muslims of all traditions and national backgrounds united to condemn the publication of this book. This resistance was also the point of origin in the creation of the Islamic Defence Council which was the first umbrella organization for Muslims, and which included both Sunni and Shia representatives. Satanic Verses was published in Norway in 1989. Three years later the publishing director William Nygård was shot outside his home in Oslo. He survived and has since actively participated in the debate on the conditions of freedom of expression in Norway and the world. The shooting incident was investigated but never solved.

In 2005 and 2006 Danish and Norwegian newspapers published 12 caricatures of the prophet Mohammed. Within a few weeks these drawings resulted in violent demonstrations all over the world. Norwegian and Danish embassies and consulates were attacked in countries as Iran, Lebanon and Syria. In Norway the already well-established contact and dialogue between Christians and Muslim leaders helped to soften the effect of this acute conflict

In retrospect it is clear that the Mohammed cartoon conflict had a major influence on the public exchange of views concerning the relationship between, in particular, Islam and freedom of expression as such. The January 2015 attack in Paris on the editorial team of the satire magazine Charlie Hebdo makes this debate as relevant today as it was in 2006.

One of the questions discussed is: Should we take into account the feelings of an individual or group of persons because of terror threats? In most European countries the answer to such a question would be no. Instead the acts of terror in France, Denmark and Belgium have strengthened many peoples' opinion as to the relevance of freedom of expression.

Freedom of expression is not just a human right. It is understood to be part of the actual basic value of European democracies. A Norwegian expert on freedom of expression, Anine Kierulf of the University of Oslo, describes two important reasons for freedom of expression; the taking into account of both the search for truth and democracy. In a newspaper article she emphasizes that freedom of expression is not only concerned with being able to express oneself freely, but equally important to be exposed to others' expressions and opinions – in other words the ideas, thoughts and opinions of others. As she writes: "(...) only thus can we, as a society, be aware of what others think, and be aware of who we live together with." (Dagbladet 11.9.2016)

Freedom of expression is also the basis for several other human rights, including freedom of religious and life stance. It is easier to see the connection between these human rights when

reading how freedom of religion is formulated in the European Convention on Human Rights which Norway has ratified. This is Article 9 about freedom of thought, conscience and religion:¹

- 1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*
- 2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedom of others.*

Here we see clearly how the right to express one's religious conviction is closely connected to the right to express oneself freely.

In Norway this means that the law and the majority of the population accept the right to be able to express critical views, even infringing views on religion and religious sanctuaries. At the same time there are many who are concerned that this will lead to an increase in intolerant attitudes towards individuals or groups, all in the name of freedom of expression. Despite this the majority recognizes that even if some expressions are unwise, cruel or even crazy, they are legal. As with the example of marital infidelity there is also a fine line between ethics and law. Even if it is legal to express oneself in a damaging or injurious way towards another person or group, this does not mean that it is ethically correct or wise to do so. In other words it is acceptable not to make any comment at all.

One is, however, not allowed to utter threats or express racist opinions or to encourage hate and violence. Acts of violence, irrespective of the reason, are never allowed.

Parent rights and its limitations

Changing one's religion or renouncing membership in a Religious or Life Stance community can, on occasions, cause conflicts in some families. In Norway we see this can be a particularly difficult experience for those whose values and religious beliefs differ from those of society at large. That is why, for instance, the Norwegian Islamic Council came out with a statement, found on their web site, that renouncing Islam or conversion to another religion is accepted in Islam. Parent rights provide parents with an undisputed right to raise their children according to their own religion and cultural values. According to Norwegian law the limitations to this are coercion and use of violence. Regarding membership in a religious or life stance community

¹ Lovdata: <https://lovdata.no/lov/1999-05-21-30/emke/a9>

Norwegian law states that this must be accepted by the child upon reaching an age of twelve. From the age of fifteen a young person may decide on their own if they wish to maintain or renounce their membership.

According to parent rights parents may choose the type of school that their children will attend. Only a small percentage of Norwegian children, some 3,5 percent, attend private schools. In Norway private schools that offer an alternative education program are permitted. Thus Montessori schools, which also exist in several other countries, and other schools that offer religious and life stance, such as a number of Christian private schools, exist in several local councils. Parent rights are an important reason as to why Norway permits private Christian schools.

The education authorities have received applications from Muslim communities to establish schools but thus far these have all been rejected, amongst other reasons due to considerations of integration. Some Muslim kindergartens do exist.

Fact box:

The normal state school is well supported in Norway. The vast majority of all children and youth attend these. The thought behind having one common school system is based upon the understanding that all children are entitled to equal education and equal opportunities. Additionally schools are the one place that children may have in common where all children, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity and religious background are included. It is at school that children learn about diversity and how to master disagreements and religious criticism. Critical thinking and research form the basis from which children may grow and learn.

Conflicts in the family about religion and life stance

What if a child and its parents have different views about questions on religion and life stance? There are examples where parents have used force and coercion in order to prevent a child from making its own choices, which appears to be in conflict with the family values. Then it is important to know that Norway is bound to uphold the UN Convention on Children's Rights which is universally supported. The resolution of disagreements between parents and children should therefore be by means of dialogue with the recognition that each family member has the right to follow his own conviction.

Parents obligations

One may not send children abroad for any lengthy period of time such that a child misses school. It is also forbidden to send a child to another country for the purpose of an arranged marriage or for genital mutilation. Any parent responsible is liable for prosecution if there is even a suspicion that a child is subjected to these. More about this on the UDI (Norwegian Immigration Directorate) web site <https://www.udi.no/ord-og-begreper/tvangsekteskap/> or <https://www.udi.no/ord-og-begreper/kjonnslemlestelse-av-kvinner-og-jenter-/>

The age of majority in Norway is 18 and any person younger than 18 may not enter into marriage without the permission of a parent or legal guardian. In addition one must also apply for permission from the County Governor, and this will not be granted if the applicant is under 16 years of age.

Fact box: The County Governor is the government's representative in the county. He or she is to ensure that any parliamentary or governmental decision is followed up by the county. One of the functions of a County Governor is to be the supervisory authority to receive all complaints from either councils or individuals.

Circumcision and female gender mutilation

One discussion that often emerges in Norway is the practice of circumcision of male infants by Jews and Muslims. This is legal and may be carried out in Norwegian hospitals. From the point of view of the state there is a desire to ensure that this kind of surgery is carried out in a safe and reliable manner and as soon as possible such that the infant's health and quality of life is not threatened. Circumcision of girls, also known as female gender mutilation, is forbidden by law. Here the state and religious communities mean that there is no basis to consider this to be a religious practice.

Fact box:

- *The age of majority is the age when a person is of age and may therefore enter into legally binding agreements and decide over his own economy with requiring a legal guardian. In Norway the age of majority is 18 years.*
- *The age of religious majority is 15 years. At this age a person may decide for himself whether he wishes to join or leave a religious or life stance community.*
- *In order to enter into marriage the minimum age is 18 years. Any person under 18 years of age that wishes to marry must receive permission from their parent or legal guardian and from the County Governor. The County Governor may only agree to such a marriage if there are compelling reasons for such. Any person entering into marriage with a minor (under 16 years of age), or who conspires in aiding such a marriage to take place, may be liable to prison for a maximum of 4 years.*
- *The sexual age of consent in Norway is 16 years. This means that having sexual relations with a minor (under 16 years of age) is a punishable offence.*
- *The age of criminal responsibility in Norway is 15 years. When a child reaches age 15 he or she may be brought before a court of law as an adult. Sentencing does however take into consideration young age.*

The individual and the group

To consider oneself as an individual with independent rights is not taken for granted by everybody. Many come from cultures where one is liable to the greater family or clan and these obligations may weigh heavier than the rights of the individual person. At the same time the prevailing attitude in Norway is that everyone has the right to choose his own life form, spouse and even dress code. This is in line with the prevailing laws on discrimination and freedom of religious and life stance.

Most people experience one form or other of group belonging, either as part of one's family, the place where one lives, one's religious community, political party or even one's group of friends. It is the right of the individual to make his own choices and to determine his own life that greatly influences the general Norwegian understanding of the relation between an individual and society. The Norwegian government web site describes the right to make one's own choices and to live in a society that respects the physical and mental integrity of each individual as one of our central values. There are few however who believe that such freedom should be without boundaries. For example one may not enjoy one's own freedom in a manner that limits or harms another's freedom. Children, young adults and others who are entitled to protection must be protected. At the same time children and others who are vulnerable have a special right to be protected against abuse of power and coercion.

The family

The family, as an institution, has a strong position in Norway. However the understanding of what a family may be has undergone changes. Up until the 19th and 20th century the extended family was the usual Norwegian family. Several generations lived under the same roof and worked closely together to resolve the various household activities such as child care. As time went on people moved from the villages to the towns and the family structure changed. In time the nuclear family became the most common form of family in Norway.

The nuclear family usually consists of one or two adults living together in marriage or cohabiting, with one or two children. The nuclear family is neither a Norwegian nor even a current phenomenon but, on the contrary, has been widespread both historically and geographically.

During the past few decades many new types of family have developed. These are not only a result of the relatively high proportion of divorces but also as a consequence that today it is socially acceptable to cohabit without being married. Divorce is a relatively new phenomenon in Norwegian family life. However being raised by step-parents or other caregivers is not new. What is new is that parental custody may be awarded across the boundaries of these new family constellations. One common type of family is the single parent family in which one or more children live together with one of the parents, usually the mother.

Following a divorce families choose different solutions but many still prefer to share custody of the children (about 30 percent in 2012). This means that children may have two homes of equal status, one at each parent. If either or both parents decide to set up new families the children

then acquire step-parents and step-siblings. With this often follows new “extended families” with grandparents, aunts and uncles. Many, in an ever-increasing number, live alone with neither child nor partner (894 126 persons thus registered in 2016).

In short there is no single template as to the structure of a nuclear family; on the contrary it comes in many different shapes.

Norwegian family policies

In Norway family policies have been actively pursued for a long time. This leads to many debates and discussions although most people agree that family policies should contribute to creating a good balance between family and work life, and thereby lay the foundation for well-functioning and equal families. Family policies shall also ensure a large degree of choice for the individual family.

Among the most important measures are the availability of parental leave schemes and the offer of good kindergartens. In other words family laws are to a great extent concerned with equality of gender. This is precisely why there is a father quota concerning parental leave such that fathers, too, have the possibility to build strong relationships with their children from an early age. Many immigrants might be unaccustomed to seeing fathers at home with small children while mother is at work. This was also the case in Norway a few generations ago. Then even the sight of a man pushing a pram was a rare sight although today it is common.

Marriage

In Norway, when it comes to marriage, one may choose to have a religious or a civil wedding. Even a religious wedding has a civil aspect to it. When entering into marriage the couple must be registered publically as married and they are obliged to adhere to Norwegian laws on marriage. A civil wedding, which is a religious and life stance neutral wedding, is performed by a judge or other public official, male or female. One may also be married by a priest in the Norwegian Church or a clergyman or chairman of a registered Religion or Life Stance community that has the right to marry. It is the Child, Youth and Family Directorate and the County Governor who maintains an overview of those religious and life stance communities that have the right to perform marriages.

According to Norwegian marriage laws a married couple has certain rights and obligations, and the law even regulates the assets and finances of a married couple. These are normally shared equally unless otherwise legally agreed between them, including inheritance, responsibility for their children and so on.

Today, in Norwegian society, many non-legal marriages are entered into, these being exclusively religious, and performed under the auspices of a religious community. There are numerous reasons why a couple might choose a non-legal wedding. One case might be if one or both of them do not have a legal permit to reside in Norway. Other cases might be to avoid Norwegian

law regarding arranged or child marriages. There are many examples in which young people have been forced into non-legal marriages, or where a child marriage has taken place in Norway or while abroad.

Another reason for a non-registered marriage is the possibility this offers a man to have more than one wife. Polygamy is practiced in many Muslim countries and the custom has also been imported to Norway. In Norway it is illegal to enter into marriage with someone who is already registered as married and polygamy is punishable with a fine or up to one year in prison. However it is not illegal to enter into a religious but non-registered marriage. An adult may decide with whom he or she will live and on the nature of the relationship between his or her partner.

There are, of course, certain problematic aspects to this, not least of which are the negative consequences that non-registered marriages pose for women. They may, for example, have great problems in obtaining a divorce on religious grounds, and they have no economic rights or any inheritance right in the event of the death of the husband.

This is recognized by many religious and life stance communities in Norway and is one of the reasons why many of these demand a valid civil wedding in addition to the religious ceremony. The above is also true for several mosques with rights to marry where an additional civil wedding is justified in order to avoid legal grey areas and misunderstandings. This is not least desirable because it is the Religious Community that otherwise is responsible to determine that the couple fully comply with the terms and conditions required in order to enter into the marriage.

Conflicts about children and human rights

The way we view children and raising children in Norway has changed throughout history. Bringing up children today is primarily based upon the child's needs, and the child is considered to be an independent individual from the moment it is very small. Boys and girls have the same rights and obligations. In previous generations children were considered to be small adults that were owned by their parents and, from an early age, children participated in the work force on an equal basis to adults. Today one is more concerned that children should have the opportunity to play and develop, and that a good childhood paves the way to a good adult life. This view of things by no means belongs only to Norway. On the contrary this is now stressed in studies on child development all over the world and in many different cultures.

Many people have heard about conflicts between families and Child Protection Services that have come about because of religious and cultural differences.

Fact box: Child Protection Services are to be found in every Norwegian local council and are there to provide help and support for children, young people and families when there are problems at home. Parents are responsible for providing care for their children. But if they cannot manage this then Child Protection Services should provide such help so that the child and young person receive care, security and possibilities to develop.

How did it get to be this way? Sometimes there are contradicting opinions as to how a child is being treated. There are examples where religious communities or minority environments refuse to allow children to take part in spare time activities, refuse them to play with children of the opposite sex or set other boundaries that resemble coercion. If this comes to the knowledge of Child Protection Services then it is their job to contact the family in order to investigate the matter.

The role of Child Protection Services is to ensure safe and good conditions under which a child can grow up. The main purpose is to let parents themselves take responsibility for their own children, irrespective of their religious and cultural background. Each year Child Protection Services receive several inquiries and, when involved, it is primarily to offer support to the family such that the family itself is best able to take care of the children. They make help available, even offering to relieve tired parents. In some cases it may be decided to take the child away from the family, but this is only justified if there is a basic failure in caring for the child and where the child's safety and welfare are considered to be in jeopardy. Lawyers are always appointed in cases where a transfer of care takes place and parents have the right to appeal and to due legal process. This means that parents have the right to examine, through the County Governor and the legal system, as to whether the decision of Child Protection Services is correct. Norwegian authorities stress that it requires a great deal before Child Protection Services actually involves itself to such a degree in any family and takes custody of a child.

Fact box: One of the most successful remedies used by Child Protection Services in protecting and enhancing the rights of a child in minority families is the offer of parental guidance through the International Child Development Program (ICDP). This is a preventive program that was developed in Norway, but which is now employed in many countries throughout the world. The main aim is to provide support for parents, develop their ability to see and understand their child and, not least, help them find good ways to act in relation to their child. This is especially important for many minority families that often lack a social network.

In those cases where Child Protection Services finds it necessary to remove a child from its family good foster families are required. Child Protection Services prefer normal families to volunteer, whether these are ethnically Norwegian or families with minority background, so that the child comes into a family where it readily recognizes both the language and the culture. This is a reason why STL recommends its members to take responsibility and make themselves available for children that need a safe and good home.

Women's rights, equality and religion

Until the 1950's most Norwegian families regarded the man in the house as head of the family. Women did not share the same social rights as men and were without any retirement pension if they stayed at home. They also earned far worse than men. During this period people started to protest seriously about the lack of equality between women and men

In the 1970's and 1980's there were many political conflicts concerning these questions. For a long time the conservative Christians were especially vigorously opposed to the modern family and the equality politics that had developed following the 1970's. However over time many religious and life stance communities have changed their view on woman's role in society. As one example the Norwegian Church has, for many years, adopted an active equality policy and has many women priests and bishops. The Norwegian Islamic Council, which is an umbrella organization of 41 organizations and communities, also had a women leader for many years. Equality policies have been successful in Norway and these now characterize Norwegian society at almost every level.

Research indicates that the participation of women in the work force is one of the main reasons for the development of the Norwegian welfare state. Norway's wealth is, in other words, directly attributable to its equality policy because women participate on an equal basis to men in the creation of economic added value. The large amount of women in the work force increases the amount of taxes raised which, in turn, provides the basis for more welfare such as free education, free health and hospital care and retirement pensions. Equality has also contributed to the increased wealth of many families because two incomes give the family a better financial security than one.

The purpose of family politics is to promote equality and simultaneously allow the individual family to make decisions according to their own situation. Families have different needs at different phases of life which is why many choose to reduce the hours at work while children are small. Statistics indicate that more women than men are employed on a part-time basis (34,7 percent women and 14,2 percent men). Men are still more active in the work force than women. 83,1 percent of men and 77,6 percent of women are employed according to the Central Bureau of Statistics key figures for equality for 2016.

This kind of life style and attitude to equality may be experienced as foreign for many that come to Norway with a different cultural background. The experience in other countries indicates that this can form the basis of misunderstandings and also of conflicts. In Norway the law states that a woman may make choices on an equal footing to her male spouse, father, brothers or any other male relative as these have no special rights or legal authority by virtue of being a man. If a women chooses to live a religious and traditional life that is fine. If, however, she chooses another way of life then this is also her own choice. Unfortunately we see many examples in these areas where women's rights are violated. Some people feel that it is a breach of religion and a departure from cultural traditions when women have the same rights as men, may work on an equal footing to men, and that girls have the same choices when it comes to education and the choice of partner or spouse.

Equality does not represent a threat to the family. On the contrary research shows that equality and equal value between men and women actually contributes to an increase in the quality of life, financial security and stable family life.

In recent years more women and girls of minority background, many of whom are Muslim, have raised their voices in favour of greater equality in their own environment. A major reason for

these debates coming out into the open is that young women who have grown up in Norway have different expectations and options available to them in education, work and life style than their parents and grandparents had. At the same time we also see that many young people with minority background choose a clearly religious identity. In the modern society with open religious and life stance communities there are many who contribute towards a better understanding that there is no conflict between being an active citizen and being actively religious, whether one is Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish or Bahai.

Homosexual rights

In 2008 the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) passed a new marriage law allowing persons of the same gender to enter into civil marriage. In 2016 the Norwegian Church resolved to develop a liturgy enabling couples of the same gender to marry in church. This happened after many years of tough debates within the church. The new resolution does however also offer any individual priest the right to refuse to marry a same-gender couple if it is in conflict with his own personal faith.

Homosexuality is not a specifically Norwegian or western phenomenon but exists in all societies. Despite this, in many countries, both gays and lesbians are subject to discrimination and being stigmatized. Up to 1972 homosexuality was forbidden in Norway and was considered as unacceptable long after that date. During the past twenty years society's opinion of homosexuality has changed drastically. Even so there are many that still find it a great burden to live out a homosexual orientation. Homosexuals are still more subject to harassment and violence than others despite an increase in security in Norway over recent years. In order to strengthen the protection of the rights of sexual minorities and to prevent discrimination a law was passed in 2013 forbidding any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression of gender. Research shows that there are still groups that continue to experience discrimination and stigmatizing but the aim of the law is still to strengthen the living conditions of sexual minorities and for the acceptance of all people irrespective of their sexual identity.

Making the individual's life and situation more visible has contributed to a change in attitude about homosexuality in Norway, and the protection of homosexuals against discrimination enjoys broad political and public acceptance.

PART III:

Religion in practice

Although Norway is, in many respects, an open religious and life stance society, there are debates and several political initiatives that indicate that there are those that are vocal in demanding a limit to special arrangements for religious minorities. At the same time there is general acceptance that integration is a two-way process and that the best solutions to conflicts of values are usually found in conversations and dialogue between the relevant parties – whether in the work place, at school or in local society.

This chapter discusses situations in which the individual's religious and life stance values and traditions may come into conflict with expectations in society at large.

Religion at the place of work

Many have questions about religion and life stance when meeting the work place in Norway. The Labour Environment Law is clear: the authorities, organizations and employers are responsible to adapt the place of work in order to provide suitable working conditions for employees, including on questions of religion and life stance. At the same time it is also made clear that the employee may not refuse to perform a task on the grounds of his or her religion, with just a few exceptions. For example a doctor in a hospital may refuse to assist in performing an abortion if it goes against his conscience.

A rule of thumb is that when employers and employees enter into a dialogue on questions of religion and life stance, good and practical solutions are usually found that protect both parties' interests. In many of these cases the employee may not have rights according to law, however several employer organizations encourage their members to develop good and inclusive solutions. Thus, for example, a canteen might provide food that all employees can eat, or there might be more breaks available if employees are fasting. If one is required to pray during working hours then it should be possible to discuss with the employer the possibility of making up lost time at a later opportunity, for example after normal working hours.

In most cases it is permitted to wear religious jewelry or symbols such as a Christian cross or Jewish Star of David. There is also usually no problem in wearing religious headgear such as a turban, hijab or kippah which may be worn at work provided it does not interfere with the actual work to be done. In places where uniforms are worn, such as in a hospital, many employers choose to make a hijab that matches the uniform. The police force does not allow the wearing of a religious head covering as part of a police uniform. The same is also true for courts of law. Lay judges, however, may wear religious head coverings such as a hijab. Religious head coverings are allowed as part of uniforms in the armed forces and in the Customs.

There is currently a debate going on as to whether there should be a national ban on wearing a niqab and several political parties have voiced an opinion against wearing items of clothing in

school that cover the face. These parties include Progress Party, Labour Party and Socialist Left Party. The government, meanwhile, opposes a nation-wide ban, the main reason for this being that it is only considered to be a small problem in schools or in public institutions. In the event of conflicts arising due to full-covering items of clothing such as niqab and burka then the local council or the public institution in question is encouraged to find its own local solution. This could include a ban such as the ban imposed by Oslo Council in schools, against the wearing of items of clothing that either partly or completely cover the pupil's face.

Even if the employer is responsible for providing suitable conditions at work, the individual employee is also obliged to find good solutions. A willingness to make adjustments and flexibility on both sides is important for this to work well.

An employer may not insist that an employee shakes hands with someone of the opposite sex, but an employer may demand that each employee treats all colleagues and customers in a respectful and equal manner. Shaking of hands is considered to be a respectful and polite gesture. After a short while most people either do not have a problem with, or manage to adapt, the Norwegian manner of greeting. Shaking hands is part of the Norwegian understanding of politeness and respect where equality in society and at the place of work is regarded as a basic value.

In short it is good to know the following: The probability of success at work and in society in general, is strengthened if one is capable of treating everybody, irrespective of gender, in a respectable and equal manner. This also includes the shaking of hands of a person of the opposite sex. Success at work, with one's own religion, is not only about fulfilling one's own obligations, but demonstrating flexibility and seeking dialogue and practical solutions that are acceptable to all parties. Simultaneously discrimination on the basis of religion is forbidden in the Norwegian place of work.

The Equality and Discrimination Ombudsman in Norway has produced some detailed information about what is permitted as well as the rights and obligations one has at the place of work with respect to one's life stance. It is all about religious holidays, funerals, pilgrimages, food, drink and so on.

For more information on work life and the practice of religion we therefore recommend the Equality Ombudsman's home page and brochures:

<http://www.ldo.no/forebygg/i-arbeidslivet/Religion-pa-jobb/>

Schools and kindergartens

Norwegian schools and kindergartens should allow for the needs and rights that are part of a religion and life stance. This, for example, might apply to dietary restrictions where Muslim or Jewish children may be offered alternatives to pork sausages when these are served at school or kindergarten. However parents may not demand that a school or kindergarten is to be free of

pork. Schools and kindergartens are also obliged to offer an alternative for those that do not wish to take part in school prayers, as for example at the end of Christmas term. In such cases the school should send out information in advance, giving those that might wish, the opportunity not to participate.

What about Christian holidays?

Are Christian holidays celebrated in Norwegian schools? Yes although usually with less emphasis on the religious content than before. Many of the Christian holidays are observed as public holidays at school and at work (Christmas, Easter, Ascension Day and Whitsun). One of the most important celebrations is connected to Christmas and the remembering the birth of Jesus. But also Christmas has become a holiday in which many non-Christians like to participate. In Norway Christmas is a cultural holiday when most can join in. Many men and women with a non-Christian background say how much they appreciate Christmas even if they themselves do not celebrate it. Just as other religious societies celebrate their major festivals, so Christmas is also a time for getting together with friends and family. It is a festival that is visible to everyone with the streets and centres in Norwegian towns decorated with Christmas trees and Christmas lights.

Prayer room and schools

In recent years there have been several discussions concerning school and religion. One such discussion has been about the prayer room – a room that is especially set aside so that pupils have a place where they can pray. Do Norwegian children have a right to a prayer room in school? In short the answer is no. Schools are under no obligation to set aside a designated room for prayer alone. Schools, especially at the high school level, are encouraged to provide suitable conditions for those pupils that wish to practice their religion. However the school is first and foremost an institution for knowledge and teaching and a common arena for all children and adolescents in Norway. School is not, and should not be, a religious institution.

An example: At Ulsrud High School in Oslo the school management decided against establishing a prayer room at the school that had been requested by a group of Muslim youth. Their reason for refusing was not because one was against the practicing of religion, as such, but that they felt that the existence of a prayer room would put undue pressure on Muslim pupils who did not otherwise wish to pray during school time. The consideration that weighed most on the Headmaster was to prevent group pressure on the individual student while at school. School is first and foremost an arena for learning and not an arena for the practice of and pressure from any particular religious point of view. At the same time the Headmaster entered into a dialogue with those students that wished to pray while at school and, what otherwise might have ended in conflict, was resolved through conversations and open discussions in which both the school leadership and the students were given the possibility to express their views.

In other words: In some few instances a school may agree to offer prayer room facilities. However pupils can always use a common activity room for everything from singing, games, prayer and meditation or any other requested activity.

Swimming instruction

Another question concerns swimming lessons at primary schools. For generations swimming lessons have been a part of the primary school curriculum in Norway. Swimming lessons are usually started during the 3rd, 4th or 5th grade when children are aged between 9 and 11 years old. In some instances allowance has been made to have gender segregated swimming lessons although the general rule is that boys and girls swim in the same pool, yet change in separate changing rooms. This is the question currently being debated in Norway with more and more people appearing to support the Norwegian practice of joint swimming lessons for boys and girls.

To allow a child not to attend swimming lessons is a problem, not least from the perspective of the child's own safety. Every year children and adults die in drowning accidents. From experience it appears that many people of non-Western cultural background are particularly poor swimmers. Parents that do not have a tradition of swimming are unable to teach their children how to swim properly. Swimming is a life-saving competence that all Norwegian children have the right to learn and is necessary in a country with such a long coastline and many large and small waterways. All parents should therefore make sure that their children take the swimming lessons that are provided by Norwegian schools as taking them out of these lessons will only have a detrimental effect on the child. If anyone finds this difficult then it is important to contact the school in order to discuss the matter and to find a solution enabling the child participate in these lessons. Experience indicates that such dialogues often result in practical solutions and, in time, many then experience swimming lessons to be both positive and unproblematic.

Meeting the public service institutions

Are people with a minority background able to preserve their religious and cultural traditions and requirements when meeting the health and education institutions?

With the increase in religious and life stance diversity many of the public institutions have now more knowledge as to how they may accommodate people of a different religious and life stance background. This may be through knowledge of certain food restrictions or with the allocation of a quiet room where patients or next of kin may offer prayers or similar religious rituals if they have the need for such.

Refugees at an asylum reception could speak positively about some good experiences they have had when meeting the Norwegian health services. Thus, for example, at one hospital they made sure that female refugees were always examined by female doctors even though this is not a right that the patient has. Many health institutions are making progress in this area and several hospitals and schools have employed a Minority Counselor to assist the institution in

accommodating the requirements of everyone, irrespective of religious or life stance background. Many institutions have allocated a room for the preparation of deceased family members.

There are however certain cases in which the health services are unable to provide consideration for religious or cultural traditions. For example parents may not refuse a hospital to provide lifesaving treatment for a child, such as a blood transfusion, even if this goes against the parents' religious belief.

PART IV:

Volunteering and cooperation everywhere

Volunteering and group voluntary action are terms that have an exalted place in Norwegian society. Volunteer organizations represent an important sector of society and research indicates that also minority groups and immigrants participate actively in volunteer work, far more than most people in Norway are aware.

Fact box: The International Labour Organization ILO defines volunteer work as follows: non-obligatory work, meaning the time a person uses in order to perform one or more activities – either through an organization or directly for a third party that is not part of one's own household – without pay. The definition emphasizes that the activity or service must be for the benefit of society, the environment or any other person that is neither a close relative nor considered to be a part of one's own household.

In Norway there is a long tradition for volunteering. Religious and life stance organizations and communities are a central part of this civil voluntary society, and this has been the case ever since the first volunteer organizations saw the light of day in the 19th century. There is more about this in the final chapter of this brochure.

Volunteering is often described as the link between the state and the people. It functions as a buffer in democracy because it increases the competence of the common man by his participating in society and in political life. Participating in volunteer work and its organizing helps one to understand how the system works and how activities may be organized in order to advance a cause that one may be interested in. By taking part actively in volunteer work there is much to be gained for someone wishing to become integrated into Norway. Through this one gets to know one's neighbours, other parents, other like-minded persons in one's Religion and Life Stance community and many others, and one is given the opportunity to make a positive contribution to society in an early phase of one's life in Norway. For many it is just such participation that is the key to inclusion and to an increased quality of life as a new arrival into Norwegian society. Many immigrants apply for membership to a community. In such cases it is important to determine whether the environment there is open and functions as a bridge builder towards the remainder of society at large. A closed environment with its focus directed towards the country of origin can quickly work against integration rather than in its favour.

Group voluntary action, 'Dugnad' in Norwegian

«Dugnad» is a word with long traditions in Norway. It is by no means an exclusively Norwegian phenomenon but does contain a certain character that is closely bound to our national community.

For those unfamiliar with the term, what does 'dugnad' actually mean? It is an activity carried out in common that is usually unpaid, voluntary and of a relatively short duration. These voluntary actions, arranged on behalf of a local community, could be Spring tidying in the area around a block of flats, building a playground on commonly owned property or parents getting together to organize a flea market in order to finance equipment for a sports club or school band. One of the major annual group voluntary actions is the preparing and organizing of the celebration of Norway's Constitution Day on 17th May. This celebration takes place in schools throughout the country and it is the parents who, in most cases, are responsible for organizing the events. There are also other types of group voluntary actions such as fund-raising for good causes, such as in the event of a natural disaster in another country.

A great part of voluntary work is about raising money for civil society organizations that themselves organize activity and work to promote their interests in Norwegian society. Volunteering in Norway consists of a myriad of organizations that are active on behalf of children and youth, sports clubs, political and religious work, - but there is also a large and professional aid sector that first and foremost works in the arena of international development.

In Norway we believe that group voluntary work plays an important part in our common cultural heritage and in understanding society.

The development of organized volunteering in Norway

Volunteer organizations were a new, large and important phenomenon in 19th century Norway. Many Norwegian civil society organizations date back to the period between 1840 and 1900. This was the period of growth of the great population movements which were involved in language and culture, religious missions and a labour struggle.

One major case that mobilised both the labour movement and the Christian organizations was abstinence from alcohol, the struggle against alcohol abuse that affected parts of the popular culture. The struggle for abstinence was about raising morals and combatting social needs resulting from alcohol abuse amongst the poor and working class. Women played a major role in this work. The popular movements were therefore instrumental in including Norwegian women into politics and community life. This in turn provided the start of women's movements that have meant so much for the development of the Norwegian model of society.

The religious organizations

The Christian missionary organizations have an important place in this story. Missionary organizations, both those that were active abroad and those who worked in Norway to save souls, were places where lay people, both women and men, could involve themselves in religious and other matters. At the start of the 20th century almost one out of every eight Norwegians belonged to a mission organization. The Mission and Inner Mission organizations were free organizations, but were tied to the Norwegian State Church. The creation of volunteer Christian organizations enabled the «awakening» Christians (vekkelseskristendommen) to mostly remain

within the State Church. They were large independent organizations that operated both close to and away from the official church work. The religious arenas of the mission organizations were houses of prayer, as many as 3000 of which were constructed from 1870 until the 1970's, this being more than twice the number of church buildings.

The missionary movement was open to both men and women but was often gender segregated. Women's missionary organizations formed the basis of the first type of women's organization outside the home. Missionary women were not a part of the movement for women's liberation although they opened the way for new female roles and new experiences. Women missionaries had no specifically defined function but were involved in activities such as healthcare and teaching. Women were also active in fund raising for missionary work. Such activity not only gained them more respect, women also became experienced in organization life and this was important in order to strengthen their influence in other areas of society.

Use of Deacons

The organizing of a multitude of mission and inner-mission associations during the second half of the 19th century and later, created a power centre in Norwegian Christian life and made its mark on Norwegian culture and organization life for many years thereafter. Out of the same movement, in time, grew the Christian aid organizations. It was a time of poverty and great social need and this period witnessed the emergence of several Christian health and care institutions. During the following decades and right up to the Second World War saw the establishment of children's homes, old age homes, homes for mothers and hospitals. The deacon commitment grew out of a low church commitment.

Fact box: The Diakonhjemmet hospital in Oslo describes its origins thus: The Diakonhjemmet hospital grew out of the low church awakening that characterized Norway in the 19th century. Following on from the tradition of Hans Nielsen Hauge one did not preach only to personal and inner Jesus-faithful and those already saved. The awakening made room also for the needs of orphans, hungry, poor and 'morally lost'. (..) The Diakonhjemmet hospital's founders were eager for a rebirth of what they termed, 'the original Church's most beautiful properties': the use of deacons, the community's effort for people in need. The Diakonhjemmet hospital was to be a power centre that would mobilise a major evangelical rescue for people in really difficult situations.

The growth in organized religious social work also mobilised the Free Church communities.

This impacted just as much the Catholic Church in Norway which had a strong deacon commitment in which nuns played a central role. Through the communities sisters ran schools while they also were responsible for the running of several hospitals. Catholics became renowned for their running of hospitals and their infusion of knowledge from abroad, but the majority's outspoken skepticism towards Catholics and the Norwegian Catholic church tells us a lot about the plight of minority Religious and Life Stance communities at that time. For example the question of Norwegian Catholic's being Norwegian enough and their loyalty to the Norwegian authorities was often questioned .

Civil society organizations

Organizations usually had one or more purposes to their business, whether it was to serve the special interests of one specific group or more generally beneficial business. They came about at a time when the state's field of activity was quite limited and therefore not capable of responding to many important social needs.

The Labour movement got its Labour Party, farmers their Farmers' Party and so on, and part of the commitment from the large popular movements was then channeled into party politics. In civil society, commitment led to organizations with clear interests such as women's struggle, youth employment, social work and religious missionary work.

As time went on this sector became more and more professional and has developed at a pace matching the needs of society. One such example is the Norwegian organization for asylum seekers (NOAS) which was formed when the first large groups of refugees came to Norway during the 1980's and the need for a political interest organization that raised the case for refugees' needs became very clear. Another illustration was the establishing of the secular Cooperation Council for Religious and Life Stance communities that gathers together many different religious and non-religious groups, but which itself does not promote a specific religion or life stance.

Part V:

Milestones in Norwegian politics concerning religion and life stance

In Norway attitudes towards religious institutions has changed much throughout history, not least during the past hundred years. The relation between religious and political power has been a part of the public debate for many generations and has taken place both within the Religious and Life Stance communities and in the large public arena. Religious and Life Stance freedom did not come about on its own, it being more of a narrative about conflict and struggle, but also about large and important changes in society during the past two hundred years.

Some important milestones in this development:

The Constitution of 1814

In 1814 Norway received its first constitution. The Constitution of 1814 is the world's second oldest that is still in force. At the time it was considered liberal in many areas. These include, amongst others, several human rights principles such as freedom of expression, ownership of property, and the right to be tried by law. The Constitution also allowed for the right to vote, although this was not available to the majority. In order to vote one needed to be male and older than 25 years, belong to a privileged work group and own some property. It was only in 1898 that universal suffrage for men was achieved and in 1913 Norwegian women were also given the right to vote.

With regard to religious freedom the Norwegian Constitution was very restrictive. It continued to promote the single purpose religious policy of maintaining the evangelical Lutheran religion as the state's official religion and that the State Church was the only permitted legal religious community. Jews, Jesuits and Catholic monastic orders were refused entry into the country. Church and State were closely intertwined and the clergy of the State Church were officials with significant public administrative functions. The parish priest played a central role with positions in the school -, caring - and social services right up to the 1960's. Until 1878 all public officials had to be members of the State Church and until 1892 the same was also true for judges.

The paragraph refusing Jews the right of entry into the country was only revoked in 1851 and the first Jewish community was formed in 1892. In 1897 the general ban on monastic orders was removed from the Constitution, however the ban on Jesuits was maintained until as late as 1956.

From religious monopoly to greater religious diversity

It was only in 1843 that the Law on Religious Community Life was revoked by the Parliament. In practice this ended the monopoly on religious truths and the control over religious practices wielded by bishops and priests. The pressure for this came from below and mirrors the strong popular undercurrents that challenged the power of the church. The law was revoked despite opposition to this from the King and government and this formed the basis for freedom of community in Norway.

Fact box: In the years that followed dispensations were given permitting the establishing of several church communities outside the State Church: Quakers in 1842 and one year later the Catholic church, although with specific conditions and restrictions. For example they were only allowed to serve foreigners or those Norwegians that had converted while abroad. These churches of dissent did not have the right to perform marriages until 1891. Also teaching positions in public schools were restricted to members of the State Church until as late as 1915

In 1845 the Law of Dissent was passed giving the right to free, public practice of religion for Christians outside of the State Church. Once the law was passed several new church communities were recognized as dissenters

Fact box: Hans Nielsen Hauge and the Norwegian layman's movement

The Norwegian layman's movement is an important flow within Norwegian church life that may be traced back to Hans Nielsen Hauge and the haugian movement at the end of the 1700's and beginning of the 1800's. Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824) is an important personality in Norwegian Church history and Christian life. Hauge wrote and preached his message with an emphasis on the individual's relationship with God, and with a modest and hardworking way of life. For several years he wandered on foot around large parts of the country while preaching and holding sermons. Hauge was arrested and imprisoned on numerous occasions for contravening the Law on Religious Community Life and he spent many years in prison for his preaching. In addition he wrote many books and in time enjoyed a substantial number of supporters, called 'Haugians'.

After 1945

In the first years following the war questions about freedom of religion and church politics were low down on the political agenda. The year 1945 marked the end of the Second World War. For Norway it signified the end of five years of German occupation. Even if Norway was spared massive suffering in comparison to other countries the acts of war had contributed to major destruction in some parts of the country, especially in North-Norway, where the German occupation had levelled almost all buildings and caused immense suffering among the population. Rebuilding the infrastructure, production equipment, places of work and housing had, therefore, a higher priority during the first years of peace.

After the Second World War, Religion and Life Stance were put on the agenda once Norway became a member of the UN and the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1950 Norway ratified the European Convention on Human Rights which

included a precision of the principle of freedom of Religion and Life Stance. After the war a balance was always required between the allowances made for the Norwegian State Church and Norway's international obligations regarding human rights.

Some important milestones up until the 1970's were:

1956: The paragraph in the Constitution forbidding Jesuits entry into Norway was revoked.

In **1964** the Norwegian Parliament amended the paragraph in the Constitution concerning religion which now maintained that every inhabitant in Norway, including non-Christians, had the right to practice religion freely.

In **1969** the «Law on religious society» was introduced replacing the older Law of Dissenters. This law provided the framework for Religious and Life Stance society activities in Norway. The most important aspect of this law was that it effectively assured equality between the Norwegian State Church and other Religious and Life Stance communities by providing access, first to religious communities and later also to life stance communities, to apply for State and Local Council financial support on a membership per capita basis.

Fact box: A Religious Society that accepts being registered must inform the County Governor with information of a democratic election, with statutes and a description of its activities and its creed / teachings. For more information on this subject see Lovdata's web pages: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2005-04-19-345>

State and Church – development of new politics

A really important question in Norwegian religion politics has always been concerning the arrangements for the State Church. After the Second World War this has also been evaluated by several public and church commissions and has been debated in the Norwegian Parliament on many occasions. The process of separating State and Church had been going on for many decades before it was formally passed by the Norwegian Parliament in 2008 which then decided to remove the ties that bind the State and the Norwegian Church.

In 2008 a cross-party agreement was reached – the so-called Church Settlement – which included extensive changes to the relation between State and Church. Also Paragraph 2 of the Constitution concerning the religion of the state was now replaced with the term: “The basic value will continue to be our Christian and Humanist inheritance. This Constitution will assure democracy, the state of law and human rights.” The Norwegian Church would continue to have a special anchoring in the Constitution as the people's church that is supported by the State. However Paragraph 16 of the Constitution also states that “All religious and life stance communities will be supported on an equal basis” (as the Church).

In 2012 these amendments to the Constitution were adopted by the Norwegian Parliament. From the beginning of 2017 these amendments were also adopted by the Church Laws such that

the Norwegian State Church may now act as an independent legal entity. This also means that the state is no longer the employer of the clergy and other employees connected to central church organs, and employment responsibility is now transferred to the Norwegian Church.

It will take time to change a system and a tradition that has influenced Norway for centuries. The reason that we finally have made these amendments is owed to the fact that Norway has become a far more diverse society. Pressure has also been brought to bear by the minorities religious and life stance communities in addition to a growing awareness of the need for equality amongst the majority of the people and its elected representatives.

Overview of STL's members

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- Lov om blasfemi: <https://lovdata.no/artikkel/blasfemi/34>
- Lov om ekteskap: https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1991-07-04-47#KAPITTEL_1-1
- Diskrimineringsloven: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/LTI/lov/2005-06-03-33>
- Likestillingsloven: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2013-06-21-59?q=likestillingsloven>
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