AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE
FIELD GUIDE

Norway

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy or be assigned to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Nordic countries.

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes unique cultural features of Norwegian society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment/-assignment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

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ECFG Kingdom of Norway

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

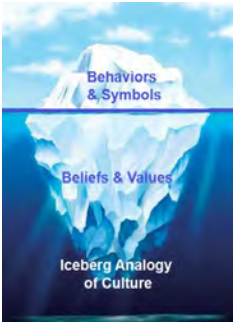
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people who you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through the Nordic countries, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Nordic countries occupy a vast area in Northern Europe and the far North Atlantic, comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Also included are the autonomous Faroe Islands, Greenland (both part of Denmark), and Åland (Finland). Until about 12,000 years ago, ice covered the region, preventing human inhabitation. Archaeological evidence suggests the first humans migrated from the Southwest and East to settle the area as early as 11,700 years ago. The inhabitants used stone tools for millennia and primarily lived as nomadic hunter-gatherers, traveling inland and along the coast by foot or boat.

Around 4000 BC, the inhabitants of the southern portion of the region began raising livestock and farming, practices that slowly spread northward and later benefitted from the introduction of metal tools. As trade increased, items ranging from the British Isles to the Roman Empire based in present-day Italy had appeared by about 500 BC.

Around 763 AD, Vikings from Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) began using their expert seafaring and navigational skills to plunder and found settlements across the region and as distant as present-day Russia and Turkey. In the 10th century, the Vikings established settlements in Greenland. Notably, Norse Icelander Leif Erikson was likely the first European to reach the Americas when he arrived in Newfoundland, in present-day Canada, in 1003.

Meanwhile, by the 10th century, kingdoms in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had emerged, and Christianity began to take hold in the region, which helped unite hitherto separate settlements. In subsequent centuries, the Swedes gradually moved eastward, settling present-day Finland, while the Norwegians took control of the Faroes, Iceland, and Greenland. In 1397, the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kingdoms merged to create the Kalmar Union, first led by King Erik of Pomerania. While this Nordic kingdom was cohesive in its initial years, its dominance by Denmark and Sweden and the internal strife between its constituent peoples ultimately led to its dissolution in 1523.

During subsequent centuries, the kingdoms fought violent wars for control of the region, though Sweden was often the victor and became a major European power, controlling much of the territory around the Baltic Sea. In 1809, Sweden lost Finland to Russia, though it gained control of Norway from Denmark in 1814. For the average resident, life in the 19th-century Nordic region was characterized by poverty, and many emigrated to the US. However, by the latter half of the century, industrialization had proliferated, with significant growth in mining, heavy industry, and shipbuilding across the region.

Norway, Finland, and Iceland all gained independence in the first half of the 20th century, though the Finns endured a civil war after declaring independence from Russia in 1917. Adjacent to more populous, powerful countries, the Nordics had to balance competing demands during several tumultuous decades. The Nordics remained neutral during World War I, after which democracy became embedded across the region. During World War II (WWII), Nazi Germany occupied Denmark and Norway and traversed Sweden, which remained neutral. The Soviet Union attacked Finland, which fought two brutal wars against its neighbor before demanding that previously allied German troops leave the country in 1944. Meanwhile, Iceland, the Faroes, and Greenland were primarily under British and US control. Although

Iceland had achieved sovereignty in 1918, it became a republic after gaining formal independence from Denmark in 1944.

After the war, the Nordics sought greater regional integration and entered a period of sustained economic development, becoming increasingly globalized while balancing shifting geopolitical affairs. Each country joined the United Nations (UN) and Nordic Council, as well as a joint labor market and passport union. With their proximity to the Soviet Union, Finland and Sweden remained neutral, while Denmark, Iceland, and Norway joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a political and military alliance among more than 30 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense). Meanwhile, labor movements and social-democratic political parties gained increased clout, aiding in the creation of welfare states in which governments provided their citizens significant social services, such as quality education and medical care.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Nordics became increasingly prosperous, and their citizens experienced some of the world's highest living standards. The countries are generally advocates for democracy, free trade, and human rights, in part because their economies and societies are deeply integrated in the global order. In recent years, the Nordics have experienced more varied coalition governments and sought closer integration with the West, as Sweden and Finland renounced neutrality in the aftermath of Russia's invasions of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. All the Nordic countries are stable, well-run democracies. A single-chamber parliament led by a Prime Minister (PM) is the highest political authority in each country. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are constitutional monarchies, while Finland and Iceland are republics with directly elected

Presidents. Although the roles of the monarchs in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are largely ceremonial, the Presidents of Finland and Iceland wield some executive power.

After most elections, political parties typically form coalitions to acquire and maintain power. Over the past several decades, Nordic governments have pursued broadly common principles, such as universal social rights, ensuring general welfare, equal opportunities for men and women, and full employment. According to an international corruption perceptions index, the Nordic countries are some of the world's least corrupt.

The Nordic countries are members of influential global and regional organizations. While each belongs to a distinct array of organizations, they are all members of the UN, European Economic Area, and NATO, after Sweden was admitted in early 2024. While Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are part of the European Union (EU), only Finland uses the euro currency. On the global stage, the Nordic countries tend to promote peace, democracy, and humanitarianism, although all but Iceland have exported weapons to nations in armed conflict.

The Nordics rely on NATO, the US, other European countries, and international support to defend against external, state-level threats. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and other aggressive acts have heightened regional tensions and consequently dominate the Nordics' security environment. In recent years, the Nordics also have experienced isolated terrorist attacks perpetrated by radical Islamist and far right-wing actors, causing increased calls to strengthen the region's security measures.

The region is one of the world's least diverse, as the vast majority of residents are of Nordic descent. The dominant ethnic group in each country accounts for at least 79% of its total population. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, immigration from other European, Asian, and African nations began to change the region's ethnic makeup, particularly in Sweden and Denmark. In

2014, Sweden began accepting thousands of asylum seekers, many of whom had fled the Syrian Civil War. The protected indigenous Sámi peoples of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and northwestern Russia are also a notable minority group and account for over 65,000 people in the region.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Early residents of the Nordic region practiced indigenous religions, venerating deities, spirits, and gods, who they believed inhabited various realms and the natural world. Norse paganism is perhaps the most well-known early religion, featuring mythical gods, such as ***Thor***, ***Odin***, and others. In the early 9th century, the region was exposed to Christianity through trade and pressure from Germanic peoples to the south. By the late 10th century, Christianity had taken root in the region after the Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish kings converted to the religion.

During the 11th century, many residents practiced both Christianity and pagan beliefs, often worshipping multiple gods. As the ruling classes adopted Roman Catholicism, the religion became entrenched in much of the region until the early 16th century, when the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe. In every Nordic country, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) became the official state-supported religious institution. Some leaders embraced Lutheranism to confiscate Roman Catholic property, increasing religious institutions' dependence on the state.

Each national ELC retained its grip on religious power as the official state church during subsequent centuries. In Finland, the ELC gained autonomy from the state in 1869, which increased after independence. While Sweden and Norway demoted the

ELC from official to national church in the early 21st century, the ELC remains the official state church in Denmark and Iceland.

Regardless of its official status, the ELC remains the dominant religion in every Nordic country, with membership as a percentage of the population ranging from about 53% in Sweden to 71% in Denmark. Although the Nordics remain primarily Christian nations, a growing segment of the regional population practices no religion. For example, around 30% of Finns and Swedes do not claim to belong to any religious group. Further, rising levels of non-European immigration in recent years have changed the religious makeup of the region. Today, over 5% of the population in Denmark and 8% in Sweden practice Islam, one of the region's fastest-growing religions.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Nordic society. Residents tend to maintain deep connections with immediate and some extended family members. Most households are single-person or nuclear (consisting of one or two parents and their children), of whom families usually choose to have just one or two. Relatives tend to live nearby but are not always present in each other's lives, except for major holidays and life events, and more often help with childcare in Iceland than the other countries.

Urbanization has changed family life in recent years, as city dwellers often marry later, cohabit (live in a long-term, unmarried partnership), or become single parents and have fewer children. Consequently, while the traditional family structure remains more common in rural areas, it is often diverse in urban centers. Most Nordic residents live in cities, and urbanization rates vary between about 84% in Norway and 94% in Iceland as of 2023.

While historically marriage was an arranged union between a man and woman, today residents of any gender choose their own partners. Generally, couples spend several years dating, live together, and may have children before choosing to marry. Divorce carries minimal social stigma and is increasingly prevalent among younger generations. Compared to the US, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden had similar divorce rates, while those in Norway and Iceland were slightly lower as of 2022.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Nordics' historically patriarchal culture privileged men as leaders and providers. Since the mid-19th century, women's status and rights have improved. Today, the Nordic countries are some of the world's most gender equal. Generally, their governments have been global leaders that support gender equality in the public and private realms through extensive laws and guidelines. While a small minority of the region's residents continue to adhere to traditional values–men as breadwinners and heads of household and women as mothers and wives–most inhabitants support equality between the sexes.

Although women hold equal rights under the law, inequalities between the genders remain, particularly regarding economic progress. For example, women earn less than men for similar work, a gap that ranges from around 9% in Iceland to 16% in Finland as of 2022. Moreover, women are underrepresented in managerial roles and take far more parental leave than men, suggesting persistent inequality in household responsibilities.

In the political realm, the Nordic countries have been at the forefront of women's representation. Women were elected to Finland's Parliament in 1907, and in 1980, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir

became the world's first democratically elected woman head-of-state as Iceland's President. As of January 2025, women comprise over 44% of each Nordic country's parliament.

Notably, Nordic women face relatively high rates of violence by intimate partners, a phenomenon known as the "Nordic paradox" because of the region's otherwise high rates of gender equality. As of 2014, women in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden experienced higher rates of physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners than the EU average. Further, a recent study reports that Nordic women believe gender-based violence increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, in part due to delays in their ability to receive support services. Abortion is available upon request in every country.

The Nordics have been pioneers for the LGBTQ+ community. In 1989, Denmark became the world's first country to recognize same-sex relationships. Today, same-sex marriage is legal throughout the region. While public opinion in all countries is largely supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, discrimination still occurs among some segments of local populations.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

While Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish are North Germanic languages that are part of the Indo-European language family, Finnish and Sámi are Finno-Ugric languages of the Uralic family, and Greenlandic belongs to the Eskimo-Aleut language family. The common ancestor of the North Germanic languages is Old Norse, which is related to Old English and most similar to present-day Icelandic. Finnish and Sámi evolved from an early language that people between the Ural Mountains and Gulf of Finland spoke millennia ago. Greenlandic originates from an early Intuit language native to northern North America.

As Sweden and Denmark were the dominant regional powers for centuries, Swedish and Danish served as much of the region's languages of administration, education, and religion. Meanwhile, many inhabitants spoke their indigenous languages at home and in informal situations.

Today, the standard varieties of the so-called Continental Scandinavian languages–Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish–are mutually intelligible, while the Insular Nordic languages–Faroese and Icelandic–are not. Studies suggest that Norwegians tend to understand other Scandinavians better than Danes or Swedes. Although Finnish has many loanwords from Swedish due to Sweden's centuries-long domination of Finland, the languages are not mutually intelligible. Finnish is more like, though not mutually intelligible with, Estonian, Karelian, and Livonian. In part due to this linguistic divide and the desire to participate in global trade and affairs, English has become an increasingly common *lingua franca*, or shared language, among residents. At least 70% of each country's residents understand English to some extent, a rate that rises to 92% among its youth.

Generally, the region's residents demonstrate respect, privacy, and candor in their communication practices. Across the region, residents usually share personal information only with family or close friends and are reserved when interacting with strangers. They tend to be direct communicators, prefer limited small talk, and take turns speaking, as they consider interruptions rude. Many residents also refrain from raising their voices in public and avoid boasting, as they value modesty. Nordic residents use limited body language and are often comfortable with extended periods of silence during conversation.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health

requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 16th century, most formal education in the Nordic countries occurred in religious institutions, where Roman Catholic clergy taught religion and basic literacy. The Church sponsored the region's first universities in Denmark and Sweden in the late 15th century. After the Reformation, national governments gained a larger role in education, though religious institutions remained central to schooling. By the mid-19th century, primary school had become compulsory in Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, and was common in Finland's urban areas.

In the 20th century, the Nordic countries generally consolidated centralized, student-centric educational systems that supported societal integration in welfare models that were focused on equality and social justice. Basic and secondary education were compulsory and free across all countries, which exhibited some of the world's best educational outcomes.

Today, the Nordic countries invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than in the US. School enrollment rates are high and nearly all residents are literate. In a regular global assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Finland has achieved some of the world's highest scores, while Iceland ranked slightly above the average of the nearly 80 countries assessed. Though each country has unique obstacles, common challenges to the region's educational systems include recently worsening student performance, shrinking rural populations and isolation, and disparities in educational attainment between majority groups and linguistic and ethnic minorities.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures,

people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Most Nordic residents value punctuality, especially in business settings. They tend to consider being on time a form of respect, trust, and efficiency. While the daily rhythm is often highly structured around tight schedules during the week, it typically slows significantly on the weekends, and especially Sundays, when many shops and supermarkets close.

Though dependent on the individual, Nordic residents tend to keep a little more than an arm's length of personal space. Residents typically do not touch during conversation and avoid most public displays of affection. Although traditionally rare, public touching and displays of affection among family and close friends have become more common in recent years.

The Nordic countries observe various public holidays. Besides the major Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, residents typically celebrate New Year's Day and historically important dates like independence. In June, many residents also observe Midsummer, which celebrates the summer solstice.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Nordic countries' art, literature, sport, dance, music, and pastimes reflect their shared and unique histories, northern geographic location, and modern global trends. Since the Viking era, Nordic craftsmen have been recognized for their textiles, ceramics, wooden toys, and other items that often feature bright colors, nature motifs, geometric designs, or mythical symbols.

Apart from some early inscriptions written in the runic alphabet (a set of letters that represent sounds and concepts), Nordic literary traditions began during the Viking era. At that time, residents wrote oral tales, histories, and mythology in Old Norse, particularly in Iceland and Norway. As the region converted to

Christianity, literature became primarily religious in nature and featured Latin instead of local languages. Subsequent influential authors wrote poems and books in various genres, ranging from poetic realism to Romanticism. Many of their works were in local languages, with Swedish and Danish most predominant. Today, Nordic crime fiction, often characterized by social realism, is one of the region's most globally acclaimed literary genres.

Traditional Nordic music and dance typically explore themes like nature and love. Many folk songs utilize vocals and various fiddles, zithers, the accordion, and other traditional instruments. Common folk or traditional dances are variants of polka, polska, schottische, and waltz, among others. Today, popular musical genres are classical, electronic, indie, metal, alternative and contemporary rock, pop, hip hop, and ***joiks*** (Sámi chants).

While the most popular sports vary by country, football (soccer) is prevalent across the region. Other common sports are handball, swimming, cycling, track and field, and tennis. Winter sports like skiing, ice hockey, and ice skating are also widespread. Further, the Nordics have a rich array of traditional sports. For example, Finland's national sport is ***pesäpallo*** (nest ball), which is similar to baseball, and Iceland's is "trouser-grip" ***glíma***, a form of wrestling in which each opponent grabs the other's harness to trip and throw him.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across the region based on local products, tastes, and customs, though common staple ingredients are seafood, root vegetables, mushrooms, cabbage, berries, rye bread, oats, cheese, butter, pork, beef, and game, such as elk and reindeer. Traditionally, residents pickled, cured, smoked, or salted many

otherwise fresh ingredients to preserve them through the long, cold winters. Typical flavorings are dill, parsley, horseradish, and caraway. Some common dishes are preserved fish, meatballs, open-faced sandwiches, and hearty stews. In recent years, a culinary movement known as New Nordic Cuisine has combined local, traditional ingredients and recipes with modern techniques, with a focus on purity, freshness, simplicity, and ethics. Notably, the Nordic countries consume more coffee per capita than any other region. Popular alcoholic beverages are beer, wine, schnapps, vodka, and aquavit, an herbaceous spirit.

Health in the region has improved in recent decades, as evidenced by rising life expectancies that average at least 81 years and some of the world's lowest infant mortality rates, which have continuously declined. The region's number of physicians per capita has also steadily risen and is generally comparable to the EU average (4.3), though rates range from 4.4 in Denmark, Finland, and Iceland to 7.1 in Sweden as of 2021. The Nordics' healthcare systems are publicly funded, comprehensive, and tend to rank as some of the world's best. As of 2022, healthcare spending as a percent of GDP ranges around 8-11%, well below the US rate of nearly 17%, despite achieving better health outcomes.

Across the region, non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, like cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, respiratory and other illnesses, present the most significant healthcare challenges. In addition to unhealthy lifestyles, other healthcare challenges are aging populations and shortages of medical staff, both of which have burdened national medical systems in recent years.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

In the 19th century, the Nordic countries began to industrialize, followed by a pivot to services in the decades after WWII. The region's economies grew rapidly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in part due to surging exports and the increased extraction of raw materials, such as oil, gas, timber, and minerals. Norway especially has flourished due to its vast oil and gas deposits and has the region's highest GDP per capita.

Today, the region's economies have large public sectors funded by some of the world's highest taxes. They tend to have stable inflation and exchange rates and integrate with other European economies at varying levels. For example, while all the Nordic countries are members of the European Economic Area, meaning they belong to a single market that enables the free movement of people, goods, and services within this zone, Iceland and Norway are not part of the EU customs union.

Denmark has advanced energy, medical, agricultural, shipping, and information technology (IT) subsectors. Forestry, minerals, and IT are Finland's most significant sources of income. Iceland, Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland rely primarily on fishing and fishery products, as well as shipping and tourism. Most of Norway's income is from the extraction of oil and gas, as well as shipping, mineral extraction, tourism, and other subsectors that have made it the region's largest economy. Sweden's economy is nearly the same size as Norway's and the region's most complex. In addition to being home to a diverse array of globally recognized firms, the country exports electronics, machines, vehicles, metals, paper, and various other goods and services.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. The Nordic countries have invested in extensive road networks and efficient public transit systems, particularly in urban areas. While nearly all of Denmark's roads are paved, the other countries have vast unpaved road networks, especially in

remote areas. All the countries except Iceland have electrified train networks and capital-city metro systems. Some residents use ferries, which shuttle commuters, service remote islands, and connect the region's major cities and nearby countries. Domestic air travel in Finland, Norway, and Sweden is common to traverse long distances.

The Nordics' energy sources are diverse. Oil provides a large portion of the region's energy supply, except in Iceland, whose shares of geothermal and hydropower are vast. The Nordics have ample hydropower, and Finland and Sweden have large nuclear industries. While Denmark has some oil and gas reserves in the North Sea, as of 2024, Norway is the region's only net energy exporter, given its extensive production of oil and gas.

The Nordics have some of the world's fastest and most reliable Internet connections, and well over 90% of residents are Internet users. Mobile phones are also extremely popular, particularly among the younger generations, with at least 111 mobile cellular subscriptions per 100 people in every Nordic country.

Media and press in the region have longstanding traditions of being independent and free. In a 2024 index of media freedom, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden ranked among the top 5, while Iceland scored 18 of 180 countries assessed, largely due to threats to its media independence from powerful fishing interests. However, the region features robust and effective legal protective frameworks and generally has high levels of public trust in public and private media broadcasters.

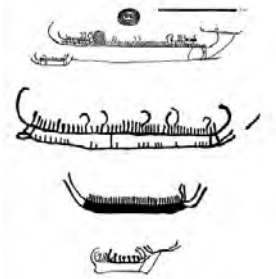
Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Nordic society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Norway.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Situated in northern Europe and home to extensive Viking activity from the 8th-11th centuries, Norway's early history is one of foreign subjugation. Norway remained at Europe's political periphery for centuries, as part of a union with Denmark from 1523-1814 and then Sweden until 1905. During the 19th century, an independent Norwegian national identity began to flourish. After gaining independence in 1905, Norway became a neutral power. Through early and mid-20th-century conflicts, Norway built robust political institutions and an extensive welfare state, later supported by newfound oil wealth. Around the turn of the 21st century, Norway became increasingly involved in world affairs, establishing itself as a global mediator. Today, Norway is a reputable social democracy, and its residents are among the world's wealthiest.



Early History

Archeological evidence suggests that humans first arrived along Norway's West Coast and fjords (long, deep, narrow bodies of water that reach far inland) about 10,000 years ago as Ice Age glaciers receded (see *Political and Social Relations*). Arriving from the South (in present-day Denmark and Germany) and later the Northeast (in present-day Finland and Russia), these early settlers relied on coastal wildlife for sustenance. Rock carvings at Alta, Finnmark (in the far North) depicting deer, reindeer, elk, bears, seals, whales, and fish were made continuously between 6200-2500 BC. During this early period, the ancestors of the Sámi peoples arrived in Norway (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Although scholars disagree on the timeline, many suggest that much of Norway underwent an agricultural transition at some point during the 3rd millennium BC. By around 1500 BC, bronze had appeared in Norway and was used to create elaborate weapons and luxury items like brooches. Early pagan practices such as burial rituals and fertility rite also emerged during this period (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

During the 1st-4th centuries AD, Roman-occupied Gaul and Germanic tribes further south introduced Norwegians to Germanic runes (an alphabet). Between 600-800, settlements in Norway became increasingly complex. Defensive hill forts and family homesteads flourished, while political institutions such as ***tings*** (local assemblies designed to settle disputes) emerged. Regionally, *tings* united to form larger ***lagtings*** (administrative units dedicated to lawmaking and negotiation). Major *lagtings* may have united to form aristocratic confederations.

The Viking Age

In the late 8th century, Scandinavian raiders – among them Danes, Geats, Norwegians, and Swedes – began to raid, pillage, and trade throughout Europe, ushering in a period now known as the Viking Age (8th-11th centuries). Many Vikings from Norway focused their efforts westward, raiding and settling in the present-day United Kingdom, Ireland, France, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland, Canada. Among the most notable Norse Vikings were Erik the Red, who founded the first Viking settlement in Greenland around 985, and his son Leif Erikson, who was likely one of the first Europeans to reach North America, in 1003.

Political rule remained largely decentralized during the early Viking Age, with petty kingships commanding local authority as vassals to powerful Danish kings. At the end of the 9th century, a coalition of Viking chiefs led by Harald I Fairhair subdued Viking bands along the West Coast, diminishing Danish influence there. Subsequently, Harald named himself King of the

Norwegians and passed the title to his son, Erik I Bloodaxe, in 930. Erik's brother Haakon, who had been raised as a Christian by King Aethelstan of England, seized the throne in 935, after which he founded the ***Leidang***, a joint defense fleet provisioned by coastal settlements. Eventually, the universal duty to supply the *Leidang* evolved into a regular tax paid to the Crown. Haakon also sought to popularize Christianity in Norway but failed.

Unification and Christianization: In 991, Olaf I Tryggvason, a descendent of Harald I, led a Viking expedition to England, where he was baptized. Upon his return to Norway in 995, he proclaimed himself King, winning political favor along the coast where he proselytized. After Olaf I's death, Olaf II Haraldsson (also descended from Harald I) became King and asserted control over much of the interior, unifying Norway under a single crown. He assumed Olaf I's mantle of Christianization.

Supported by English bishops, Olaf II persecuted pagans and introduced a religious edict that established Christianity as the official religion of the Kingdom in 1024 (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Removed from the throne in 1028, Olaf II died in battle 2 years later, while seeking to reclaim his seat. He was canonized, becoming St. Olaf, the patron saint of Norway (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

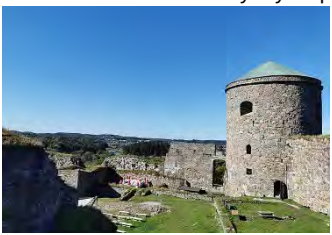
Olaf II's son Magnus became King in 1035. Ruling through 1047, he was succeeded by his uncle, Harald III Sigurdsson, who held power until 1066. The succession of Norwegian rulers from Harald I through Harald III firmly established a hereditary monarchy in Norway. Often supported by English bishops, they granted substantial land concessions to the Church, increasing its political importance.

Political Strife and Administrative Reform

Following a period of relative stability – during which the direct descendants of Harald III occupied the throne, sometimes as joint kings – political strife gripped Norway in the 12th century. Seeking to expand its influence and win political independence

at the expense of the Norwegian Crown, the Church provoked conflict, supporting pretenders in return for obedience to the Pope (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church). In 1162, Church-backed Magnus V Erlingsson became King and transferred the authority to elect kings to a Church-dominated body. However, the reform was short-lived, as Church-opposed Sverrir Sigurdsson deposed Magnus V Erlingsson in 1184.

Conflict persisted until 1217, when Sverrir's grandson Haakon IV ascended the throne. Haakon IV implemented administrative reforms, introducing a new law of succession and founding a national assembly. Reform continued after Haakon's death through the efforts of his son and successor Magnus VI, who in 1274 introduced a national code of law, known as ***Magnus Lagabøters Landslov*** (Magnus Lagabøte's State Law). The code transferred legislative responsibility to the Crown and repurposed *tings* (which remained important local institutions) into courts commanded by royal appointees. An accord reached between the Crown and the Church forced Church elements in Norway to accept the law in 1277.



Following Magnus's rule, the power of the Crown diminished somewhat as the Norwegian aristocracy won increasing influence. In the early 14th century, King Haakon V sought to restore the throne to its earlier stature and built a series of defensive fortresses. Akershus Fortress in Oslo became especially significant, and the political core of the realm shifted eastward from the coast to the site of the modern capital.

Union with Sweden, the Black Death, and Hanseatic Trade

The period from 1319-55 marked a brief personal union between Norway and Sweden under the authority of Magnus VII Eriksson, who inherited the Crown of Norway from Haakon V and was elected King of Sweden while still a child. However, separate national councils largely governed the territories, and influential Norwegian aristocrats forced Magnus to abdicate, dividing the union in 1355. Meanwhile, between 1349-50, the bubonic

plague, known as the Black Death, ravaged Norway. Likely brought on a merchant ship from England, the plague is estimated to have killed nearly half of Norway's population. The pandemic reduced the Crown's authority, halving its tax income and decimating the nobility, civil servants, and clergy, whose positions subsequently were filled largely by Danes and Swedes less amenable to the Crown. Without a strong central authority, local administrations emerged to manage political affairs.

Meanwhile, Norway developed important trade links with the Hanseatic League, a powerful trading confederation of northern European towns and cities, also known as the Hansa (see *Economics and Resources*). Establishing an exclusive trading office at Bergen in 1360, Hansa merchants traded extensively with Norway and eventually gained privileged trading rights.

The Kalmar Union

In 1397, largely owing to political and military maneuvering by Margaret I of Denmark (who had married King Haakon VI of Norway), the Nordic kingdoms (Norway, Denmark, and Sweden) established the Kalmar Union, which united them under a single monarch, Erik of Pomerania (Margaret's great nephew). Norway became increasingly weak politically during the Kalmar period. Margaret, Erik, and later Christian I, who ascended the Kalmar throne in 1450, regarded Norway as peripheral, governing the Union from Denmark and appointing Danes and Germans to administrative positions in Norway.

Denmark-Norway

While the Kalmar Union dissolved after Swedish noble Gustav Vasa rebelled from 1521-23, Norway remained part of a union with Denmark. A Norwegian council mostly comprising clergy sought to reverse Norway's political subordination in the post-Kalmar period. Though this attempt largely failed, Norway retained a degree of political autonomy. In the late 16th century, Danish policy evolved to prioritize continued Danish-Norwegian

goodwill to prevent Sweden, interested in controlling Norway, from gaining a foothold.

The Reformation: Meanwhile, a protracted period of religious reform occurred at the outset of Norway's union with Denmark. By the mid-1520s, the Catholic Church in Norway had become weak, facing increasing pressure from Lutheran preachers newly arrived from the continent. The reform reached its apex in 1536-37, when the Lutheran Church was established in Norway as a state church under decree by Danish King Christian III (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Simultaneously, a Norwegian commercial elite emerged as large fishing, timber, iron ore, and copper enterprises flourished. The copper mine at Røros was especially lucrative, enriching both its merchant equity holders in Trondheim and the King of Denmark-Norway, who received annual copper rents.

The union persisted through the 18th century, with Norway remaining a subordinate partner that was at times drawn into Denmark's wars with Sweden. The Norwegian-Swedish frontier fluctuated frequently during this period. It stabilized in the mid-17th century and was later formalized by a treaty signed between Denmark-Norway and Sweden at Strömstad in 1751, which established the modern border.

The Napoleonic Period and the Norwegian Constitution

Though Denmark-Norway initially sought to remain neutral during the era of Napoleonic France, preemptive British naval action to subdue the Danish fleet brought the union into the Napoleonic fold in 1807. As a result, Denmark-Norway took part in Napoleon's blockade of England and fell victim to a British counterblockade. Halted fish and timber trade wracked Norway, yielding an economic crisis and food shortages (see *Economics and Resources*). In 1813, Sweden, with support from Prussian and Russian forces, initiated an offensive against southern Denmark, occupying the Danish-German duchies of Slesvig

(Danish)-Schleswig German) and Holstein. Denmark surrendered, and the ensuing Treaty of Kiel transferred Norway (excluding its dependencies of Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland) to Sweden in return for Sweden's withdrawal.

However, Norway refused to acknowledge the terms of the treaty. Its Governor-General Christian Frederick, son of Danish King Frederick VI, promoted anti-treaty sentiment and found support among civil servants and peasants opposed to foreign domination, as well as timber merchants interested in free trade with continental Europe. Emboldened by this popular backing, Christian Frederick organized a constituent assembly at Eidsvoll in May 1814. The assembly drafted a constitution (that remains in force today – see *Political and Social Relations*) declaring Norway a free, independent, indivisible realm and providing for political representation through ***Stortinget*** (Parliament, or "the Storting"). Though the constitution stipulated that the King retain executive power, the broad legislative authority vested in the Storting rendered the body uniquely powerful among European parliaments at the time. Today, Norway celebrates its national day on May 17, honoring the Norwegian constituent assembly at Eidsvoll (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Second Union with Sweden

Nevertheless, neither Sweden nor any other major European power recognized Norway's independence. In July 1814, under the command of Crown Prince Charles John (a French Marshall appointed to the Swedish throne in 1810), Sweden attacked Norway. Charles John's forces routed the Norwegian resistance, and Christian capitulated after only 2 weeks of conflict. Charles John decided to accept the Eidsvoll Constitution, allowing the Storting to retain its power, while merging Norway and Sweden in a personal union.

Reorganization and Nationalism: The 19th century was a period of significant political and social reorganization in Norway. The nobility was formally abolished in 1821, as civil servants,

farmers, and a budding labor movement emerged as the most influential political elements. Loose confederations became formal political parties in the 1880s. Having become increasingly aligned over several decades, progressive civil servants and agrarian elements established the ***Venstre*** ("Left," the Liberal Party, or V) in 1884. That year also yielded the ***Høyre*** ("Right," the Conservative Party, or H). In 1887, labor organization members founded the ***Det norske Arbeiderparti*** (Norwegian Labor Party, or DNA, known since 2011 as the ***Arbeiderpartiet***, or Ap – see *Political and Social Relations*).

Meanwhile, a distinctly Norwegian national consciousness grew during the 19th century. Norwegian mathematicians, physicists, historians, dramatists, poets, painters, explorers, and statesmen achieved world renown, becoming champions of independent Norwegian cultural expression. As this identity developed, political divisions emerged between the Storting, Swedish ***Riksdag*** (Parliament), and the King of the Union. As Norwegians sought increased political latitude, they gained some legal authority over the Swedes between 1842-86. By the late 19th century, they had established de facto authority of the Storting over the King.

Dissolution of the Union

While domestically independent, Norway lacked representation abroad, as its foreign interests remained in the hands of a joint Swedish-Norwegian diplomatic corps. Seeking to reverse this diplomatic arrangement, the Storting passed a bill establishing an independent Norwegian consular service in 1905. Oscar II, then King of the Union, refused to sanction it, causing Norway's coalition government to resign in protest. In turn, Oscar refused to accept the resignation, which spurred the Storting's June 7 ***unionsoppløsningen*** (dissolution of the Union) declaration. To resolve the matter more formally, Norway held a referendum on dissolution in August. With 357 votes,149 in favor of dissolution and 184 opposed, the union formally dissolved.

World War I (WWI)

At the outset of WWI (1914-18), which pitted the Allies (Britain, France, Russia, and the US) against the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire), Norway, Sweden, and Denmark issued a declaration of neutrality. Despite British pressure, Norway initially continued to export fish and ores to Germany, profiting from high wartime prices. Between 1915-17, however, after its commercial vessels fell victim to Germany's submarine warfare campaign in the North Sea, Norway began to cooperate with Britain and agreed to reduce trade with Germany, while secretly providing the Allies with merchant vessels in exchange for much-needed imports. While historians occasionally refer to Norway as the "neutral ally," Norway nevertheless maintained its official neutrality.

In the postwar Paris Peace Conference, Norway won sovereign control of Svalbard (see *Political and Social Relations*), an Arctic archipelago that was previously *terra nullis* (no man's land) under the condition that it allow foreign mining, fishing, and hunting to continue. The Svalbard Treaty entered into force in 1925.

The Interwar Period

Between 1924-35, control of the Storting alternated between the V, H, DNA, and ***Bondepartiet*** (Agrarian Party, or Bp, now ***Senterpartiet***, or Centre Party, Sp). Focusing primarily on economic restoration after years of postwar inflation, successive governments sought to restore the krone (Norway's currency) to its prewar value. However, Norway poorly managed its recovery effort and suffered from serious monetary and labor crises in the mid-1920s (see *Economics and Resources*). Already approaching 20% by 1927, unemployment worsened as the Great Depression progressed in the early 1930s, eventually rising above 30%.

The crisis brought the reformed DNA to the center of Norwegian politics. Moderated by several cleavages in the 1920s that saw communist elements break away, it proposed a "Work for All"

fiscal expansion program designed to increase employment that found favor among many Norwegians. As a result, the DNA won 69 of 150 Storting seats in the 1933 national election. In 1935, the DNA and Bp formed a coalition government under the leadership of Labor (DNA) parliamentarian Johan Nygaardsvold, implementing a series of social reforms – primarily pension and unemployment insurance – and substantially expanding state spending. These efforts somewhat improved the labor situation.

During this period, Norway demilitarized markedly. Led by the staunchly anti-militaristic DNA, the government refused to spend enough to maintain a functional defense force, emboldened by the belief that continued neutrality would prevent future conflict. In 1938, as politics in continental Europe became increasingly tense, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark issued another joint declaration of neutrality.

World War II (WWII)

In 1939, Norway rejected Adolf Hitler's proposal for a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, electing instead to remain neutral. German forces invaded in April 1940, seizing Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik in a rapid campaign. Shortly thereafter, the Storting granted complete wartime authority to King Haakon VII.

On the day of the invasion, Vidkun Quisling, the Nazi-sympathizing leader of ***Nasjonal Samling*** (National Union, or NS, a small far-right party) organized a coup. The German envoy to Norway delivered an ultimatum urging King Haakon to capitulate, revoke Nygaardsvold's mandate, and recognize Quisling as the legitimate authority. After Haakon refused, the Germans replaced Quisling with an Administrative Council of other Nazi-aligned Norwegians.

As the German military campaign proceeded, the underfunded Norwegian Army abandoned its defensive effort in the South. Nevertheless, with support from Allied forces, the Norwegians managed to recapture Narvik, a key iron-producing town, and hold it until June, when Allied support withdrew to France. Having fled northward from Oslo by train after the German

invasion, King Haakon and the Nygaardsvold Government left Norway shortly thereafter, establishing a government-in-exile in London. They coordinated the war effort from a distance, leveraging Norway's merchant fleet to support the Allied cause.

In September, Hitler removed the Administrative Council and appointed a German, Josef Terboven, to administer Norway. Terboven considered Norway's coastline and economy valuable, because they supported extensive German naval basing and the German war machine's materiel needs. In 1942, Hitler established Quisling as the head of an entirely NS-staffed puppet government under Terboven.

Terboven, Quisling, and the NS established a brutally repressive regime that sought to Nazify Norwegian society. Norway became a police state, with strict Nazi control of the press, economy, and civil institutions. The German security forces closely monitored and violently suppressed the population. The regime also launched the Holocaust in Norway, issuing orders to arrest all Norwegian Jews in late 1942. The Germans and Norwegian collaborators arrested and transferred hundreds of Jews to Germany, from where they were sent by train to death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau in southern Poland and other Nazi-run camps. At least 757 Norwegian Jews were killed during the Nazi occupation.

Meanwhile, overland escape routes, facilitated by underground organizers, enabled around 60% of Norway's Jewish population to escape to Sweden. A robust resistance movement against the Nazi regime also emerged, involving widespread passive resistance to Nazi initiatives, labor strikes, and extensive industrial sabotage. In response, the regime sent captured resistance actors to concentration camps in Norway and abroad.

As the war progressed, Germany's hold on occupied Norway weakened. Losing territory in the North to a Soviet offensive in 1944, retreating German forces burned much of the countryside, leaving it in ruins. After the Germans surrendered in May 1945,

the occupying force retreated peacefully. In response, Terboven and several NS leaders committed suicide.

The Postwar Period

Immediately after Norway's liberation, the 1945 general election yielded a DNA majority, which would persist for the next 20 years. A broad coalition government formed under the leadership of Labor figure Einar Gerhardsen, whose postwar government prioritized justice and reconstruction. Having been tried in Oslo, 25 Norwegian Nazi collaborators (Quisling among them) were sentenced to death, while 19,000 more were imprisoned. Meanwhile, efforts to revive the Norwegian economy and rebuild the damaged merchant fleet proved effective, as national production recovered to prewar levels by 1949 (see *Economics and Resources*).

To bolster its national security with tensions in Europe again on the rise, Norway joined the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a political and military alliance among more than 30 nations that promotes its members' security through collective defense) in 1949. However, Norway adopted several restrictions that prevented NATO basing and nuclear stockpiling in the country, enabling it to maintain and improve its relationship with the Soviet Union (USSR) at the same time.

The Norwegian Welfare State

In the 1950s-60s, successive Labor-led governments (mostly with Gerhardsen as PM) worked to expand the social welfare programs introduced 2 decades earlier by instituting universal pensions in 1957 and national welfare assistance in 1964. Though the DNA lost its majority to a center-right coalition in 1965, welfare reforms continued, with a novel earnings-related supplementary pension established in 1967. These efforts laid the groundwork of the modern Norwegian welfare state, which remains robust today (see *Economics and Resources*).

European Economic Integration: As Norway developed its social programs, the country decided to seek economic

integration with other European nations. Having joined the European Free Trade Association at its inception in 1960, Norway also applied for membership in the European Economic Community (EEC, the predecessor to the European Union) in 1961, and again in 1967 alongside Britain, Ireland, and Denmark. Accession negotiations were suspended on both occasions after French President Charles de Gaulle vetoed the British application. Having applied again in 1969, Norway won EEC acceptance but did not join the bloc after Norwegian voters defeated a referendum on membership in 1972.

Oil Wealth: During this period, foreign firms discovered and Norway laid claim to large offshore hydrocarbon deposits in Norwegian waters. In 1972, the government established a state-owned oil firm, Statoil (now Equinor). Between Statoil's vast earnings and lucrative exploration and drilling concessions to private (Norwegian and foreign) firms, Norway's burgeoning oil wealth contributed substantially to economic growth and supported the expanding welfare state. Since 1969, some 80% of Norway's oil revenue has accrued to its citizens (see *Economics and Resources*).

Parliamentary Politics and International Involvement

The DNA retained control of the Storting between 1973-81, yielding Norway's first woman PM, Gro Harlem Brundtland, in 1981 (see *Sex and Gender*). From 1981-96, the DNA traded control of the Storting with conservative coalitions, and politics centered on continued debate about the EEC. Brundtland returned as PM twice during this period and was in power when the USSR dissolved in 1991.

The reformation of the Russian state reignited a decades-long dispute over territorial boundaries in the Barents Sea, north of the land border between Norway and Russia. Given the Sea's oil and gas reserves, the disagreement seemed intractable but would become settled in 2010, when a treaty evenly divided the disputed area (see *Political and Social Relations*).

At the turn of the 21st century, Norway became increasingly involved in global affairs. Emerging as an international mediator, it facilitated discussions between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization from 1993-2000, and between Sri Lanka and Tamil insurgents in 2002-03. Norway assigned troops to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, and in 2011, the Norwegian Royal Air Force flew F-16s in support of NATO's Operation Unified Protector in Libya.

Conservative Resurgence

In 2013, the Ap (formerly DNA) failed to secure a parliamentary majority after 7 years in power under Jens Stoltenberg, who the following year became NATO's Secretary General. A center-right coalition won control, with H leader Erna Solberg becoming Norway's first Conservative PM since 1990. Immigration and environmental concerns dominated Solberg's tenure, especially as migrants fleeing Syria's civil war entered Norway in increasing numbers in 2015. In a compromise with the Labor and Christian Democrat opposition, the Solberg Government agreed to grant amnesty to some asylum seekers who had entered the country illegally, providing shelter and funding repatriation while simultaneously pursuing stricter immigration policies.

Solberg won reelection in 2017, forming a minority government in coalition with the V. After weathering the COVID-19 pandemic (and implementing one of Europe's most stringent response strategies – see *Sustenance and Health*), the Solberg Government lost its mandate in the 2021 general elections.

Labor leader Jonas Gahr Støre then became PM of a minority government, which remains in power today. Environmental politics and the Russia-Ukraine war have dominated the Storting's agenda in recent years. Norway's role as a major oil producer contradicts its efforts to protect the environment (see *Technology and Material* and *Political and Social Relations*). Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Norway has delivered

substantial military aid to Ukraine (see *Economics and Resources*). It also has displayed its resolve as a NATO ally, redoubling its commitment to meet the organization's defense expenditure target and holding a defense exercise with Finland and Sweden in early 2024 after their NATO accession.

Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Ancient Nordic folklore represents a well-developed system of religious beliefs that evolved over centuries. Most closely associated with Viking beliefs, the Nordic cosmology integrates elements from a range of northern European belief systems, with particularly evident ties to Germanic mythology.

Odin the Wanderer: ***Odin***, a paternal deity in Norse cosmology (see *Religion and Spirituality*), is associated with acquired, rather than innate, wisdom. Tradition relates that he wandered both the earthly and divine realms seeking knowledge. Eventually finding the water of wisdom at the Well of Urd, his quest became sacrificial. Yielding his eye to the well, Odin earned its knowledge. Unsatisfied with the water's wisdom, he made another self-sacrifice, ritually hanging himself from ***Yggdrasil*** (the tree of life – see *Religion and Spirituality*), gaining knowledge of the runic alphabet in return.

Ragnarök: Nordic folklore foretells of a coming cosmological battle, ***Ragnarök***, in which the principal Norse gods struggle against cosmic monsters. ***Thor*** (god of lighting, thunder, storms, trees, strength, and fertility), *Odin*, and ***Freyr*** (god of prosperity, peace, and fertility) succumb to the monsters. With the Gods defeated, a wolf swallows the sun, the stars fall, and the cosmos floods. Finding refuge in a forest, two humans survive the deluge. As the water recedes, descendants of the original cast of gods appear, and life begins anew in an abundant world.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Kingdom of Norway (Norway)
Kongeriket Norge (Norwegian)

Political Borders
Sweden: 1,035 mi
Finland: 441 mi
Russia: 119 mi
Coastline: 63,962 mi

Capital
Oslo

Demographics
Norway's population of about 5.5 million is growing at an annual rate of around 0.6%. Some 84% of the population lives in urban areas, with about 1.1 million people residing in Norway's capital and most populous city, Oslo. Generally, the population concentrates in coastal areas, particularly in the South.

Flag
Designed in 1821 and officially adopted in 1899, a few years prior to Norway's separation from Sweden (see *History and Myth*), the Norwegian flag is red with a dark blue cross outlined in white that extends to its edges. The vertical part of the cross is off center toward the hoist side, resembling the style of the Nordic Cross and symbolizing Norway's membership in the community of Nordic nations. The colors represent Norway's past political unions (see *History and Myth*) – red and white with Denmark and blue with Sweden.

Geography
Norway is the world's 69th and Europe's 8th largest country. Norway borders the Barents Sea to the north, Russia, Finland,

and Sweden to the east, the Skagerrak strait to the south, the North Sea to the southwest, and the Norwegian Sea to the west. Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago, lies off the mainland's northern coast in the Arctic Ocean and includes nine main islands. Slightly larger than New Mexico, Norway's total land area is 117,484 sq mi.

About two-thirds of Norway's landscape is mountainous, with the rest comprising scattered plains, forests, and some 65,000 lakes. Fjords (long, deep, narrow bodies of water that reach far inland) indent the coastline due to Ice Age glaciation (the process or result of glacier coverage, see *History and Myth*). Despite its relatively small size, Norway's jagged, twisting coastline is the world's second longest after Canada's. The western, coastal Vestlandet region is home to many of Norway's 240,000 islands, more than any other country except Sweden. A group of numerous mountain ranges, collectively called the Lang Mountains, runs northward from the country's southernmost point, dividing Vestlandet from Østlandet, the eastern region. Østlandet features Norway's highest point (Galdhøpiggen, 8,100 ft) and longest river (Glomm, 372 mi).

Trøndelag, Norway's central region, is mountainous with small strips of lowlands along the coast, fjords, and river valleys. Nord-Norge, the northernmost region, lies mostly above the Arctic Circle. It is extremely mountainous, with dense forests, many rivers, and thousands of lakes.

Climate

Much of Norway has a maritime climate that varies by latitude, and winter is the longest of its four seasons. Due to the Gulf Stream, Norway is warmer than other countries at the same degrees of latitude. Nearly half the country lies within the Arctic Circle, where winter lasts longer than in the far South. The Circle experiences polar nights and the midnight sun, periods of 24-hour darkness or light. In the cold northern interior, January temperatures average 5 °F, and during the short summers, daytime temperatures average 57 °F in July.

Average temperatures are higher in the South, where the coastal climate is cold in the winter and cool in the summer. Bergen, on the southwestern coast, has an average low of 33 °F in January and high of 67 °F in July. In the Southeast, the climate is semi-continental, making for colder winters and warmer summers. In Oslo, the average low in January is 24 °F, and the average high in July is 73 °F. Much of Norway receives around 32-40 in of rain and snow per year, though the coast tends to be wetter. Bergen receives on average 98 in of annual precipitation.

Natural Hazards

Floods, landslides, and avalanches are the most common natural disasters in Norway. In 2020, one of the worst landslides in Norway's modern history resulted in the death of 10 people and over 700 evacuated from Ask, a village north of Oslo. The landslide caused serious damage, destroyed homes, and created a deep ravine across a road that cars could not pass. In 2023, days of heavy rain caused catastrophic flooding on the Begna River, displacing hundreds of people and causing major roads and railways to close, with damage estimates of nearly $100 million.

Environmental Issues

Human practices and related climate change have degraded Norway's natural environment, resulting in a dramatic increase in the country's average temperature and precipitation, as well as damage to biodiversity. Heat waves, especially in the Arctic, cause wildfires and fatal heatstroke, as many Norwegians are unaccustomed to high temperatures. Despite the economic importance of its massive oil and gas sectors, Norway has made efforts to curb environmental harm and achieve reduced emissions. In a 2024 environmental performance index, Norway ranked 7 of 180 countries, higher than the US (34) and Russia (84), but lower than Finland (4) and Sweden (6).

Government

Norway is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy that divides into 15 ***fylker*** (counties), which subdivide into 356 ***kommuner***

(municipalities). Citizens and long-term residents of Norway elect representatives to county and municipal councils every 4 years. Each county also has a governor, who supervises local authorities as a state representative. Norway's constitution, adopted in May 1814 and last amended in 2023, protects residents' freedoms of religion, expression, press, assembly, and movement, envisioning a democratic state based on the rule of law and human rights.

Executive Branch

Norway's current King, Harald V, ascended the throne in 1991. The monarch's duties as head-of-state are symbolic, and he holds no political power. The King is Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and responsible for formally opening new sessions of Parliament, meeting the Prime Minister (PM), and carrying out state visits, among other duties. The monarch can be a woman. King Harald V and Queen Sonja's son Haakon is Crown Prince.

The current PM, Jonas Gahr Støre of ***Arbeiderpartiet*** (Labour Party, or Ap), has been the head-of-government since 2021. Citizens vote in a parliamentary election every 4 years, and the resultant legislature appoints the PM, who forms a ***Statsrådet*** (Council of State, or cabinet) of at least 7 ministers with Parliament's approval. Today, PM Støre governs with 19 cabinet members. The *Statsrådet* generally defines Norway's political direction by guiding politics and proposing legislation. As its most senior member, the PM is responsible for coordinating and leading the government, which is accountable for submitting bills to Parliament, concluding agreements with other countries and international organizations, and sanctioning passed legislation.

Legislative Branch

Located in Oslo, ***Stortinget*** (Parliament, or "the Storting") is a 169-seat single-chamber legislature. All members are elected in multi-seat constituencies by party-list proportional representation vote. Members serve 4-year terms with no term limits. The Storting controls most legislative powers by passing

and amending legislation, adopting the budget, supervising the government, and approving domestic and foreign policy.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Høyesterett*** (Supreme Court, the highest judicial power), ***lagmannsrettene*** (Courts of Appeal), ***tingrettene*** (District Courts), and special courts like the ***Utmarksdomstolen for Finnmark*** (Finnmark Land Tribunal) that considers land and water disputes in the northern Finnmark region. Serving until mandatory retirement at age 70, the *Høyesterett*'s 19 Justices and 1 Chief Justice review legality of government decisions and constitutionality of legislation. The Appeals Committee, comprising three Supreme Court Justices, determines whether the *Høyesterett* will hear a case.

The Judicial Appointments Board, comprising seven members of various backgrounds appointed by the *Statsrådet,* reviews applicants for a vacant judgeship of the *Høyesterett*. The Board recommends three options to the Chief Justice and Minister of Justice, who deliver an opinion on the recommendations. The Government then appoints a new *Høyesterett* Justice based on these recommendations and opinions, completing the process for appointing Supreme Court Justices.

Political Climate

Norway's political structure widely ranks as one of the world's fairest. Norway received the highest possible score in a global freedom index that rates people's access to political and civil rights from 2017-23. In 2024, Norway's score dropped to 98 of 100. Corruption scandals, the government's failure to enforce a Supreme Court ruling, and other incidents caused the score to decline. While the country has several dominant political parties, governments typically consist of multiparty coalitions, and rival parties can gain power through elections. Norway has universal suffrage for citizens ages 18 and older.

The 2021 parliamentary election resulted in a minority coalition government between the Ap and ***Senterpartiet*** (Centre Party, or Sp), which relies on votes from the left-wing Socialist Left

Party for a majority. Ap holds social democratic and socialist values, advocating for social justice, workers' rights, and a productive welfare state. Generally, Sp holds centrist values and advocates for agrarian interests, as well as the preservation of Norwegian traditions. ***Høyre*** (Conservative Party, or H) leads the opposition that comprises various other parties, such as the right-wing Progress Party and centrist ***Venstre*** (Liberal Party). H is a center-right party that promotes individual freedom and free-market capitalism, while advocating for limited government intervention in the economy.

In recent years, Norway's national government has shifted between left- and right-wing alignment. H and its center-right coalition governed the country from 2013-21, until the Ap won the most votes in 2021. However, in 2023, H took the largest share of votes in local elections, upending the Ap's reign as the largest party in local elections since 1924. Ap's local electoral setback does not affect its role in Parliament but does suggest a divide between voters and rising favor of an H-led government. Some of the country's most polarizing topics include indigenous rights, immigration, oil and gas production and its effects on climate.

Norway scores highly on indicators of stability, freedom, public safety, and social progress. In a 2024 corruption perceptions index, Norway ranked 5 of 180 countries, behind Denmark (1) and Finland (2). Nevertheless, in 2023, high-level government officials faced corruption accusations that led to a cabinet reshuffle. Ap, Sp, and H ministers faced accusations of their own or their partners' involvement in insider trading and cronyism (favoring friends and family) in high-level positions, resulting in officials resigning and being removed from office.

Defense

The ***Forsvaret*** (Norwegian Armed Forces) are a unified military force consisting of ground, maritime, and air branches, with a joint strength of 25,400 active-duty troops and about 40,000 reserves. Military operations focus on territorial defense and responding to a deteriorating security environment. A long-term

defense plan aims to strengthen readiness and capabilities in the High North (Arctic). Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Norway allocated additional funds to its Arctic region. Norwegians aged 19-35 are eligible for compulsory military service. Norway is one of only two countries in the world with gender-neutral conscription. Selected eligible candidates take an online assessment, and if they pass, physical tests. Of the 24,000 individuals who took the physical tests in 2023, 9,800 were selected for military service. Males can volunteer as young as 17 and women 18. Conscripts serve a maximum of 19 months: 12 months while aged 19-28, then 4-5 training periods until age 35 or older, depending on their rank.

Army: As the largest branch, the Army consists of some 8,300 active-duty troops and comprises 3 reconnaissance and 1 light maneuver battalions and 1 armored brigade.

Navy: This branch comprises about 4,600 active-duty personnel organized into 5 elements: the ***Marinen*** (fleet), ***Kystvakten*** (Coast Guard), ***Harald Haarfagre*** (recruit training school), naval medical branch, and naval bases. Naval forces include 1 combat support platoon and 1 reconnaissance maneuver convoy.

Air Force: Composed of around 4,300 active-duty personnel, the Air Force consists of 2 air defense battalions in addition to the following squadrons: 2 each of fighter/ground attack and air defense and 1 each of maritime patrol, search and rescue, transport, and training.

Joint Staff, Commands, and Home Guard: Special Operations Command is a joint staff that consists of two departments: the Special Operations Command and the Naval Special Operations Command. The Central Support Administration and Command is composed of around 7,400 military personnel responsible for logistics for all Norway's forces at home and abroad. The Home Guard is a separate organization that closely cooperates with all military services, comprising some 40,000 reservists organized into 11 districts. It includes 3,000 troops in mobile rapid reaction forces and 37,000 in reinforcement and follow-on forces.

NORWAY

Royal Norwegian Air Force Rank Insignia


General


Lieutenant General


Major General


Brigadier General


Colonel


Lieutenant Colonel


Major


Captain


1st Lieutenant


2nd Lieutenant


Sergeant


Corporal


Career Private

Security Issues

Foreign Threats: As of 2025, Norway considers Russia's military, intelligence, and cyber operations the greatest threats to European security. Russia refers to Norway as an "unfriendly country," and according to ***Etterretningstjenesten***'s (The Norwegian Intelligence Service, or NIS) 2025 annual threat and risk assessment, Russian military behavior in areas close to Norway is the main military threat to Norwegian sovereignty. The NIS also lists other authoritarian states, like China and Iran, as threats for engaging in similar, albeit less frequent, offensive activities.

After years of deteriorating relations, Norway's complex affairs with Russia have worsened since the latter's 2022 invasion of Ukraine (see "Relations with Russia" below). The NIS threat assessment reports that Russian intelligence services have been mapping Norwegian targets in the digital and physical spaces to gain information about Norwegian politics, energy, the High North, allied activities, and defense. Another major concern is Russia attempting to influence politics in Norway through pro-Russian messaging on social media, the spread of disinformation, and cyberattacks. For example, in June 2022, a pro-Russian group committed a distributed denial-of-service cyberattack against important private and public institutions in Norway.

Hate Crimes and Extremism: While hate crimes had been increasing prior to 2015, they more than doubled from 2015-23. Over 35% of the reported hate crimes in 2023 were related to skin color or national/ethnic origin. Although Norway is one of the world's most accepting countries of LGBTQ+ people (see *Sex and Gender*), sexual orientation was the most common motive of hate crimes in 2023 (52%). In June 2022, an attack on a popular gay bar in Oslo during a pride celebration resulted in 11 people shot and 2 killed. Norway's Police Security Service is investigating a potential terror link in connection with this mass shooting. The country's worst-ever peacetime attack was a rare act of deadly domestic extremism in 2011. A right-wing extremist

set off a bomb in Oslo's government district killing 8 people before traveling to Utøya Island, where he attacked a political youth camp, killing 69, mostly teenagers.

Foreign Relations

Norway is a member of international organizations like the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), World Trade Organization, Arctic Council, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank. Norway has contributed military and police personnel to more than 40 UN peacekeeping operations since it joined in 1956.

Norway historically has been involved in global affairs. During World War II, it abandoned its principle of neutrality after Nazi Germany invaded Norway in April 1940 (see *History and Myth*). Norway generally has good relations with most countries and prioritizes peace and freedom globally. For example, it organized confidential talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in 1993 that led to the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords (see *History and Myth*). During the more recent 2023-25 Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza, Norway has stressed the importance of adhering to humanitarian and international law and the protection of civilians.

Regional Relations: Norway is a member of political and economic regional organizations like the European Economic Area (EEA), European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Sharing a common history dating back millennia (see *History and Myth*), Norway has maintained close ties with its Nordic neighbors – Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland – and is part of the Nordic Council (an official body for inter-parliamentary cooperation among the Nordic countries). Relations between the Nordic countries are defined by close cooperation and resolution of internal conflict by peaceful means. Norway is active in several policy areas, like sustainable development of the Arctic, gender equality, and

healthy food systems. “Our Vision 2030” is a cooperative goal among Nordic countries to become the world’s most sustainable and integrated region by 2030.

Norway is a member of the EEA and takes part in several European Union (EU) programs but is not an EU member. Generally, Norway claims that EU membership may threaten its sovereignty, that its agricultural sector would suffer upon joining (see *Economics and Resources*), and that its economy is already strong and unemployment low, making membership undesirable. Further, through an EEA agreement, Norway fully participates in the EU’s internal market as a member of the EFTA (see *Economics and Resources*).

Relations with Russia: The Russian government recognized Norwegian independence in 1905 (see *History and Myth*), and the countries have generally maintained peaceful diplomatic relations since then. In 2010, Norway and Russia settled a dispute over maritime borders in the Barents Sea that had begun in the 1970s. The treaty divides the disputed area equally and allows both countries access to large areas in the Arctic region for oil and gas exploration.

In recent decades, Norway has distanced itself from Russia, and tensions have grown over resources in the High North. While Norway regulates all activities on Svalbard and its sovereignty over the archipelago is undisputed, the Svalbard Treaty affords citizens and companies from multiple countries equal access to resources. Historically, Svalbard’s major industries were whaling and mining, but today, polar exploration and tourism are main attractions. Russia has key economic, scientific, and geopolitical interest in the archipelago and maintains a significant presence there, increasing the security implications for Norway, the US, and NATO. Although the treaty prevents any country from building military fortifications on the islands, the increasing navigability of Arctic waters places Svalbard in a key strategic position. After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, disputes between

Russia and Norway over territorial rights on Svalbard resurfaced. Since the escalation of the war, Russia has made securing its northern boundaries, especially around the archipelago, an even higher priority.

Russia's hostile rhetoric toward Norway is evident as Russia placed Norway on its list of "unfriendly countries" in a seemingly unprovoked act. In 2023, Norway expelled 15 Russian diplomats accused of spying, and in response, Russia ordered 10 Norwegian diplomats expelled.

Russia has also exhibited a willingness to pursue more extreme measures by increasing its military presence in the Arctic. Nonetheless, Russia and Norway sustain bilateral economic interests in places like the Barents Sea through fisheries cooperation. In 2023, the countries reached an agreement that seeks to ensure long-term and sustainable ocean management in the High North to protect fish species.

Relations with the US: The US and Norway have sustained close diplomatic relations since 1905. When Nazi Germany occupied Norway in World War II, Crown Princess Märtha and her children, including Prince Harald (now King), lived in exile in the US from 1940-45 at the invitation of President Franklin Roosevelt. Today, the countries are committed to the global provision of development and humanitarian assistance. Norway and the US also co-lead and partner on initiatives focused on combatting climate change. The countries are also members of the Arctic Council and maintain robust cooperation in the Arctic to ensure the region remains peaceful, stable, and sustainable.

The US and Norway have a mutually beneficial economic partnership. By deploying clean technology in the US, Norway is investing in US offshore wind on both coasts and building clean energy manufacturing facilities that create jobs in the US. Over the last decade, US direct investment in Norway has more than doubled, and an estimated 659 US companies employ more than 50,000 people in the country. The US imports mineral fuels,

fish and seafood, machinery, and optical and medical instruments from Norway.

Ethnic Groups

Over 80% of Norway's permanent residents are ethnic Norwegians; 9% other Europeans such as Poles, Lithuanians, Swedes, and Danes; 10% other groups (often with African, Asian, or Middle Eastern backgrounds); and 1% indigenous Sámi. Despite their small populations, Norway recognizes five groups as national minorities: Jews, Roma, Romani people/Tater, Kvens (Norwegian Finns), and Forest Finns.

Generally, Norway is an ethnically homogenous country. Ethnic Norwegians descend from North Germanic people and are most closely related to populations of Sweden, Denmark, and a few other groups in the Nordic region. Notable Norwegian cultural values include tolerance, respect, and equality.

As of 2023, nearly 112,000 Poles (2% of the population) live in Norway, comprising the country's largest group of foreign citizens. Having an aging population and shortage of specialist workers, Norway encourages migrant laborers, Poles in particular, to fill gaps in the labor market. Following Poles, Lithuanians and Swedes made up the second and third largest groups of immigrants, respectively.

The Sámi peoples traditionally concentrate in the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and northwestern Russia. Their ancestors were the region's original inhabitants (see *History and Myth*). Today, Norway estimates its Sámi population to be around 50-65,000, more than in any other country. The Sámi have their own 39-seat Parliament–***Sametinget*** (The Sámi Parliament) – located in Karasjok (Kárášjohka in Northern Sámi). Regulated by the Sámi Act, the Sámi Parliament is an independent body that identifies priorities particularly concerning their culture, language, and education and develops policies to govern the Sámi peoples.

For most of Norway's history, immigrants were primarily from other Nordic or European countries. In recent decades, Pakistanis, Somalis, Turks, and other groups from Asia and Africa have moved to Norway. Norwegians are generally welcoming towards refugees, immigrants, and ethnic and religious minorities, although some Norwegians are bias towards these groups (see "Social Relations" below). As of 2023, the reasons for new immigrants to migrate to Norway were for refuge, to reunite with close family, and to search for work, among others. In 2022, the number of new immigrants entering Norway reached an all-time high of 90,500 people, mostly from other European countries. Around 40% of these immigrants were refugees escaping the war in Ukraine.

Social Relations

Although Norway historically had a hierarchical class-based system (see *History and Myth*), society today is much more equal. Egalitarian values (beliefs that all people are equally important and should have the same rights) define Norwegian society, and the country's quality of life and standard of living are among the world's highest. Norway consistently ranks as the world's most equal country. Despite Norway's socioeconomic progress and sustainable welfare system (see *Economics and Resources*), inequalities based on gender, educational attainment, area of residence, and immigration status persist.

In recent years, social relations in Norway have been generally stable. The income inequality gap and poverty rate are among the world's lowest. For example, in 2023, some 12% of residents lived at risk of poverty, on par with that of Denmark and Finland (12%) but lower than Sweden (16%). Norway promotes gender equality and has made significant progress in recent decades, even though men still retain certain advantages (see *Sex and Gender*). Norway does not have slums in a conventional sense, and as of 2023, some 7% of the population live in an overcrowded household, the Nordic region's lowest rate. Even

so, Norway aims to decrease its overcrowding rate to 3% as part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While Norway advocates for human rights on the international stage, some groups like Muslims and Jews face discrimination (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 2018, the Storting passed a law that bans face coverings, like the ***niqab*** (face veil) and ***burqa*** (full face mask and body covering), from teaching environments at all levels of education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). The right-wing coalition in power at the time favored tighter rules on immigration and wanted a full ban on face coverings in public places. They called the garments "suppressive" and said they prevent women "from living a free life." Some groups criticized the ban, saying it violates the rights to freedom of expression and religion. Protests involving burning the Qur'an (the Islamic holy book) are a form of freedom of expression in Norway.

Incidents of anti-Semitism towards Jewish Norwegians increased during the 2023-25 Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza. The government has implemented national action plans and efforts to combat anti-Semitism with a focus on finding measures to address increased hostility during periods of tension in the Middle East.

Historically, colonization of the Sámi peoples led to centuries of social injustices like the loss of reindeer herding culture and traditions, decline of indigenous languages, racism, and other wrongdoings that left lasting consequences reflected in the conditions of the Sámi today. In recent years, the Sámi have experienced negative stereotypes, prejudice, and hate speech despite laws that protect their rights and culture. International organizations have criticized Norway's passivity to Sámi protection compared to other minority populations such as Muslims. Norway aims to address these issues by increasing investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for crimes against the Sámi peoples.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Norway's population is predominantly Christian. As of 2023, an estimated 64% of residents belong to the Protestant Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) of Norway, 22% are non-religious (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic), 7% belong to other Christian denominations, 3% are Muslim, and 3% follow other religious traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Norway's constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) guarantees freedom of worship and prohibits religious discrimination but recognizes the ELC of Norway as the country's established church, which retains certain privileges. Although Norway's Parliament (see *Political and Social Relations*) mandates a separation of church and state, the ELC of Norway remains the "people's church" and requires the country's monarch to be a member.

Early Spiritual Landscape

The territory comprising present-day Norway was first settled by nomadic tribes and clans such as the ancestors of the Sámi peoples (see *History and Myth*), who shared many similar spiritual beliefs. Accounts and ***joiks*** (Sámi chants) describe a rich mythology of spirits and deities, who many early residents believed governed the natural world and various aspects of life.

Early Norwegians practiced Norse paganism and believed the universe was divided into nine realms within ***Yggdrasil*** (Norse tree of life – see *History and Myth*). All humans, gods, giants, and other beings inhabited *Yggdrasil* in realms such as ***Asgard*** (the realm of the gods), ***Midgard*** (humans), and ***Niflhel*** (the dead). ***Bifröst*** (a rainbow bridge) connected the realms and allowed the gods to travel between them to interact with and protect the human world. The Vikings recognized gods like ***Odin***

(the god war), ***Thor*** (the god of thunder), and ***Heimdallr*** (the guardian of *Bifröst*) as warrior deities and protectors of the cosmos. Vikings prayed for blessings like bountiful harvests and health from gods associated with nature, fertility, and wisdom.

These deities include ***Njörd,*** (the god of the sea) and his children ***Freyr*** (the god of peace and fertility) and ***Freyja*** (the goddess of love, fertility, and death).

Introduction of Christianity

By the 8th century, Norwegian pagans had been exposed to Christianity through pillages, raids, and trade with Germanic and Anglo-Saxon Christians (see *History and Myth*). In the early 11th century, Olaf II Haroldsson, who was raised and baptized outside the country, invaded Norway to become King (see *History and Myth*). According to the ***Kulisteinen*** (an ancient stone found on the island of Kuløy with runic inscriptions, an early alphabet), Olaf and his clerical advisor, Bishop Grimketel, announced a religious code and made Christianity the official religion of the Kingdom around 1024. Olaf violently enforced the code, fining or executing anyone who resisted conversion. He quickly fell out of favor with many Norwegians, who forced him into exile. In 1030, Olaf attempted to return to Norway but died during the Battle of Stiklestad. Shortly after his death, legends of miracles surrounding his body venerated Olaf, and many converted in his wake. Today, Olaf is Norway's patron saint.

In 1152, the Roman Catholic Church organized nationally and declared the seat of the Archbishop of Norway in Nidaros (Trondheim). While the Catholic Church built houses of worship across Norway and was its dominant religious institution for the next 4 centuries, plague and poverty greatly hindered significant Church activity during much of this period (see *History and Myth*).

The Protestant Reformation

This movement began in 1517, when German priest Martin Luther criticized the Catholic Church's teachings and corruption, particularly its indulgence system that granted pardons for sins

to those who bought certificates. Lutheranism encouraged an individual relationship with God, separate from the control of the Catholic Church, its priests, and pope (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church). During the 1520s, Danish Kings, who then maintained control of Norway (see *History and Myth*), tolerated Lutheranism. The religion had rapidly gained popularity among Denmark's peasants, some of whom worked in serfdom (an exploitative system of peasant tenant farming). However, the Catholic clergy and nobles in Norway did not have the same level of wealth and corruption that the Reformation denounced, resulting in slower conversion there compared to other Nordic countries.

In 1536, Christian III ascended the throne as King of Denmark-Norway and forcefully began converting Norwegians to Lutheranism (see *History and Myth*). Transferring the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church to the state, he confiscated Church property, declared himself Head of the Church, and stripped Catholic bishops of their titles before arresting them. In 1537, he appointed Gjeble Pederssøn as the first Lutheran Bishop of Norway. While many Norwegians had accepted Lutheranism by the mid-16th century, some Catholic practices, especially pilgrimages to holy sites such as Røldal in the southern region, continued until the 19th century.

Lutheran Orthodoxy, Pietism, and the Haugean Movement

Throughout the 17th century, Danish absolutism (when the monarch had unrestrained power) dictated Norwegian religious life during a period known as Lutheran orthodoxy. The Norwegian Code of 1687 guaranteed the King's control over clerical life and prevented other religious beliefs from spreading. The statute mandated baptisms for infants and required confirmations and marriages to take place in the ELC. Only exceptional circumstances allowed some foreign Catholics,

many from Germany and France, who specialized in glasswork and mining, to practice their religion in private without priests.

In the 18th century, Pietism, which placed personal faith over the authoritative doctrine of the ELC, gained many followers in Norway. To stop the expansion of Pietism, in 1741, the government issued the Conventicle Act, which sought to retain a uniform religious state and end private religious meetings. The Act prohibited lay preachers from providing religious services without a Lutheran priest's explicit approval. However, many Lutherans pursued alternative convictions through shared spiritual experiences, and illegal meetings continued despite followers facing the threat of arrest and deportation.

In the late 18th century, Hans Nielsen Hauge, a lay preacher, led the ***Haugianere*** (Haugean movement), which emphasized spiritual discipline and challenged the authority of the Lutheran Church. Viewing idleness as a sin, the movement encouraged followers to pursue and experience daily work as a divine calling.

Many Haugeans channeled their religious fervor into the establishment of industrial mills, shipyards, and textile houses, contributing to an increase in commerce in the 19th century (see *Economics and Resources*).

Religion in the 19th Century

Between 1814-1905, Norway was unified with Sweden (see *History and Myth*). While Norway's constitution of 1814 contained strict religious clauses such as prohibiting Jews and Jesuits from entering the country, it also granted Norway democratic freedoms. Elected officials required support from the agrarian population to retain power, giving the people more influence over legislation (on religion or otherwise). Norway also experienced a rise in revivalist (renewed religious passion) movements, largely based on *Haugianere*. Revivalism appealed to Norwegians because it allowed personal faith and biblical interpretation, which the Church had restricted. Likewise, revivalist movements enabled a degree of religious tolerance.

Anticlerical rhetoric spread throughout the 19th century as the rural population demanded greater influence over state and Church matters. Religious tolerance expanded in the 1840s-50s as changes to clerical leadership created greater influence of lay people in the Church. In 1842, the ban on lay preachers lifted, and shortly after, the Dissenter Law (1845) allowed the establishment of alternative Christian organizations. The law allowed Christians to practice their faith freely and publicly by holding their own rituals, burials, and marriages. In 1851, the Norwegian Parliament lifted the ban prohibiting Jews from entering the country, though the ban on Jesuits would remain until 1956. Likewise, the statute requiring children to submit to confirmation lifted in the 1830s, while the requirement for infants to be baptized remained until 1898.

Religion in the 20th Century

After Norway gained its independence from Sweden in 1905 (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), religious disagreements between liberals and conservatives over the role of the Church in society occurred. During World War II, Nazi Germany invaded then occupied Norway (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Many Norwegian church officials resisted the Nazi occupiers. Some 645 ELC bishops resigned, refusing to preach Nazi ideology. Norwegians continued to support their bishops, and many refused to attend services provided by German priests, which helped prevent the complete Nazification of the country.

Nevertheless, in 1942, the widespread arrest and deportation of Norwegian Jews began. While many Jews escaped to neutral Sweden or went into hiding, at least 757 Norwegian Jews (see *History and Myth*) died at the hands of the Nazis and their Norwegian collaborators. After Norway was liberated, many Nazi officials committed suicide or were sentenced to death (see *History and Myth*), and the prior clergy returned to their churches as the ELC resumed its function as a state church.

During the 1960s-70s, church membership and attendance began to decline. Mid-century labor opportunities increased immigration to Norway, which expanded religious diversity as the country continued to secularize. Nevertheless, many Norwegians held the ELC as a culturally significant organization and opposed a complete separation of the Church and state. In the 1980s, Parliament voted to retain the ELC as a state church, though the establishment of the General Synod (assembly of church officials) granted the Church more autonomy. In 1997, the responsibility to appoint clergy transferred from the government to the Church, though Church staff remained state employees. Between 2012-17, a further separation of Church and state resulted in Norway recognizing the Church as its own legal entity, which ended the ELC's status as the state church and Lutheranism as the state religion.

Religion Today

Although over 64% of Norwegians identify as members of the ELC of Norway, many do not regularly attend church services or actively practice the faith. In recent years, ELC membership has continuously declined. Nevertheless, the Church continues to play a significant role in Norway's culture. For example, many traditional rituals and ceremonies such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals occur in the Church (see *Family and Kinship*), though confirmation among others are also available as non-religious rituals.

Despite the country's shift toward secularization in recent years, immigration has continued to increase religious diversity in Norway. Although many Norwegians pride themselves on their tolerance and acceptance of different religions, discrimination against people who practice minority religions persists. A rise in populist right-wing extremism has increased anti-Muslim sentiment and hate crimes (see *Political and Social Relations*). While some Norwegian media outlets have sought to provide a platform for Muslim voices, many have portrayed Islam

negatively. Likewise, inaccurate and offensive portrayals and comments about Jews have highlighted anti-Semitism throughout Norway. Since 2016, the government has worked with Jewish communities to combat anti-Semitism by implementing action plans with measures such as providing security services for places of worship, supporting Jewish educational programs, and monitoring hate speech online.

The ELC: With nearly 3.5 million members, the ELC of Norway is the country's largest Christian denomination. Since 2012, the ELC has been a self-governing body that establishes its own clergy and doctrine and no longer requires the monarch's consent. Nevertheless, the national government and local municipalities still provide the Church financial support. In 2017, all clergy ceased to be state employees when the ELC separated from the state. However, the government continues to finance Church employees' salaries, benefits, and pensions. By law, children who have one parent who is a member of the ELC are automatically members, which some observers have argued favors the Church's stature by increasing its membership numbers.

The ELC of Norway is composed of 11 dioceses that divide into parishes, which are independent institutions responsible for their administration and maintenance. The General Synod is the highest representative body of the Church and comprises 85 elected members. Issues and opinions regarding theological matters are addressed during the Bishops' Conference, which occurs three times annually. The conference is attended by the 11 diocesan bishops and the Primate of the ELC, who since 2020 has been Olav Fykse Tveit.

Other Christian Churches: Roman Catholicism is the second most common Christian denomination in Norway. In 2023, Church officials estimated that about 165,000 registered Catholics live in Norway, accounting for around 3% of the population. However, estimates do not account for unregistered Catholics or some immigrants and refugees, many of whom are

Catholic. Norway is home to some Protestant free churches comprising Evangelical, Pentecostal, Methodist, and Baptist denominations that account for about 2% of the population. In 2021, Norway revoked state funding for Jehovah's Witnesses, stating that the group violates member's rights to freedom of expression through practices such as banishing ex-members. While some observers felt the law violated religious freedom, it was upheld.

Other Religions: During the mid-20th century, immigrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Europe established a diverse Muslim population in Norway. Between 2006-23, the number of Muslims increased from about 77,000 to over 181,500, accounting for about 3% of the population. Today, several hundred local congregations comprise different branches like Shi'a, Sunni, and Ahmadiyya. Muslims primarily live in Oslo, the capital city.

Between the 18th-20th centuries, Norway enforced harsh assimilation policies, known as Norwegianization, on the Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*). During the mid-20th century, the government began recognizing the Sámi as an indigenous population and implemented efforts to preserve their culture and language. While many Sámi today follow the Lutheran faith, some continue to hold traditional beliefs such as animism, shamanism, and polytheism. Many Sámi live in the northern regions of Norway, primarily in Finnmark (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Many other religious minorities also live in Norway. The Norwegian ***Human-Etisk Forbund*** (Humanist Association) is one of the world's largest humanist organizations, which emphasize human agency and virtue over that of the divine. *Human-Etisk Forbund* has some 148,000 members that account for over 2% of Norway's population. Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism, and various other faiths together comprise less than 1% of the population.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is important to Norwegian society, with members relying on each other for emotional, economic, and social support. Families are typically small and close-knit. Values like openness and equality are central to the country's family and social life.

Residence

Norway began to urbanize in the 19th century, and as of 2023, some 84% of Norwegians live in urban areas. All Norwegians have access to electricity, and most homes have safe sanitation services. While Norwegians traditionally burn wood to heat their homes, some residences built since the early 2000s are heated by absorbing the ambient temperature of outdoor air through air-to-air heat pumps. This process regulates the indoor temperature through fan coils rather than by burning wood, oil, or other polluting materials.

Due to the country's cold climate (see *Political and Social Relations*), roofs and walls often have thick layers of insulation made from natural or synthetic wools. The design and style of homes often incorporate natural elements, and many of their interiors feature raw materials such as wood and stone. Children typically have access to parks and open spaces for outdoor play. Likewise, many urban residents tend ***kolonihager*** ("colony gardens"), which are shared plots of land reserved for residents to grow vegetables, flowers, and other plants.

Urban: Urban families typically reside in apartments, detached single-family homes, and townhouses. Many urban homes are constructed from wood, though concrete or mixed materials are also common. Most homes have 2-3 bedrooms and incorporate minimalist designs and furniture. Norwegian apartment buildings vary in size, and many provide access to an outdoor space or balcony.

Rural: Many rural residents live in wooden houses such as log cabins that have a steep roof to prevent the accumulation of rain and snow. Some other rural homes have a ***torvtak*** ("turf roof," made by laying sod atop layers of birch bark), which helps insulate the home by retaining heat. Many urban Norwegians have access to a ***hytte*** (cottage), which is often in the mountains or by a body of water and serves as a temporary rustic escape from fast-paced city living.

Family Structure

Many Norwegian families value gender equality. Parents usually share domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and financial responsibilities (see *Sex and Gender*). Nuclear (immediate) families typically consist of parents and one or two children, who often live at home until age 18. While extended family members often live nearby, some Norwegians only see their extended family on special occasions.

Children

While Norwegian families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Both parents typically are employed, which has increased the demand for access to childcare, family programs, and early educational resources (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Many Norwegians keep their child at home for the entire 12-month duration of their parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents expect older children to help with household chores and prepare meals, often in exchange for extra spending money or ***ukelønn*** ("weekly wage," like an allowance). After school, many children attend ***fritidsklubber*** (leisure clubs), which provide activities like sports or games that church groups or parents usually organize.

Birth: Expectant mothers receive free regular checkups from a ***helsestasjon*** (public health clinic – see *Sustenance and Health*) and work with a ***jordmor*** ("earth mother," or midwife) to create a care plan, which includes the doctor and hospital where she

intends to give birth. After birth, many Norwegians hold a baptism for their newborn, when they announce the godparents and receive gifts from family and friends.

Rites of Passage

Many members of Norway's Lutheran Church, as well as some non-religious residents (see *Religion and Spirituality*), participate in the rite of confirmation around age 15, which establishes their adult commitment to the faith (for members). Many Norwegians prepare for confirmation by attending a class to learn and participate in discussions of morals and values. The ceremony usually takes place at a church or concert venue, during which participants give speeches, sing, and dance. Some Norwegian youth participate in Russ a month before taking their final exam in high school. During this rite of passage, they decorate a bus or van from which they play loud music, wear colorful overalls, and drink and party excessively to celebrate their graduation.

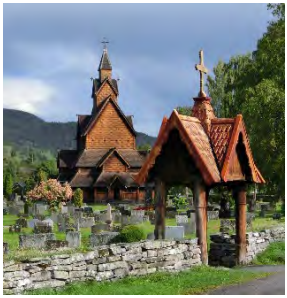
Weddings: Pre-wedding celebrations typically occur a few weeks before the wedding. Many Norwegians have a ***Utdrikningslag*** ("stag party," or drinking party), similar to bachelor and bachelorette parties in the US. The party, which often lasts an entire weekend, usually begins as a surprise for the bride or groom, who is "kidnapped" or unknowingly brought to the party. In addition to drinking (see *Sustenance and Health*), typical activities for brides are spa days and dancing at bars or clubs, while grooms usually participate in outdoor activities, such as white-water rafting and hiking.

On the wedding day, brides traditionally wear a ***brudekrone*** (bridal crown) made of silver with dangling embellishments that is often a family heirloom. While the crown symbolizes purity, the sound of the embellishments clinking together when the bride moves is thought to ward off evil spirits. Ceremonies typically occur in a church or city hall. The couple arrives at the venue in procession led by a violinist, followed by their parents, a ring

bearer, flower children, and the guests. After vows are exchanged, guests usually throw grains and rice at the newlyweds as they exit. Brides try to catch as many grains as possible, representing prosperity and happiness in the marriage. After the ceremony, the reception consists of toasts, speeches, a first dance, and a cake table. If the bride or groom leaves the room, guests may kiss the newlywed who remains. Traditionally, after the wedding, the couple plants two fir trees on either side of their front door to symbolize fertility.

Divorce

A common practice in Norway but less so by regional standards. As of 2022, the divorce rate was about 1.8 per 1,000 inhabitants, lower than neighboring Finland (2), Sweden (2.1) and the US (2.4). One or both spouses may apply for divorce through the ***sosialkontor*** (social welfare office), a governing legislative body that issues divorces. Norway encourages couples to reflect on their differences before separating and requires a 1-2-year separation period, depending on whether one or both spouses wish to divorce.



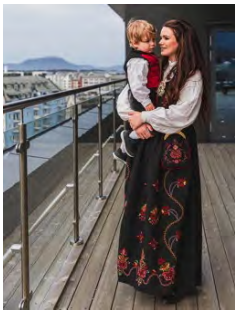
Death

Norwegians typically hold a funeral 1-2 weeks after a death. Lutheran funerals are usually held in a chapel. Most ceremonies begin with a priest talking about the deceased and reading passages from the Bible. Family and friends often bring floral arrangements that feature short messages tied with large ribbons. The priest typically reads the ribbons aloud at the end of the ceremony. The coffin is then taken to the deceased's burial place accompanied by music. Secular funerals are usually conducted in a similar manner, though without scripture. The ***Human-Etisk Forbund*** (Humanist Association, see *Religion and Spirituality*) performs many non-religious ceremonies and provides a ceremony leader, who plans the event according to the family's wishes. Afterwards, a reception with coffee and cake is common, and some families hold a dinner or go to a restaurant to celebrate the deceased's life.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, the Norwegian social system was patriarchal, meaning men held most power and authority. Today, Norway commits to securing women's rights and gender equality. Men and women both take active roles in working life and caregiving, and the social system is generally equal. Women have similar opportunities as men to hold positions of authority in the private and public sectors. Norway ranked 3 of 146 countries in a 2024 gender equality index, behind neighboring Finland (2) and above Sweden (5).



Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Traditionally, women in Norwegian society have been responsible for household chores and childcare. Today, many parents, especially among the younger generations, equally share household duties and consider each other equivalent authority figures. In many families, both parents work (see *Family and Kinship*).

Labor Force: In 2023, about 62% of Norwegian women worked outside the home, similar to Sweden (63%), but higher than neighboring Finland (58%) and the US (57%). Despite the higher rate, Norwegian women typically occupy low-paid, part-time occupations. In 2022, women held about 32% of senior and middle management positions, lower than Finland (37%), Sweden (42%), and the US (43%). Norwegian women and men often work in traditionally gendered occupations. For example, men typically hold construction, manufacturing, and mining jobs, while women occupy human health, social work, and education fields.

Gender and the Law

The first Gender Equality Act went into force in 1978, formally promoting gender equality and aiming to improve the status of women in society. In 2002, Norway's Parliament updated the Act

to require not only public, but also private-sector entities to promote gender equality in the workplace. Expanding on earlier statutes, and to further improve women's and minority workers' rights, Norway adopted the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act in 2018. Despite these and other laws, discrimination and a gender pay gap persist. For example, although the law requires equal pay for work of equal value, women's average earnings in 2022 were around 86% of men's. Differences in profession, sector, and the tendency for women to work part-time to care for children help explain this gap.

Norwegian law guarantees parental leave and other benefits. The government entitles parents to 12 months of paid leave in connection with birth, up to 12 weeks of which is reserved for the mother during her pregnancy. In addition, each parent can take 1 additional year of leave for childcare, immediately after the first 12 months. Norwegian parents also receive 12 months of financial benefits after birth, which are calculated based on total family income when parental leave begins. Adoptive and foster parents have the same rights to leave.

As of 2018, the minimum age of marriage is 18 with no exceptions. Previously, 16- and 17-year-olds could marry with parental consent and permission from the county governor.

Gender and Politics

In 1913, Norway granted women universal suffrage, and in 1921, the country elected its first female regular member of Parliament (MP). Women's representation continued to grow over the years. In 1981, Gro Harlem Brundtland became Norway's first woman Prime Minister and served three terms. By 1985, some 25% of MPs were women. Today, Norway continues to promote gender equality. A central premise of its foreign and development policy is that gender equality is a human right and promoting the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people will contribute to social change. As of January 2025, women hold about 44% of seats in Parliament, the country's highest-ever rate, lower than Sweden (45%), but higher than the US (28% – both houses combined).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is an issue in Norway. As of 2023, about 20% of women aged 15 and older had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, lower than Sweden (21%), Finland (23%), and the US (26%). Some evidence shows that IPV increased in Norway during the COVID-19 lockdown during 2020 (see *Sustenance and Health*) due to the closure of social institutions, restricted movement, and more time spent together between perpetrators and survivors. Norway has a low femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender) rate by global standards, at 0.5 per 100,000 females in 2022, higher than Sweden (0.4), but lower than Finland (0.9) and the US (2.8). Norway participates in domestic and international efforts to combat GBV. One of the main objectives of Norway's 2023-30 Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality is for every person to experience the right and opportunity to live free from violence.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2024, Norway's birthrate declined from 2.9 births per woman to 1.6, similar to the US rate (1.8). Likely due to mandatory sex education (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and laws preventing child marriage, Norway's adolescent fertility rate was 1 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2022, far lower than the US rate (14). In 1964, Norway passed a law allowing women to terminate a pregnancy under certain circumstances and requiring the approval of two physicians. Today, abortions through the 12th week of pregnancy are legal and available without restrictions. From weeks 13-18, abortions require approval from a medical association board.

Homosexuality in Norway

In 1981, Norway became the first country to enact a law against the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people. In 2009, a gender-neutral Marriage Law took effect, which legalized same-sex marriage and adoption. Norwegians generally support LGBTQ+ rights, and Norway is one of the world's safest countries for and most accepting of LGBTQ+ people. Nevertheless, discrimination and prejudice still exist (see *Political and Social Relations*).

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The primary national language in Norway, Norwegian is used in business, government, media, and society, though Sámi is also an official language. Norway protects six national minority languages, and some residents commonly use English, French, Polish, and other foreign languages.

Norwegian

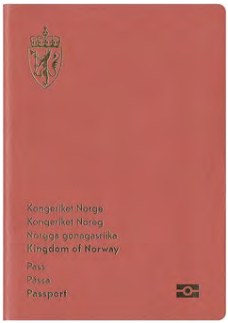
Norsk (Norwegian) belongs to the North Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family and is most similar to Danish and Swedish. Today, the standard forms of Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish are mutually intelligible, and speakers can mostly understand one another without difficulty.

Norwegian evolved from Old Norse, a language of the Vikings (see *History and Myth*). Although Norwegian eventually became a distinct language, unions with Denmark and Sweden (see *History and Myth*) resulted in considerable Danish and Swedish influence on the language. During Norway's union with Denmark (1523-1814), Danish was the primary language of the Norwegian elite and of law and literature, though many other residents spoke Norwegian. When Norway united with Sweden in 1814, a nationalistic movement promoted the development of a standardized Norwegian writing system separate from Danish, as several forms of written Norwegian existed at the time.

Danish and Swedish remained the languages of administration, education, and religion throughout Norway's union with Sweden. Meanwhile, Norway continued its efforts to establish a written standard for Norwegian. In the 1840s, linguist Ivar Aasen developed ***Nynorsk*** ("new Norwegian") from rural dialects that he believed were closer to original spoken Norwegian than the Danish-influenced urban dialects. Around the same time, Knud Knudsen developed ***Bokmål*** ("book language") by altering the written Danish form to reflect the spoken dialect used primarily

among Norway's educated classes. In 1885, Norway's Parliament declared both written forms official. Although *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk* are derived from dialects of spoken Norwegian, they are only written standards, as no spoken standard exists for either. While both written standards continue to share equal status, *Bokmål* is the primary and most common written form, with about 85-90% of Norwegians using it as their standard.

Both written forms are based on the Latin alphabet. Compared to English, Norwegian uses three additional vowels that have no exact equivalent: "å" (pronounced like the "o" in own), "æ" (like "ai" in hair), and "ø" (like "i" in circus). Norwegian uses diacritics (accent marks) to differentiate words that are otherwise spelled the same. It is also a pitch-accent language, meaning it uses distinct tones and pitches to differentiate between words that would otherwise be pronounced identically. Spoken Norwegian has four main regional dialects.



Sámi Languages

Today, over 20,000 residents speak one of three indigenous Sámi languages, which belong to the Uralic language family along with Finnish and Estonian. Most speak North Sámi, while smaller groups speak Lule or South Sámi. Most speakers live from central to northern Norway, and just over half of Norwegian Sámi live in Finnmark, the northernmost county. Norway's three Sámi languages are mutually intelligible, but speakers of other Sámi languages may not understand them. Norway's Sámi Act protects the Sámi language and indigenous peoples.

English

English is the most spoken foreign language in Norway. As of 2021, about 86% of Norwegians understand and can use English to some extent, even though less than 0.7% are native speakers. Schools in Norway have taught English since the early 19th century, and in 1997, it became compulsory from first grade (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Residents in Bergen, Oslo, and Hamar rank as the country's best English speakers.

Other Languages: The most common languages after English are French, Polish, and Ukrainian. Norway protects six national minority languages: the three Sámi languages, Kven (a Baltic Finnish language mainly spoken in northern Norway), Romani, and Romanés. The most common national minority language is North Sámi. Romani and Romanés, spoken by the Romani people/Taters and Roma, respectively (see *Political and Social Relations*), are part of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. Norway protects minority languages to help maintain and develop cultural wealth and traditions.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Norway requires some knowledge of Norwegian and the ability to interact effectively using language. This notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). These forms of communication ensure statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Norwegians tend to be direct and sincere communicators. Small talk is typically uncommon, and when engaging in conversation, Norwegians are often deliberate and effective to avoid wasting each other's time. Generally, Norwegians are proud to speak their minds, do not avoid conflict, and prefer to be cooperative in resolution efforts.

Many Norwegians are thoughtful, considerate communicators. They tend to think before they speak, which often results in occasional pauses. Norwegians value silence and do not consider long pauses awkward. Rather, silence may indicate careful consideration of the conversation topic, and Norwegians do not like being rushed in conversation. Consequently, Norwegians' rate of speech may seem slow to a foreign national.

Norwegians tend to have reserved body language and limit hand gestures while speaking, though they consider eye contact

important, as it conveys respect and sincerity. Touching among strangers during conversation, such as a hand on the arm, is traditionally uncommon, though this custom is changing. Norwegians are likely to stand at least an arm's length away from acquaintances and keep their arms by their sides during conversation (see *Time and Space*). Norwegians also usually maintain serious facial expressions during conversation, which often indicates that they are giving careful consideration to the conversation and paying attention.

Greetings

Norwegians consider greetings a sign of respect and generally do not wait for others to facilitate an introduction. Standard greetings vary by region and context, though the most common in any setting is a handshake with direct eye contact sometimes accompanied by a small bow or nod. In business contexts, handshakes are especially firm and brief. In more personal settings, handshakes may be longer and friendlier. Close friends and family may ***klemme*** (hug) while exchanging a single kiss on the right cheek. Many Norwegians shake hands or say goodbye to every person present when entering or leaving a social setting.

Norwegian greetings are accompanied by the phrase ***hallo*** ("hello"), ***hei*** ("hi"), ***god morgen*** ("good morning"), or ***god dag*** ("good day"). Another common greeting is ***nei så hyggelig*** ("oh, how nice"), which is a friendly way to say, "it has been a long time, and I'm glad I ran into you."

Names

Norwegian names generally consist of one or two given names followed by a surname. Many parents name their children after a relative or give them a traditional family name. Norwegian names are often inspired by nature, mythology, or history. Historically, Norwegians formed surnames by adding "sen" to the end of their father's given name so that the child's last name would indicate that they were their father's child. Consequently, some of the most common last names today are Hansen and

Johansen. Traditionally, surnames are patronymic (indicating the father).

Forms of Address

The Norwegian language has a single form that rarely varies to indicate level of formality. Once Norwegians learn another person's first and last name, they commonly address everyone by first name, even elders and those of higher authority. For example, students usually address their teachers by first name. Traditionally, in very formal settings, Norwegians use titles like ***Herr*** ("Mr."), ***Fru*** ("Mrs."), or ***Frøken*** ("Miss"). Today, Norwegians rarely use honorifics, as equality is an important principle in Norway (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Conversational Topics

Common topics are local places of interest, sports, and travel. To avoid offense, foreign nationals should avoid small talk, should not ask personal questions, nor bring up social status, income, politics, and religion. Once a relationship has developed, few subjects are taboo. Norwegians typically value modesty and consider bragging about one's wealth or skills inappropriate. They tend to promote ***janteloven*** (the Jante law), or the notion that people should put society ahead of the individual and not consider themselves superior.

Gestures

Norwegians use some gestures to emphasize discussion points. They wave their index finger when warning others or expressing anger. Norwegians may nod their head while actively listening, not to indicate agreement, but to show they are paying attention. They may accompany a nod with a small "ah" sound, like a sharp intake of breath, also to indicate active listening.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Bokmål Norwegian
Hello	Hallo
Yes	Ja
No	Nei
Thank you	Takk
Please	Vær så snill
You're welcome / Help yourself	Vær så god
Sorry	Beklager
Excuse me	Unnskyld meg
I do not understand	Jeg forstår ikke
What's your name?	Hva heter du?
My name is…___	Jeg heter..___
Where are you from?	Hvor er du fra?
How are you?	Hvordan har du det?
I am from…	Jeg er fra...
Goodbye	Ha det (bra)
Good morning	God morgen
Good day	God dag
Good evening	God kveld
How do you say ___ in Norwegian?	Hvordan sier man ___ på norsk?
What is this / that?	Hva er dette / det?
I would like to buy…	Jeg vil gjerne kjøpe...
Do you speak English?	Snakker du engelsk?
Help!	Hjelp!
What time is it?	Hva er klokka?
Yesterday	I går
Today	I dag
Tomorrow	I morgen
Where is…?	Hvor er...?
Who?	Hvem?
When?	Når?
Where?	Hvor?
Which?	Hvilken?
Why?	Hvorfor?
Car	Bil
Plane	Fly
Bus	Buss
Train	Tog
Oslo Metro	Oslo T-bane

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 100%

Early Education

Before the arrival of formal education that accompanied the introduction and spread of Christianity in Norway (see *History and Myth*), regional inhabitants informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, and historical knowledge to younger generations. The indigenous Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) taught their children by demonstrating everyday tasks essential to survival such as reindeer herding. Norwegian fathers generally taught boys hunting, fishing, and woodcarving, while mothers taught girls household skills, weaving, and farming.

In the 10th century, Roman Catholicism began to spread, and monasteries established educational institutions, which banned many indigenous practices (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In the 12th century, Pope Adrian IV (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church) authorized the opening of cathedral schools in Bergen, Hamar, Oslo, and Trondheim. These schools prepared boys as servants of the Catholic Church, which remained the primary organizer of formal educational institutions until the 16th century, when Norway embraced Protestantism (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

In the 16th century, during its union with Denmark (see *History and Myth*), Norway converted cathedral schools to Latin schools, which provided education to middle- and upper-class boys to prepare them as Lutheran priests. Parish clerks served as teachers and usually taught classes on Sundays after mass. These classes primarily focused on the Lutheran virtues of obedience, truth, and diligence. Throughout the 17th century, education generally remained limited to religious subjects.

During the 18th century, the Church sought to raise literacy to enable Norwegians to read and interpret scripture on their own. In 1736, a law required every child to learn basic knowledge of Lutheranism and pass confirmation, which involved reciting scripture. In 1739, the School Ordinance introduced ***allmueskolen*** (public school) and required all children to attend school at age 7. The ordinance sought to establish permanent schools in every community. However, many rural communities could not afford to construct one, resulting in the establishment of traveling teachers and schools. While *allmueskolen* provided the first compulsory education in Norway, children often only learned to read scripture, and many could not write. Because the ordinance did not mandate how long children should be in school, many only attended for a few years.

Education In the 19th Century

In 1811, Norway established the University of Oslo, the country's first university. Until then, students had to travel to Denmark or elsewhere to receive their higher education. While the university based its curriculum on Danish higher education, its opening highlighted Norway's growing national consciousness, and subjects focused on Norwegian culture, language, and history. The university's other course offerings expanded beyond Lutheran instruction to include math, biology, and philosophy as well. Nevertheless, most of the students who could attend university were upper-class, having received a higher-quality education from private tutors than many of those who attended *allmueskolen*. Classes were primarily in Danish during this time.

During Norway's union with Sweden (see *History and Myth*), 19th-century reforms made education more secular, causing clashes between the Church and liberals. In the 1820s, Norway adopted a national curriculum that aimed to strengthen nationalist sentiment among children, with a strong emphasis on Norwegian history, though instruction remained in Danish until the 20th century (see *Language and Communication*).

In 1848, the Folk School Law mandated the establishment of one school in each town. Local municipalities assumed financial responsibility for *allmueskolen*, which granted children of all socioeconomic classes access to tuition-free education. These schools limited classroom sizes to 60 students per teacher and expanded class content to include writing, math, and singing. In 1889, ***folkeskole*** (public school) replaced *allmueskolen*, with an increased focus on creating a unified and educated nation that mandated children attend from ages 7-14.

Education in the 20th Century

Following the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway in 1905 (see *History and Myth*), Norway established new national institutions such as technical colleges and trade schools. The University of Oslo remained the country's only university until the post-war period (see *History and Myth*), when the government established the University of Bergen and University of Tromsø (today the Arctic University of Norway). Nevertheless, university enrollment remained low during the first half of the 20th century, as few Norwegians completed the compulsory schooling required to obtain admission to higher education.

During the 1950s-60s, reforms established school hours and extended compulsory education from 7 to 9 years, comprising 6 years of primary and 3 years of lower secondary education. In the 1970s, Norway sought to develop more equal educational opportunities regardless of social status, location, and gender through a more centralized curriculum. To account for students' individual needs, teachers were granted autonomy to develop their own teaching approaches under this common framework. In addition, teacher education expanded in the 1970s, and by 1992, teachers were required to have completed 4 years of higher education. In the 1990s, the government introduced 3 years of optional upper-secondary education to help prepare students for university, and the length of compulsory education increased again, from 9 to 10 years.

Modern Education System

Today, education in Norway is free and compulsory for all citizens, with a mandated minimum of 10 years of schooling starting at age 6. Most students attend free government-run schools, although some enroll in private schools. In 2022, about 4% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, much lower than Denmark (18%) and neighboring Sweden (12%), but higher than neighboring Finland (2%).

The Ministry of Education and Research oversees all school accreditation and is tasked with assuring that educators meet national benchmarks. Local municipalities and counties manage school funding. While taxes and grants are the primary funding sources, residents pay fees for their children to attend nursery school and kindergarten. Most schools extend from mid-August until late June, and the school day typically runs from around 8:15 am to between 2-3 pm. Students receive three breaks that include lunch and two recesses. Outdoor time is important in Norwegian culture (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), and children spend almost all their recess time outdoors regardless of weather, though temperatures must be above -15 °C (5 °F).

School facilities foster close relationships among students, parents, and communities, and Parliament mandates a maximum of 450 students per school. While English is a compulsory second language starting in first grade, instruction is primarily in Norwegian, and the government permits education in Sámi or other official minority languages used by local communities (see *Language and Communication*).

In 2022, Norway spent about 4% of its GDP on education, higher than Sweden (7.9%), Finland (5.5%), and the US (5.4%). Spending on education declined significantly after 2020 due to the adjusted priorities of Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre's government (see *Political and Social Relations*). Some academics argue that politicians' educational reforms focus on

end results rather than teacher strategies. Likewise, teachers have limited participation in the development of the national curriculum's content, which has hindered their ability to address students' needs. In a 2022 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Norway ranked below Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and the US, with similar scores to Italy.

Pre-Primary: Children ages 1-5 may attend ***barnehage*** (kindergarten) for a small fee. Many Norwegians enroll their children in *barnehage* to encourage the development of social-cognitive skills through play-based learning, which is often outdoors. Most preschoolers take part in ***turdag*** (tour day) once per week, when teachers take them on field trips into the forest to explore nature. Some 97% of children of the appropriate age attended pre-primary programs in 2022.

Basic Education: ***Barneskole*** (primary school) begins at age 6 and comprises grades 1-7. Most schools follow the national curriculum, which consists of history, geography, arts, math, natural sciences, religion, English, and physical education. Students are often taught by the same teacher for the entirety of *barneskole*, and while students do not receive grades, teachers write comments on their work and give parents two progress reports per year. Students do not repeat grades in Norway, as teachers have the autonomy to adjust certain criteria within the curriculum to suit different children's needs. Some 99% of children of the appropriate age attended primary school in 2022.

Secondary Education: Compulsory ***ungdomsskole*** (lower secondary school) begins at age 13 and comprises grades 8-10. Students receive grades on a scale of 1-6, with 6 the highest and 2 the lowest without failing. The curriculum builds upon primary education, and students may take a second foreign language, like German, Spanish, or French, and an elective, which varies by school. While students still do not repeat grades, they take

examinations for the first time and must complete a formal exam to assess their competency at the end of grade 9. Results monitor students' progress rather than determine progression to upper-secondary education. Some 99% of children of the appropriate age attended lower secondary school in 2022.

Videregående skole (upper-secondary school) is optional and free of charge. Students who complete compulsory education are entitled to admission and either take ***studieforberedelse*** ("study preparation," or general studies), which prepare them for higher education, or ***yrkesfag*** (vocational subjects), which lead to a vocational qualification. Both programs take around 3 years to complete, though for *yrkesfag,* students often spend their final year completing in-service training in their chosen field. Some 94% of children of the appropriate age attended upper-secondary school in 2022.

Post-Secondary School: Norway has a network of public universities that offer free tuition for Norwegians. To determine admission, institutions typically administer their own entrance exam, though most students who complete *videregående skole* are eligible to enroll. Applicants aged 23 and over who have 5 years of work experience or education and completed secondary-level Norwegian, English, history, math, science, and social science are also eligible for admission.

Higher education in Norway divides into three cycles, the 3-year ***bachelorgrad*** (bachelor's), 2-year ***mastergrad*** (master's), and Ph.D., which typically takes 3-4 years. The University of Oslo is one of the country's best and largest universities, offering some 89 international master's programs in multiple languages and various study abroad programs. Likewise, many universities offer ***fagskoleutdanning*** (vocational education), which usually allows students the flexibility to work while studying. *Fagskoleutdanning* programs offer instruction in topics like health, technology, construction, transportation, art, or agriculture and typically take 6 months to 2 years to complete.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Norwegians tend to be punctual, direct, and reliable, valuing attention to detail in the workplace. They generally display minimal emotion in professional settings, exercise caution when making decisions, and value their personal space, especially among strangers.

Time and Work

The workweek in Norway generally runs from Monday-Friday, with most business occurring between 8am-4pm. Though hours vary by store size and location, most shops are open weekdays from 10am-5pm and Saturdays from 9am-3pm but close on Sundays. Major shopping centers and grocery stores frequently stay open later, until 8-9pm on weekdays and 6-10pm on Saturdays. Many banks are open Monday-Friday from 8:30am-3pm, with some open until 5pm on Thursdays. Post-office hours vary widely by location and day, but service is typically consistent between 9am-8pm on weekdays. Government office hours also vary, generally opening around 8am and closing sometime between 12-4pm. In general, Norwegian professionals closely adhere to established working hours.

Working Conditions: The Working Environment Act mandates that a workweek not exceed 40 hours. Norwegian law provides workers a range of protections and benefits such as paid leave, overtime pay, and occupational pensions. The country offers maternity leave, paternity leave, and parental leave (see *Sex and Gender*). Norway's ***Arbeids-og velferdsfirvaltninga*** (Labor and Welfare Administration) provides sick pay, unemployment benefits, and a range of pension schemes. Although Norway has no national minimum wage, a series of collective bargaining agreements at the national, industry, and enterprise levels establish minimum pay standards. Norway's

labor rights are robust and well-enforced, creating generally good labor conditions and workweeks averaging under 40 hours.

Time Zone: Norway adheres to Central European Time (CET), which is 1 hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Norway observes Daylight Saving Time between late March and late October.

Date Notation: Like the US, Norway uses the Western (Gregorian) Calendar. Unlike Americans, Norwegians typically write the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- March/April: Maundy Thursday
- March/April: Good Friday
- March/April: Easter Sunday
- March/April: Easter Monday
- April/May: Ascension Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- May 17: Constitution Day
- May/June: Pentecost
- May/June: Whit Monday
- December 25: Christmas
- December 26: Boxing Day

Time and Business

Norway's business culture prioritizes punctuality, directness, and reliability. Norwegians generally consider lateness unprofessional and prefer to follow strict, pre-determined meeting agendas. They waste little time developing rapport and respect established schedules. Meetings may be long, as Norwegians generally exercise caution when making decisions in professional settings, evaluating matters thoroughly and seeking consensus before proceeding. In addition, the relatively flat hierarchical structures of Norwegian organizations, which encourage input from everyone present, often prolong meetings. Periods of silence, especially during deliberation, are common.

Norwegians tend to communicate directly, plainly, and honestly, avoiding exaggeration and emotion. Often bringing relevant data to meetings, they are fact-oriented, prefer precise figures, and typically avoid bargaining. Norwegians regard verbal contracts as binding and generally deliver on their promises.

Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Norway depends on the nature of the relationship. Norwegians generally value their personal space, especially among strangers, and stand at a greater distance during conversation than Americans.

Touch: Norwegians greet with a firm handshake in professional and personal contexts. Touching during conversation tends to be rare, except sometimes among relatives and close friends.

Eye Contact: Norwegians maintain direct eye contact during conversation to demonstrate attentiveness, interest, and respect (see *Language and Communication*).

Photographs

Some government buildings, churches, museums, and military installations limit photography. Foreign nationals should ask permission when photographing Norwegians (especially children).

Driving

Norway's roads are generally safe and well-maintained (see *Technology and Material*). Speed limits are low, and drivers usually adhere to road regulations. Traffic is minimal, especially beyond urban centers. Winter conditions often make driving dangerous, particularly in areas with steep mountains and fjords (long, deep, narrow bodies of water that reach far inland). Depending on the region, vehicles must be equipped with winter tires between October/November-April/May. Use of headlights is mandatory, even during daylight hours. Like Americans, Norwegians drive on the right side of the road. In 2022, Norway had 2.1 road fatalities per 100,000 people, slightly lower than the Nordic average (2.4) and much lower than the US (12.8).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Norwegian clothing, arts, and recreation reflect the country's rich history, geography, and natural elements.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Some Norwegians wear the ***bunad*** (Norwegian folk dress) for holidays and special events, especially on Constitution Day (see "Holidays and Festivals" below). To protect *bunader* as official forms of cultural identity, they must be registered with a government agency, which ensures the garments comprise distinctive qualities and follow historic, regional patterns. The men's version of the *bunad* typically consists of a white blouse, ***bukseseler*** (suspenders), trousers, and a ***lue*** (hat). The women's *bunad* features a white cotton blouse, ***livkjol*** ("skirt," a bodice sewn to a skirt), and a ***forkle*** (apron). Many women add accessories such as a ***sølje*** (brooch), belt, and buttons made of ***bunadsølv*** (*bunad* silver) or gold.

Some Norwegian folk costumes that do not adhere to the official *bunad* standards are known as ***drakter*** ("suits," or costumes). *Drakter* also describe the folk dress of different ethnic groups such as the Sámi ***kofte*** (dress or tunic, often with a high collar). Some Sámi wear the *kofte* (also called gákti) as a symbol of cultural pride during ceremonies and while reindeer herding. Although traditional *kofte* materials are reindeer leather and fur, fabrics such as wool, cotton, and silk are more common today.

Modern: Many Norwegians follow conservative European fashion trends. Due to the country's cold climate, well-insulated jackets, layering, and durable garments are common. Men typically wear dark jeans or pants, shirts, and well-kept shoes. Women often wear jeans or pants with a blouse or t-shirt. While Norwegians typically prefer conservative styles such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits in business settings, many prefer to

dress in flashier clothing for special occasions – especially Christmas.

Recreation and Leisure

Norwegians often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical summer activities are biking, hiking, fishing, boating, and dancing. Popular winter sports are ice hockey, ice skating, and skiing. Many Norwegians also spend time doing indoor activities like reading, watching TV, knitting, and learning. Norway is home to over 800 public libraries which offer films, lectures, and ***Norsktrening*** (Norwegian learning), where non-fluent speakers can practice speaking Norwegian in a group.

Holidays and Festivals: Norwegians hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's Lutheran beliefs (see *Religion and Spirituality*), pagan traditions, or historical events. ***Sankthansaften*** (St. John's Eve) is a celebration held in late June that originates from the pagan celebration of the summer season, harvest, and fertility. Many Norwegians believe *Sankthansaften* is a magical time of good fortune and celebrate by barbecuing, drinking, and lighting a ***sankthansbål*** ("Midsummer bonfire," also referred to as St. John's bonfire), which some believe keeps evil spirits away. They also often travel to their rural cottages (see *Family and Kinship*) to experience the longest days of sunlight (see *Political and Social Relations*) while amidst nature.

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in the country's history. On May 17, Norwegians celebrate Constitution Day, or ***Syttende mai*** (Seventeenth of May), to commemorate the signing of the constitution in 1814 (see *History and Myth* and *Political and Social Relations*). Many Norwegians wear their *bunader* and celebrate with parades, flag-raising ceremonies, and marching bands. Children often participate in ***barnetoget*** ("the children's train," a parade), which has led many to call the holiday Children's Day. Celebrations typically also feature school marching bands, games, magic shows, and music, but

minimal military presence. Norway's royal family watches *barnetoget* from the Oslo Castle balcony, where adults participate in a citizen's parade after the children's event.

Sports

Norwegians participate in a wide variety of sports such as skiing, biathlon (a winter sport combining cross-country skiing and rifle shooting), ice hockey, cycling, handball, soccer, and boating. Norway participates in numerous international competitions such as the Summer and Winter Olympics, World Aquatics Championships, World Powerboat Championship, and World Handball Championship, where the Norwegian women's team won three gold medals in 1999, 2011, and 2015. In recent years, Norway has dominated the Winter Olympics, which the country has hosted twice (in 1952 and 1994). It also won more total and gold medals than any other country in 2018 and 2022. Notable athletes are Ole Einar Bjørndalen, who many consider the greatest biathlete of all time, having won eight Olympic gold medals and six World Cups, and Jakob Ingebrigtsen, a middle- and long-distance runner, who won an Olympic gold medal in the 1500-m race in 2020 and currently holds the world record for the fastest indoor 1500-m, 2000-m, and overall 2-mi race.

Soccer: Commonly known as football, soccer is Norway's most popular sport. Many youths learn through pick-up games at school and amateur leagues. ***Eliteserien*** ("The elite series") is the country's 16-team professional league. The Rosenborg and Molde clubs have participated in the UEFA Champions League, an annual competition among Europe's best soccer clubs. While the Norwegian men's national team has qualified for the World Cup only three times, Erling Haaland, a striker for the team, is considered one of the world's best players. In 2023, he won the Golden Boot award, given to the highest goal-scoring player in top-division European league matches, for scoring 36 goals.

Skiing: Norway's mountainous terrain and heavy snowfall provide ideal conditions for recreational skiing, which many

consider the country's national sport. Norway dominates the cross-country skiing and ski jumping events at the Winter Olympics. Marit Bjørgen, a cross-country skier who has won 8 Olympic gold medals, 12 World Cup titles, and 18 World Championships, is the world's most decorated Winter Olympian and considered the greatest female athlete in the sport. Norway has hosted the FIS Nordic World Ski Championship five times and plans to host it again in Trondheim in 2025.

Music and Dance

Traditional folk music features a variety of instruments, like the ***hardingfele*** (Hardanger fiddle), ***langeleik*** (a stringed instrument similar to a guitar), horn, and ***seljefløyte*** (willow flute). Norwegians traditionally performed ***slåttestev*** (improvised ballads), which usually told stories of the country's history using alliteration, which some scholars believe was inspired by Norse poetry. *Slåttestev* usually are accompanied by regional dances like the ***hallingdansen*** (halling), a solo dance that men traditionally performed to impress women. The dance involves leaps, kicks, and other physically challenging steps.

In the 19th century, Edvard Grieg, a composer and pianist, helped develop "National Romanticism," an artistic movement influenced by Norway's folk traditions, natural landscape, history, and people. In 1875, playwright Henrik Ibsen commissioned Grieg to write orchestral music, which resulted in his composition of ***Morgenstemning i ørkenen*** (Morning mood) and ***I Dovregubbens hall*** (In the Hall of the Mountain King). Many of Grieg's works have been used in films, TV, and other songs, and many regard him as Norway's greatest composer.

In the 20th century, foreign influences, primarily from France and the US, helped expand Norway's musical diversity. In the 1920s, dance clubs opened, and the first Norwegian jazz groups, like the Bodø Jazz Band and Sixpence Jazz Band, emerged. Through German occupation during World War II (see *History and Myth*), a ban on dance clubs and censored radio greatly

hindered music production, and many artists fled to Sweden. In the late 1950s, the Metropol Jazz House opened in Oslo, which attracted international musicians and revitalized the genre as Norwegian musicians, such as pianist Einar Iversen, popularized American styles of jazz.

In the 1990s, Norwegian black metal groups encouraged violence and opposed organized religion with lyrics of Satanism, antireligion, sorrow, and Norse paganism. Today, the genre retains themes of chaos and antireligion, though most bands no longer promote violence. Some Norwegian black metal artists have a classical background, resulting in a symphonic black metal subgenre that incorporates orchestral and symphonic elements.

Other Musical Genres: Norwegians listen to an array of musical genres, such as pop, ***dansband*** ("dance band," a combination of jitterbug, swing, and country), heavy metal, rap, electronic, and jazz. Norwegian DJ Kygo gained global recognition in the 2010s and became the first house music producer to perform at an Olympic ceremony during the 2016 Summer Olympics in Brazil. Likewise, Norwegian singer Aurora Aksnes, commonly known as AURORA, received international praise for her 2015 song "Runaway," which blended electronic and folk music styles.

Literature

With roots in oral traditions, Norway has a rich literary history. The earliest forms of written literature were Norse poems about myths and legends. Until the 16th century, Danish and Icelandic influences dominated Norwegian literature. After Norway and Denmark separated in the 19th century (see *History and Myth*), local literature thrived. Authors like Henrik Wergeland helped shape the Norwegian identity. His ***Digte, første Ring*** (Poems: First cycle) and ***Skabelsen, mennesket og messias*** (Creation, Humanity and Messiah) explored social issues and themes like patriotism and heritage. Today, Wergeland is the country's national poet and a symbol of independence. Likewise,

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's poem ***Ja, vi elsker dette landet*** (Yes, we love this country) celebrates patriotism, love, and devotion to Norway and became the national anthem. Bjørnson became the first Norwegian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1903.

In the 20th century, writing was influenced by literary realism. Describing everyday life in Norway, authors often criticized the country's institutions. Knut Hamsun's novel ***Markens Grøde*** (Growth of the Soil) tells the story of a man who embarks on a journey into the Norwegian wilderness with nothing, and through determination, builds a bountiful homestead. The novel explores themes of poverty, nature, the human condition, and resilience. In 1920, Hamsun won the Nobel Prize in Literature. Sigrid Undset's trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter* explored themes of female sexuality, gender roles, faith, and the everyday life of women in the Middle Ages. In 1928, she received the Nobel Prize for her powerful descriptions of life in northern Norway.

Notable modern authors are Lars Saabye Christensen, whose novel ***Halvbroren*** (The Half Brother) won the Brag Prize (a Norwegian literary award) in 2001, and Bjørg Vik, whose short stories, plays, and novels explore themes of feminism, gender roles, and the lives of contemporary women. Jon Fosse, a playwright and novelist, is Norway's fourth and most recent Nobel laureate, having won the prize in 2023 for his innovative exploration of morality and religion.

Folk Arts and Handicrafts

Norway has a rich history of arts and crafts such as ceramics, paintings, jewelry, embroidery, and woodcarvings. One of the most recognizable types of Norwegian folk art is ***rosemaling***, or rose painting, named after the floral motifs painted in bright colors on wooden surfaces. *Rosemaling* developed in rural Norway, where many artists did not receive formal training, which resulted in regional variations of flowers and styles. In another tradition, during Christmas, Norwegians make many ornaments using the ***hvetevefting*** (wheat weaving) technique that involves braiding strands of wheat into various shapes and patterns.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events in Norway. Norwegian cuisine reflects the country's traditions, agriculture, geography, and environmentally friendly culinary practices.

Dining Customs

Generally, Norwegians eat three or four daily meals. Traditionally, ***frokost*** (breakfast) is light because many Norwegians take ***lunsj*** (lunch) early, between 11am-12pm. Norwegians eat their main meal, ***middag*** (dinner), between 4-6pm. In addition to these primary meals, some Norwegians eat ***kveldsmat*** ("evening food") in the late evening, around 8-9pm, which often consists of breakfast foods. While *frokost*, *lunsj*, and *kveldsmat* generally include bread, *middag* does not.

When invited to a Norwegian home, guests typically bring the host a gift like flowers or chocolates. Generally, Norwegians expect guests to arrive on time and remove their shoes upon entering the home. Guests typically take their seats promptly, as the meal often begins upon their arrival. Norwegians tend to eat nearly all meals, even "finger food," with utensils, the knife remaining in the dominant hand and fork in the non-dominant hand. Guests typically do not overindulge in the first serving, as Norwegians consider it polite to ensure that enough food is left over for everyone to have seconds. Guests also usually stay after the meal for conversation, coffee, and ***kaker*** (cakes).

Diet

Norwegian culinary trends vary across the country and reflect its landscape, local agriculture, and hunting patterns. Generally, meals are simple and highlight seafood, wild game, root vegetables, breads, and cheese. Norwegians widely regard ***fårikål*** (mutton and cabbage stew) as their national dish.

While varying by region and season, elk, lamb, salmon, cod, wild berries, potatoes, and seasonal produce like cabbage are

common in many dishes. Reindeer is a popular ingredient that draws on the culinary traditions of the indigenous Sámi peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*). Wheat and rye feature prominently in Norwegian cuisine. Norwegians eat bread, often a whole meal or wholegrain variety like ***knekkebrød*** ("crispbread," a dry rye bread that stays fresh for over a year) with most meals. In addition, Norwegians tend to cook with flavorings found growing wild, like dill and caraway, but also use imported spices like thyme, oregano, and cinnamon.

The Norwegian diet limits processed foods, typically focusing instead on local ingredients. Norway launched the Food Nation Norway initiative with national and international commitments to achieve sustainable food production and reduce food waste, among other goals, by 2030. Due to the country's cold climate (see *Political and Social Relations*), preservation methods like drying, salting, and pickling also have shaped Norwegian cuisine.

Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Norway is typically nutritious, highlighting proteins. While some Norwegians just have black coffee, a typical Norwegian breakfast consists of a boiled egg and bread topped with cheese, cucumber, tomato, and pickled herring. Another meal is ***laks og eggerøre*** (smoked salmon and scrambled eggs). Common cheeses are ***brunost*** (brown cheese) or Jarlsberg (a yellow cheese) often paired with a sweet jam as an accompaniment or a meal itself.

Lunch tends to be simple and cold. Many Norwegians eat a ***matpakke***, a packed lunch that contains a stacked, open-faced sandwich on whole-wheat bread with ***pålegg*** (layers of toppings). The most common *pålegg* are fish, sliced meat, cheese, fruit, vegetables, boiled eggs, and ***leverpostei*** (liver paté). Many Norwegians bring this traditional style of lunch to work, school, or on hikes. Restaurants typically serve sandwiches, salads, and a fish or meat dish with sides for lunch.

Generally, dinner is the only hot meal of the day and consists of a meat, seafood, or pasta dish with sides like boiled potatoes, vegetables, or a small salad. ***Kjøttkaker*** is a meatball dish with gravy, mashed peas, and boiled potatoes. ***Lapskaus*** (stew) is another common dish that usually uses beef and root vegetables, but any ingredient on hand such as lamb or pork can be used. ***Pølse med lompe*** is a hotdog or sausage wrapped in a traditional potato pancake similar to a flatbread. Foreign dishes like tacos, pasta, burgers, and sushi are also popular. Many Norwegians eat tacos on Friday, which they call ***Tacofredag*** (Taco Friday). For special occasions like Christmas and Easter, feasts often comprise ***pinnekjøtt*** (salted lamb ribs), ***lutefisk*** (salted, dried cod), ***ribbe*** (roasted pork belly), and ***juletorsk*** (Christmas cod, served with ***sandefjordsmør***, a butter sauce), typically accompanied by an array of sides and sweets.

Traditional desserts and sweets are ***Kvikk Lunsj*** ("quick lunch," a chocolate-covered wafer) and ***vafler*** (waffles made with an egg-heavy batter and pressed in the shape of a heart, usually topped with berries or brown cheese, though they can also be savory). ***Skolebrød*** ("school bread") or ***skoleboller*** ("school buns"), named for their popularity as a treat in children's lunch packs, are sweet buns topped with custard and coconut flakes.

Beverages

Norwegians consume the second most ***kaffe*** (coffee) per capita after Finland, and many consume multiple cups throughout the day. Tea, herbal drinks, chilled or hot apple cider, and ***Solo*** (an orange-flavored soft drink) are common non-alcoholic beverages. The standard Norwegian beer is a lager. Wine and hand-crafted ciders are also popular alcoholic beverages. ***Akevitt*** (aquavit) is the national spirit, typically made with grain or potatoes and flavored with caraway or dill.

Eating Out

Restaurants in cities like Oslo and Bergen range from fine dining establishments to affordable family restaurants. Cafés typically

open only for breakfast and lunch and serve light meals and coffee. Kiosks, street food carts or trucks, are cheap alternatives to sit-down restaurants that serve fast food. Fish markets in large towns sell a variety of fresh-caught seafood. While casual restaurants do not expect tips, Norwegian etiquette at full-service restaurants is to leave up to 10%.

Health Overview

Norwegians tend to live long and healthy lives but are susceptible to cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Between 2000-24, life expectancy at birth increased from about 79 to 83 years, the same as neighboring Sweden, just above Finland (82), and higher than the US (81). During the same period, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) decreased from about 4 deaths per 1,000 live births to 2, the same as Sweden, but lower than the US (5).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Some residents commonly rely on traditional medicine, which is shaped by Christianity and Sámi reverence for nature (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Healing rituals rely on practices like spiritual connection, prayer, herbal remedies, and the use of natural substances like moss, water, stones, and soil. Traditional healers are mostly non-professional, non-commercial therapists. Some Norwegians use methods like cupping (the process of applying suction cups to draw blood and pathogens to the skin's surface), prayers, rituals, and other methods to treat various conditions. Norway considers traditional healing as complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). CAM providers mostly operate outside the public health system, and treatment is often administered by family, community members, or patients themselves for little or no cost.

Healthcare System

Political and social movements advocating for universal healthcare and insurance in Norway began around 1900. The

Act of Health Insurance came into force in 1909, covering healthcare and guaranteeing basic income in the case of income loss due to ill health for employees and their families. In 1956, the Act expanded into a universal and mandatory right to healthcare for all citizens. Today, Norway has universal health and social insurance coverage under the ***Folketrygd*** (National Insurance Scheme). The national government is responsible for providing healthcare in accordance with the goal of equal access to care regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. The Ministry of Health and Care Services is largely responsible for regulating, funding, and overseeing the provision of care, though it shares the administration of care with municipalities.

Taxes and payroll contributions shared by employers and employees primarily fund Norway's universal health coverage, which automatically enrolls all residents. European Union residents can also access health services in Norway. Further, undocumented adult immigrants have access to emergency acute care, while migrant children receive the same care as citizens.

Norway's public health system is semi-decentralized. While the national government is responsible for hospital and specialty care, four regional health authorities manage public hospitals at the local level. Municipalities are responsible for primary, preventive, and nursing care and set their own budgets. The regions and municipalities cooperatively determine public health initiatives and campaigns, like the promotion of healthy lifestyles and reducing social health disparities. Public healthcare is free until age 16 and for pregnant or nursing residents. Everyone else pays up to about $250 out-of-pocket per year. Once residents reach this cap, they receive an exemption card that grants them free public healthcare for the rest of the year.

Since public healthcare is universally accessible, only about 10% of Norwegians have private insurance, mainly to gain quicker access to outpatient services and have a greater choice

of providers. The private healthcare sector is small, covering fewer than 5% of elective care and does not cover acute care services. Private healthcare is also affordable, as employers pay about 90% of private healthcare costs, making the individual average monthly out-of-pocket cost around $56.

While pharmaceuticals are not free, they tend to be affordable. Depending on the type of prescription, the government pays a portion of the cost and the patient a co-payment. The state pays around 80% of expenses related to prescription medications. Except for braces, all dental treatment is free for residents aged 18 and under. Until age 25, the government continues to cover a large share of dental treatment, but thereafter most people pay all their expenses with a few exceptions. As of 2023, Norway spent about 8% of its GDP on healthcare, lower than Finland (10%), Sweden (11%), and the US (17%). Despite its comparatively low expenditure, Norway's rates of preventable and treatable mortality continue to decline. As of 2023, fewer than 6% of low-income Norwegians reported unmet medical care needs, higher than the EU average (3%).

Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death in Norway are cancers, accounting for about 28% of deaths in 2023, followed by circulatory diseases like stroke and heart diseases (25%). Behavioral risk factors, like dietary habits and tobacco use are also important contributors to overall mortality. Lung cancer is the most common cause of death, responsible for one in five cancer fatalities. Norway also has some of Europe's highest rates of sexually transmitted infections. As of January 2025, the Norwegian government confirmed some 1.5 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in nearly 5,700 deaths. As of December 2023, about 76% of the population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Norway's government successfully managed the pandemic, largely due to its adopting a suppression and control strategy, communicating with the public that has a high level of trust in government, and maximizing its healthcare resources.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

The early Norwegian economy was limited and subsistence-based for millennia. Regional trade eventually developed, and by around 1500 BC, Norway had integrated into budding trade routes to continental Europe. During the Viking Age (8th-11th centuries AD – see *History and Myth*), trade flourished as medieval Norwegians began to raid extensively throughout the North Sea, developing slave trading networks and founding early commercial centers.

An institutionalized, currency-based economy began to emerge in Norway during the 10th century. King Olaf I Tryggvason (see *History and Myth*) introduced Norway's first currency – the penning, modeled after Anglo-Saxon coins – in 995, which the country minted through 1387. In the 13th century, Norwegians started to trade extensively with merchants from the Hanseatic League, a powerful trading confederation of northern European towns and cities, also known as the Hansa. Hansa merchants won special privileges from the Crown, establishing a ***kontor*** (joint trading office) at Bergen in the 14th century.

Fishing, timber, iron ore, and copper industries flourished in the mid-16th century, producing a class of Norwegian merchant elite. Copper production expanded significantly with the discovery of a major deposit near present-day Røros in 1644. As Røros Copper Works soon became one of the country's largest enterprises, similar mining operations emerged in Løkken Verk (copper) and Kongsberg (silver).

During the early 19th-century Napoleonic Wars (see *History and Myth*), Britain blockaded Norway, refusing to accept its timber and fish exports. Also unable to import Danish grain through British-controlled seaways, economic crisis and food shortages wracked Norway until 1810. Recovery proved slow, mired by a depression in Europe, deflationary monetary policy, and British

trade barriers. Fortunes reversed beginning in the 1840s, as agricultural productivity improved, and Norway began to industrialize. A boom followed, with GDP per capita growing by an average of 1.6% annually from 1843-76. Alongside industrialization, which continued through the 1870s, exports were a main source of growth. As its maritime fleet developed into one of the world's largest and most profitable, Norway began to import British capital, becoming increasingly dependent on the British economy.

In the 1870s, as Britain's economy slowed, so too did Norway's. With additional economic pressure created by Norway's transition to the international gold standard (which caused surging inflation), a depression began, causing significant Norwegian emigration between 1879-93. Growth renewed when a new wave of industrialization, prompted by the development of the hydroelectrical industry, began in the early 1900s.

During World War I, the Norwegian economy initially benefitted from high wartime commodity prices and shipping demand (see *History and Myth*). However, when Germany's submarine warfare campaign started to cripple Norwegian shipping, a recession followed. After a brief period of postwar growth, the economy contracted again in late 1920. Ill-conceived policies designed to mitigate the decline made matters worse, causing monetary and labor crises. Already approaching 20% by 1927, the unemployment rate worsened as the Great Depression progressed in the early 1930s and eventually reached more than 30%. Recovery began with Norway's decision to abandon the gold standard in 1931, which enabled the government to increase spending. As conditions improved, manufacturing output and exports grew substantially, though unemployment remained high throughout the 1930s.

After Nazi Germany occupied Norway in 1940 during World War II (WWII), the domestic economy was restructured to supply the

German war machine. Meanwhile, Norway's government-in-exile (see *History and Myth*) managed its merchant fleet from London, amassing "floating capital" that it used to support the Allied war effort. After the war, Norway became a beneficiary of the Marshall Plan (the US's post-WWII economic assistance program to support European reconstruction), receiving some $400 million between 1948-52. As it sought to integrate further into the increasingly globalized economy, Norway joined the Bretton Woods System, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in the postwar period.

During the 1950s-60s, the Norwegian government significantly expanded its welfare provisions, transforming the economy along the lines of the "Nordic Model," which merges free markets and a generous public welfare system. At the same time, Norway considered joining the European Economic Community (the predecessor to the European Union, or EU) but ultimately held out (see *History and Myth*).

This period also yielded the discovery of vast hydrocarbon deposits beneath Norway's territory in the North Sea. Major production began at the Ekofisk oil field in 1971, just 2 years after its discovery, and Norway established its state-owned oil firm, Statoil (now Equinor), in 1972. Oil income quickly became the primary driver of Norwegian GDP growth and assumed an important role in supporting the state's welfare spending. It also enabled countercyclical economic policy that helped sustain growth amidst a stagnating global economy.

During the 1980s, policymakers fixed interest rates below market level, causing a credit boom, and then raised them. This shift in monetary policy resulted in a financial crisis from 1991-93 that affected consumer prices, the housing market, and unemployment. Eventually, the state took control of Norway's largest commercial banks and implemented various reforms to

control the situation. It also established what became the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, the Government Pension Fund.

By the turn of the 21st century, Norway had become one of the world's wealthiest countries by GDP per capita, owing to its expanding oil wealth. The global financial crisis of 2007-09 was relatively mild in Norway, due to improved capital requirements and more accountable banking supervision implemented after the 1990s crisis. As a result, the economy returned to pre-crisis levels by early 2010. The following year, Norway received huge capital inflows from Europeans eager to evade the Eurozone debt crisis, establishing its banks as regional safe havens.

While Norway underwent a serious economic shock during the COVID-19 pandemic (see *Sustenance and Health*), especially as global oil demand fell, government spending and a quick recovery in 2021 softened the blow. Today, Norway has the Nordic region's second highest GDP, totaling some $485.31 billion as of 2023. In the same year, its unemployment rate and debt-to-GDP ratio were low at 3.5% and 44.3%, respectively. Economic growth has slowed amidst increased inflation and is forecast to decline to 0.5% in 2024 before recovering in 2025.

Industry

While the services sector has accounted for the largest share of Norway's economy in recent years, high energy prices in 2021-23 increased the industrial sector's contribution to 39% of GDP (2023) and 19% of the workforce (2022). Its largest subsectors are oil and natural gas, hydropower, shipbuilding, and mining.

Oil and Natural Gas: Norway is one of the world's largest oil and natural gas producers, endowed with extensive undersea hydrocarbon deposits throughout its North Sea continental shelf. Totaling 7 billion barrels of proved petroleum and 48.2 trillion cu ft of natural gas reserves, Norway's deposits accounted for about 2% of global crude oil and 3% of natural gas production in 2023. In 2023, oil and natural gas exports comprised around half of Norway's total export revenue and 23% of GDP. Norway is

the world's fifth largest exporter of crude oil, much of which transits through a dense pipeline network that links to the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Belgium, France, and Denmark.

Services

The services sector accounts for around 50% of GDP (2023) and employs some 78% of Norwegians as of 2022. Major subsectors include tourism, banking, and shipping.

Tourism: In 2023, about 5.56 million tourists visited Norway, accounting for about 4% of GDP that year. Norway's tourist attractions range from urban centers like Oslo and Trondheim to the fjord-carved, mountainous expanses of the West Coast. The country's Arctic islands, like those of the Lofoten Archipelago and Svalbard (home to Longyearbyen, the world's northernmost permanent settlement), are also popular destinations.

Banking: Large commercial banks dominate Norway's banking sector. The largest is DNB Bank, which managed some $348 billion in assets as of late 2023 and commands a 32% market share in retail deposits and 37% in commercial deposits.

Shipping: Norway is a major maritime power, controlling the world's third-largest merchant fleet. Its ships account for almost 10% of global trading tonnage. Norway's commercial vessels include oil, liquefied natural gas, petroleum gas, and chemical tankers; bulk carriers; and car carriers, among others.

Agriculture

This sector accounts for about 2% of both GDP and the workforce. Cattle and sheep rearing and cereal (mostly barley and wheat) production predominate. Owing to its rugged terrain (see *Political and Social Relations*), only about 2.5% of Norway's land is arable. Its farms are typically family-owned and small, averaging 20 hectares (around 49 acres).

Fishing: In 2022, Norway produced over 4.3 million tons of fish, making it the world's ninth largest fish producer. Aquaculture, particularly of Atlantic salmon, dominates the subsector. Norway

produced nearly 1.6 million tons of farmed fish in 2023, making it the world's eighth largest aquaculture supplier.

Currency

In 1875, Norway adopted the krone (kr or NOK, plural kroner, and sometimes translated as "Norwegian crown"), issued in four coins (1, 5, 10, and 20) and five banknotes (50, 100, 200, 500, and 1,000). A krone divides into 100 øre, which are no longer used. From 2019-24, $1 was worth between 8.17-11.81 kr.

Foreign Trade

Exports, which totaled some $225.9 billion in 2023, consisted of petroleum gas, crude petroleum, non-fillet fish, refined petroleum, and aluminum sold to the UK (19%), Germany (19%), the Netherlands (8%), and Sweden (8%). Imports totaled about $156.7 billion and consisted of cars, petroleum, nickel, and broadcasting equipment from Germany (11%), China (11%), Sweden (10%), and the US (8%).

EFTA

Norway remains party to the EFTA, an intergovernmental trade organization that promotes free trade and integration among its members (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland). Through the Agreement on the European Economic Area, EFTA members (except for Switzerland) participate in a single market with EU countries, known as the "Internal Market," but do not fall within the EU Customs Union and are not subject to EU trade and monetary policy.

Foreign Aid

Norway contributed some $5.5 billion of official development assistance (ODA) in 2023. Norway delivers around 80% of its ODA as bilateral funding, either directly or as earmarked contributions to multilateral organizations. Norway's ODA primarily supports nations in West, Central, and South Asia; Africa; and Latin America. In early 2023, the country's ***Stortinget*** (Parliament) approved a multi-year, roughly $7 billion assistance package to Ukraine designed to provide it with military, civilian, and humanitarian support amidst Russia's ongoing invasion.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Norway's physical and telecommunications infrastructures are well-developed. Its media landscape is one of the world's freest.

Transportation

Travel by privately owned vehicle (POV) is Norway's most common method of transportation. At 520 cars per 1,000 people in 2023, Norway had the Nordic region's second highest POV ownership rate after Finland. The country also has the world's most electric vehicles and charging stations per capita. Norway's public transit system is well-developed, with bus, rail, tram, and taxi services available in much of the country and ferries servicing coastal areas. While buses are the most common form of public transport, ridesharing services are available in Oslo, Bergen, and Trondheim. Oslo has an extensive rail system, including its ***Tunnelbane*** (or ***T-bane***, metro), ***Lokaltog Østlande*** (Eastern Norway Local Train), and ***Trikk*** (tram, shortened from ***elektrikk***, or "electric"). About 53 mi of *T-bane* tracks traverse 100 stations along 5 lines. A 6th line is scheduled to open in 2026-27. The more expansive, 344-mi-long *Lokaltog* functions as a commuter rail, linking Oslo to nearby counties. Bicycles are also a common means of transport.

Roadways: Norway's 59,255-mi-long roadway network consists of national roads maintained by ***Statens vegvesen*** (Norwegian Public Roads Administration), as well as secondary and regional roads. The network is far less dense than those in neighboring Sweden and Finland, largely due to Norway's rugged terrain (see *Political and Social Relations*). Many East-West routes cross mountains and often close in winter. In a 2019 global assessment, Norway ranked 94 of 141 countries in road connectivity and 46 in quality of road infrastructure.

Railways: Norway's 2,391-mi-long railway network is radial in design, with most lines extending from Oslo. East-West routes

connect Oslo to Bergen and Stavanger, and a primary North-South line runs through Trondheim before terminating in Bodø. Passenger rail operators like state-owned *Vy* and *SJ NORD* (the name under which Swedish national rail company, *SJ*, operates in Norway) enabled some 62 million passenger trips in 2023. Oslo's ***Sentralstasjon*** (Central Station), known as Oslo S, is Norway's busiest, handling about 100,000 daily passengers.

Ports and Waterways: Norway has about 980 mi of navigable waterways. Its two major inland routes – the Telemark and Halden Waterways, both of which terminate in the Skagerrak Strait – were built in the 19th century to facilitate timber transport but are now recreational. Norway has 69 major port areas that service its enormous merchant marine fleet and foreign vessels. Bergen is the country's largest cargo port.

Airways: As of 2024, Norway has 145 airports, 67 of which are paved. Oslo Gardermoen Airport (OSL) is Norway's primary air transit hub and one of three bases for Scandinavia Airlines (SAS), the flag carrier of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Although SAS is Norway's largest airline by passenger traffic, Norwegian Air Shuttle, one of Europe's leading low-cost carriers, also commands a large market share.

Energy

Having extensive offshore hydrocarbon deposits, Norway is a net energy exporter. In 2023, it produced 2.02 million barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil, 4.37 trillion cu ft of natural gas, and 204,000 b/d equivalent of natural gas liquids, much of which was exported to foreign (mostly European) consumers via pipelines, onshore terminals, and tankers. Equinor (Norway's state-owned multinational energy company) is the country's largest crude oil producer, accounting for about 68% of total production in 2021. Following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Norway increased its natural gas production by 50 billion cu ft to mitigate Russia's reduced supply to Europe. In 2023, hydropower made up about 43% of Norway's total energy supply, followed by oil (25%),

natural gas (16%), biofuels and waste (8%), wind and solar (4%), and coal (3%).

Media

In 2024, Norway ranked 1 of 180 countries assessed in a world press freedom index. The country is a global leader in free media due to a strong legal framework that guarantees freedom of expression and the right to public information. Politicians exert minimal influence over media outlets, and journalists rarely face physical danger. Though most media subsectors are somewhat concentrated, the government seeks to maintain a competitive media environment, offering, for example, a newspaper subsidy to bolster small papers.

Print Media: Although newspaper circulation has decreased in recent years, Norway ranks second in Europe for newspaper consumption. While most papers are small with local circulations, popular regional and national newspapers are *VG*, *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, and *Dagens Næringsliv*. Just three entities control some 61% of newspaper circulation: Schibsted (27%), Amedia (24%), and Polaris Media (10%). *The Local Norway* is the country's primary English-language newspaper.

TV and Radio: *Norsk rikskringkasting* (NRK), the national, state-owned radio and television company, controls Norway's radio and television markets. NRK has a 65% radio market share, and its channel P1 – which broadcasts current affairs, popular music, and sports programming – is Norway's largest. NRK also has a 40% television market share, though commercial competition is stronger in the television sector. Private firms like Schibsted, Discovery, MTG, and Egmont are also major players.

Telecommunications

In 2023, Norway had about 3 landline and 111 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. Norway's rapidly developing 5G network reached about 95% of the population in 2023.

Internet: In 2023, about 99% of Norwegians were regular Internet users. While many Norwegians access the Internet through mobile devices, Norway had about 46 fixed broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants in 2022.

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