

Norway: National Government

The Kingdom of Norway (*Norge* in *bokmål* or *Noreg* in *nynorsk*) is a constitutional monarchy with a democratic government. Citizens over 18 vote using proportional representation in a general election every four years for 169 seats in the parliament (*Storting*). There were upper (*Lagting*) and lower (*Odelsting*) chambers until a constitutional amendment in 2007 abolished the bicameral division from 2009. Seven political parties are represented, the largest being the Labour Party (social-democrat). Other parties are moderate and include conservative and very small communist parties. There are no right wing neo-fascist movements. Only 8% of voters belong to a political party. Following the general election on 14 September 2009, the majority centre-left "red-green" coalition continued in government, made up of the Labour Party, Socialist Left and Centre Party. Turnout was 76.4%, about average for Europe. Policies are more left-wing than pre-2005 with an emphasis on expenditure on social welfare, the environment and local government at home, and on disarmament, development aid and peace brokering abroad.

Royal family; King Harald V (born 21 February 1937), Queen Sonja (born 4 July 1937).

Crown Prince Haakon Magnus (born 20 July 1973), son of King Harald and Queen Sonja, married Crown Princess Mette-Marit (born 19 August 1973), their children Princess Ingrid Alexandra (born 21 January 2004), Prince Sverre Magnus (born 3 December 2005).

Princess Märtha Louise (born 22 September 1971), daughter of King Harald and Queen Sonja, married Ari Mikael Behn. their children Maud Angelica Behn and Leah Isadora Behn.

Princess Ragnhild (born 9 June 1930), daughter of King Olav and Princess Märtha of Sweden, married Erling Sven Lorentzen.

Princess Astrid (born 12 February 1932), daughter of King Olav and Princess Märtha of Sweden, married Johan Martin Ferner

<<http://www.kongehuset.no/?lang=eng>>

Prime Minister: Jens Stoltenberg, Labour Party

Seats in parliament (40% are women):

Socialist Left (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti* - SV) 11

Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet* - Ap) 64

Liberals (*Venstre* - V) 2

Centre Party (*Senterpartiet* - Sp) 11

Christian People's Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti* - KrF) 10

Conservative Party (*Høyre* - H) 30

Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet* - FrP) 41

Since 2005, opinion polls show the right of centre Progress Party is increasing its support.

The next election will be in September 2013.

<<http://www.stortinget.no/en>> for information on the parliament.

<<http://www.regjeringen.no/en.html>> for comprehensive government information in English

There is cradle-to-grave social welfare; all citizens are entitled to free education, including university (there is 100% literacy), free hospital treatment, generous holiday and maternity leave, family allowances and a guaranteed pension. The Norwegian Pension Fund is worth around £150bn (January 2007), equivalent to around £32 000 for every man, woman and child. Norway has topped the UN survey of Human Development in life expectancy (men 78 years, women 83 years), access to tertiary education and average income for four successive years. It has the highest female employment rate in Europe (74% of all adult females). 15% of the population is over 65 and despite the high level of welfare, Norway ranks only eighth among OECD countries in the level of direct taxes; income tax and insurance contributions are on average 22% and 8% respectively of a person's gross income.

Norway participates in the EU Single Market through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement. As an EEA Member, Norway implements EU Directives on trade and economic matters, and contributes financially to the EU structural and cohesion funds, but remains outside the Common Agriculture and Fisheries Policies. It has adopted more EU legislation into domestic law than any EU country except Denmark. Norway also takes part in police, judicial, visa and frontier co-operation through the Schengen Convention and is active in the Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The Berlin Plus arrangements enable non-EU members to participate in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations and Norway contributes troops to the EU Bosnia mission under Berlin Plus. On 4 December 2004, the Storting voted to contribute Norwegian troops to an EU Battlegroup with Sweden and Finland, drawing on UK based headquarters support. The most contentious issue involves EU trade defence measures imposed on imports of Norwegian farmed salmon at the request of the UK and Ireland. Scottish producers of farmed salmon are angry that their livelihoods are being endangered by Norwegian imports to the EU at low prices that they claim are unfairly below the cost of production. The Norwegian producers dispute the EU figures and claim the EU measures breach WTO rules. The views of other member states are influenced by producer, consumer and fish-processing interests. The case has been referred to the WTO.

With other Nordic countries, Norway has been an energetic supporter of UN reform and was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2001-2002. The first UN General Secretary was the Norwegian Trygve Lie; former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland headed the WHO. Home of the Nobel Peace Prize, conflict prevention/resolution is high on the foreign policy agenda. Norway's international profile was significantly boosted in 1993 as a result of its pivotal role brokering the Middle East Peace Agreement (the Oslo Accords). Norway's discreet peace-facilitator role continues in the Middle East, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Haiti, Guatemala, Colombia and the Sudan. Both sides generally trust Norway as a small country with no aspirations of superpower status, no military clout and no vested interests in the conflict. Alongside conflict prevention/resolution efforts, key policy priorities include sustainable development, human rights and promoting international good citizenship. Norway has a high overseas aid budget (\$2.954 billion donated, 0.89% of Gross National Income in 2006, exceeding the UN target of 0.7%) with half targeted at Africa. Norway is ranked fourth of the 21 richest countries in the effectiveness of its aid. Environmental issues are important too: climate change is high on the agenda as is international engagement over nuclear clean-up on the Kola peninsula in north-west Russia.

The government has continued the main lines of Norwegian foreign policy, including active membership of NATO and adherence to the EEA agreement. It will not join the EU — although the Labour Party is in favour of membership, its two coalition partners are opposed. In addition the government's priorities include strengthening the UN, contributing to peace support, disarmament, and increased development aid. Relations with its near neighbours in the High North (the Barents/Arctic Region) are a main strategic priority and in particular the need to tackle illegal fishing and co-operate with Russia and others over future oil and gas extraction. As a party to the 1920 Spitzbergen Treaty, and with strong interests in energy security and tackling climate change, the UK has an interest in co-operating with Norway to develop the region in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Over the last 50 years there has been a strong tradition of Norwegian peacekeeping and nearly 1% of Norwegian police are involved in international operations. At present Norway has around 700 troops in Afghanistan as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Norway has also provided forces to international operations in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina and, until July 2004, 140 members of the Telemark engineering battalion worked with British forces in Basra. Iraqi officers are also being trained at the NATO Joint Warfare Centre in Norway. The government has now withdrawn all military personnel from Iraq, and has also withdrawn from the US-led

Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. It now sets a high threshold for considering the use of military force. There has been a 23% reduction in the number of armed forces personnel since the government came to power in 2005.

Bilateral relations with the UK are close and strong, reflecting long-standing trading links, geographical proximity, ties between the Royal families, connections forged during World War II, continuing shared security concerns and many cultural affinities (eg music, theatre, shopping and football). Over 3,000 Norwegians study in the UK. Military contacts remain close with low flying practice and thousands of UK service personnel involved in regular annual winter training/exercises in Norway; British troops make up about half of all NATO training in Norway. Norwegian personnel attend training in the UK. British and Norwegian ministers and other government officials meet frequently for talks. UK and Norway are jointly investigating the use of spent North Sea gas fields as potential storage for carbon dioxide.

From about 1850 there were restrictions on Sami rights and language. This was reversed after World War II and since 1988, the Norwegian Sami elect their own parliament (*Sameting*, meeting in Karasjok) every four years. Sweden and Finland have similar bodies. They belong to the Saami Council which co-operates with Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Russian governments and also participate in the Arctic Council.