



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Norway

Population: 5.15 millions (#121 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 323,802 square km. Stretching the western coast of Scandinavia, Norway borders Finland, Sweden, Russia, and the Norwegian Sea. Svalbard, an archipelago north of the Arctic Circle, is under Norwegian administration. The terrain of Norway is mostly mountainous with fertile valleys. Coastal areas are rugged and bisected with fjords as a result of past glaciations. Far northern areas consist of tundra, whereas other areas tend to be forested wetlands. Coastal areas experience a wet temperate climate due to the North Atlantic Current; interior areas tend to be cooler and wetter. Rockslides and avalanches are natural hazards. Environmental issues include water pollution, acid rain, and air pollution. Norway is divided into eighteen administrative counties.

Peoples

Norwegian: 82.1%

Sami: 1.1%

Other European: 8.3%

Other: 8.5%

Population: 5,372,191 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.94% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.85 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 79.9 male, 84.1 female (2018)

Languages: Norwegian (97.6%), Polish (1.8%), other (0.6%). Norwegian is the official language and only language with over one million speakers (5.19 million). Sami has official status in nine municipalities in northern Norway.

Literacy: 100% (2011)

History

The Vikings originated in Norway during the Middle Ages and launched raids into Britain and Europe, although only about 1% of the Scandinavian population participated in Viking raiding parties. To the east, Scandinavian Vikings called Varangians raided the Baltic coast and became established at Novgorod in what is now Russia in 862 AD and from there sailed down the Dniepr to Kiev (now Ukraine), establishing the foundation of Kievan Rus through intermixture with local Slavs. Viking seafarers explored the North Atlantic Ocean, establishing colonies in Iceland and Greenland around AD 1000, reaching as far as Newfoundland but not establishing a permanent presence in these distant areas. Following the adoption of Christianity by King Olav Tryggvason in 994, Viking raids and aggression declined. In the late fourteenth century, Norway formed a union with Denmark that lasted over four centuries. In 1814, Norwegians opposed a Swedish takeover that resulted in an invasion by the Swedes. Although some autonomy was granted to Norway during the nineteenth century, total independence did not occur until 1905. Norway was neutral in both world wars, although in World War II Nazi Germany occupied Norway for five years. Following the war, Norway joined NATO in 1949 after heavy costs were incurred during both world wars, notwithstanding neutrality. Oil and natural gas discovery and exploitation in the latter half of the twentieth century have fueled economic growth and modernization. Norway remains one of the few European nations with an advanced economy that has not joined the European Union. The number of immigrants has significantly increased in recent decades – many of which are from other European countries.

Culture

Norway has a proud heritage of music, literature, architecture, and art that has retained the romantic tradition. Norwegian literature begins in the Viking age through skaldic poetry and history, reaching its height in the nineteenth century. Edvard Grieg was a famous Norwegian composer who influenced romanticism through classical music in Europe in the late nineteenth century. Painters such as Edvard Munch produced expressionistic works. Common farm and sea foods such as fish, bread, and cheese dominate cuisine as agriculture continues to be a major traditional influence despite Norway's modernized economy. Cigarette and alcohol consumption rates rank lower than most European nations. Although most are nominally Christian, secularism is widespread. Norway legalized same-sex marriage in 2009.[\[1\]](#)

Economy

GDP per capita: \$72,100 (2017) [121% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.953 (2017)

Corruption Index: 84 (2018)

Diversification of the economy has occurred in recent years, yet dependence on oil and natural gas revenues for economic growth and stability is a concern. The price and demand for oil drive economic growth rates. Petroleum generates 13% of revenue and 37% of total exports. The government has been preparing for the eventual exhaustion of petroleum reserves by saving oil profits in a sovereign wealth fund valued at over one trillion United States dollars. Abundant natural resources including large mineral deposits, hydropower, fish, and timber offer potential for long term growth and economic development. Services account for 78.6% of the labor force and generate 64.0% of the GDP, whereas industry accounts for 19.3% of the labor force and generates 33.7% of the GDP. Agriculture constitutes less than 5% of the labor and GDP. Primary crops include barley, wheat, and potatoes. Pork, beef, and fish are also major agricultural products. Major industries include oil, natural gas, food processing, tree products, shipbuilding, mining, and fishing. Primary trade partners include Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Norway ranks among countries with the lowest levels of perceived corruption.

Faiths

Christian: 77.4%

Muslim: 2.9%

Other: 2.0%

None: 17.7%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Lutheran Church of Norway – 3,814,256

Catholic – 155,794

Pentecostal – 39,000

Orthodox – 20,000

Jehovah's Witnesses – 11,745 – 167

Seventh Day Adventists – 4,544 – 64

Latter-day Saints – 4,598 – 21

Religion

Seventy-one percent (71%) of the population is estimated to be Lutheran,^[2] although church attendance is low. Other Protestants number less than 200,000, and Roman Catholics total approximately 156,000. The Muslim population is over 150,000 and rising rapidly due to immigration and much higher birth rates among Muslims than ethnic Norwegians. Most religious minorities live in the Oslo metropolitan area and are recent immigrants.^[3] There are approximately 93,000 members of the Norwegian Humanist Association.^[4]

Religious Freedom

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is upheld by the government. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway receives some benefits not available to other religious groups. The constitution requires that the King claim membership in the Church of Norway. Religious groups do not have to register to operate in Norway. All religious groups that register with the government are entitled to state funds in proportion to the number of adherents. Religious education in public schools is mandatory and teaches all major world religious traditions in a respectful manner but with an emphasis on Christianity. There has been increasing debate regarding the treatment of Muslims as relating to cultural accommodations. There have been increasing reports of societal discrimination or abuse of religious freedom that target Muslims – the vast majority of which occur in Oslo. Missionaries may serve on regular foreign work visas.^[5]

Largest Cities

Urban: 82.2% (2018)

Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Bærum, Kristiansand, Fredrikstad, **Sandnes**, Tromsø, Drammen.

Nine of the ten most populous cities have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the national population resides in the ten largest cities.

Church History

One of the first Norwegian Latter-day Saint converts, Svend Larsen, was introduced to the Church in Denmark while delivering timber. He and another recent convert began missionary activity in Norway in 1851, and the first baptism occurred before the end of the year. In 1852, the first two congregations were created. Missionaries were frequently arrested and imprisoned when they first preached in Norway. Slow and steady growth occurred for the latter half of the nineteenth century and first several decades of the twentieth century. Former shipbuilding Norwegian converts who immigrated to Utah participated in the construction of the Manti Utah Temple, designing the roof as a watertight upside-down ship.^[6] Norwegian Latter-day Saints in Utah introduced skiing as a recreational sport and influenced the future ski industry in the area.^[7] The Norwegian Mission was created in 1920 from the Scandinavian Mission. Eight thousand, five hundred, and fifty-five individuals joined the Church prior to 1930, 3,500 of whom immigrated to Utah. Missionaries were evacuated from Norway at the beginning of World War II.^[8] During the first century of missionary activity, native members and missionaries utilized Danish translations of Latter-day Saint scriptures. The Book of Mormon was not translated into Norwegian until 1950. Seminary and institute were introduced by 1975. In the 1980s, thirty local members were called as missionaries in the Norway Oslo Mission to assist the full-time missionary force.^[9] In 1988, the Church became registered with the government for the first time.^[10]

In 1990, President Thomas S. Monson addressed the Norwegian community in Salt Lake City, urging them to preserve their

Norwegian traditions.^[11] Prior to 2000, Norway belonged to the Europe North Area and then became part of the Europe Central Area. In 2010, Norway was assigned to the Europe Area. In 2001, Church members in Scandinavia commemorated the emigration of converts 150 years ago to Utah by crossing the Atlantic in four sailing ships from Europe to the United States.^[12] In 2003, Norway became one of the first eight countries to receive its own national Church website.^[13] The Church observed the Norwegian centennial in 2005 and noted that 60,000 Utahans on the 2000 census declared their ancestry to be from Norway, largely due immigration from early converts.^[14]

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 4,598 (2018)

Slow membership growth has occurred throughout the Church's history in Norway. Church membership totaled 1,507 in 1930, 1,643 in 1940, 1,515 in 1950, 1,907 in 1960, and 2,885 in 1970. In 1974, there were 3,000 members.^[15] In 1990, there were 3,700 members.^[16] By 2000, membership totaled 4,061.

During the 2000s, slow membership growth occurred. Membership increased to 4,102 in 2002, 4,134 in 2005, and 4,164 in 2008. Several years experienced slight membership decline, such as 2001, 2003, 2004, and 2006. In the 2010s, the Church continued to report slow membership growth or slight decline in membership. Membership totaled, 4,361 in 2010, 4,696 in 2014, and 4,633 in 2016. Membership typically fluctuates between ten and thirty members a year, or –1% to 1%. Convert baptisms totaled forty-eight in 2008 and sixty in 2009. Membership increase has been smaller than the number of convert baptisms due to very low birthrates among Norwegian members, member attrition, and emigration. Non-Norwegian immigrants living primarily in Oslo and other large cities have constituted a large proportion of converts since the 1990s. Notwithstanding some annual variation, Church membership in Norway has experienced cumulative growth of less than 1% per year for the past five decades. When national population growth is considered, the percentage of Latter-day Saints in the Norwegian population has remained stagnant since the 1970s.

In 2018, one in 1,168 was nominally a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 11 Branches: 9 (April 2019)

The Church organized branches in many cities in Norway during the nineteenth century, particularly during the 1850s. Some of these cities included Fredrikstad (1852), Oslo (1853), Drammen (1854), Stavanger (1854), Kristiansand (1856), Trondheim (1857), Arendal (1864), Bergen (1881), Ålesund (1892), and Moss (1899). A branch was organized in the Narvik/Harstad area in 1903.

The Church did not appear to open additional areas to missionary work or organize branches until the 1960s and 1970s. Additional branches were organized in Skien (1961), Romerike (1962), Hamar (1977), Sandvika (1977), Haugesund (1979), Alta (1980), Bodø (1980), Tromsø (1980), and Tønsberg (1980). Some of these cities appeared to have had branches previously or had had received missionary outreach decades or a century earlier.

In 2000, there were seven wards and seventeen branches organized into one stake (Oslo Norway Stake [seven wards, two branches]) and three districts (Stavanger [six branches], Tromsø [four branches], and Trondheim [five branches] Norway Districts). By the mid-2000s, all three districts were discontinued, and all the branches in the former districts became mission branches. The Church discontinued one branch in 2004 and another branch in 2007 (the Kristiansund and Levanger Branches). In late 2009, a mission branch was created for the Norway Oslo Mission to administer groups in isolated locations with too few members to create independent branches. In 2010, the Oslo Norway Stake had seven wards and two branches.

In early 2010, the Norway Oslo Mission withdrew most of its missionary force from northern areas and relocated missionaries to the Oslo area in an effort to proselyte areas with more receptive populations and help prepare branches to mature into wards so that a second stake could be organized. In 2012, a second stake was organized in Drammen from the Stavanger Norway District and Oslo Norway Stake. The district closed as part of the new stake creation. The new stake included the following five wards and five branches: the Bergen, Drammen, Kristiansand, Skien, and Stavanger Wards, and the Ålesund, Arendal, Evje, Haugesund, and Tønsberg Branches. Additional branches closed in the 2010s, including Evje (2013), Mo I Rana (2018), and the Norway Oslo Mission Branch (2019). A member group operated in Kristiansund under the supervision of the Trondheim Ward in 2019.

Activity and Retention

The ratio of Church-reported members to congregations has increased over the past two decade from 169 in 2000 to 183 in 2009 and 230 in 2018, although this at least in part reflects consolidations that have left some members without nearby congregations. Regional church conferences have been well attended by Norwegian Latter-day Saints. Over 4,000 members

from the Nordic countries gathered in 1974 for a special regional conference in Stockholm, Sweden with Church President Spencer W. Kimball.^[17] Three hundred six were enrolled in seminary or institute during the 2008–2009 school year. In the mid-1970s, one returned missionary reported the following church attendance by congregation: Oslo (100), Skien (40), Stavanger (20), and Moss (15). In the mid-1980s, one returned missionary reported the following church attendance by congregation: Oslo (80), Fredrikstad (75), Trondheim (75), and Mo I Rana (12). In the mid-2000s, one returned missionary reported the following church attendance by congregation: Bergen (120), Stavanger (100), Fredrikstad (95), Tønsberg (20), and Mo I Rana (6).

The number of active members widely varies based on location at present, with larger congregations located in the Oslo area. Full-time missionaries were removed from Trondheim due to low productivity but were reintroduced in 2010. Following the reintroduction of the missionaries, Trondheim had nine convert baptisms in six months, and active membership increased from thirty to fifty-five. There are few active members in the branches of northern Norway. In 1991, the largest branch was the Harstad/Narvik Branch with forty-three members. Many of the branches at this time had fewer than fifteen active members.^[18] The Drammen Ward and another ward in the Oslo area had over 175 active members in 2010. Other wards at the time appeared to have around one hundred active members. In 2009, 120 of the 400 members in the Bergen Branch attended church regularly, there were forty active members in the Kristiansand Branch, and thirty of the one hundred members in the Tønsberg Branch were active, including ten priesthood holders. The Arendal Branch had around twenty-five active members in 2010. In the mid to late 2010s, returned missionaries reported the following church attendance by congregation: Drammen (150-200), Moss (150-200), Oslo (150-200), Bergen (150), Stavanger (100-125), Sandvika (100-120), Fredrikstad (60-100), Kristiansand (60-80), Skien (70), Trondheim (50-60), Arendal (55), Tønsberg (20), Bodø (10), Ålesund (4), and Mo I Rana (less than 5). At the time, returned missionaries estimated that 30-50% of new converts regularly attended church one year after baptism. Local members in early 2019 reported church attendance by congregation as follows: Bergen (125), Skien (50), Stavanger (50), Trondheim (30), and Alta/Hammerfest (less than 20). Local members at the time estimated that member activity rates by congregation varied from 15-50%, most wards or branches have fewer than five converts who join the Church a year, and that only one-third of new converts in most congregations remain active one year after baptism. The Kristiansund Group had approximately ten members who attended Church in early 2019.

Total active membership in Norway is estimated at 1,400, or 30% of total membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: Norwegian, Finnish, English.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures and most church materials are available in Norwegian and Finnish, including many CES manuals.

Meetinghouses

Trondheim has one of the oldest church meetinghouses. In 2010, congregations met in at least twenty locations. Most congregations met in church-built meetinghouses. Some smaller branches met in renovated buildings or rented spaces.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted three refugee response efforts in Norway since 1985.^[19] Service activities are limited to missionaries performing weekly service hour assignments and service projects organized on a congregational level.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church faces no restrictions or limitations to its activities in Norway. Missionaries proselyte freely and members worship openly.

Cultural Issues

Secularism, nominalism in the Lutheran Church, and misinformation about Latter-day Saints have impeded Norwegians' receptivity to the Church. Secularism is the greatest cultural barrier that missionaries face on a daily basis, as many Norwegians are disinterested in religion and view religion contemptuously. Missionaries have remarked that many Norwegians feel that they no longer need religion and have all their material needs and desires due to economic prosperity and socialism. Nominalism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is a challenge, as most do not attend church regularly yet continue to identify as

Lutheran. However, many have a basic knowledge of Christianity that can assist efforts to build on common Christian principles. Some Norwegian theologians and scholars have written negative accounts or propagated misinformation about the Church that have contributed to the anxiety many feel towards the Church and its members.^[20]

National Outreach

With a population of five million and one mission, Norway experiences good national outreach that has been sustained for over forty years, although outreach has contracted somewhat in recent years due to low receptivity and limited missionary manpower. All cities with over 50,000 inhabitants have a nearby ward or branch. Approximately 53% of the national population lives within 10 kilometers of a Church meetinghouse or a city or town with its own ward or branch. Of the eighteen administrative counties, two have no mission outreach centers (Oppland and Sogn Og Fjordane) with a combined population of 300,000 (less than 6% of the national population). However, eleven counties have only one congregation. Eleven percent (11%) of the population resides in cities between 20,000 and 50,000 inhabitants without a mission outreach center. Only one percent of the population resides in cities that used to have a Church presence.

The Church has opportunities to expand national outreach in Norway and assist missionary work in foreign nations through proselytism efforts in cities with large universities. Despite being Norway's third largest city with nearly 200,000 inhabitants, Trondheim has only one branch. Trondheim offers significant opportunity for mission outreach targeting young adults, as it is home to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, one of Norway's largest universities. The Church responded to this opportunity in 2010 by placing eight full-time missionaries in Trondheim, including two sister missionaries and a senior missionary couple. These efforts appear to have been productive, as twelve investigators attended church in Trondheim in August 2010. However, they extract a significant portion of the total full-time missionary force (nearly 20% at the time) for just one city. Oslo also offers meaningful university-student outreach. Greater involvement from local members in reaching college-aged population would help increase mission efficiency.

There are opportunities to establish additional congregations in unreached cities. Several of these cities may already have groups or dependent branches under the Norway Oslo Mission Branch created at the end of 2009. For example, a member group operated in Kristiansund at times during the 2010s. Holding cottage meetings with the few active members of investigators can assist in the proselytism of the half of the Norwegian population without close access to a congregation.

The Church maintains an Internet site in Norwegian for Norway at <http://www.jesukristikirke.no/> and also a Norwegian version of Mormon.org at <https://www.mormon.org/nor>. Current news, meetinghouse locations, contact information, and information regarding church programs and beliefs are provided. Use of the websites by local members and missionaries can help broaden the scope of mission outreach and provide opportunity for interested individuals to seek out the Church and obtain correct information.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Some branches, particularly in northern Norway, have experienced declining numbers of active members due to the desire of some members to move to areas with larger congregations for greater social opportunities. For example, essentially all the active members in the Alta-Hammerfest Branch were from the same family as of early 2019. Local members and returned missionaries have indicated distance to the nearest meetinghouse is an obstacle for many to more regularly attend Church, especially for more casual members and investigators. Secularism is a cultural influence that appears to have lowered member activity rates in some areas. Missionaries generally provide adequate pre-baptismal teaching and coordinate with local members although convert retention rates remain low. Nevertheless, many new Norwegian converts appear to be committed and devoted to the church prior to baptism. However, many converts come from Africa, a region that has inherently higher percentages of religiously active individuals than Scandinavia. There appears to have been no increase in active membership nationwide over the past two decades.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Missionaries frequently meet with foreigners from Africa, continental Europe, and Latin America. These groups have shown greater receptivity to Latter-day Saint outreach than Norwegians but are difficult to fellowship and retain due to culture and language barriers and are often transient, as many return to their home countries.

Language Issues

A large body of Church materials is translated into Norwegian. Over 99% of the national population has church materials in their native language. To meet the language needs of non-Norwegians, missionaries in Trondheim reported in 2010 that they sometimes carried English, French, Chinese, and German proselytism materials. Higher receptivity among nonnatives results in an overrepresentation of foreigners in some congregations and can create language issues for both Norwegians and foreigners.

Missionary Service

In 2010, there were fifty missionaries serving in the Norway Oslo Mission divided into three zones. The number of missionaries assigned to the mission appeared to increase for most of the 2010s. Norway relies on foreign missionaries to staff its mission force and has few active youth in many areas. The number of missionaries serving has been cut to less than half the level of the 1990s due to low receptivity, limited missionary manpower, and more pressing opportunities elsewhere. Youth-oriented missionary outreach, missionary preparation classes, and member-missionary initiatives may assist Norway to become more self-reliant in its missionary endeavors, but it appears unlikely that self-sufficiency will occur anytime soon due to the small numbers of active youth and long history of nongrowth or minimal growth, notwithstanding intensive proselytism.

Leadership

Although the number of active priesthood holders appears to be unable to support a district for northern Norway, most congregations have at least a few active priesthood holders, as nearly all branches are led by a native branch president or foreign members who have moved to Norway. Increasing the number of active priesthood holders as well as overall active membership have been major areas of focus for current church leaders in Norway, especially leading up to the creation of a second stake in Drammen in 2012.

Several Norwegian members have served in international church leadership positions. Jan T. Tveten was born in Norway, immigrated to the United States, and was called as the Norway Oslo Mission president in 1999.^[21] Stein Pedersen from Skjetten served as an Area Authority prior to 2000.^[22] In 2005, Elvind Sterri from Asker was called as an Area Authority,^[23] and Jan Karlsson from Oslo was called as the Sweden Stockholm Mission president.^[24] In 2016, Tom-Atle Herland from Oslo was called as an area authority seventy.^[25] There does not appear to be an over-representation of Church employees in significant leadership positions. For example, none of the members in the stake presidency of the newly organized Drammen Norway Stake were Church employees in 2012.^[26]

Temple

Norway is assigned to the Stockholm Sweden Temple district. Attending the temple regularly can be challenging and requires planning and sacrifice but is feasible for many. Local members desire a temple for their own country one day, but a prospective temple district would only service two stakes and a few mission branches. In the early 2010s, the Stockholm Sweden Temple appeared well attended by members in Norway, Sweden, and Latvia despite a temple district of only four stakes and two districts, as endowment sessions are scheduled almost every hour for much of the day from Tuesday through Friday. Temple sessions are held in Norwegian when members travel as a stake or congregation. However, in 2019, the temple appeared underutilized as only 3-5 endowment sessions were scheduled per day. Furthermore, other types of temple ordinances are performed for only 1-2 per day based upon the schedule posted on the Church's website.^[27]

Comparative Growth

The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population in Norway is representative of other Scandinavia countries in which members constitute around 0.1% of the national population. The only European nations outside of Scandinavia with a higher percentage of members are Portugal, the Isle of Man, Jersey, the United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland, Albania, Guernsey, and Estonia. Member activity rates compare to other Scandinavian nations and are average for most of Western Europe. Nongrowth or consolidation of congregations is also representative for the region. Norway has had one of the longest continual Church presences in Europe. Denmark and Finland have comparable membership numbers to Norway as well as two districts each; however, activity rates are higher in Finland where the Church supports two districts. Both Finland and Denmark also enroll greater numbers of seminary and institute students. These factors may indicate lower member activity and participation in Norway compared to Finland and Denmark. National outreach in Norway by Latter-day Saints is among the most penetrating in Europe, as few European countries have congregations established in areas accounting for half of the national population; Norway has experienced this level of outreach for over forty years.

Christian groups report slow church growth in Norway. Jehovah's Witnesses achieve slow growth but have made steady progress and report 167 congregations. Witnesses reported a net increase of more than 700 active members between 2010 and 2018. Seventh-Day Adventists generally had fifty new converts a year in Norway but have experienced stagnant membership and congregation growth over the past decade. Many Christian groups struggle to develop proselytism approaches tailored to address secularism and nominalism in the Lutheran Church, although Jehovah's Witnesses have been by far the most successful.

Future Prospects

The Church has established congregations in most areas and has the basic infrastructure to meet outreach needs in most areas, but secularism remains a cultural influence that has reduced receptivity. The missionary complement assigned to Norway has been cut to less than half of its prior levels without noticeably affecting growth. The Church depends heavily on the larger Latter-day Saint populations in the Oslo area and in a few additional cities such as Bergen to stabilize the national church population and looks to this region for future growth. Many members in small branches are considering moving to the Oslo area that, over time, may lead to additional consolidations of smaller branches in northern Norway. The heavy emigration of Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century has continued, although at a slower rate in recent years and has made local growth harder to achieve. Outreach directed toward youth is needed due to low birth rates among Latter-day Saints and the small

number of youth converts in order to ensure long term growth.

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