

# **N O R W A Y**

## **SECTION A**

### **Capital**

Oslo 483,401 (1995 est.)

### **Area**

323,878 sq km (125,016 sq mi)

### **Form of government**

Constitutional monarchy with one legislative house

### **GDP—per capita**

Purchasing power parity—\$25,100 (1999 est.)

### **Population**

4,438,547 (July 1999 est.)

### **Ethnic composition**

Norway	96.3%
Denmark	0.4%
Sweden	0.3%
United Kingdom	0.3%
Pakistan	0.2%
United States	0.2%
Yugoslavia	0.2%
Iran	0.1%
Other	2.0%

## **Official language**

Norwegian - with two official written forms: Bokmål and Nynorsk

## **Minority languages**

Finnish, Sami

## **Legislation dealing with the use of languages**

*Constitution*, adopted on May 17, 1814

A new and more detailed *Language Law* was passed in 1980, *the Law on Language Use in the Official Service*, which was based on the same fundamental principle as the original 1930 Law. The first paragraph reads: "Bokmål and Nynorsk are equal versions of the language and shall be regarded equally as written languages in all governmental bodies at the national, provincial and municipal level."

Norway has two Norwegian languages. Bokmål, (Book Language or Standard) and Nynorsk, (New Norwegian). Bokmål - formerly Riksmål (the language of the nation) is the older of these two languages. Riksmål was influenced by the Danish language during the 434-year union of the two nations. Nynorsk was created by the philologist Ivar Andreas Aasen (1813-96) from rural dialects about 100 years ago and it serves as the written norm for most of the dialects in rural areas and some smaller urban centers mainly in the West. In 1884 it was given equal status as an official language. Since 1917, essentially the same spelling principles have applied to both Norwegian languages; both are spelled etymologically, with elements of exact sound, and ortho-epic forms. The differences in spelling since 1917 are not a reflection of two different writing traditions but rather actual language differences.

Norwegian belongs to the North Germanic branch of the Germanic language group. The Norwegian alphabet has three extra letters, "æ" as in *bad*, "ø" as in *burn*, and "å" as in *ball*. Of note is the fact that both Nynorsk and Bokmål are pure written languages. No one actually speaks these languages; in Norway all spoken languages are regarded as dialects.

For a Norwegian native, it is quite easy to understand both languages, since they are very close in linguistic terms. Most words are the same, although sometimes spelled differently. For instance the word "I" is "jeg" in Bokmål and "eg" in Nynorsk. Other Norwegians can understand anyone, who speaks Norwegian, whether it is a local dialect or one of the two standard languages.

In this century, it has been a political goal to merge the two languages, imposing changes in Bokmål that were unnatural and illogical. Today, there is much greater tolerance.

### **Background notes**

The peculiarities of the language situation in Norway are the product of Norwegian and Nordic history. The languages of the three main Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, are so similar that the inhabitants for the most part understand each other when using their own language with people from the other countries. This is true throughout Central Scandinavia, because the language evolved from a common Nordic tongue.

One thousand years ago, when Nordic pioneers settled in Russia and Western Europe, and on the islands in the Atlantic Ocean from the Orkneys and Shetland islands to Greenland, the same common Nordic language was spoken throughout the entire region. The differences in dialects that existed then were insignificant, far smaller than the dialectical variations found today in each of the Nordic countries.

Around 1,000 AD the same language, Old Norse, was spoken in Norway and Iceland. The Norse sagas, skaldic poems, and Eddas were written in Old Norse. In Iceland, due to their geographic position as an isolated outpost, the Old Nordic language was not influenced and changed by other languages and remains closer to the original dialect.

Norway is not the only country in the world with lots of dialects or accents, or the only one with two official languages. Others have even more, for example Belgium has 3 official languages, but only Norway has 2 Norwegian languages.

### **SAMI**

The Sami are an indigenous people who form an ethnic minority in Norway, Sweden and Finland. From about the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sami have inhabited nearly all the areas of the Nordic countries where they now have permanent settlements. In Norway, there are believed to be between 40,000 and 45,000 Sami.

Section 1-5 in the Sami Act states that Sami and Norwegian are equal languages and thereby establishes that Sami is one of the official languages in Norway along with Bokmål and Nynorsk.

## **SECTION B**

**To what extent are minority groups in this country disadvantaged by their language?**

### **NYNORSK**

Nynorsk is not a minority language, in fact; it is only spoken a smaller percentage of Norwegians and using it does not disadvantage its speakers. However, there were some problems with Nynorsk as a school language such as a shortage of textbooks in many subjects. After several years of lobbying from Nynorsk organizations, the Primary School Act of 1969 stated that all textbooks for public primary schools were to be published in both a Bokmål and Nynorsk version at the same time and the same price. The same principle was introduced for secondary schools five years later.

Some people remained opposed to Nynorsk, although they were obliged to study it at school as a secondary language, so it was necessary to adopt a law to secure the rights of Nynorsk users in dealing with the authorities. Such a Law was passed by Parliament in 1930, stating that officials were obliged to use both variants according to regulations given by the government. The rules were continually broken and Nynorsk remained in a subordinate position. The more detailed Language Law from 1980 tried to solve that situation.

### **SAMI**

At the end of the 1800s teachers were instructed to restrict the use of the Sami language in the schools. From 1902 and onwards, it was forbidden to sell land to anyone who could not speak Norwegian. After World War II Norwegian policy towards the Sami changed significantly. In the 1960s, the Sami's rights to develop their culture were officially acknowledged.

Since 1980, the legal status of the native inhabitants of Norway has been considerably improved. This change in attitude was reflected in Article 110 a of the Norwegian Constitution ratified in 1988 as follows: "It is the responsibility of the authorities of the state to create conditions enabling the Sami to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life."

**What does it cost in terms of money, time and government resources to police the country's language restrictions?**

Norway has two official written languages, standard Nynorsk and Bokmål. They have equal status, in that they are both used in public

administrations, in schools, in churches, and on radio and television broadcasts. Books, magazines and newspapers are published in both languages. The inhabitants of local communities decide themselves which language is to be used as the language of instruction in the school attended by their children. Officially, the teaching language is called “the primary” and the other language “the secondary”. Students read material written in the second language and at the upper secondary level they should demonstrate their ability to write in that language. It is a requirement of a public employee to answer letters in the language preferred by the sender.

In Norway two different laws regulate language use. Firstly, there is an Act of Language Use in Public (governmental) Services, stating that the two written standards of Norwegian stand on an equal footing and have to be used in defined contexts. In the second place, the Act of the Sami Parliament contains paragraphs about the use of the Sami language in public services. That law mainly applies to an administrative region in Northern Norway. So ostensibly there are three official languages.

### **The use of language in everyday life, e.g. education, broadcasting and other**

#### **SCHOOLS**

Over 80% of Norwegian schoolchildren have Bokmål as their primary language while between 16% - 17% are Nynorsk speakers. Writing Bokmål or Nynorsk is a matter of choice. School pupils may decide which language they want as their “main” language although they will have to study both for 6 to 8 years. Nevertheless the two languages are equal and all official papers exist in the two variants.

#### **SAMI**

Sami speakers have several Sami newspapers and magazines. NRK Radio started broadcasting in Sami in 1946. Since then programs have been expanded and given a more varied content. In 1996 twelve immigrant magazines received a grant in total amount of NOK 1,2 million.

The Sami people’s right to use their language in contact with administrative authorities is regulated in Chapter 3 in the Sami Act. Section 3-3 states that any person who contacts a local public body in the administrative area in the Sami language has the right to get a reply in Sami. Accordingly, any person who makes a written request in Sami to a regional public body in the administrative area has the right to receive a written reply in Sami. The same applies in court proceedings.

Sami as a beginning language in certain elementary schools was initiated in 1967. Later legislation extended the use of the Sami language in schools. Since 1975, school districts with a mixed language basis are permitted to establish Sami school districts at parental request. This provides an opportunity for the use of the Sami language as a means of education as well as instruction in the language itself. A new curriculum in Sami education was created in connection with educational reforms in 1997. This primarily applies to pupils who reside in areas, which are administrated according to the Sami Act's language regulations. Furthermore, basic material about Sami matters has been added to the national curricula.

King Olav V opened the Sami Parliament in 1989. The Sami Parliament's plenary body consists of 39 elected representatives from 13 electoral districts. The Parliament convenes four times a year for weeklong plenary sessions. The Sami Parliament's main administration is located in Karasjok. The Sami Parliament Council leads the legislative body's day-to-day political activities. Various professional advisory councils have been established under the subordination of the Sami Parliament. These are the Sami Cultural Monuments Council, the Sami Culture Council, the Sami Business Council, and the Sami Language Council. They function as professional organs for the Sami Parliament and assist in the management of allocations and subsidies.

**Did the country ratify any international treaty dealing with the protection of minorities?**

The Framework Convention for the Protection National Minorities signed on February 1, 1995, ratified March 17, 1999 and enacted on July 1, 1999.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority languages signed on November 5, 1992, ratified on November 10, 1993 and enacted on March 1, 1998.

## **SECTION C**

### **The use of language in everyday life, education, broadcasting and other**

***Updated (September 2002)***

#### **EDUCATION**

Tøyen Primary School in Oslo focuses on minority language students and bilingual education. Out of 355 pupils, 304 are minority language speakers of 25 different languages (Urdu, Tamil, Arabic, Somali, Vietnamese, Turkish etc.). All pupils receive education both in Norwegian and in their mother tongue. This year also the first Sámi class was formed having four children who will get their education completely in the Sámi language.

Tor Helgesen, the headmaster of the school, explains that its principle of bilingual education is based on a research conducted in 1997 on Spanish-American pupils in the United States. The study showed that minority language children are successful in bilingual education, whereas they tend to drop out from education that is conducted only in the majority language of the country.

In Oslo, around 30 percent of all school children come from minority language background, whereas in Norway generally the number is around 6-7 percent. It is their right to get education in their mother tongue until they are able to fully master Norwegian, says Mr. Helgesen.

The children in Tøyen Primary School, from grade 1 to 7 (age 6 to 12), receive education partly in their mother tongue and partly in Norwegian. The main focus on mother tongue education is however, from grade 1 to 4. Forty teachers guarantee education in twenty minority languages. In some classes, two teachers are present at the same time, helping with translation.

This is the fifth school year since Tøyen school has followed the American model, and the headmaster says that it has already proved to be successful. "We have noticed very good results. The children enjoy themselves and school becomes more meaningful when they can express themselves without language barriers. We have also developed much better contacts with the parents, because when they know that they can speak with us in Turkish or any other language, it is easier for them to approach us."

Regarding a new Sámi class, which is the first one in Oslo, it is a result of growing demand of roughly 6,000 Sámis living in the capital. A full time Sámi teacher is employed for the class and Sámi curriculum runs parallel to the standard Norwegian curriculum.

However, most of the Sámis live in the northern region of Finnmark, and thus education in Oslo is a cooperation project of Finnmark and Oslo municipalities.

Source: Eurolang, [www.eurolang.net](http://www.eurolang.net), Brussels, August 20, 2002, by Eva Blässar

### ***Updated (January 2003)***

#### MICROSOFT TRANSLATED SOFTWARE INTO NYNORSK

Initial calls from Norwegian language organizations to translate “Office” software<sup>1</sup> into the country’s second official language were ignored by Microsoft, due to the expenses connected with the translation. Only after the majority of schools teaching in Nynorsk agreed to boycott Microsoft’s products, the software giant gave in.

Nynorsk is one standard written form of Norwegian developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by Ivar Aasen. The other Norwegian written standard that was developed around that time is Bokmål, based on the Danish written language and “norwegianized” according to the norms of urban upper-class speech.

There are four million Norwegians, and more than 98 percent of them use one of the Norwegian varieties as their primary language (often a dialect for speech and one of the standards for writing). No census has been taken to find out the proportion of Bokmål vs. Nynorsk users; however, according to the sources, 17 percent of all school children are taught Nynorsk as their first written variety and the rest use Bokmål. It is reasonably realistic to assume that there are approximately half a million Nynorsk users, i.e. around 12 percent, mainly in western Norway.

Source: Eurolang News, Brussels, January 6, 2003, by Margret Oberhofer,  
<http://217.136.252.147/webpub/eurolang/pajenn.asp?ID=4022>

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<sup>1</sup> The software is currently available in more than thirty languages.



## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF NORWAY



## **APPENDIX B**

### **NORWAY - CONSTITUTION**

(Adopted on May 17, 1814)

(Adopted by the Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll)

(Document Status on February 29, 1996)

(Official Title: The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway)

#### **Article 92 (Eligibility to Public Offices)**

(1) To senior official posts in the State may be appointed only Norwegian citizens, men or women, who speak the language of the Country, and who at the same time

#### **Article 110a (Minority Rights of the Sami)**

It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life.

Note: The complete text of the Constitution and further information on the constitutional background of Norway are provided by the International Constitutional Law Project at the University of Wuerzburg.

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