



European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

FLASH REPORT

Country:	Norway
Title:	Attitudes in the Norwegian population towards equality and anti-discrimination issues, hate speech and the instruments of equality policy
Date:	5 July 2019
Experts:	Lene Lovdal with input from Marte Bauge
<u>Context</u>	
Issue at stake:	Attitudes in the Norwegian population regarding discrimination issues, hate speech and the instruments of equality policy
Grounds of discrimination:	Disability, Gender, Racial or ethnic origin, Religion or belief, Sex, Sexual orientation, Transgender
Field of application:	All fields
Source:	Policy development
Applicable law:	Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (GEADA), Act on the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (AOT) and Working Environment Act (WEA)

Content

Policy development: A report on attitudes in the Norwegian population regarding discrimination issues, hate speech and the instruments of equality policy was commissioned by the Directorate for children, youth and family affairs (BufDir), and executed by Guri Tyldum at Fafo, an independent social science research foundation (see fafo.no). The analyses are based on a nationwide survey that was conducted in spring 2018 among 4 443 respondents.

Men and women

There is a broad support among the population for gender equality in Norway. However, there is considerably more disagreement between different groups when it comes to whether the Norwegian society has achieved equality, and whether it is necessary to continue with equality policies to secure equality between men and women. More people without higher education responded that they do not believe that men and women are treated equally in the labour market today compared with people from a higher education background. However, there is a broader support for gender equality measures (such as positive discrimination and paternity leave) among people with higher education than people with lower income who are less educated.

Despite this, there is a broad support for paternity leave across gender and age groups. 82 % agreed, in whole or partly, that it is an advantage for society if men take paternity leave. This is the only gender equality policy that received equal support among both men and women.

Younger age groups are also less supportive of gender equality measures than older generations. However, the findings in the report appear to show a significant increase in support for measures promoting gender equality for the population as a whole, compared to surveys done in 1985, 1989 and 1994 ("valgundersøkelsen") and in 2001 ("Maktutredningens medborgerundersøkelse"), see p. 48 in the report. As the surveys were conducted somewhat differently, the results should be interpreted with care. Yet more than every third man and every fifth woman agreed that so much emphasis is placed on helping weak groups today that the society ends up discriminating against white Norwegian men.

Ethnic and religious minorities

Ethnic and religious minorities Roma, Romani and Muslims are the groups most people believe to be the victims of discrimination in Norway. Of all the groups that are protected under the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, these are also the groups that are least popular as a potential prime minister, neighbour or spouse. The Roma is the group that received the greatest opposition in terms of being potential neighbours; 38 % say that they would rather not have Roma as neighbours, and there was almost the same degree of opposition towards this group as towards having neighbours who are alcoholics or "mentally unstable". Every sixth Norwegian said they would not like to have Muslims as neighbours.

One in four stated that they agree fully or in part that some "races" are smarter than others. As it was impossible for the respondents to say whether they supported the term "race" as valid, the report has been criticized for methodological clumsiness regarding this question, and the author of the report has agreed that one should be careful as to which conclusions can be drawn from this.

One out of three respondents stated that they sometimes feel afraid if they have to walk past a group of Muslim men on the street. The respondents thus not only report a fear of Islam at an overarching ideological level but a sense of being afraid when they encounter people who seem to be Muslims on the street. This unease around Muslims is the single factor with the greatest explanatory power in a regression analysis of attitudes to immigration.

People with disabilities

People are more supportive of measures to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities than any of the other groups protected by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination act. The willingness to deliver formal sanctions in cases of discrimination or hate speech is significantly higher when people with disabilities are the victims of discrimination compared with other groups. There appears to be little knowledge in the population about the experiences of people with disabilities in terms of discrimination and hate speech.

This discrepancy between the will to use resources for equality measures and the unwillingness to recognise that this group is discriminated against can be understood in light of the type of stereotypical prejudice others may have about people with disabilities. They are often understood as a group for whom we have low expectations but who are not considered to be particularly threatening. According to the researcher, such low expectations can make it difficult to see the limitations for their participation in the labour market and other arenas, as their low degree of participation is perceived as "natural" and not as a consequence of a lack of facilitation, discrimination and other structural constraints.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression

The acceptance of homosexuals is somewhat lower in Norway than in neighbouring countries to which we usually compare ourselves in relation to equality issues e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands and Iceland. There are significant differences between different social groups in terms of their attitudes as to whether same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt. The differences are particularly large between age groups; opposition to same-sex

couples adopting is more than twice as large for those over 34 compared to those below, and women are far more open to gay adoption than men. There is greater scepticism towards transgender people than homosexuals, both as neighbours, potential prime ministers or family members. Attitudes towards transgender people are more positive in younger age groups. On questions related to transgender people there was also a significant proportion who said they do not know what their opinions are, and the proportion of uncertain respondents is lowest in the youngest age groups.

Hate speech

There is a significant level of support for the proposal that controversial political statements should not be allowed, e.g. racist or jihadi statements, the prohibition of abortion, or the promotion of totalitarian ideology. There is less acceptance for the use of formal sanctions such as fines or imprisonment against concrete statements directed towards individuals or groups.

Policies for promoting equality

There is broad support for a publicly funded policy of equality and anti-discrimination in Norway, and only seven per cent say that they do not think it is right for the government to use resources to promote equality and fight discrimination for any of the groups that are currently protected under the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act. There is more disagreement about which groups should be targeted by such an equality policy; support is highest for equality measures for people with disabilities and lowest for transgender people.

Source: Guri Tyldum, *Holdninger til diskriminering, likestilling og hatprat i Norge* (*Attitudes towards discrimination equality and hate speech in Norway*) Fafo report no. 26 2019 www.fafo.no/images/pub/2019/20723.pdf (English summary on pages 12-15).