



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

FLASH REPORT

Country:	Norway
Title:	COVID-19 and discrimination issues in Norway
Date:	29 June 2020
Expert:	Lene Løvdal
Context	
Issue at stake:	COVID-19 and discrimination issues in Norway
Grounds of discrimination:	Age, Disability, Racial or ethnic origin
Field of application:	All fields
Source:	Policy development
Applicable law:	The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (GEADA), 16 June 2017

Content

Policy development: The Norwegian government shut down large parts of the country from 16 March 2020, including a number of health services such as physiotherapists and psychologists, unless they could provide services within the limitations of anti-contagion guidelines. These services were reopened under strict guidelines from 20 April. All kindergartens and schools were shut down entirely from 16 March to 20 April. Kindergartens then reopened partially, and schools reopened for all pupils from 11 May, entirely or partially, depending on the school's administration.¹

The effects of these measures have especially impacted persons with disabilities. The umbrella organisation for NGOs working for the rights of persons with disabilities, FFO, reports the following:

- persons with cognitive disabilities have been subjected to a number of measures targeting them as a group with few individual considerations, such as visiting prohibitions in their homes and closing of day care and schools. The prohibition of visits has been criticised by the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI).² The NHRI expressed particular concern that the guidelines for municipalities regarding care services did not to a sufficient degree specify to what extent emergency can be used as a justification.
- Due to the closing down of number of part-time care facilities as well as municipal care at home many families of persons with disabilities have been unable to work. When the person needing care has been over 18 years old their families have had very limited opportunities to receive social benefits to replace their wages.
- Children in need of individual accommodation in kindergarten or school have very often not received such, since the resources have been moved to the larger group of pupils.

¹ Timeline for COVID-19 measures: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/Koronasituasjonen/tidslinje-koronaviruset/id2692402/>.

² Letter from the National Human Rights Institution to the Norwegian Government, 6 April 2020 <https://www.nhri.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Brev-til-HOD-KMD-HD-FHI-fra-NIM-4.4-20.pdf>, p. 4.

- Persons with mental illness have received less healthcare, while many more people report anxiety and depression during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Newspapers report that persons living in care facilities, including the elderly, have occasionally suffered from insufficient care.³

A disproportionately high number of immigrants have had COVID-19 due to a lack of information in other languages than Norwegian.⁴ In Norway, language is protected under the ground of ethnicity. A number of measures have later been taken to remedy the situation.⁵

When it comes to employment issues, work migrants are in a particularly vulnerable position, both because they often have looser connections to the workplace and because they have difficulty in obtaining information about their rights and opportunities due to a lack of information in their language.⁶ Some are stranded in their home countries without receiving Norwegian unemployment benefits they have a right to.

Many au pairs have also been in a difficult position since they have a time-limited contract and were unable to go back to their home countries for months. While they and other work migrants do have a right to receive help from the municipalities regarding food, shelter etc, this right is little-known both among those concerned, the au pair information centre, and caseworkers in the municipalities.⁷ Since their immigration status is not seen as work migration, but rather as cultural exchange, au pairs do not have the right to unemployment benefits. The gendered aspect of the au pair scheme, as well as the fact that most of the au pairs come from the Philippines and are de facto work migrants, raises questions about discrimination which have been accentuated during the COVID-19 crisis.

Among all immigrants (persons born outside Norway with two parents without Norwegian citizenship), Swedish persons experienced the highest increase in the unemployment during the most severe shutdown period, while Somalis experienced the least increase in unemployment.⁸ This is explained by the Swedish people being overrepresented in restaurants and bars, while Somalis being overrepresented in the transport sector.

The civil society organisations report that even though there were early reports on vulnerable groups suffering disproportionately due to the COVID-19 measures, reactions from the government have been too slow. On 24 April 2020 the Norwegian government created a commission who shall evaluate the authorities' actions regarding COVID-19. Discrimination issues are not mentioned in particular, but the economic and social consequences of the pandemic and the measures taken against it are on the list of things they shall look into.⁹

The directorate for children, youth and family affairs (BufDir), Department for equality and universal design, has been assigned responsibility for looking into discriminatory effects of COVID-19 in Norway 'based on gender and other grounds of discrimination in relevant areas, for example violence, employment and economics'.¹⁰ Their reports are not yet finished.

³ <https://www.vl.no/nyhet/samler-kunnskap-fra-sykehjem-med-koronasyke-1.1709143>.

⁴ <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/b5vJE3/kraftig-oekning-i-koronasmitte-blant-innvandrere-i-norge>.

⁵ <https://www.klartale.no/norge/qir-10-millioner-til-korona-info-for-innvandrere-1.1699906>.

⁶ <https://fafoestforum.no/index.php/seminarer/item/ny-undersokelse-blant-polske-arbeidsinnvandrere> and <https://www.norskindustri.no/dette-jobber-vi-med/arbeidsliv/koronaviruset-rad-til-bedrifter/status-for-og-analyse-av-industrien-17.-april/>.

⁷ Phone conversation with NRK journalist Kadra Yusuf, 4 May 2020.

⁸ <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/i/GGkp0q/arbeidsledige-under-koronaen-svensker-svaert-hardt-rammet-somalier-h>.

⁹ <https://www.koronakommisjonen.no/>.

¹⁰ Email from Lise Margrethe Østby, senior advisor in BufDir, Department for equality and universal design, 23 June 2020.