



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Norway, one of the “three fingers” of Scandinavia, is nearly half as large as Afghanistan and slightly larger than the U.S. state of New Mexico. It covers 125,023 square miles (323,802 square kilometers). Its coastline, indented with beautiful fjords, stretches more than 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers), from the North Sea to the Arctic Ocean. *Norway* means “the northern way.” In fact, the Arctic Circle crosses the country almost in its middle. Along the fjords on the western coast are numerous small islands. Norway is generally mountainous and has several glaciers. As a result of the forbidding terrain, large areas of the country cannot be permanently inhabited. Only about 3 percent of Norway is suitable for cultivation.

Norway has many natural resources, including crude oil (in the North Sea), copper, nickel, zinc, lead, and timber. More than one-fourth of the land is forested. Waterfalls are a source of clean, inexpensive electric power. The North Atlantic Drift, a warm ocean current, moderates the otherwise cold climate and allows for ice-free harbors and mild summers. Rain is abundant on the west coast. In the interior, winters are colder and summers are warmer than on the coast. Above the Arctic Circle, the sun shines day and night for part of the summer and does not rise above the horizon for part of the winter. In the absence of the sun, the *aurora borealis*

(northern lights) is often visible.

History

During the Age of the Vikings (AD 800–1050), Vikings conquered many areas in Scandinavia and Europe and made exploratory voyages as far west as North America. Records indicate that Leifur Eiríksson landed in present-day Canada, preparing the way for later settlements on the continent. In Norway, Viking leader Harald the Fairhead became the first supreme ruler of a unified kingdom around 872. Christianity spread throughout the area by 1030. The country came under Danish domination from 1381 to 1814. It was then given to Sweden as a peace treaty provision after Denmark's alliance with Napoleon during the Napoleonic Wars. Thereafter, Norway declared its independence and drafted a constitution, although it still accepted the Swedish king as its monarch. A referendum in 1905 dissolved the union with Sweden, and a Danish prince, later called Haakon VII, was chosen as the constitutional monarch of an independent Kingdom of Norway.

Norway was neutral in World War I, but Germany attacked in World War II (April 1940) and held the country until May 1945. During that time, the monarch was out of the country, supporting the Allied effort against the Germans. The son of Haakon VII, Olav V, was king of Norway from 1957 to 1991. Upon his death, his son, Harald V, took the

throne.

Norway's postwar period was marked by political stability, economic progress, and development. Norway is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Economic Area (EEA), but it is not a member of the European Union (EU). The issue of joining the EU has been sensitive in Norway ever since voters rejected membership in 1972. In 1990, a prime minister (Jan Syse) resigned over the debate. His successor, Gro Harlem Brundtland, risked her considerable popularity in 1994 to apply for membership in the EU and then to campaign to have voters approve the measure. In a 1994 referendum, held after neighbors Sweden and Finland voted in favor of joining the EU, voters rejected entry into the EU. Many expressed concern that some autonomy would have to be sacrificed to EU leaders. Norwegians continue to have enough confidence in their country's resources and economy remaining strong without membership in the expanding EU. There is evidence that public opinion about joining the EU may be changing gradually, but it is unlikely that Norway will pursue membership in the near future.

Norway's Nobel Committee has been awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to individuals and organizations who have promoted peace between nations since the early 1900s, but in recent decades, Norway has become a stronger force in international politics. Norway's troops have played a role in more than one United Nations peacekeeping operation, the country has refereed talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil separatists, and Norway has also put some of its wealth toward funding environmental causes around the world. The country's wealthy economy and rich reserves of natural resources helped it to remain largely untouched by the 2008 financial crisis, allowing Labor Party leader Jens Stoltenberg's center-left coalition, which was elected in 2005, to retain its majority in the 2009 elections. Immigration and taxes remain controversial issues.

In July 2011, a bomb exploded at the prime minister's Oslo office, and shortly after, dozens of people were killed in a shooting at an island retreat; the confessed killer was motivated by xenophobia and radical nationalism. The country was deeply affected by the attacks, and Norway's prime minister subsequently vowed to protect the country's open and democratic society.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Norway's population of nearly 4.7 million is growing at approximately 0.33 percent annually. Norway is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Over 75 percent of Norwegians live in urban areas, and most live within 10 miles (16 kilometers) of the sea. The two largest cities are Oslo (more than 900,000 residents) and Bergen (about 264,000).

The population is predominantly of Nordic (Scandinavian) descent. Although Norway strictly limits immigration, the number of immigrant workers, mostly from Poland and

Sweden, increased following the discovery of oil in the North Sea. Recently, asylum seekers have also come to Norway from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Eritrea. About 3.6 percent of the population comes from other European countries. A small minority (about 60,000) of native Sami (pronounced "SAW-me") live mostly in the north. Also called Laplanders, their ancestors were the original inhabitants of northern Norway.

Language

Norwegian, a Germanic language, has two forms. Bokmål, or "book language," is the most common form. During Denmark's four hundred years ruling Norway, Bokmål adopted many characteristics of the Danish language. It is used in most written works and is spoken by more than 80 percent of the people, especially those in urban areas. It is also the main language of instruction and broadcasting, although laws require that the other form, Nynorsk, be used in a certain percentage of schools and broadcasting media. Nynorsk was created in the 1800s using a combination of various rural dialects. All government agencies support both written forms, but written Nynorsk is seen by some as an extra burden for students and government agencies.

Norwegian is also a *pitch accent* language, which means people use rising or falling tones to distinguish two-syllable words with the same pronunciation. This gives Norwegian a unique sing-song quality.

The Sami speak Sami (Lappish) but learn Norwegian in school as a second language. The Norwegian alphabet has three more vowels than the English: *å*, *æ*, and *ø*. Schoolchildren begin learning English at age seven; it is spoken widely as a second language.

Religion

More than 85 percent of the population belongs to the state church, the Church of Norway, which is Evangelical Lutheran. Still, freedom of religion is guaranteed, and many other Christian churches are active in the country. Among them are the Pentecostals (1 percent), Roman Catholics (1 percent), and various Protestant groups (2.4 percent). The Muslim population (1.8 percent) is growing through immigration. Although religion is important to some Norwegians, less than half the population practices religion on a daily basis. Religion and going to church are increasingly less important to younger generations. Most people attend church services only on special occasions or holidays.

General Attitudes

Tolerance, honesty, human kindness, and independence are important Norwegian ideals. Reliability in business and private matters is also valued. Cheating is frowned upon. Once trust is lost, it is difficult to regain. Norway's interest in peace and progress is reflected in its longtime sponsorship of the Nobel Peace Prize. Norway is also one of the world's leaders in the percentage of gross national product provided in aid to the world's poorest countries.

Norwegians work fewer hours than people in other high-income countries. There is a strong sense of a national

community and a high level of civic participation. A large majority of Norwegians report being satisfied with their life. Criticism of other people or systems is considered inappropriate, although distrust of foreigners is common, especially among older generations, and attitudes toward immigrants can be critical.

Norwegians take great pride in their individual and national independence. They feel Norway has developed a superior social system with high standards. Indeed, social equality and a good standard of living are important values that have shaped post–World War II politics. Although the country is rich and has many natural resources, Norwegians tend to be modest about their personal wealth. Bragging is seen as inappropriate. They love the outdoors and promote measures to protect their environment.

Sincerity in friendship is important, but people show reserve in the expression of personal feelings. Norwegians make a point to not disturb others around them; city-dwellers are rarely close friends with their neighbors and do not often greet passersby on the street. Norwegians are, however, open and talkative with their close friends and family.

A person's behavior is just as important to their social status as their occupation. Intelligence, loyalty, self-restraint, and friendliness are seen as valuable traits. Norwegians in urban areas tend to be more formal, while people from smaller cities and towns are more matter-of-fact. Norwegians from the northern counties are known for being very straightforward and using more colorful language than others; they sometimes tell jokes that people from other parts of the country find inappropriate. Norwegians from the south tend to be more traditional and religious than other Norwegians.

Personal Appearance

Dress generally follows conservative European fashions and is influenced by the necessity to keep warm in the cold climate. Cleanliness and dressing well are important; an unkempt appearance in public is considered inappropriate. Norwegians tend to dress up for social gatherings and dress down for work. A shirt and tie, casual pants, and sweaters or pullovers are appropriate professional attire for men; women wear skirts or pants and blouses, often accompanied by a scarf. Suits are worn for business meetings. A dinner party with colleagues (especially at Christmas) is an occasion to dress up. Young people are fashion conscious and tend to buy brand name clothing.

Traditional costumes (*bunad*), which are specific to each region, are worn on special occasions such as weddings and national and local holidays. The costumes are often hand sewn and have elaborate embroidery. For women, they usually consist of a white blouse (often embroidered), a jumper-type skirt, an apron, and a headdress. Men's traditional costumes include knee pants, shirts, and vests. The traditional attire of the Sami people is similar and includes shoes made of animal skin.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Norwegians generally do not wait to be introduced by others. They often take the initiative in meeting new colleagues or neighbors. Natural courtesy is important to good relations. Shaking hands is appropriate in both formal and informal contexts. In formal contexts, businesslike handshakes are firm and short. In personal contexts, handshakes are longer and warmer. Close friends may hug each other while touching opposite cheeks during or after a handshake.

Everyday acquaintances greet each other with a casual *Morn* (literally, “Morning”), regardless of the time of day. The term is roughly equivalent to “Hi.” The word *Hei* also means “Hi” and is as common as *Morn*. A slightly more formal greeting is *God dag* (Good day). People greeting others for the first time since a shared social event often say *Takk for sist* (Thanks for the last time), a phrase that recognizes the closer social bond between them.

Traditionally, only close friends addressed each other by first name, but the younger generation tends to use first names once they have been introduced. Even schoolchildren may call teachers by their first name. Older individuals continue to follow the custom of using titles with a family name. When being introduced for the first time, a person addresses the other by both first and last name.

Gestures

Norwegians keep hand gestures to a minimum during conversation. However, people may wave the index finger in the air when warning others or expressing anger. It is impolite to place one's hands in the pockets when standing in front of a large group. Chewing gum is also inappropriate in public and business settings. It is impolite to yawn without covering the mouth. On public transportation, people usually offer their seats to women or the elderly. Courtesy and good behavior are important in all cases.

Visiting

Most Norwegians socialize at home. Friends visit each other regularly, either to maintain friendships or just to socialize. In the past, people visited unannounced, but now a call in advance is appreciated. Guests usually are offered coffee, tea, lemonade, or soda water and cakes or cookies. It is considered impolite for invited guests to refuse any refreshments the hosts offer.

When visiting a home for the first time, one customarily brings a gift of flowers, sweets, or another small token of appreciation to the hosts. Traditionally, guests wait to be invited in by the host, who helps them remove their coats as a gesture of hospitality. Guests may also wait to sit down until they are invited to do so. Personal privacy is important; topics such as income and social status are avoided in casual conversation. Punctuality is important. It is considered poor taste to leave directly after dinner is over.

Eating

In the past, Norwegian families ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. Today, most families meet together for dinner and sometimes breakfast. Many also enjoy a light evening snack. Norwegians eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. It is

impolite to leave food on the plate. It is polite to pardon oneself before leaving the table or to stay at the table until everybody is finished eating. At the end of a meal, whether in casual or formal situations, diners thank the person who prepared or is responsible for the meal. Indeed, children are taught to say *Takk for maten* (Thank you for the food) before leaving the table. Hands are kept above the table during the meal.

Norwegian affluence has increased the popularity of eating out. Formal restaurants, coffee bars, and informal cafés, which serve sausages, hamburgers, french fries, and other types of fast food, are popular. In a restaurant, a patron summons the server with a raised hand. The bill usually includes a service fee, but a small tip (5–10 percent) is also customary.

LIFESTYLE

Family

The typical Norwegian family unit is small, consisting of a mother, father, and two children. Families from immigrant populations, especially those from countries with high Muslim populations, usually have more than two children. Norwegians typically become parents in their late twenties. Extended families rarely live together in the same house but often live in the same city or region.

Both parents typically work outside the home, but women usually handle most of the household tasks. Nearly 80 percent of mothers are employed after their children begin school. Men are more likely to be responsible for financial matters. Most husbands and wives consider each other equal in authority.

Parents can take up to 46 weeks of fully paid leave (or 56 weeks at 80 percent of their usual pay) before their child's third birthday. Mothers generally take three weeks of leave before their due date and six weeks after the birth. Fathers can take a total of 12 weeks. Parents then may split the remainder as they wish. The government provides some monetary support until the child is 18 years old.

Children usually take part in simple tasks such as setting the table for a meal, cleaning up after a meal, and cooking. Children typically receive a small allowance (*ukelønn*, or weekly wage) in exchange for doing their chores. Children usually begin to earn their own money and pay for their own entertainment and clothing around age 18.

Parents are expected to be responsible for their children's well-being. After children reach 18, they are considered adults, and parents have no legal obligation to support them. Parents are still expected to help their older children when necessary. Children are also expected to help their parents for the rest of their lives. The majority of elderly Norwegians who cannot care for themselves move to nursing homes, which are typically paid for by the residents' pensions.

Partly due to gender-related quotas, women have a strong presence in politics and hold nearly 40 percent of the seats in Parliament and roughly half of the cabinet posts. Though many women play a key role in businesses and corporations, most leadership positions are held by men. Women also

comprise 45 percent of the labor force. The influence of women in the workforce has helped Norway develop strong child-care, educational, and family programs.

Housing

Most Norwegians prefer traditional home styles; these houses are typically built of wood with a concrete foundation, and the roofs are pitched at a steep angle so rain and snow slide to the ground. It is not uncommon to restore old houses instead of buying or building new ones, although new-home building has surged recently. In some neighborhoods, functional houses date back more than one hundred years. Where new houses are built, they are often designed to fit in with older, existing homes. Homes that are built in more modern, non-traditional styles, or homes that are built with non-traditional materials, are generally considered to be in bad taste but are becoming more popular among younger Norwegians.

Apartments are common in urban areas; however, most metropolitan areas include residential areas with single-family wood houses. The typical house has two or three bedrooms, one to two bathrooms, a kitchen, a living room, a basement, and an attic. Wood is the most common building material, but brick houses are not unusual. Most Norwegians decorate and fix up their homes themselves. Many are highly design conscious and spend a lot of time and money making their homes more attractive. This tendency may be related to the fact that Norwegians spend a lot of time in their homes during the long winter season. In decorating, Norwegians have generally conservative tastes, preferring furnishings made from wood, leather, or wool. Many well-off Norwegians own summer cabins near the ocean or winter cabins in the mountains, close to skiing and winter activity sites. Summer cabins are typically small and simple, with outhouses and no running water, televisions, or telephones.

Dating and Marriage

Serious dating is discouraged among young teens, so teenagers usually socialize in groups. Teenagers typically spend time together after school. Dances, outdoor activities, and movies are favorite pastimes. Expensive activities such as eating at restaurants, going to the cinema, and buying gifts for significant others are increasingly common. Some people, young and old, meet through online dating. Casual sexual relationships are common. Relationships usually form between people with similar social backgrounds, ages, and education levels. The phrase "Equal people match" is typically used in reference to friendships and romantic relationships to indicate that people with shared values and life experiences will make the best matches.

Most Norwegians expect to marry eventually; parents hope that their children will marry, even if it is later in life. On average, men marry at age 34 and women at age 31. Most Norwegian couples live together before or instead of marrying. Common-law marriage does not exist in Norway; however, unmarried couples who are registered as living under the same roof and who have children together have some rights. For example, should the couple separate, the father has the right to spend time with his children and has a

say in health procedures and whether his children move out of the country. Same sex marriage is legal. Nearly 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, and divorce is largely accepted by society.

The majority of weddings, even for non-religious Norwegians, take place in churches. Some weddings take place before a judge at a public office, but civil ceremonies are not required for church weddings. Large parties for families and friends include dinner and speeches followed by refreshments and dancing. The newlyweds perform a bridal waltz. Foods served at weddings vary; cold dishes like salads, dried and salted meat, breads, and desserts are common. Newlyweds often leave the church in a car that has something similar to "Just married" written on it. They often have wedding pictures taken by a professional photographer. Many Norwegians go on a honeymoon but may have to wait until after they have saved enough money to do so.

Life Cycle

Norwegian life-cycle rituals are influenced by the Lutheran state church. Almost everyone in Norway observes the traditional religious ceremonies associated with birth, marriage, and death. Most Norwegians baptize their newborn babies and name godparents for them. This ceremony involves close relatives and friends. A celebration following the baptism includes dinner and dessert in the parents' home and gifts for the newborn. In recent years, the growth of the Human Ethics organization has provided Norwegians with the opportunity to undergo secular versions of the traditional religious ceremonies.

Confirmation, which takes place around age 15 and marks the admission of young people into the church, is another important religious ceremony. Christian (and some non-Christian) teenagers take a class in which they learn about and discuss values, moral codes, and social skills. On the day of the confirmation, all the participants take part in a large ceremony in a church or a concert arena, where they perform speeches, songs, and dances. At the end of the ceremony, the participants receive diplomas and then celebrate with their friends and relatives. Most of the participants receive money as gifts.

Norwegians are considered legal adults at age 18. Teenagers usually leave their parents' home at this age. Military service is mandatory for men, and young men (and sometimes women) often join the military for one year around age 18. Young people may also work and travel for a year before attending university or another form of higher education.

Most funerals take place in churches, where a priest speaks to honor the deceased. After family members say their last good-byes, the coffin is brought outside to be buried in a cemetery. Cremation is not common. The Human Ethics organization now performs non-religious burials, but these are not as common as burials with traditional religious rituals. Most graveyards are on grounds belonging to the state church, and in the past, burial there was denied to people who had not been baptized and confirmed; however, this is not the case today.

Diet

Breakfast and lunch usually consist of open-faced cheese or ham sandwiches and milk or coffee. Meat or fish, potatoes, vegetables, and a soup or dessert are generally prepared for dinner, the main meal. Ready-made or frozen foods are popular, particularly for evening snacks. Delis usually sell ready-made fried fish, fish cakes, fish pudding, and meatballs. A common meal is meatballs with potatoes and brown gravy, served with vegetables. Norwegian specialties include fish balls served in a milk sauce, smoked salmon, *lutefisk* (cod or coalfish soaked in potash lye), *fårikål* (cabbage and mutton), *smalahode* (sheep's head), and a variety of other dishes. Drinking alcohol is common, especially on the weekends. Ice cream and puddings with various toppings are popular desserts.

Recreation

Most Norwegians are physically active. Many enjoy skiing (cross-country skiing is especially popular), and children learn at a very young age. "Norwegians are born with skis on their feet" is a common cliché. Snowboarding is increasingly popular among teenagers. Norway is one of the world's centers for ice-skating and skiing, both Alpine (downhill) and Nordic (cross-country). The city of Lillehammer was the site of the 1994 Winter Olympics.

Soccer is the most popular sport in Norway for both men and women; it is among the first sports most children learn. During winter, some professional and amateur teams practice in indoor stadiums with artificial grass. Handball is also popular; the Norwegian women's national handball team has won several titles in recent years.

Schools do not organize their own sports teams, but each community has sports clubs for individual and team competition. Most families are actively involved in these clubs. Participation is emphasized more than winning, and young children are taught to treat everyone equally in sports. Soccer teams, for example, are unlikely to play only their best players in important matches; not letting everyone participate is considered unfair.

Norwegians love to be outdoors. Walkways and bicycle lanes make it easy to travel by bike. Families often go for a walk in the woods or in their neighborhoods on Sunday afternoons. Fishing is excellent and popular; trout, pike, and salmon abound in Norwegian waters. People also enjoy playing, swimming, and hiking during the summer months. Boating is popular when the frozen lakes and fjords thaw.

Reading is a popular leisure activity. Card games and knowledge-based games are also popular. Poker is popular, but gambling with money is illegal. Many Norwegian children take part in organized activities such as *korps* (marching bands) or *speideren* (scouting).

The end of July and the beginning of August are known as *fellesferien*, which translates as "the general staff holiday," because most Norwegian companies shut down for summer holidays. Norwegians love to spend this time sunbathing, swimming, playing sports, and doing other outdoor activities while spending time with friends and relatives. Wealthy Norwegians often own vacation homes, usually around Oslo

and in Norway's southern archipelago, where the climate is more stable. Many Norwegians also travel abroad during the summer months. Spain, Turkey, and Greece are favorite destinations, but Italy, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Denmark, and Sweden are also popular. Families vacationing in these countries usually enjoy spending time relaxing by the sea.

The Arts

Many families participate in the performing arts, either by performing themselves or by attending theater, concerts, and other cultural events. Theater is particularly valued. The Norwegian Opera, the Norwegian National Ballet, and numerous orchestras add to the lively arts scene.

Traditional arts are important to Norwegians. Folk musicians are popular, and festivals feature many types of folk music. The best-known folk dance is the *halling*, in which male dancers perform challenging kicks and leaps. Norwegian folktales are also popular. They often portray animals or mythical creatures such as trolls, pixies, and ocean monsters. Examples of ancient craft and architecture include rock carvings, Viking ships, and 1,000-year-old churches made out of wooden slats. Contemporary arts include furniture, jewelry, textiles, and painting. Mural painting is especially renowned.

Holidays

Official holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (Thursday–Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Constitution Day (17 May), and Christmas (24–26 Dec.). Nearly all businesses close on these days. The Norwegian flag is a prominent feature of all holidays; it is even used to decorate Christmas trees.

Families often take skiing vacations or stay in vacation homes on the coast during the Easter holiday. Camping and hiking are also popular. Traditional foods eaten on Easter include lamb, turkey, eggs, and candies such as chocolate and marzipan. Large, hollow decorated eggs filled with various kinds of candy are given to children. Some Norwegians, especially the elderly, decorate their homes with yellow and purple Easter decorations.

Constitution Day is celebrated much like the Fourth of July in the United States, with parades, flags, and family gatherings. Schools in each city or town hold a children's parade (*barnetog*), in which all the students march with their classes. In Oslo, the royal family watches the children's parade from the balcony of the Oslo castle. Afterward, the citizens' parade (*borgertog*) takes place; it is open to anyone who wants to participate and includes labor unions, sports teams, and other organizations. These parades do not include floats but do include many marching bands, both school bands and adult bands. Many people also dress up in *bunad* (traditional Norwegian costumes) to celebrate.

Most employees have 25 paid vacation days per year, and they often spend this time vacationing during the summer, when students have time off of school. *Sankt Hans*, also known as *Jonsok*, *Sankthansaften*, or St. John's Eve, celebrates the summer solstice. On 23 June, Norwegians light bonfires to scare away evil spirits, stay up late to watch the

sunrise, and eat hot dogs with ketchup. Barbecuing is popular in the summer.

Christmas is the biggest celebration of the year. As in many other countries, preparations for Christmas begin weeks before the holiday begins. At 5 p.m. on *Julaften* (Christmas Eve), bells ring and the holiday officially begins. Norwegians decorate with Christmas trees, candles, lights, and red and green decorations. Families gather to share a big meal and exchange gifts, which are stored under the Christmas tree. Stories about *Julenisse* (Father Christmas) are popular among children. Parties are common on Christmas Day and thereafter until the new year begins.

On New Year's Eve, most people celebrate with their friends by lighting fireworks and drinking alcohol. Turkey, salted and diced mutton (known as *pinnekjøtt*), and pork ribs are the most common dishes for New Year's Eve celebrations.

SOCIETY

Government

Norway is a constitutional monarchy. The king (currently Harald V) has limited authority, except as head of the military and as a symbol of continuity and stability. A 1990 change to Norway's constitution allows a monarch's firstborn child to inherit the throne, regardless of gender.

The leader of the dominant party in Parliament serves as prime minister (currently Jens Stoltenberg) and has executive power. The Parliament (*Storting*) has one house. Members of Parliament are elected by proportional representation every four years. In Norway's judicial system, the highest court is the Supreme Court, or *Høyesterett*. There are also courts of appeal for civil and criminal cases as well as conciliation courts for civil suits. Norway has 19 counties (*fylker*), which are further subdivided into rural and urban municipalities. All citizens may begin voting at age 18.

Economy

Norway enjoys a strong economy and has one of the highest standards of living in the world. Wealth is, in general, evenly distributed. Highly developed social institutions are able to provide for general economic prosperity but also result in heavy tax burdens. Inflation and unemployment are relatively low. The decision to remain outside the EU (after a referendum in 1994 rejected the option) has not weakened the economy. Norway remains closely tied to Europe through its membership in the European Economic Area (EEA), which allows for the free movement of labor, capital, goods, and services between the EU and non-EU European countries. Norway's labor force employs many immigrants; the country recruits professionals with special skills, such as doctors, nurses, and construction workers, from the EU. Though the global economic crisis of 2008 affected some industries, Norway as a country was relatively untouched.

Norway has a rich supply of natural resources; it is one of the world's largest oil exporters, but the government is working to diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on oil. Norway is also a major aluminum producer. Other important exports include natural gas, fish, and manufactured

items such as furniture and ships. Oil drilling, commercial shipping, paper products, textiles, chemicals, technology, and food processing are among the key industries. The industrial sector employs about 20 percent of the workforce, while the services sector accounts for more than 75 percent and agriculture and fishing 3 percent. The currency is the Norwegian *kroner* (NOK).

Transportation and Communications

Norwegians depend on cars for personal transportation, particularly because of the country's length and its sparse population. Trains, buses, and airplanes also connect many cities and towns. Before cars and airplanes became readily available, steamboats known as *Hurtitruten* were the main form of transportation for people along the coast. Steamers still transport goods and are popular among tourists. Norway has one of the largest fleets of commercial ships in the world. Ferries, which provide service across many fjords, are vital to infrastructure in western parts of the country.

The country's communications system is highly developed and fully modern. There are more mobile phones than people. Norwegians enjoy newspapers; local, district, and national papers are widely read. Most of the press is privately owned and partisan. Multiple television stations broadcast throughout the country. Nearly 95 percent of the population uses the internet.

Education

Schooling is free and compulsory for all children between the ages of six and sixteen. Private schools, which are state supported but still expensive, include Christian schools and schools for students who need extra help in their studies. The first seven years constitute primary school, while the last three are lower secondary school. Upper secondary school provides either vocational training or preparation for higher education. More than 80 percent of Norwegian adults ages 25 to 64 have earned a secondary school diploma.

Norway's educational system is known for being one of the best of the world. Norwegians place emphasis on giving all students equal amounts of attention, and teachers encourage their students to do well in school. Students who struggle in a certain subject are sometimes given extra tutoring outside of school.

Norwegian (both Bokmål and Nynorsk), English, physical education, history, religion, mathematics, and science are all taught through primary and secondary school. Study of additional foreign languages is not required, but most students choose to take classes in French, German, or Spanish. The amount of time the students spend in school and the amount of after-school homework increases as they get older; secondary students usually spend about two or three hours on homework every night.

After secondary school, many Norwegians begin working. Others are admitted to a university or college, and a small number attend folk colleges, liberal-arts boarding schools that focus on personal enrichment without giving credit toward a degree. Popular activities at folk colleges include music, sports, outdoor recreation, and traveling. Good education is seen as essential for high social status.

Students must receive high grades in secondary school in order to be admitted to a university program; more difficult programs of study require higher grades for admission. More women than men study at the university level. Universities are located in Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø, Agder, Nordland, Trondheim, Stavanger, Bodø, and Ås. Instruction is readily available to most citizens and basically free at all levels, including higher education. Space is limited at universities; however, many students travel to other countries for their college education. The government offers generous loans to students who seek education abroad; Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States are popular choices.

Health

Norwegians enjoy a high standard of health and a higher life expectancy than many high-income countries. In keeping with its commitment to social welfare, the government has an extensive system that provides free, high-quality healthcare services to all. Health clinics and regional hospitals provide service on a local level, but district and national hospitals are also available. Socialized medicine pays for all hospital charges, although small fees are charged for medicine and some procedures. Costs are shared between the central and local governments. Private doctors, clinics, and hospitals are limited.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

Population	4,691,849 (rank=118)
Area, sq. mi.	125,023 (rank=68)
Area, sq. km.	323,802

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	1 of 182 countries
Gender inequality rank	6 of 155 countries
Adult literacy rate	100% (male); 100% (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	78 (male); 83 (female)

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2011 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).