

NORWAY

Population: 4,5 Mio

Area: 328.877 km²

Part 1: Laws concerning Homosexuality

Forbidden by law: No

Registered partnership: Yes, since 1993, amended in 2000 and 2001.

Differences to heterosexual marriages: Yes.

A partner in a registered partnership can adopt the children of her/his partner unless the child is adopted from a foreign country. But adoption of foreign children is not possible. Artificial insemination is not possible for a lesbian registered couple. In Norway heterosexual weddings taking place in churches are also formally valid before civil administrations because the Norwegian Church is a State Church. This is not possible for lesbian and gay couples. They have to register their partnership in the town hall. But additional church blessings are possible in some areas.

Apart from these exceptions the conditions are exactly the same as for heterosexual marriages. The wedding is the same as for civil marriage and the divorce regulations are the same.

Anti-discrimination law, protecting lesbians/gays (L/G) against discrimination: Yes, since 1981

At work: Yes

On the housing market: Yes

In other areas: No

Other groups in the society protected through such a law: Yes, a general anti-discrimination law (135a) where the above mentioned is included.

Incidents/outspoken attitudes that briefly describe the situation of L/G in society:

The situation is quite mixed. It is easier to be open now than it has ever been before, but still a lot of people are afraid of what will happen if people around them identify them as lesbian/gay – especially in outspokenly Christian settings.

The general atmosphere towards LGBT is liberal and tolerant in most of the places, at least on a political level. The partnership registration law is more or less supported by all political parties and an accepted part of society. However, in a survey about the popularity of different groups in society in 1996 teenagers ranked lesbians and gays at the bottom of the list – together with Neo-Nazis and Satanists. In another survey about the quality of life for lesbians and gays in 1997 the figures for suicide (attempts), alcohol consumption and loneliness of lesbians and gays were alarmingly higher than for heterosexuals. It shows that the situation for LGBT is more difficult and complex than one would think.

Part 2: Situation in the Church(es)

Open L/G welcome to

Eucharist: Yes/no

Not in all churches. The Church of Norway (Lutheran) is relatively open, even though we have some ecclesiastic laws against us (in general we are not allowed to become ministers, and some other positions in the church). Some parishes do have a clear practice of welcom-

ing people. The Catholic Church does not allow open LGBT people in general, but some local ministers give communion, anyhow.

Do volunteer work: Yes/No

It depends on where you are living in the country, what denomination you belong to, and, in the churches which have one, on the bishop. It is generally easier today than just a few years ago. There has been a big controversial debate in the Churches in Norway about homosexuality – mainly because of the lobbying work of Open Church Group, the Ecumenical LGBT group founded in 1976.

Work as ordained ministers: Yes/No

Comments: The National Church Annual Meeting is outspokenly against it. However, during the last 5-7 years at least 10 lesbians and gays living openly in partnership have become ministers in the Church of Norway. Some still live in the closet, but we see a rapidly increasing number of lesbian and gay ministers coming out. Almost every semester new lesbian and gay theologians finish their education, ready for serving the Church.

Other employment in church(es): See above.

Partnership blessing possible: Yes/No

Comment: We are not officially allowed to hold such ceremonies, but some of the bishops do approve of them. It is the policy of “Don’t ask, don’t tell”. Many lesbian and gay ministers and also open-minded heterosexual ministers hold blessing ceremonies for those who wish to have one. Even in the most conservative parts of the country, one might be able to have some kind of ceremony. This is quite new.

Incidents/outspoken attitudes that briefly describe the situation of L/G in the churches:

In the last years we have had a situation of four out of eleven bishops accepting lesbian and gay ministers, who live in registered partnerships, to work as ministers in the Church of Norway. The first openly lesbian minister, Hilde Raastad, was ordained in 1995. Since then there have been several controversial cases in church and in the public at large, where lesbian or gay ministers who had registered their partnership while in church office, had to take a leave or were refused ordination in the first place. In 1999 the Church of Norway almost faced a split after the bishop of Hamar, Rosemarie Köhn, reinstated a lesbian minister who had been barred from the pulpit after she had her partnership registered. The minister Siri Sunde was suspended in 1997 because church rules prohibit ordination and church service for ministers in gay/lesbian partnerships. But Bishop Köhn believed that the ban was wrong and sent Sunde back to work after more than a year of fierce discussions and debates over the issue. “With the same justification the church has used to change its view in other cases, it must change its view about homosexuality”, Köhn said. “There is not a theological basis for excluding clergy for entering a partnership.” (*see:*

www.qrd.org/qrd/world/wockner/news.briefs/250-02.08.99)

Up to the present the issue of lesbian/gay ministers living or wanting to live in registered partnerships has been a very controversial issue where no common agreements have been found yet. It is basically up to the regional bishops how the subject is dealt with in the different church districts. In this respect it is important to know that the Norwegian Church is a State Church. Therefore it is the State Government which appoints new bishops. Thus, it is crucial which political party/parties we have in the government whenever a new bishop is about to be appointed. The conservative parties tend to appoint conservative bishops and vice versa. Right now (2004) the Christian conservative parties hold the government position.

In February 2004 there was an “uproar” in the political and public sphere. The Christian Mission Alliance, where the leader of the Christian conservative party (and State Minister of

Health) is actively involved, decided to exclude lesbians and gays living in registered partnerships, even if they were believing Christians.

An interesting aspect: Before Norway got the law about registered partnerships, the position of the Christian conservative side was that lesbians and gays in general could not work as ministers etc. After the partnership law was introduced, the conservative position changed. Nowadays many of them see lesbian and gay ministers who have registered their partnership as the problem, not lesbians and gays in general any more. Lesbian and gay ministers can have a partner as long as they do not have their partnership registered. For heterosexuals however, many conservative Christians see it as a problem if the minister is living with a partner without being married.

Part 3: Christian Lesbian/Gay Networks

Network name: Åpen Kirkegruppe, LLH - Oslo

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