



International strategy for freedom of expression

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(<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/id833/>)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched its international strategy for promoting freedom of expression in foreign and development policy 29 June.

- 1 [Freedom of expression](#)
- 2 [Don't stop the press!](#)
- 3 [Right to know](#)
- 4 [Safe environment for freedom of expression](#)

[The strategy in pdf](#)

(http://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/mr/strategy_expression.pdf).

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1 Freedom of expression

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1.1 Freedom of expression and democracy

The right to freedom of expression, including free access to information, is a fundamental human right. Freedom of expression is essential to enabling people to acquire knowledge and form their own opinions. Freedom of expression is also a cornerstone of a vibrant democracy where all members of society can take part in a free exchange of views and ideas and influence social development. In pluralistic societies, an open dialogue where opinions can be pitted against each other helps to promote democracy and safeguard human rights.

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1.2 Freedom of expression under pressure

In many countries, freedom of expression and media freedom are under severe pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a negative trend in which democratic values and human rights are increasingly challenged, and autocratisation is accelerating.^[1] Many countries, including a number of democratic countries, have introduced new restrictions that limit freedom of expression. Journalists and the media are being prevented from doing their job in various ways, and human rights defenders and other critical voices are being denied access to information and silenced.^[2] Government-sanctioned censorship of the internet and media channels is a growing problem. It is essential to strengthen freedom of expression and freedom of the press in order to restore people's trust in public institutions and in each other, and to promote support for social development based on respect for human rights and democratic values.

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1.3 Human rights in the digital space

The digital transformation is steadily gathering pace. New communication platforms provide greater access to knowledge and information, and give more people the chance to participate in the public debate. This strengthens democracy. Social media make it possible to reach out to large numbers of people across national borders and engage them in social and political change processes. However, there is significant variation between countries and population groups when it comes to internet access and use. Fewer girls and women use the internet than boys and men.^[3] Internet access, digital skills and digital safety must all be enhanced to reduce these disparities.

Digital technology is used by both state and non-state actors for illegal surveillance, censorship, propaganda campaigns, online harassment and other forms of digital violence. Journalists, human rights defenders, artists and other cultural practitioners, minorities, women and girls are particularly exposed to online violence. Underreporting and widespread impunity for online violence discourage those who are targeted and others from participating in the public debate. This poses a serious threat to freedom of expression.

The sheer scale of hate speech, disinformation and propaganda online increases polarisation in society and undermines trust in democratic institutions and values. Online search engines and social media channels control which opinions, news and information are made available and visible to several billions of users all over the world. This limits the public discourse and diversity in the public domain, and raises questions regarding the manipulation of public opinion.

Freedom of expression - a human right



The UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation^[5] provides a good basis for ensuring that new technologies promote respect for human rights and equal opportunities for all. Norway supports the EU initiative to develop a new regulatory framework for online platforms, which is intended to ensure greater transparency and accountability, and to protect consumers and their fundamental rights online.

Legislation and mechanisms that are intended to provide protection against harmful and illegal speech must be developed in a way that safeguards the most vulnerable groups but does not lead to disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression and information. A strong, diversified and independent media sector that can provide critical, fact-based journalism, combined with a high level of public media and information literacy, is also vital for protecting freedom of expression and information.()

1.4 Strategic objectives and approach

Norway gives high priority to protecting freedom of expression in its international human rights work. This is primarily because freedom of expression is a fundamental human right in itself and a prerequisite for democracy and the realisation of other human rights as well. Protecting freedom of expression is also relevant in the context of Norwegian development policy because respect for human rights is essential for promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

Responsibility of business enterprises to respect human rights



This strategy sets out the overall objectives and priorities for the continued efforts of the Foreign Service to promote a diversified, independent media sector, ensure access to information and protect journalists and other vulnerable groups. In the light of the rapid pace of development of digital technologies, importance will be attached to improving the protection of human rights in the digital space.

It is necessary to take an integrated, long-term approach in the international efforts to promote human rights. Norway recognises the interdependence and indivisibility of political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights, and bases its efforts to reach the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on respect for human rights. Norway also promotes human rights through its participation in international and regional organisations, through bilateral dialogue and cooperation, and by providing support to civil society organisations and human rights defenders. These are all important tools for protecting and promoting freedom of expression as a fundamental right that is essential to democratic and sustainable development.

The UN and multilateral cooperation: As part of the effort to strengthen states' compliance with their human rights obligations, Norway provides recommendations to individual countries through the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Norway participates in discussions on freedom of expression in the UN, supports the work of UN special rapporteurs and other special procedures, and supports the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Norway promotes freedom of expression and freedom of the press through its participation in regional organisations and forums, such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU/EEA cooperation. One of Norway's priorities in the Council of Europe is to ensure that the Convention system continues to be robust and effective. The European Court of Human Rights plays an important role in protecting freedom of expression in Europe. The Court's decisions are binding on the 47 member states that have ratified the European Convention on Human Rights.

Through multilateral networks such as the Freedom Online Coalition and the Christchurch Call to Action, Norway cooperates with other countries, civil society, academia and the private sector to safeguard freedom of expression and other human rights in the digital space.

Human rights dialogue and open criticism: In its political dialogue with other countries' authorities, Norway is a staunch defender of freedom of expression and other human rights. Norway voices clear criticism in the UN Human Rights Council of human rights violations in individual countries. In addition, Norway often raises concerns and expresses criticism jointly with other countries in specific situations where journalists, human rights defenders, opposition activists and others have been subjected to threats as a result of their work. Norway attaches importance to promoting inclusive dialogue on human rights both with the authorities and with civil society in partner countries. Promoting the participation of civil society in UN human rights efforts and in the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Reviews is part of this work. Knowledge and analysis of the human rights situation in individual countries provide an important basis for Norway's engagement.