

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway: The role of religious organisations

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Responses to the crisis – a transnational view

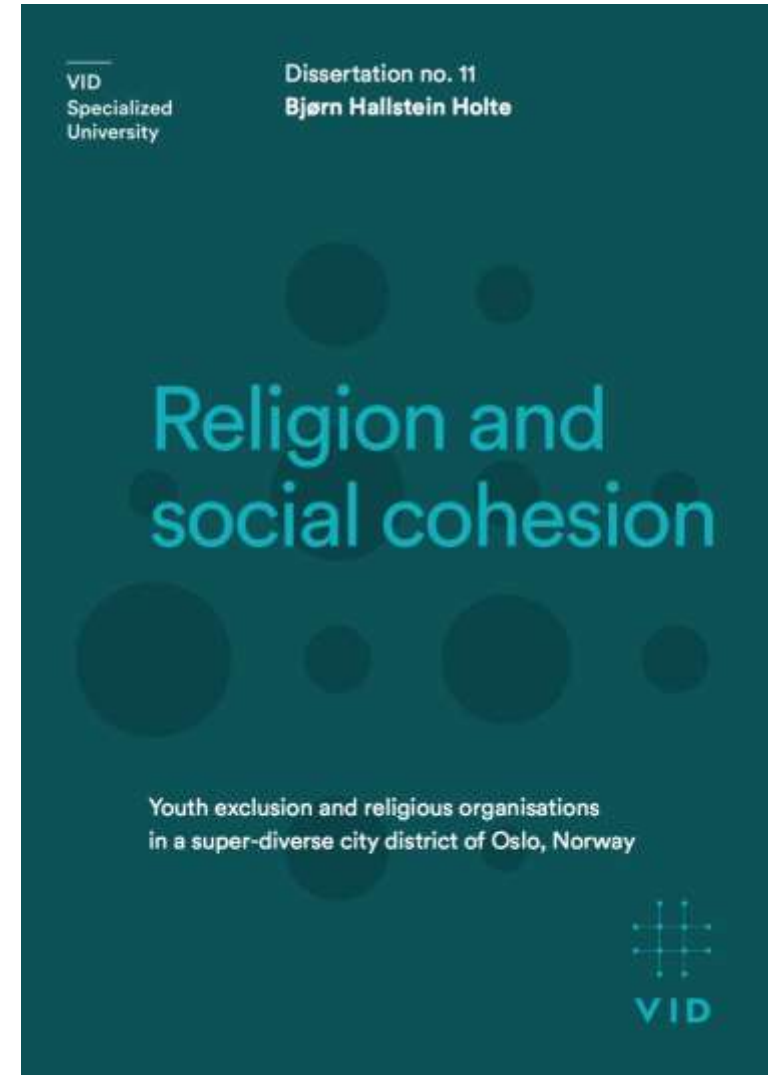
3IN Alliance online conference

University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt

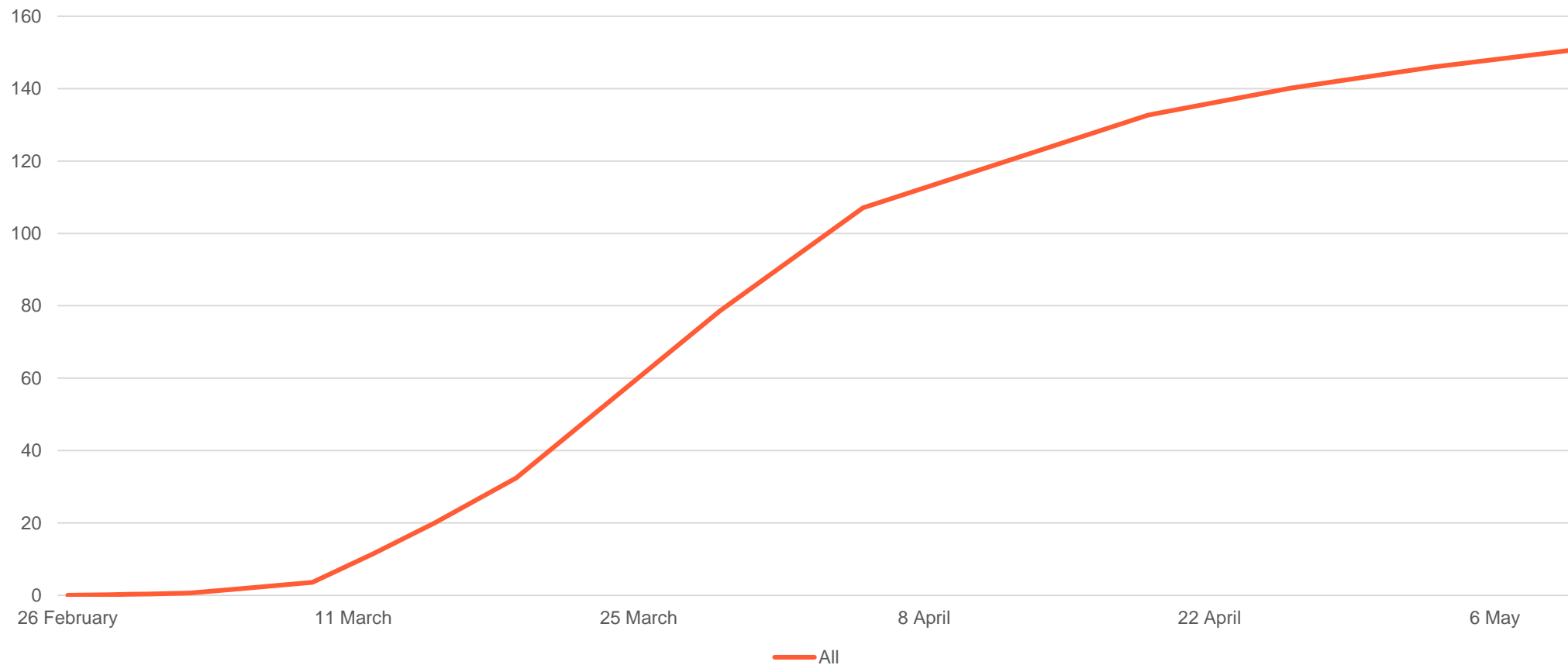
Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway: The role of religious organisations

Background

- I am an anthropologist and sociologist of religion.
- My doctoral research within the field religion and welfare and focused on youth exclusion and religious organisations in a diverse city district of Oslo.
- One of the main results of this work was the idea of “religious organisations as public space” as a way of understanding the social role of religious organisations in Norway.



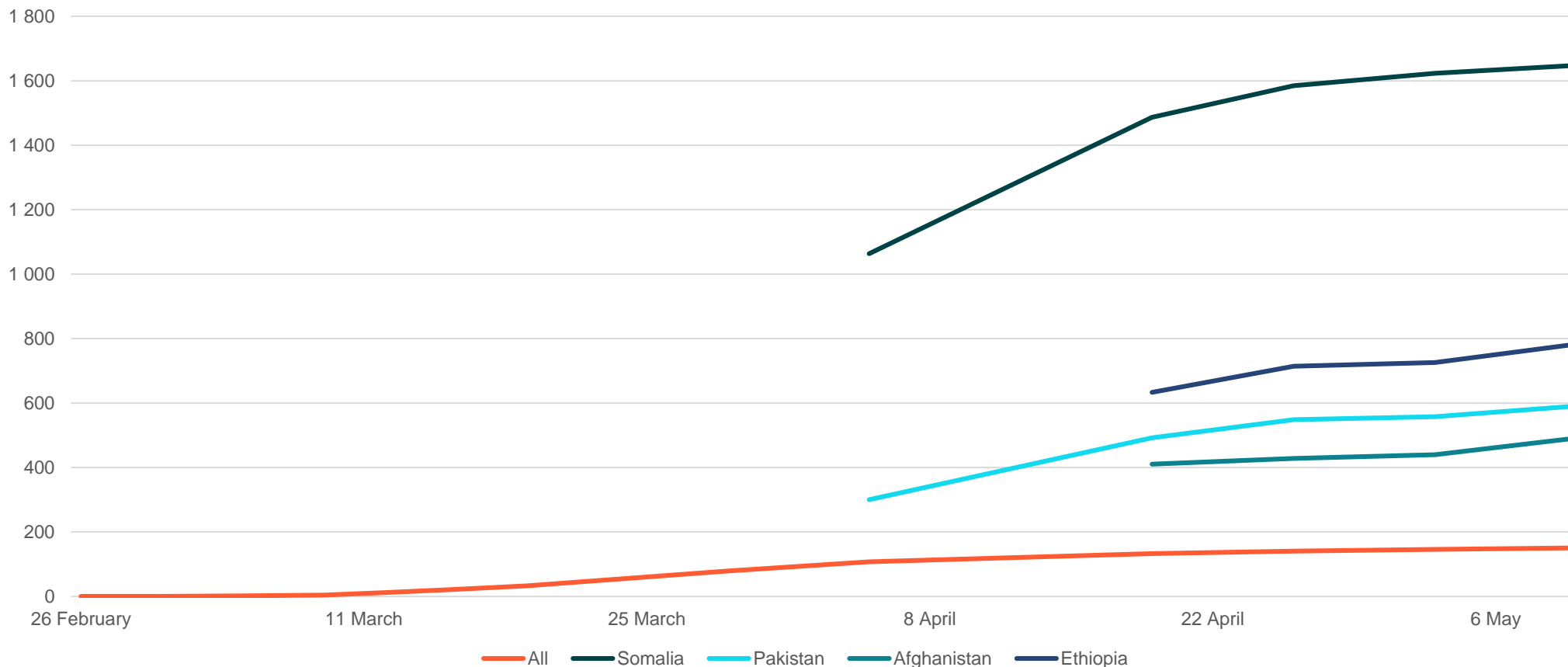
Confirmed corona cases in Norway pr. 100 000



Confirmed corona cases in Norway pr. 100 000 by country of birth (selected countries, 5 April)

Country of birth	Confirmed corona cases	Foreign born population	Corona cases per 100 000
Somalia	304	28 581	1 064
Pakistan	64	21 329	300
Iraq	55	23 294	236
Sweden	55	47 714	115
Iran	47	18 560	253
Philippines	46	25 149	183
Denmark	37	24 434	151

Confirmed corona cases in Norway pr. 100 000 by country of birth (selected countries)



Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

Different explanations

- A larger share of immigrants from Somalia and other overrepresented countries work in manual jobs and service jobs where they are exposed to the virus.
- A larger share of immigrants live under crowded conditions, increasing the risk of transferring the virus within households.
- A lack of information in languages and media accessible to immigrants.

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

A lack of information accessible to immigrants

vårtland TL.TOPPEN **14. APRIL 2020** **Aftenposten** Annonser Kontakt Sport Meny

Loveleen Brenna: – Minoritetene sviktes i krisen

Hun ser koronakrisen gjennom sine indiske foreldres øyne. Norge svikter en stor del av befolkningen, mener Loveleen Rihel Brenna.



Raymond Johansen: - Mange av de smittede i Oslo har innvandrerbakgrunn

Særlig norsksomalere er rammet. Nå går Oslo kommune aktivt ut i innvanderemiljøene og informerer om koronasmitte.



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A lack of information accessible to immigrants

On 3 April, six civil society organisations – some of them faith-based organisations – were granted public funding to “reach out to the immigrant population.”

“To do that, we are fully dependent on the work of civil society organisations,” the Minister said (my translation).

- Røde Kors, Caritas, Norske Frivillighetssentraler, Norske Kvinners Sanitetsforening, Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid og Norsk Folkehjelp.

A screenshot of the Norwegian government website (Regjeringen.no) displaying a press release. The page title is "Styrker korona-informasjonen til innvandreregrupper" (Strengthens corona information for immigrant groups). The release, dated 03.04.2020, states that the government will provide 6.6 million kroner in grants to voluntary organizations for information work about the coronavirus to the immigrant population. The funding is distributed to Røde Kors, Caritas, Norske Frivillighetssentraler, Norske Kvinners Sanitetsforening, Kristent Interkulturelt Arbeid, and Norsk Folkehjelp. The page also features a "TEMA" section with "Innvandring og integrering" and "Koronasiluasjonen" highlighted, and a sub-section titled "Økende informasjonsbehov" (Increasing information needs).

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A lack of information accessible to immigrants

vårtland

KIDP ABONNEMENT **NYHETER** E-AVIS KIRKE MENINGER BOKER KULTUR REPORTASJER

Regjeringen bevilget 6,6 millioner kroner til koronainformasjon til innvandrere. Ingenting gikk til innvandrersorganisasjoner

Stemmer fra innvandretermiljøet er kritiske til at regjeringen ikke gir penger til innvandreres organisasjoner når de skal nå ut med korona-informasjon.



Aftenposten Årsmagasin | Osoby | Sport | Meninger | Bjørn Halden | Meny

Regjeringen gir millioner for å styrke korona-informasjonen til innvandrergupper, men «glemte» innvandrersorganisasjoner

Innvandrersorganisasjoner reagerer på at de er blitt forbigått ved tildeling av midler som skal brukes til å styrke korona-informasjon blant innvandrerne.



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A lack of information accessible to immigrants

On 14 April, the government announced that up to 10 million kroner (approx. 1 million euros) would be made available for civil society organisations providing information about the coronavirus and its consequences to immigrants.

I have not looked up or seen the results of this call.

A screenshot of the Norwegian government website (Regjeringen.no) showing a press release. The page has a dark blue header with the Norwegian flag and the text "Regjeringen.no". Below the header is a navigation bar with tabs for "Tema", "Dokument", "Aktuelt", "Departement", and "Regjering". The main content area features a breadcrumb trail: "Du er her: Forsiden > Aktuelt > Styrker korona-informasjon til innvandreregrupper med 10 millioner". The title of the press release is "Styrker korona-informasjon til innvandreregrupper med 10 millioner" and it is attributed to "Kunnskapsdepartementet". The text of the press release states: "Regjeringen ønsker å nå ut med mer informasjon om covid-19 til innvandrerbefolkningen og foreslår en ekstraordinær økning på 10 millioner kroner til informasjonsarbeid i regi av frivillige organisasjoner." At the bottom, it says: "Tilskuddet vil bli lyst ut på www.vid.no umiddelbart og det vil være en søknadsfrist på 10 arbeidstager."

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

The role of religious organisations

So far, I have focused on the government's response to the coronavirus and the ideas of civil society and religious organisations it reflects.

Moving on, I will focus on a parallel course of events: the Islamic Council of Norway's response to the coronavirus.

- The Islamic Council of Norway received public funding as an umbrella organisation for Norwegian mosques between 2007 and 2017, when the funding was withdrawn.
- Ten mosques and Muslim organisations resigned from the council in 2017.
- The Council has been mired in conflict and controversy before and after 2017, but it still remains a significant religious actor in Norway.

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

The Islamic Council of Norway

On 13 March, the Islamic Council of Norway published guidelines for mosques and a document titled “3 Hadith/Ayah to protect oneself from the coronavirus”.

- The documents were produced in collaboration with the Muslim Council of Britain.
- The latter document grounded advice on how to avoid the coronavirus in two Hadith and an Ayah.
- It informed about the quarantine for travellers from outside the Nordic countries in force at that time and provided the phone number to the Norwegian authorities' information services for readers seeking further information about the virus.

3 Hadith/Ayah for å beskytte seg mot
KORONAVIRUS
(COVID-19)

1 Profet Muhammad (saw) sa:
Renslighet er halvparten av troen (Muslim)

- Viruset spres fra smittede personer som nyser, hoster eller ved fysisk kontakt. Hold dere til 1-meter avstandsregel.
- God håndhygiene er viktig for begrense spredningen. Vask hendene jevnlig med vann og såpe i 30 sekunder. Håndsprit er også et godt alternativ.
- Unngå å berøre ansiktet / spise mat eller drikke uten å ha vasket hendene.
- Unngå klemming, håndhilsning og nærkontakt.
- Unngå å besøke offentlige steder og steder på offentlig transport.

2 Profet Muhammad (saw) sa:
Hvis du hører om en pest i et land, ikke gå inn i den.
Hvis det rammer et land og du er i det, ikke gå ut av det.
(Bukhari og Muslim)

- Hvis du har vært i et berørt område etter 28. februar, er du pålagt hjemmekarantene i 14 dager. Bli hjemme.
- Hvis du til og med har mild forkjølelse eller influensalignende symptomer, så bli hjemme. Hold deg borte fra arbeidssted, moskeer, treningssentre og andre beferdte områder.
- Unngå å besøke de som er syke og over, til de er blitt friske.

3 Allah swt sier:
Så spør de som besitter ekspertisen (ahl adh-dhikr) om du ikke vet (16:43)

- Det er mye feilinformasjon om Covid-19 på nettet og sosiale medier.
- Munnbind og masker er ikke spesielt nyttige.
- Vennligst ikke spre ubekreftet informasjon.
- Ta vare på din familie, venner og naboer som har karantene eller av andre årsaker er isolert fra storsamfunnet.
- Hvis du er bekymret, ring din lokale legevakt eller ring FHI's/ Helsedirektoratets informasjonstelefon 815 55 015.

LA OSS TA VÅRE FORHOLDSREGLER OG GJØRE DU'A FOR ET TRYGT NORGE

Samarbeidspartner:
MCB
The Muslim Council of Britain

Denne plakaten er tilgjengelig på www.irn.no
For mer informasjon, vennligst send e-post: post@irn.no

Utarbeidet av:
IRN

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway



The Islamic Council of Norway

In the beginning of April, the Islamic Council of Norway launched online videos in different languages.

- The videos were addressed to “Norwegian Muslims” and included references to the Hadith.
- The videos “thus” encouraged listeners to obey the recommendations of the public authorities, of which they repeated key points.



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The Islamic Council of Norway

Also in the beginning of April, the Islamic Council of Norway cooperated with the civil society organisation Imdad Relief Foundation to produce and print information booklets in nine different languages. The booklets were published online and distributed in Oslo in mid-April.

- The booklets contained two Ayah and summarised key points of Norwegian authorities' recommendations. The Ayah and the recommendations were not on the same pages of the booklet.
- Neither the booklets nor the videos mentioned that the authorities' information services or that the authorities were publishing information in the same languages.



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The Islamic Council of Norway

We can draw the following conclusions about the Islamic Council of Norway's covid-19 response:

- The Islamic Council of Norway reacted early and swiftly.
- The Islamic Council of Norway interpreted and summarised Norwegian authorities' information, in some of their material giving it theological justification and legitimacy.
- The Islamic Council of Norway's covid-19 response does not fit the model of “religious organisations as public space”.

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The role of religious organisations

The government acted based on an understanding of civil society organisations, some of them Christian organisations, “as public space”. They granted funding to six organisations and then announced a broader call for funding.

The Islamic Council of Norway and other “immigrant organisations” were not granted support in the first round, even though they were already responding to the coronavirus.

- This does not necessarily reflect a lack of trust or even a conscious choice, but it does reflect the relative power and position of different civil society organisations, including different religious organisations.
- To some of us, this brings memories of the 2015 funding scheme for dialogue and “counter-radicalization” initiatives.

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

The role of religious organisations

The Islamic Council of Norway's response to the coronavirus provides an alternative model of religious organisations' social role.

- The Islamic Council of Norway is not merely a channel for information from Norwegian authorities; the Council interprets the information and provides theological justification and legitimacy.
- Working together with the Muslim Council of Britain, the Islamic Council of Norway is embedded in a transnational/global Islamic public, as well as within the Norwegian national public.

Covid-19 and immigrants in Norway

The role of religious organisations

This presentation reflects how different ideals of the religious and the secular, and of the national and the transnational, coexist in Norway.

The seemingly simple question of whose coronavirus information campaigns to fund raises bigger questions of governing religion in secular states, and even of the boundaries between the secular and the religious.

These seemingly abstract questions become relevant in the present situation. At the same time, the present situation can provide empirical material to analyse the questions.

References



Contact Bjørn Hallstein for a paper version with references.

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