

# OSLO MONITOR 2.0



**BEVEG  
OSLO**

*ANALYSIS that sets the  
AGENDA and creates an  
ARENA.*



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BEVEG OSLO, 2024

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

When Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke, quotes the prophet Isaiah saying that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and announce freedom and liberation (Luke 4:18), it is a declaration of purpose. That the Kingdom of God has come near in this way is a message and a mission the Church has been entrusted with—to steward and share wherever it is present. It is both radical and liberating—a responsibility and an opportunity.

The question the Church must always ask itself is: when we carry such groundbreaking news, how are we stewarding it? Are we proclaiming freedom for captives? Are we binding up the brokenhearted? How are we serving as instruments of liberation and relief in the society of which we are a part? To do this, we need, among other things, knowledge of who we are, what we do, and a reality check on what we are engaged in.

When we present the "Oslo Monitor 2.0," it is with the aim of shedding light on this by informing, engaging, and challenging the churches—towards focused efforts and effective collaborations. It is also our hope that authorities, organizations, and the business sector may gain insight into what the churches are doing and what they care about, and that this can raise awareness that the diversity of churches is part of an ecosystem striving for a better city for those who, in various ways, are marginalized.

In addition, we present updated figures on active members and church attendance, as well as other updates compared to our previous report, Oslo Monitor 1.0 from 2018.

Finally, we offer some recommendations based on our findings. We have focused on being as concrete as possible and highlighted the need for certain priorities. This does not mean that the diversity of commitments the churches already have should be reduced, but that a clear, shared agenda should lead to increased efforts—and above all, sustainable collaboration in these areas.

We would like to thank all the churches that participated in our survey, both online and by phone. This was essential for this report and provided us with valuable insight.

We extend a big thank you to Myrth Vaage, Christian Vaage, and Sylvio Oterhals Carvalho for their crucial contributions to the structure, statistical quality assurance, and design of the report. Thanks also to Beveg Oslo staff members Emily Gabrielsen and Kjell Martin Myhr for their work on the report along the way.

We hope and believe this can be an important and useful tool for churches, organizations, and others who want Oslo to become an even better city to live in.

Happy reading!

October 2024 – Beveg Oslo



David Bratlie, Project Manger

# 2. SUMMARY

Oslo Monitor 2.0 is Beveg Oslo's analysis of the city's

## **SPIRITUAL SITUATION, SOCIAL PAIN, AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES**

The purpose is to inform, engage, and challenge the churches towards targeted and coordinated efforts through a shared agenda.

In this year's report, we have used a wide range of sources, distributed a dedicated survey to the churches, and placed the main focus on Oslo's social pain among children and youth.

### **1. SPIRITUAL SITUATION** – a trend MAY have turned.

- For the first time since the 1980s, there is an increase in the number of people who believe in God.
- The number of active church members is rising slightly: up by ~1,500 since 2017, although the percentage of the population remains stable at 4.8%, reflecting population growth.
- Half of the churches do not have youth ministries, and only a few have large ones, but the climate of collaboration among churches is strong.

*Multiple surveys confirm that a long-standing downward trend for churches may have reversed. Churches across the spectrum should be attentive to the renewed interest in faith and use the strong collaborative environment to strengthen youth work in the city.*

## 2. SOCIAL PAIN – is the church part of the solution?

Groups with the greatest humanitarian needs are not being reached by the welfare state's safety net. The main issue is not a lack of money, but rather poor coordination of resources.

There are strong reasons to prioritize children and youth. Regarding this group, we observe that:

- 15.2% of all children in Oslo grow up in persistent poverty in a divided city; while in the borough of Ullern the rate is 3.6%, it is as high as 35.5% in Sagene. The consequences include health problems, social exclusion, rootlessness—and vulnerability to recruitment into criminal activity.
- 24% of all children experience parental separation—and they are more affected than their parents tend to realize.
- Loneliness has increased markedly among young adults living alone—even in the years before the pandemic.

Most churches are involved in social work and collectively contribute over 117 full-time equivalent volunteer years to this area. However:

- Only 8% of active church members, in total, are involved in some form of social or diaconal volunteer work for about 1.1 hours per week.
- The majority of churches either already have, or desire, partnerships in this area.

*Churches have untapped potential to mobilize volunteers for social work in the city. Coordinated and lasting partnerships with experienced actors could help unlock this potential—provided that the churches prioritize this work.*

### 3. CULTURAL CHALLENGES – systemic deficiencies

- Low-income families are being exploited in the housing market, resulting in children growing up in unworthy living conditions. There is insufficient oversight of landlords, and the structure of the housing benefit system makes families vulnerable.
- Employment and housing training are two key tools in breaking negative spirals for youth, but the rules for housing support for those under 18 should be relaxed.

*Churches are encouraged to work alongside businesses and organizations to offer non-commercial rental housing at reasonable prices for low-income families, as well as to support job training opportunities.*

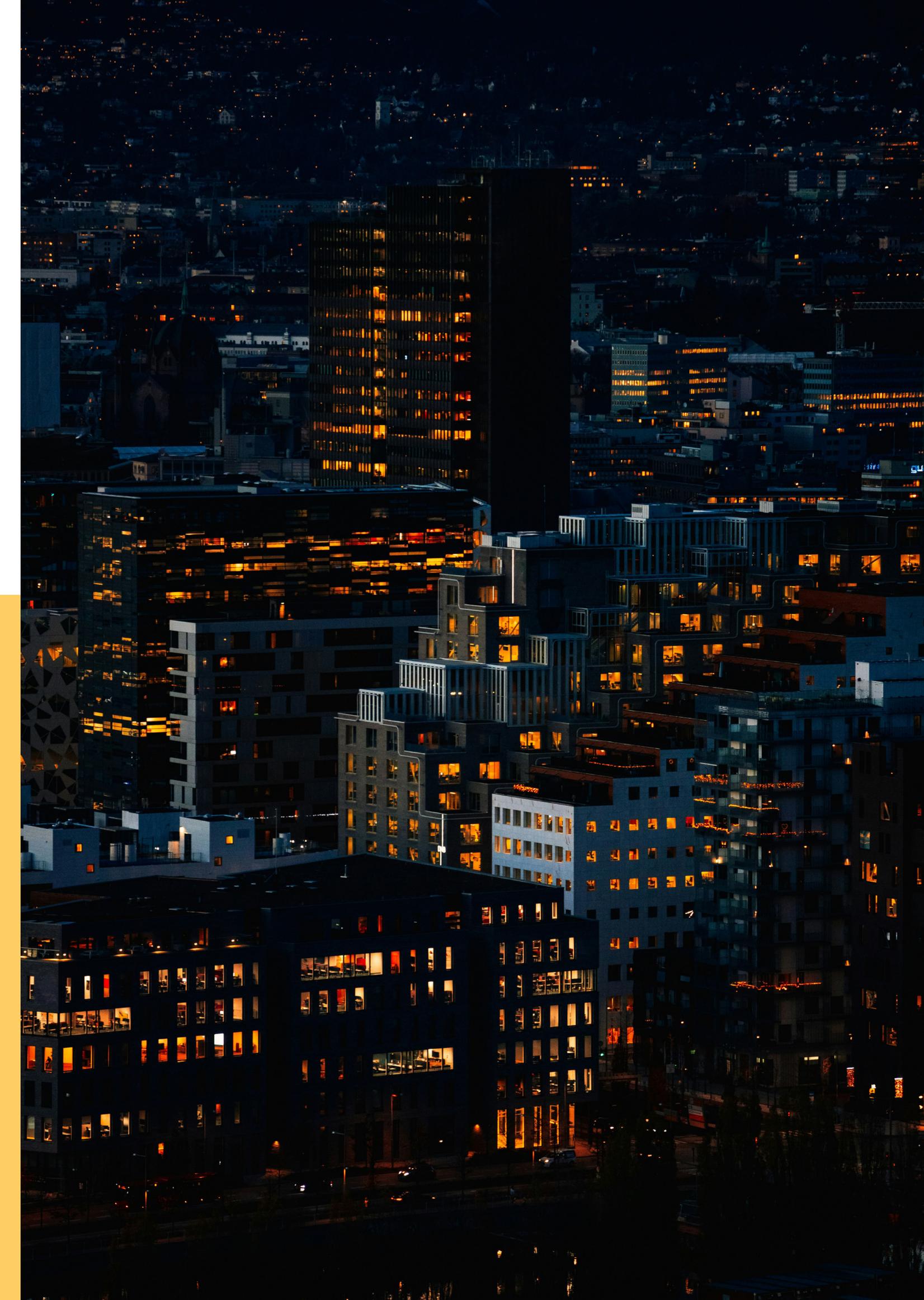
### RECOMMENDATIONS

*We recommend that churches continue to develop the initiatives they already have. In addition, we urge them to **unlock further potential** by prioritizing and implementing initiatives in collaboration with one another and with relevant organizations to:*

- *Offer free and inclusive activities for children and youth in their local communities, with a special focus on young boys in East Oslo.*
- *Provide guidance and support to families, with particular emphasis on labor rights, language learning, digital skills, and housing opportunities.*
- *Develop tools and meeting spaces that can help identify and prevent loneliness among young adults.*

**Businesses and organizations** are encouraged to:

- *Partner with churches to facilitate job training opportunities.*
- *Enable and mobilize people within churches to offer non-commercial rental housing at affordable rates, especially targeting low-income families.*



# 3. BACKGROUND

This report is a follow-up to Oslo Monitor 1.0, which was published by the think tank Skaperkraft in January 2018, commissioned by what was then called "Beveg Byen" ("Move the City"). The intention was to regularly update this study, but the necessary resources and timing have not aligned—until now. This time, the association Beveg Oslo has both initiated and carried out the work on this report.

## 3.1 BEVEG BYEN, A 3-PART FOCUS

"Beveg Byen" as a concept is inspired by the CityChangers Movement, an international network that originated from the church network Doxa Deo in South Africa and now includes churches from diverse contexts around the world. The movement's founder, Alan Platt, has visited Oslo multiple times and has inspired many churches through our shared platforms. The movement's core desire is to see the city one is a part of transformed for the better—on all levels. To clarify what this means, three primary areas of focus have been defined where challenges should be addressed: *"Spiritual lostness, social pain, cultural brokenness"*

"Beveg Byen" is a way of applying these principles in a Norwegian context without directly affiliating with the international network. The fundamental goal is to view all of life and society as relevant to the Christian life, and therefore to the Church. While this may seem obvious to many, we believe this awareness could be significantly strengthened—both within the churches and in society at large.

In Norway, unlike in South Africa, there is a higher level of trust in authorities and a general sense of material well-being. Therefore, the three concepts we want to bring awareness to, and which will be explored in this report, are translated into a Norwegian context as:

- Spiritual situation
- Social pain
- Cultural challenges

## **3.2 BEVEG OSLO'S MANDATE**

Beveg Oslo is owned by 8 churches in Oslo and was established in 2019 to fulfill the desire for a knowledge-based common platform for the city's churches. The mandate is to conduct ANALYSIS in the three focus areas, in order to establish a shared AGENDA that can stimulate various actions through local churches and joint ARENAS. This report represents Beveg Oslo's analysis.

## **3.3 FOLLOW-UP TO OSLO MONITOR 1.0**

### **3.3.1 Oslo Monitor 2.0 addresses areas within spiritual situation and social pain**

Oslo Monitor 1.0 (OM 1.0) from 2018 presented several key findings and areas for follow-up. The points identified for monitoring in the following years were:

#### 1. Spiritual Situation

- *Number of active churchgoers in the city*
- *Number of people attending worship services*
- *Number of people identifying as "personal Christians"*

These figures, along with further reflections, are provided in the chapter "Analysis – Spiritual Situation."

#### 2. Social Pain

- *Proportion of the population feeling lonely*
- *Proportion of children growing up in persistent low income at the borough level*
- *Proportion of youth dropping out of school*
- *Proportion of children under 18 experiencing parental separation*

Developments in these areas since the last report are presented in the chapter "Analysis – Social Pain." These are contextualized within a more in-depth analysis of social pain, and yield some interesting findings that confirm the main emphasis of the report and offer a more nuanced picture of trends in some areas.

### 3 Cultural Challenges

- *The size of the black (informal) economy in Norway*
- *Funding of the volunteer sector*

These areas were not prioritized for further follow-up in this round. The challenges and awareness raised in OM 1.0 therefore still stand. For the issue of the black economy, the focus is primarily on changing attitudes and lowering the threshold for people to speak out against it. In terms of funding for religious and social work, it was noted that the share financed through the business sector is disproportionately low, and this challenge remains.

#### **3.3.2 Two areas with clear progress since OM 1.0; the challenge of loneliness remains**

OM 1.0 encouraged action across 12 relatively broad areas, often framed in terms such as “strengthen” and “map out.” One of its main recommendations was to collaborate with actors already active in these areas rather than starting entirely new projects. This aligns with the vision of Beveg Oslo—to act as a connector rather than a project initiator.

There are two specific areas where initiatives have been implemented and where we see movement resulting from increased collaboration:

#### **1. “Establish a common strategy for church planting and evangelism/ outreach over the next 15–20 years.”**

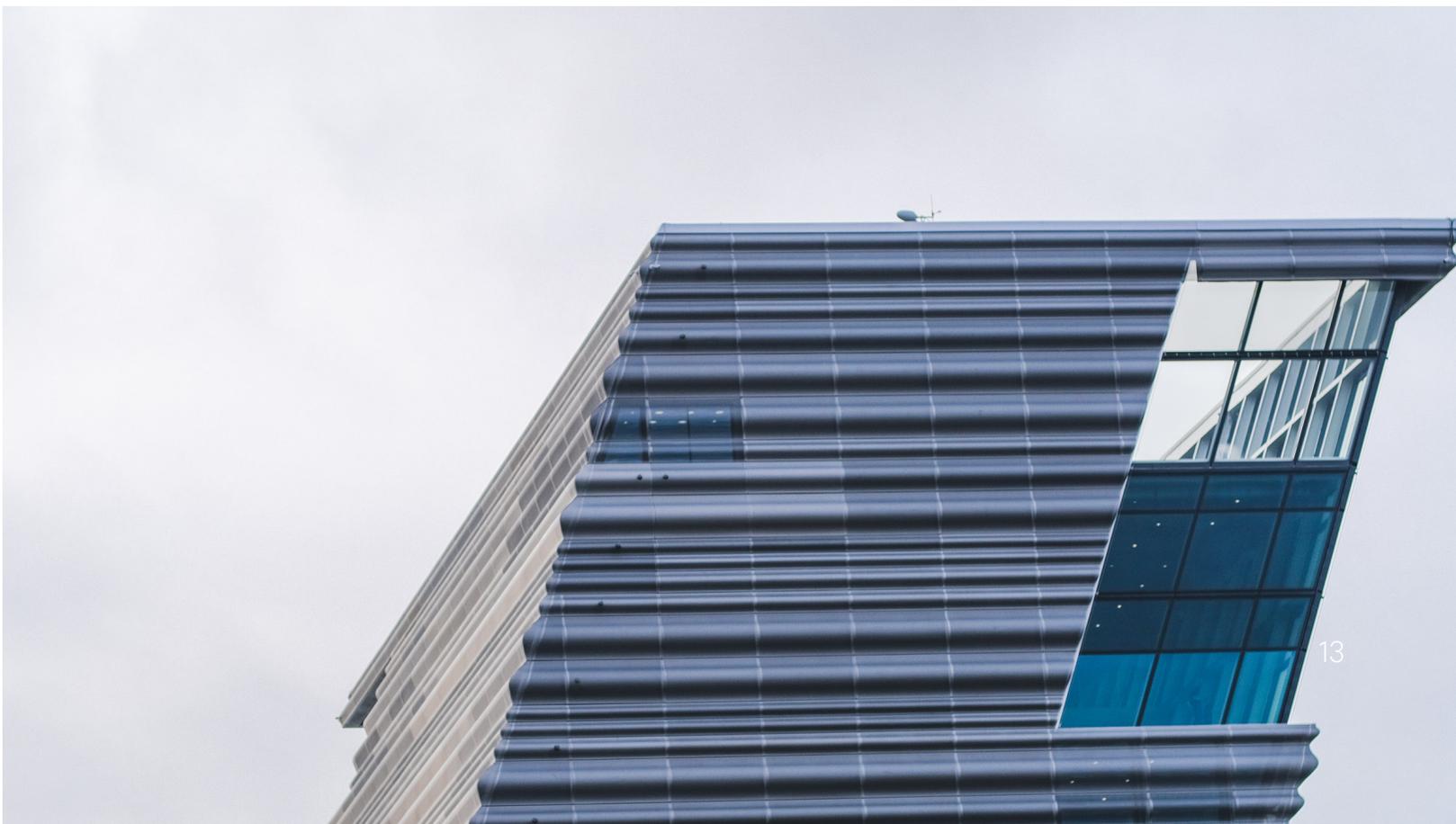
- **Sendt Norge** is an interchurch network that inspires and equips for church planting. Their 2021 report<sup>1</sup> provides a good overview of development as well as insights from those involved in planting churches. It complements this report with regard to developments in Oslo. The network facilitated by Sendt Norge is recommended for those wishing to plant churches in the city.
- **Håp for Oslo** (Hope for Oslo) is an interchurch initiative for evangelism in today’s urban culture, established after Beveg Oslo brought churches together for inspiration and practical learning based on the work of Steiger International<sup>2</sup>. Håp for Oslo runs annual campaigns and a monthly joint outreach on Friday nights. It appears to be a sustainable and unifying effort anchored in healthy church stewardship, and we encourage continued support for this initiative.

## 2. ***“Offer information and training about being a foster home in the churches.”***

During Beveg Oslo’s first year, significant efforts were made in this area, including a tailored awareness campaign led by then-director Fred Håberg. This resulted in concrete outcomes and positive dialogue with government authorities. However, this remains a major task that Beveg Oslo cannot carry forward as an active implementer. Still, there is reason to believe this specific initiative increased church awareness of the urgent need to support vulnerable youth in Oslo through various practical means. Although becoming a foster home is a major step, several churches have mobilized to serve as respite homes or host families.

OM 1.0 also included several recommendations related to loneliness. However, no specific or binding plan has since been implemented to “map” or “strengthen” efforts against loneliness among churches in Oslo. This represents a concrete challenge arising from this year’s analysis (see section 7.3.4).

In other words, we must become aware of what sets the agenda. As part of the ecosystem working for a better city for all, we operate with limited resources—but through careful analysis, we can focus our efforts on something unifying, and from that create momentum. That is the goal of Oslo Monitor 2.0



# 4. Delimitations

In this analysis, we have the following delimitations and clarifications:

**4.1. SPIRITUAL SITUATION** - In this context, the spiritual situation refers to Norwegians' belief in God, their relationship to the Christian faith, and church-related activity in Oslo. This report does not delve into the situation for other religions or faith communities beyond presenting statistics on membership in religious communities in Oslo.

**4.2 SOCIAL PAIN** - This has been our priority area in the analytical work. In our context, social pain highlights:

- Experienced and measurable challenges and needs among specific groups, as expressed by key stakeholders in the field
- Challenges described by those who feel them most acutely in their everyday lives
- The churches' responses, attitudes, and activities in relation to social pain

After presenting the overall landscape of challenges facing different groups in Oslo, we made a justified prioritization by focusing on children and youth, and on areas where voluntary organizations in general—and churches in particular—are most likely to be able to make a meaningful impact. The recommendations for churches in this report are thus shaped by this focus.

**4.3 CULTURAL CHALLENGES** - These are defined as systemic and structural challenges in society. This area has not been prioritized as a main entry point for the issues addressed in this report. However, we do draw some connections between challenges in the social sphere and those that extend into systemic issues. These are challenges that relate to the business sector and other actors that, in various ways, are part of Oslo's church landscape.

# 5. Methodology

## 5.1 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of this report is to obtain the best possible picture of the current situation in Oslo from a church perspective. We have chosen to focus on the two main areas: Spiritual Situation and Social Pain. Throughout the work, we have systematically alternated between an external and internal perspective. This can be summarized as follows:

### ***Spiritual Situation***

- External – Faith in the general population
- Internal – Participation in and activity within the churches

### ***Social Pain***

- External – Needs in the population
- Internal – Work done or initiated from, or support provided by, the churches

### ***Cultural Challenges:***

- External – Systemic issues in society that result in social pain

For the external perspective, we have relied exclusively on secondary sources. There is a wealth of high-quality reports and statistical data that address the themes we have focused on. Oslo Monitor 1.0 identified several areas that were to be followed up, and these formed a natural starting point. In these areas, we were able to compare and observe developments over time, with Statistics Norway (SSB) being the primary source.

Additionally, we have referred to more recent in-depth analyses. For the spiritual condition, we used Norsk Monitor (Ipsos), which examines trends in Norwegians' belief in God. Regarding social pain, we referred to the Red Cross report "Sosial Puls", which, based on research from SSB, identifies the groups in Norway with the greatest humanitarian needs and provides a normative rationale for prioritization.

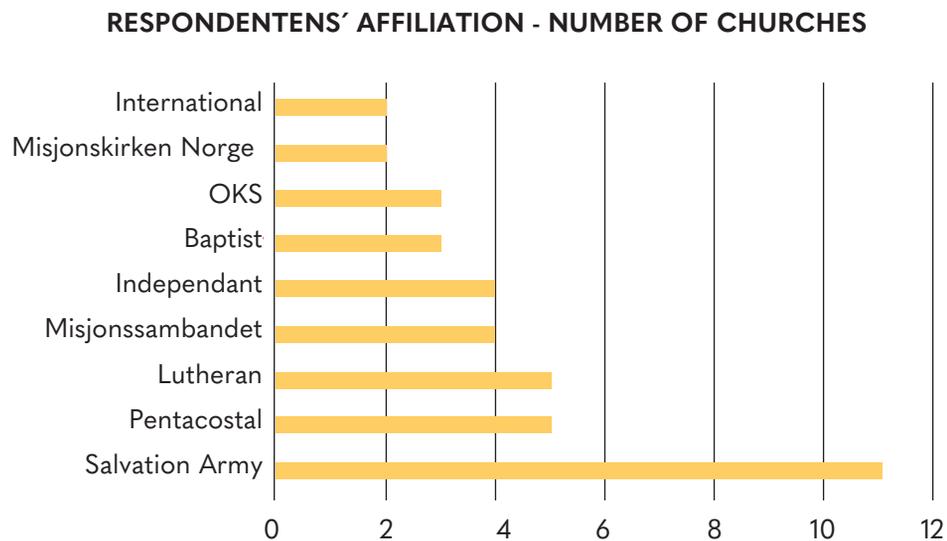
Furthermore, key contributions came from Hans Magnus Gjerlaug, Head of the Crime Prevention Section in the East Oslo Police District, and Dag Jacobsen, Director of the Maritastiftelsen. Other sources included Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI), Bufdir (Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs), Ungdata, and The Salvation Army. We also included relevant quotations from media outlets such as Vårt Land, VG, and Avisa Oslo.

For the internal perspective, our primary source was our own survey directed at churches and congregations in Oslo. This included direct phone outreach to 60 churches, as well as responses from 39 churches to a more detailed online survey conducted in spring 2023. The survey gathered information such as membership numbers, number of active participants, and demographic composition. It also inquired about the scope of youth work and social/diaconal activities, as well as the level of collaboration and interest in further cooperation. We also received assistance from Norwegian Christian Council through Lemma Desta, advisor for migration and multicultural work, who provided an overview of immigrant churches. Additionally, Ann-Magrit Austenå, Assistant Director of Church Affairs, contributed regarding source data for the Church of Norway.

## 5.2 BEVEG OSLO'S SURVEY

### 5.2.1 Distribution, Response, and Attrition

The survey was distributed directly to 97 churches, as well as to all Salvation Army departments via their central office, in February 2024. We received responses from 46 churches, of which 7 did not complete the survey. Therefore, our analysis is based on 39 completed responses (40%). These responses are distributed across the following church affiliations/denominations:



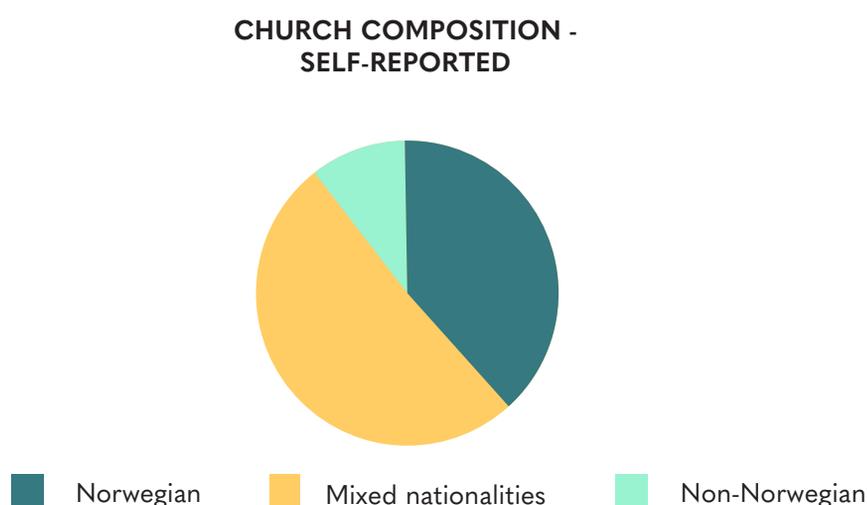
There is a clear majority of respondents from The Salvation Army, which we have taken into account in the weighting of the analysis where appropriate. This is clearly indicated where relevant.

By agreement with the office of the Church Warden, we did not send this survey to the congregations of the **Church of Norway**. Instead, we have used comprehensive Statistics Norway (SSB) data on church attendance and the number of confirmands, along with figures from the annual report of the Oslo Diocesan Council.

### 5.2.2 Composition of Respondents

In the survey, churches were asked how they would characterize themselves in terms of the composition of nationalities and backgrounds.

The responses were distributed as follows:



More than half of the churches describe themselves as communities with mixed nationalities. In comments from this group, it is stated that the majority have a Norwegian background, but that many different nationalities from all over the world are represented overall. It is therefore reasonable to assume that churches have defined this somewhat differently. Whether this indicates a higher degree of integration is not something we can determine based on this data. However, it is an interesting observation and may warrant further investigation in a future report.

### 5.2.3 Basis for Calculating Church Involvement

In the first part of the survey, we asked churches about membership numbers, church attendance, and the number of active participants. The reason for asking about "active" individuals is to establish the most comprehensive basis possible for estimating how many regular participants the Church in Oslo as a whole can account for. The challenge here is that churches approach this differently. The Church of Norway (CoN), as a people's church, focuses on maintaining a presence for the entire population<sup>3</sup>. The Catholic Church serves those attending its daily Masses at any given time. A typical small or medium-sized free church that relies heavily on volunteer work considers those who contribute—whether to a greater or lesser extent—and who attend services regularly, as its core participants. There are also churches that primarily operate through small house groups and place less emphasis on Sunday services. Therefore, we asked churches to define and explain how they arrived at their count of active participants. The guiding criteria provided were that an active person is someone who: "attends a church service at least once a month, is part of a small group, involved in ministry, or similar."

Another important reason for using this definition is that it allows for direct comparison with data from the Oslo Monitor 1.0, where a similar methodology was used. For congregations of the Church of Norway, the Oslo Monitor 1.0, in agreement with the Church Warden, used a calculation basis of 2× the average church service attendance to estimate the number of regular attendees. This was based on figures from so-called "counting weeks." More accurate data has since become available through Statistics Norway (SSB) tables starting from 2015. These figures indicate a degree of underreporting of the number of active participants in the Church of Norway in OM 1. Therefore, in this report, we have used a calculation method that aims to provide the most plausible comparison with the 2017 figures, while also reflecting trends identified in our own survey.

### 5.2.4 Basis for Calculating Social Work and Diaconal Activity

In the second part of the survey, our main focus was on social work. We asked about the extent of both volunteer and paid involvement. In this section, we accounted for the different approaches of churches by distinguishing in the questions between social work aimed at community needs, internal church support and support of work outside Oslo/internationally.

For a church whose profile and geographical location position it to primarily serve its immediate neighborhood, the concept of "internal diakonia" may feel less relevant. In contrast, for a church with a broad membership—people of all ages and social backgrounds from across the city—it may make more sense. By distinguishing these categories in our survey, we were able to capture varying perspectives while maintaining the ability to compare results. The opportunity for additional comments was important here, as these provided further insight.

### 5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In preparing the report, we formulated the following key research questions:

#### **Spiritual Situation;**

**RQ1:** Several signals from churches suggest a renewed interest in the Christian faith. *Is there evidence to suggest that a long-term decline in belief and church participation has reversed?*

**RQ2:** Many have long expressed concern about retaining young people who grow up in the church. *What does the current situation look like regarding youth ministry in churches, and is there a basis for increased collaboration?*

#### **Social Pain;**

**RQ3:** There is a growing call for more support and funding for various population groups. *Which groups have the greatest needs—and what are those needs?*

**RQ4:** *Is there a basis for giving particular priority to children and youth?*

**RQ5:** There has been extensive discussion of a loneliness epidemic. *Are we facing a loneliness epidemic, and are there specific groups that stand out?*

**RQ6:** The church has always been engaged in diakonia. *In what ways and to what extent are churches involved in outward-facing social work, and is it sustainable and targeted?*



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# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## SPIRITUAL SITUATION

**RQ 1** - *Is there evidence to suggest that a long-term decline in belief and church participation has reversed?*

**RQ 2** - *What does the current situation look like regarding youth ministry in churches, and is there a basis for increased collaboration?*

## SOCIAL PAIN

**RQ 3** - *Which groups have the greatest needs—and what are those needs?*

**RQ 4** - *Is there a basis for giving particular priority to children and youth?*

**RQ 5** - *Are we facing a loneliness epidemic, and are there specific groups that stand out?*

**RQ 6** - *In what ways and to what extent are churches involved in outward-facing social work, and is it sustainable and targeted?*

# 6. Analysis - Spiritual Situation

## 6.1 RQ 1: IS THERE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT A LONGTERM DECLINE IN FAITH AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE HAS REVERSED?

### 6.1.1 Belief in God in the Population

The proportion of Norwegians who say they believe in God has steadily declined over the past 40 years. Norsk Monitor(Ipsos) has, every other year since 1985, asked a representative sample of Norwegians this question. In the first survey in 1985, 52% answered “yes.” In 2024, that number is 28%. However, what is particularly interesting is the recent development. For the first time since the survey began, several indicators suggest that this downward trend may have halted—or even reversed. John Spilling, senior consultant at Ipsos and responsible for Norsk Monitor, said the following to Vårt Land on March 21, 2024:

*“It’s clear that some trends have been broken. The decline in the proportion who say they believe in God has stopped, and may even have increased somewhat. The other trend is trust in the Church. After declining for a while, that has now risen quite significantly over the last two years (...)”<sup>4</sup>*

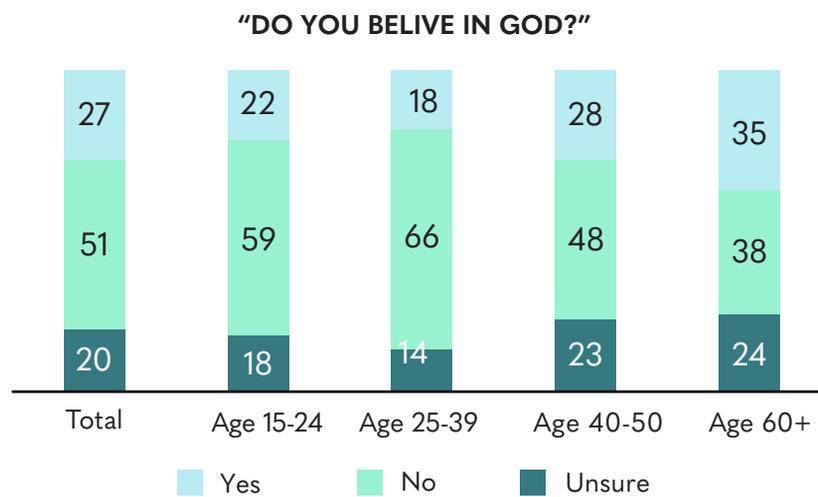
One might speculate whether this reported belief in God could be influenced by an increase in Muslim faith within the population. However, this does not appear to be relevant here, as only 1% of respondents in the survey reported a preference for the Muslim faith tradition.

Another recurring question in these surveys is whether one identifies as a “personal Christian.” In 2024, 21% answered affirmatively—exactly the same percentage as in 1985. **It is striking that the number of personal Christians has remained stable for nearly 40 years**, even as the number of people who say they believe in God has decreased. These figures are now converging. Spilling further states to Vårt Land:

*“Now it’s more the case that if you believe in God, then you are also a personal Christian. Perhaps this concept was seen as more binding in 1985 than it is today (...)”*

Even though the term “personal Christian” is debated and has been interpreted in various ways over the years, it still suggests a connection between Christian faith and one’s personal life. In other words, about 1 in 5 Norwegians still in some way associate Christian faith with their personal identity.

It is also interesting to look at the age distribution of responses to these questions. In the 2022 survey, the distribution was as follows:



Source: Ipsos' Norsk Monitor 2021/22. Norsk Monitor is a social survey conducted by Ipsos every other year since 1985. Approximately 4,000 interviews are conducted with members of the general population in each round.

Read more at [www.ipsos.no](http://www.ipsos.no).



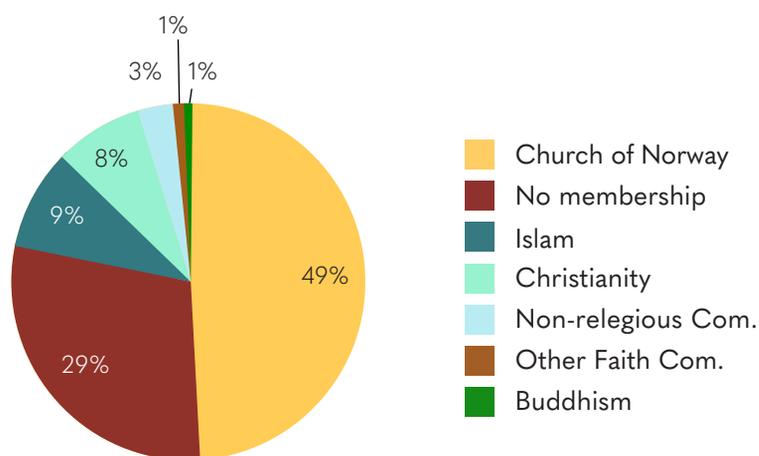
It is not unexpected that the oldest age group shows the highest level of belief in God. However, it is interesting to note the numbers for the 15–24 age group compared to the 25–39 age group, where the younger group shows slightly higher levels of belief. The difference is minimal, but it is noteworthy in light of the 2024 figures.

### 6.1.2 Faith and Life Stance Communities in Oslo - Christian Denominations see membership growth

The most up-to-date overview of the situation for faith and life stance communities in Oslo can be found in the report "Believe It or Not" from the Oslo Municipality's Faith and Life Stance Committee, published in 2020 <sup>5</sup>. In addition to presenting a political program for the coming years in this area, it provides an overview of the membership numbers across all religious groups.

The figure below shows that while approximately half of the population in 2020 were members of the Church of Norway (DNK), 8% were members of other Christian denominations. This is roughly the same proportion as those belonging to Muslim communities. Consequently, a minority of 29% are not members of any faith community.

**ALL RESIDENTS IN OSLO DISTRIBUTED BY FAITH AND LIFE STANCE MEMBERSHIP**



If we supplement these findings with data from Statistics Norway (SSB), it shows that while membership in the Church of Norway (DNK) is declining (from a high starting point), the number of members in other faith communities, including Christian ones, is increasing slightly.

Nationwide, membership in Christian denominations outside DNK has seen a steady increase from 5.7% to 6.8% between 2015 and 2024 (based on registered claims for government subsidies)<sup>6</sup>. There is otherwise little statistical data available on this group, and with our survey, we aim to provide a broader picture of affiliation and activity within the Christian denominations.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/13\\_69945-1590647903/Tjenester%20og%20tilbud/Politikk%20og%20administrasjon/Politikk/Byrådet/For%20pressen/Pressemeldinger/Rapport%20Tro%20det%20eller%20ei.%20Fremtidens%20tros-%20og%20livssynpolitikk%20i%20Oslo.pdf](https://www.oslo.kommune.no/getfile.php/13_69945-1590647903/Tjenester%20og%20tilbud/Politikk%20og%20administrasjon/Politikk/Byrådet/For%20pressen/Pressemeldinger/Rapport%20Tro%20det%20eller%20ei.%20Fremtidens%20tros-%20og%20livssynpolitikk%20i%20Oslo.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/06326/tableViewLayout1/>

### 6.1.3 Reported Trends in Christian Denominations

Other contributing trends include direct experiences shared by church leaders from a broad range of churches and congregations across the country, pointing to a growing openness and interest in church and faith:<sup>7</sup>

- Several denominations in the Free Church segment report more young people attending services, more visitors without prior church background, and increased interest in theology and spiritual deepening (this is also supported by the Student Survey from 2024 by "Laget")<sup>8</sup>
- A growing share of the new members joining the Church of Norway is young people.<sup>9</sup>
- Record attendance is being reported at youth camps and festivals.<sup>10</sup>

### 6.1.4 Church Attendance – Stable, Not Set Back After the Pandemic

In this section, we refer to survey responses from churches outside CoN in Oslo, specifically concerning the number of active members and worship attendance.

For CoN, we have used service attendance figures from Statistics Norway (SSB) and the Oslo Diocesan Council's annual report for 2023.

Through a round of phone calls to 60 churches outside CoN in Oslo that did not participate in the survey, we primarily gathered data on active members.

#### Church Participation

As described in the methodology chapter, we allowed the churches we contacted to define the number of active members themselves based on the guiding criterion: "attends worship service at least once a month, participates in small groups, serves in the congregation, etc."

For DNK, we used weekly worship attendance data and applied the same method as in OM 1, slightly modified with more accessible data from SSB.<sup>11 12 13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://nkss.no/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Student-report-1.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vl.no/religion/2024/06/27/flere-unge-melder-seg-inn-i-kirka/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.vl.no/religion/2024/04/10/pameldingene-renner-inn-til-kristen-ungdomsleir-na-har-de-satt-ny-rekord/>

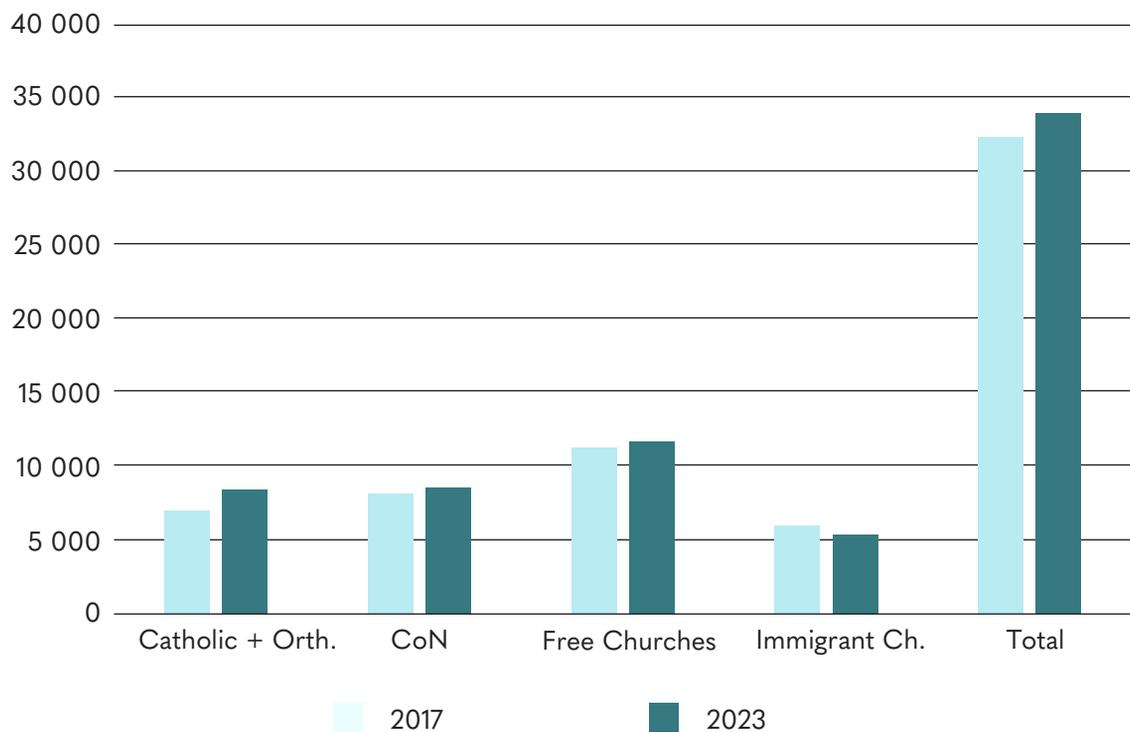
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/12026/tableViewLayout1/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/11963/tableViewLayout1/>

<sup>13</sup> In 2017, there was an average of 99 people per service in DNK churches in Oslo (verified by SSB). The average number of active members in CoN congregations was, in collaboration with the then church administrator in Oslo, calculated in OM 1 as 184 active members spread across 44 churches. The actual average of 99 attendees per service and the calculated average of 184 active members per church gives a ratio of 1.86. Since one of the criteria in this part of the report is comparison with 2017 data, the most accurate method is to apply the ratio of 1.86 when calculating active members in 2023.

In this way, we have a direct basis for comparison from OM 1. Here are the figures on active church members in Oslo, comparing 2017 and 2023:

**ACTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS – NUMBERS IN 2017/2023:**



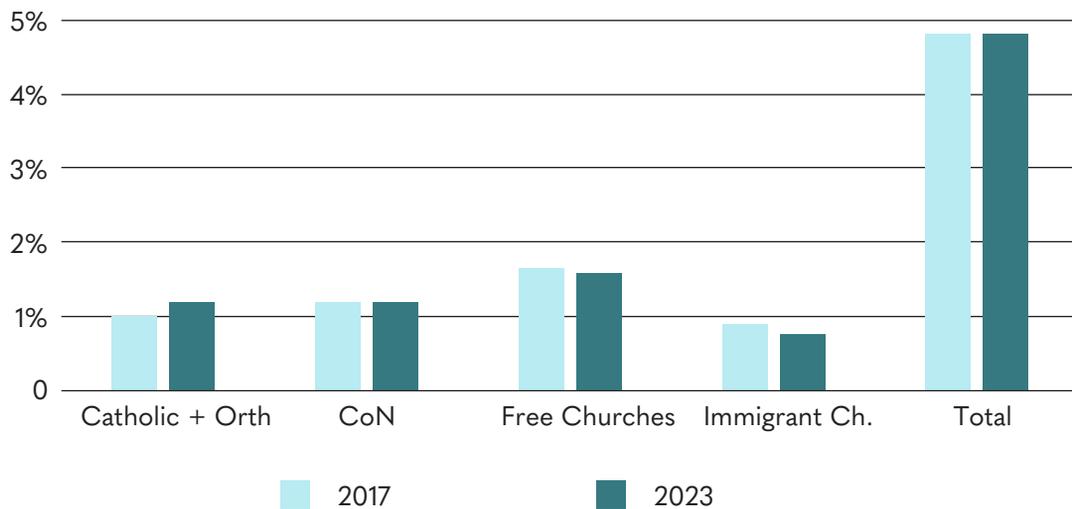
The number of active members in 2023, based on the survey, is 33,806 compared to 32,272 in 2017.

The calculated figure for the Church of Norway (DNK) is 8,458 in 2023 compared to 8,068 in 2017<sup>14</sup>. We see that there has been a slight nominal increase in the number of active members over the past 6 years. The figures are uncertain enough that we cannot conclude there has been an increase based on this. However, the number of active church members has not decreased since 2017, even after the pandemic.

An important point made in the presentation of the figures in OM 1 was to continue monitoring whether the number of active members keeps pace with population growth. If we look at the percentage of the population, it looks like this:

<sup>14</sup> Calculation (see footnote 13): An average of 90 participants at 51 weekly worship services (Sundays and holidays) × 1.86 = 8,458. This also suggests a certain degree of underreporting of active members in 2017, given more precise figures available retrospectively.

### ACTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS – % OF THE POPULATION IN 2017/2023:



Here we see that with a population growth of almost 6% since the last survey, the percentage remains the same—4.8% of the population. We see that the number of active Catholics has increased, while there has been a slight decline in the number of active members in immigrant churches.

*The number of active churchgoers has remained stable in proportion to the population since the last measurement in 2017.*

### Worship Attendance

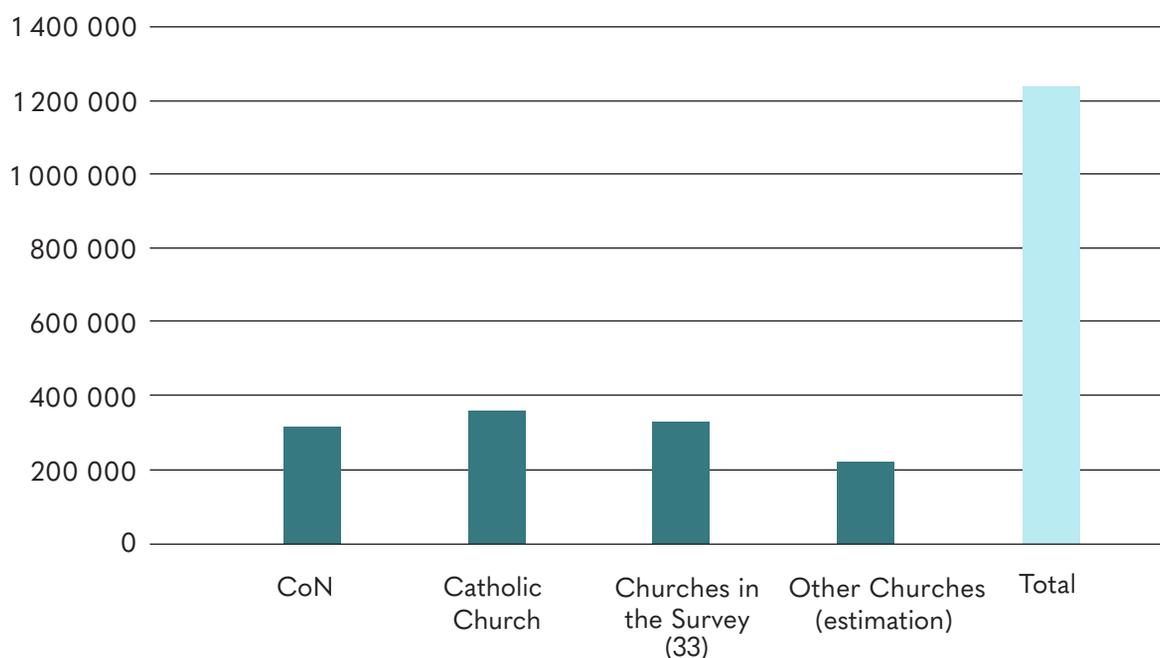
The numbers for worship attendance illuminate activity from a different perspective. They do not indicate the number of unique individuals, but rather how many people attended each service. Here we do not have directly comparable figures from 2017 from our own surveys, but we can provide a solid overview for 2023.

In the survey, churches that held regular services (N=33 reported how many people attended on average per service and how many services they held per month. This yielded a total of 4,161 worship attendees per week across the 33 churches. That equates to an annual worship attendance of 216,388.

If we estimate that the respondents represent one-third of the churches in Oslo outside the Church of Norway and the Catholic Church, we can calculate attendance using the median of the 33 respondents and multiply by 2 to get a realistic comparable figure for the remaining churches. The calculated number of annual worship attendances for churches outside CoN and CC in Oslo is thus 549,100.

The Church of Norway, for its part, reported an exact number of 320,034 annual worship attendances in Oslo (excluding the deaneries of Asker and Bærum)<sup>15</sup> across 3,890 services in total<sup>16</sup>. The Catholic Church reports 7,000 weekly attendees, totaling 364,000 visits in 2023. This gives a well-founded estimate of 1,233,134 annual worship attendances in Oslo.

Thus, the distribution between the largest communities, the survey, and the estimate from the remaining churches is as follows:

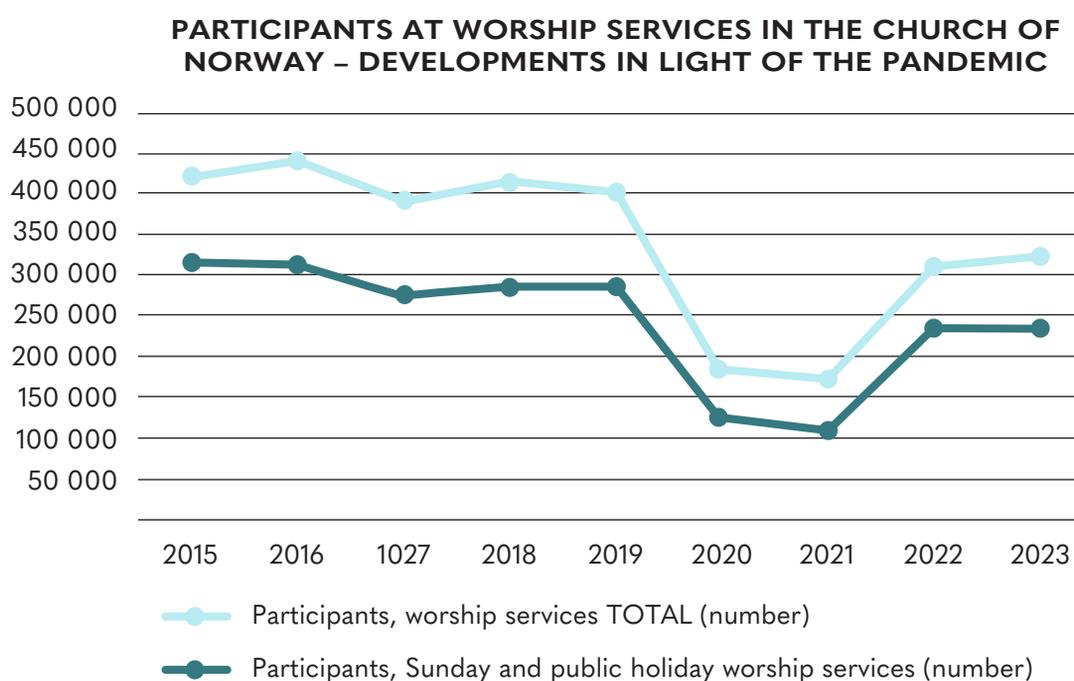


A direct comparison between active members and total worship attendance has its weaknesses, but it can still be meaningful to compare across church communities with different demographics and perspectives on the importance of worship attendance.

*In other words, we see that the ratios between these groups are recognizable when compared with the ratios for active members.*

## Development in Light of the Pandemic

A significant factor in the development over the past six years has been the impact of the pandemic on church activity. The most precise way to observe this development is through Statistics Norway (SSB) data for the Church of Norway for each year since 2015<sup>17</sup>:



An interesting observation is that between 2016 and 2019, the long-term decline in church attendance in Oslo leveled off, before the pandemic hit in 2020. The year 2023 was the first normal year since 2019. Attendance numbers have not returned to 2019 levels, but it will be interesting to see whether the trend observed in the cultural sector—where a return to normalcy is taking longer than initially expected—also applies to a central institution like the CoN.

A related point is the question of how the pandemic pause may have affected the number of active participants in other churches in Oslo. Is there still reason to believe that a natural post-COVID rebound had not yet been reached in our 2023 data? This will be one of several factors to monitor in the coming years.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/12026/tableViewLayout1/>

## 6.1.5 CONCLUSION — A LONG-TERM DECLINE MAY HAVE REVERSED

There are several signs suggesting that the long-term decline in Christian faith may have reversed, and that this could be linked to a renewed interest in religion. It is too early to determine whether this is a lasting trend, but it is something churches should remain alert to.

The Beveg Oslo survey of churches does not show unambiguous growth, but there is good reason to believe that there are approximately 1,500 more active participants in churches in 2023 than in 2017. The most notable growth appears to have occurred in the Catholic Church, while there has been a slight decline among immigrant churches. As in society at large, there was a “down period” during the pandemic, and it takes time to return to previous levels.

*Based on this, it is reasonable to claim that the data supports the idea that a long-term downward trend has been reversed, although it is still too early to say whether this growth is permanent.*

It is also worth noting that there remains a gap between the figures from Norsk Monitor and our survey using our specific criteria. Just as in 1985, 21% of Norwegians identify as personally Christian. In Oslo, this corresponds to over 148,000 people. This is something churches should be aware of, while also maintaining focus on serving all the city's residents, regardless of their religious beliefs.

## 6.2 RQ 2: YOUTH IN THE CHURCHES – WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

### 6.2.1 Background

One of the top three stated priority areas among the congregations that participated in the OM 1 survey was children and youth. There has been a general perception that church engagement among youth under 20 is clearly declining, and that it is difficult to create vibrant youth environments in small and medium-sized congregations—especially after confirmation age.

In the aftermath, Beveg Oslo facilitated a learning community across churches and organizations to take a closer look at the challenges congregations were facing in developing youth ministry. A few meetings were held before the pandemic put everything on hold.

In the search for possible root causes, the learning community based their work on a study by the Barna Research Group<sup>18</sup> from the U.S., which found that only 3 in 10 young people who grow up in churches remain active in a congregation into adulthood. The reasons for leaving the church are many, but the study showed that the transitions between different age segments are especially critical.

There has been expressed interest in conducting a similar study in a Norwegian context, but that is a more extensive project than what our survey could accommodate. Nevertheless, recent data from the "Ungdata"<sup>19</sup> and "Ungdata Junior"<sup>20</sup> surveys shed light on this issue. These surveys, conducted among Norwegian school students, confirm that the number of youth regularly participating in some form of "religious organization" activity is halved between lower and upper secondary school. This issue is discussed in Vårt Land on August 16, 2024<sup>21</sup>, highlighting various explanations—both the general decline in social activity among youth and the increasing difficulty churches face in reaching this demographic. This aligns with the challenges reported by churches in recent years.

### 6.2.2 What Has Been Important in Growing Up? Student Responses

The Norwegian Christian Student and School Youth Association (NKSS) has, through its 2024 student survey<sup>22</sup>, provided some insights into what has been significant in the upbringing of students who are now actively involved in church life. The findings suggest that while regular attendance at church and Sunday school has been important, the factors that stand out for this group—compared to those who are less active—are the significance of **camp, Bible reading, and conversations about faith**. This underscores that the value of experiences such as camps and having someone to talk to about faith cannot be overstated. These are important considerations for shaping the youth ministries of tomorrow.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.barna.com>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.ungdata.no/kartside/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://oda.oslomet.no/oda-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/3145148/UngdataJunior2024\\_NasjonaleResultater\\_UU.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://oda.oslomet.no/oda-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/3145148/UngdataJunior2024_NasjonaleResultater_UU.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.vl.no/religion/2024/08/16/halvparten-sluttar-pa-religiose-aktivitetar-etter-ungdomsskulen-dette-trur-anna-naomi-er-arsaka/> <sup>22</sup> <https://nkss.no/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Student-report-1.pdf>

### 6.2.3 Presence and Scope of Youth Work – Highly Variable

Through our survey, we aimed to provide a realistic picture of the state of youth work in the city’s churches. We requested data from churches (excluding the CoN) regarding the extent of work in the following areas:

1. Tweens ministry (ages 9–13)
2. Confirmation ministry (ages 14–15)
3. Teen ministry (ages 13–18)
4. Any other programs for those aged 9–18

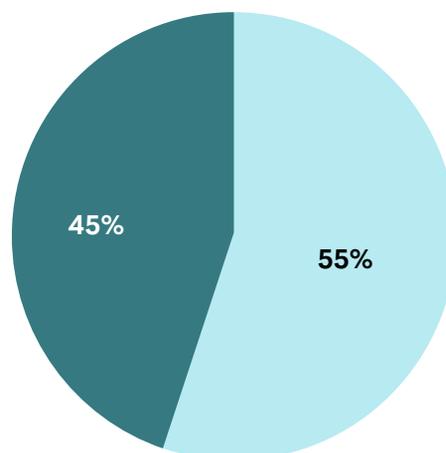
Confirmation ministry is included in this survey as, in many free churches, it is more integrated with broader youth work than in the CoN

It’s also important to note that the survey did not differentiate based on the type of work or whether the target group consisted of children growing up in the congregation or, for instance, all youth in a given area. These are interesting questions that could be addressed in future research.

The survey asked both whether youth work existed and, if so, how many youth participated on average. Among the responding churches where the question of youth work was relevant (N = 31), 14 reported *having no dedicated youth ministry*.

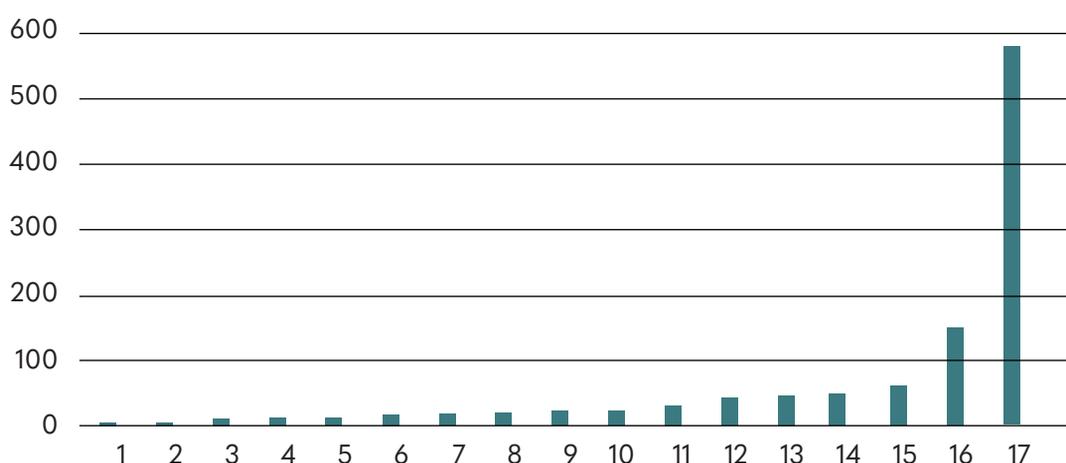
#### CHURCHES WITH/WITHOUT YOUTH MINISTRY

■ Has dedicated youth ministry. ■ Does NOT have dedicated youth ministry.



Among those with active youth programs, the number of young people in each church is distributed as follows:

**YOUTH MINISTRY – DISTRIBUTION AMONG CHURCHES WITH EXISTING PROGRAMS**



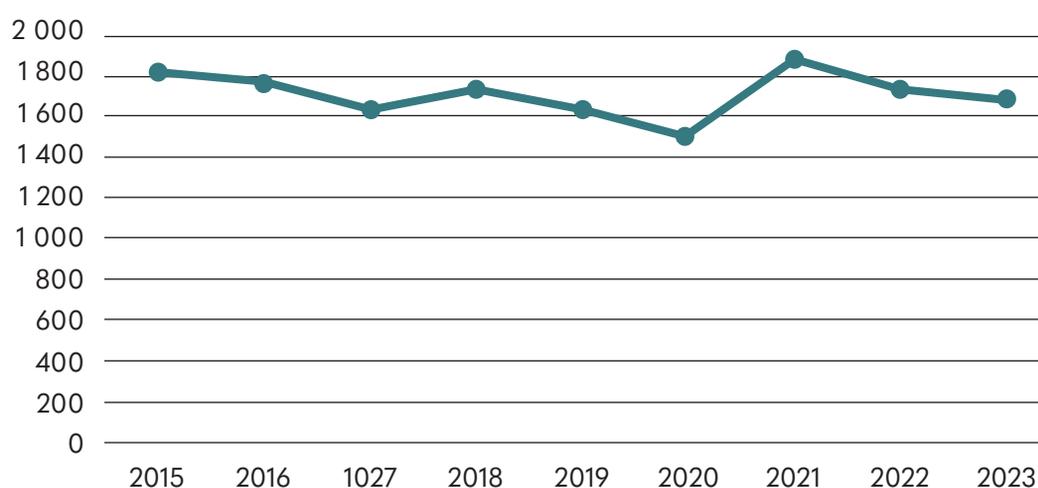
The table clearly shows that a few churches have many youths involved in their ministry, while most have relatively few. This presents a relevant overall picture indicating that youth—unsurprisingly—are drawn to larger environments in a city like Oslo.

With such a large number of small instances, it's difficult to make broad conclusions about the state of youth ministry in Oslo beyond this point. One notable trend is that among the six churches with the highest number of youths, there are no signs of drop-off after confirmation—quite the opposite. This may be partly due to young people from smaller churches finding their place within the larger youth communities. We will return to this in the chapter on collaboration.

## 6.2.4 The Church of Norway – Stable Number of Confirmands, Less Activity for Older Youth

Despite a steady decline in the years leading up to 2020, the Church of Norway (CoN) still clearly has the largest reach among Norwegian 14/15-year-olds through its confirmation program. In 2023, there were 1,693 confirmands in the CoN in Oslo. It is worth noting that since 2017, the number has fluctuated but has not decreased in Oslo.

### CONFIRMED IN THE CHURCH OF NORWAY (NUMBER) – TRENDS OVER TIME



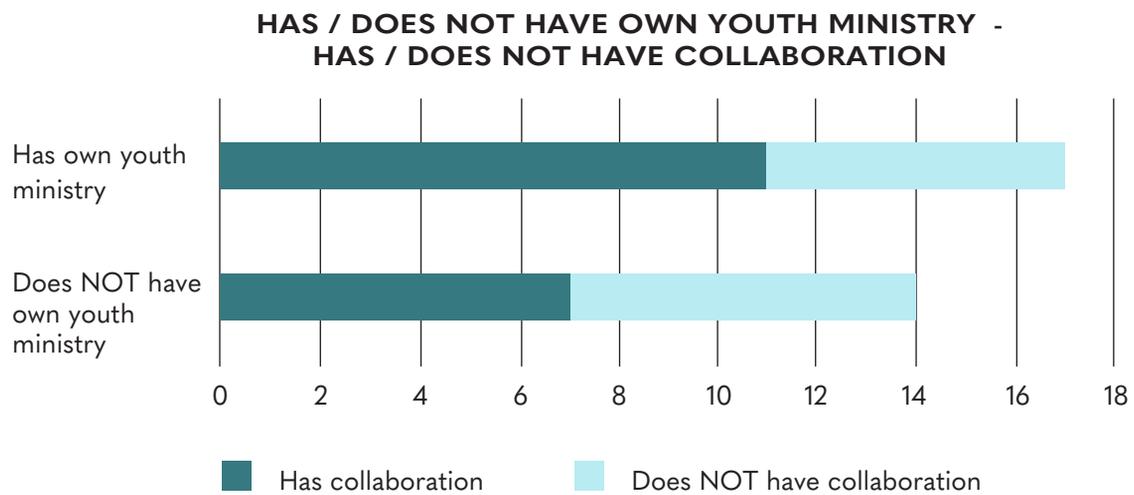
CoN follows children and youth through their upbringing with established programs like "Tower Agents" and "Awake at Night" weekends, which attract broad participation. After confirmation, many congregations offer 16-year-olds leadership training courses. Recruitment to these programs has declined and was particularly affected by the pandemic.<sup>23</sup>

Beyond this, the offerings are more scattered: 14 out of 40 CoN congregations in Oslo provide programs for teenagers (according to the congregations' websites). Still, the examples that exist are strong: some are long-standing initiatives, such as the youth club in Prinsdal, or programs that are particularly relevant in today's context, such as food and homework help in Fossum.<sup>24</sup>

### 6.2.5 Collaboration – How Common Is It, and Is There Potential for More?

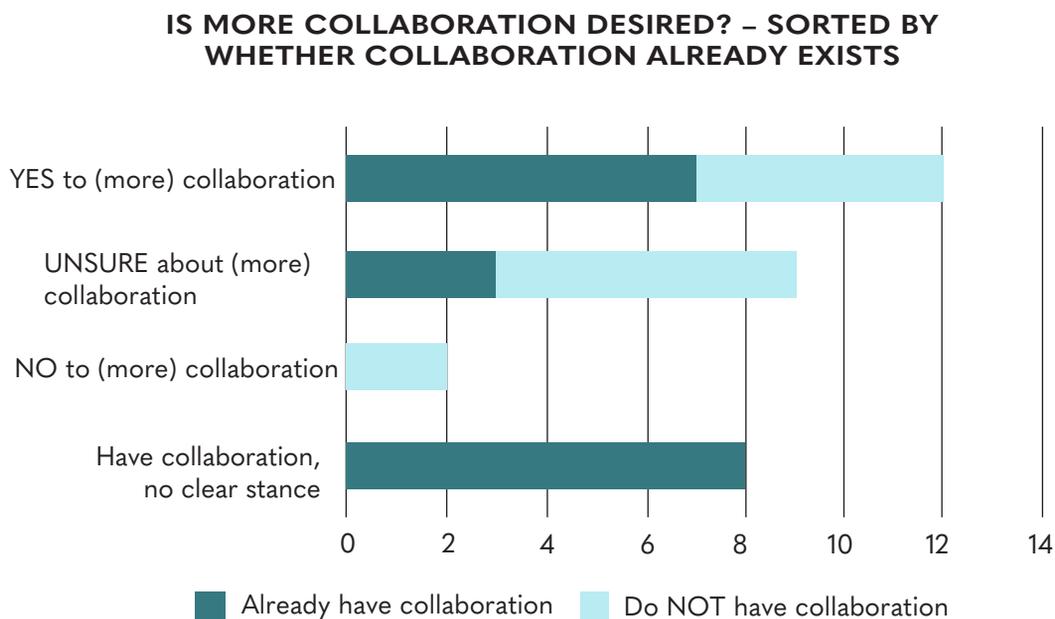
Given the many small youth environments, it becomes especially relevant to explore whether collaboration exists and in what form, whether those without youth work are interested in cooperation, and if those already involved in partnerships are open to more.

When asked whether there was any form of collaboration on youth ministry, churches responded as follows, categorized by whether or not they had their own youth program:



Of the 14 churches that do NOT have their own youth ministry, half state that they collaborate by actively referring youth to programs in other churches. Among those that DO have their own youth ministry, collaboration takes place both with other churches and with interchurch organizations such as YMCA/YWCA and YoungLife.

In response to the question of whether more collaboration is desired, the answers are distributed as follows:



Of those who HAVE existing youth work but no existing collaboration, three are uncertain, and only one responds “no” when asked whether collaboration on this area could be relevant. What they have in common is that they belong to the group with the fewest youth involved in their programs. All others report either existing collaboration or a willingness to welcome it.

Although the survey reveals a complex picture, there is good reason to conclude that there is a high level of openness to collaboration in this field—across both church size and type.

## 6.2.6 CONCLUSION - VARIATION IN YOUTH WORK PRESENCE, STRONG CLIMATE FOR COLLABORATION

The issue of challenging transitions between age segments during childhood and adolescence, as well as drop-off after confirmation, is something churches have experienced over time—and data from Ungdata confirms this. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the number of confirmands in the Church of Norway has stabilized in Oslo, after many years of decline leading up to 2017.

Our survey offers a snapshot of current youth activity across age groups in Oslo's churches. It shows that 14 out of 31 do not have their own youth ministry, and among those that do, a few have large programs while most are relatively small. The survey also highlights a strong openness to collaboration among Oslo's churches.

*We encourage churches to explore the potential for greater synergy through collaboration on youth work—and to connect with the many organizations that specialize in ministry to young people, particularly with a view toward addressing the tendency of disengagement after confirmation age.*



BEVEG  
OSLO

# 7. Analysis - Social pain

There is no doubt that Norwegian society is, in most respects, a good society. A generally high standard of living, low inequality, and, not least, a high degree of trust in public institutions provide a solid foundation. Precisely for that reason, the groups that fall outside become particularly vulnerable. Pinpointing where the pain is greatest can be challenging. Different groups receive attention at different times, and there are constant demands to increase resource allocation in various areas to meet the needs of high-need groups. So why are we unable to solve these challenges in “the world’s richest country”?

Based on an in-depth analysis from the Red Cross on the city’s social needs, we are turning our focus to children and youth, who appear to represent one of the city’s most pressing challenges. In this context, we also see significant potential for churches to play a vital role and make a meaningful difference. We base this on four follow-up points from Oslo Monitor 1.0, as well as data and analyses from Statistics Norway (SSB), the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI), Adults for Children, the Salvation Army, the Marita Foundation, and the police

## 7.1 RQ 3: WHICH GROUPS HAVE THE GREATEST NEEDS - AND WHAT DO THEY NEED?

In 2022, the Red Cross published the report “Sosial Puls”<sup>25</sup>, an analysis based on the report “Humanitarian Needs in Norway – Status 2022”<sup>26</sup> commissioned from Statistics Norway – a comprehensive and systematic review of the greatest humanitarian needs in Norway. It concluded that there are ten groups which, according to certain normative criteria, have the greatest humanitarian needs: (Based on “Hammersland and Barstad 2022”, chapters 4, 8, and appendix B)

1. Children subjected to abuse, violence, bullying, and neglect
2. People who inject drugs or have other serious substance abuse issues
3. Prison inmates
4. People with severe mental illnesses
5. Poor families with children
6. People with both health problems and limited financial resources
7. Social assistance recipients
8. Elderly people with dementia, in nursing homes and home care services
9. Asylum seekers and irregular migrants
10. Sexual and gender minorities

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.rodekors.no/globalassets/\\_rapporter/humanitar-analyse-rapporter/220816\\_rapport-sosial-puls\\_uu5.pdf](https://www.rodekors.no/globalassets/_rapporter/humanitar-analyse-rapporter/220816_rapport-sosial-puls_uu5.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/levekra/artikler/humanitaere-behov-i-norge-status-2022/\\_/attachment/inline/e2dca5cb-3288-4353-945b-a71ca8d67450:1bf3083ec2b9751ce840d6117237e6954d9b0cdb/RAPP2022-33.pdf](https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/levekra/artikler/humanitaere-behov-i-norge-status-2022/_/attachment/inline/e2dca5cb-3288-4353-945b-a71ca8d67450:1bf3083ec2b9751ce840d6117237e6954d9b0cdb/RAPP2022-33.pdf)

This is what Secretary General Bernt G. Apeland writes in the foreword after presenting this list:

*“A recurring pattern seems to be that the groups with the greatest humanitarian needs in Norway are not adequately captured by the welfare state’s safety net. **The resources do not find each other** (...).”*

This is how the Red Cross illustrates this situation:

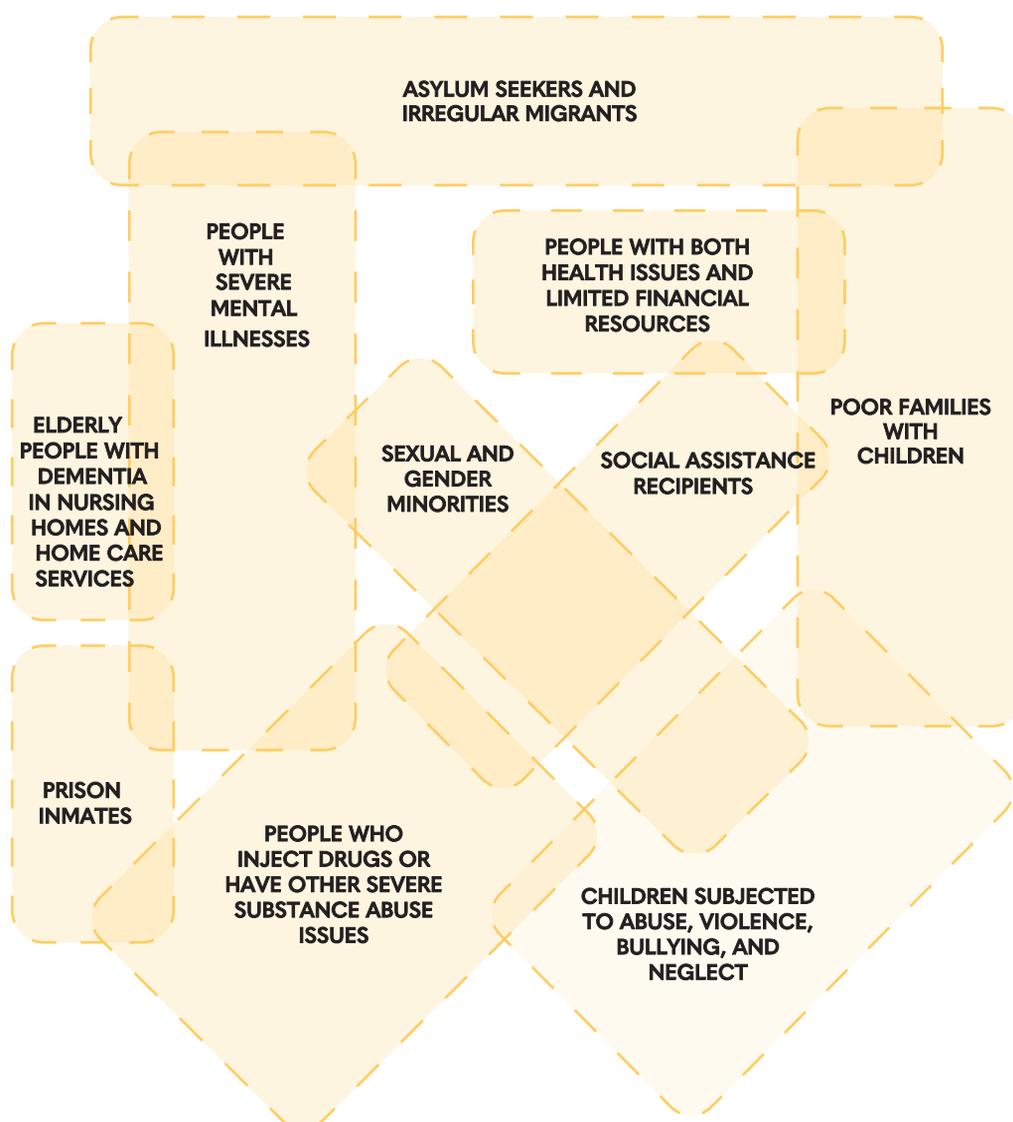
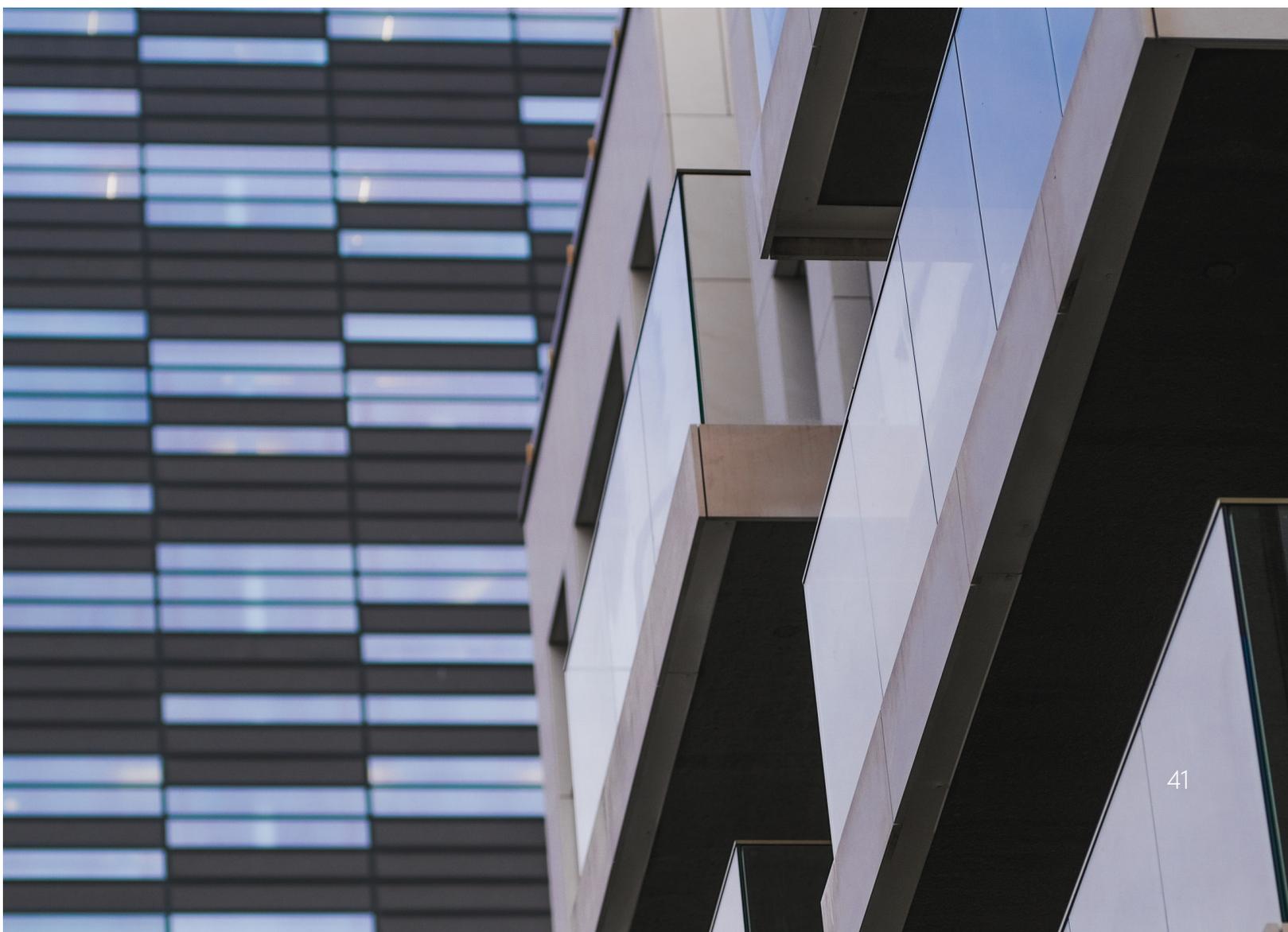


Figure 1: Overlap Between Groups With the Greatest Humanitarian Needs (Red Cross "Sosial Puls" 2022)

This provides a broad and complex picture of the reality, and for the churches, it can be difficult to navigate. Before narrowing our focus to children and youth, we want to emphasize the importance of having a holistic view of society's needs. There is a lot of work being done by various actors – not least Christian organizations – that strive to meet the needs of many of these groups.

*Given the core premise that all suffering is the Church's suffering and the observed lack of coordination among available resources, we encourage churches to support and collaborate with actors who have worked in these areas over time and to ask themselves the following question:*

*How can we as churches help connect the available resources?*



## 7.2 RQ 4: IS THERE A BASIS FOR PRIORITIZING CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

In the Statistics Norway (SSB) report on which Sosial Puls is based<sup>27</sup>, a number of criteria are used to define need. These include low survival rates and poverty, as well as physical, mental, and social distress. To assess the scale of the needs, additional criteria are considered, such as the number of people affected, the intensity and duration of the need, and the potential for the need to be met. Moral criteria are also listed, such as obligations tied to human rights and the importance of human dignity. Still, the focus on children and youth stands out, as challenges during this stage of life can have major ripple effects.

*There are several normative arguments for why the humanitarian needs of children and youth should be prioritized. Many humanitarian challenges originate in a difficult childhood. Children are especially vulnerable because they lack the same resources as adults to cope with difficult situations. Unlike most adults, children also cannot be held personally responsible for their circumstances. **Measures aimed at children are also the most effective way to reduce social and economic inequality.***

*(Sosial Puls 2022, Red Cross, p. 9 – based on Hammersland and Barstad 2022, Chapter 7)*

As Apeland also writes in the foreword:

*It is still the case that the greatest humanitarian challenges in Norway particularly affect children and youth. (...) Ensuring that children and young people are given equal opportunities, that they are seen and taken seriously, and that they receive the care they need and are entitled to, **is among the most important investments we can make as a society***

"Sosial Puls" is primarily a report intended for political authorities, but it concludes with some recommendations for broader society:

- Strengthen efforts to create inclusive, free meeting spaces
- Ensure participation from children, youth, and other groups in activities
- Actively facilitate equal opportunities to take part in civic and organizational life.

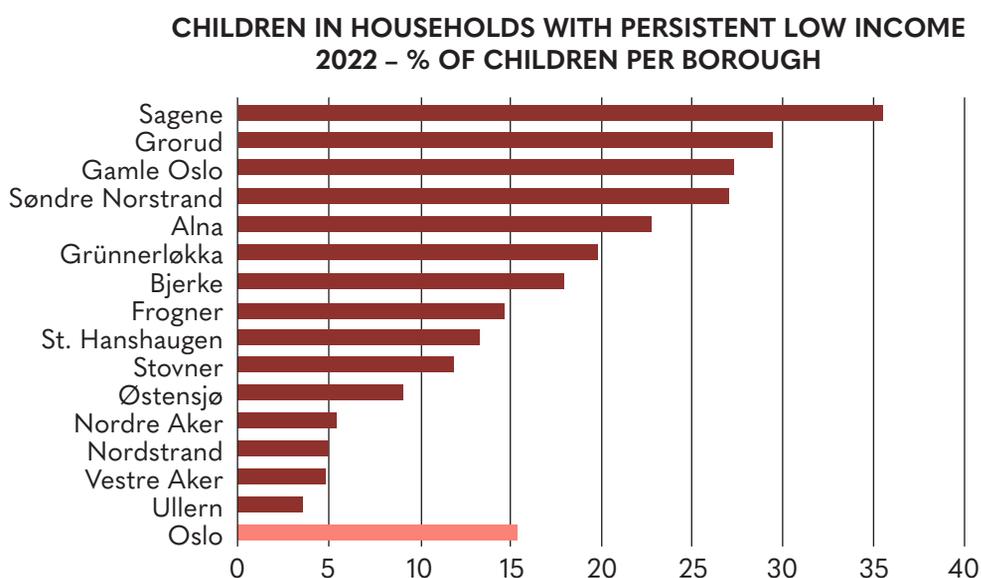
With this as a backdrop, and with children and youth as a focal point, we delve into three of the follow-up areas from Oslo Monitor 1.0 and offer concrete challenges to churches in each of these areas:

1. Children growing up in persistent poverty (main focus)
2. School dropout
3. Divorce – from the child’s perspective

### 7.2.1. THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN GROWING UP IN PERSISTENT POVERTY REMAINS HIGH; SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES ACROSS THE CITY

In 2015, the proportion of children living in households with persistent low income<sup>28</sup> in Oslo was 17.5% – a very high figure, well above the national average. The development since then shows that the percentage has decreased, particularly in the last two years, and was at 15.2%<sup>29</sup> in 2022. Given a 6% population increase during the period, this corresponds to a decline from approximately 22,300 to just over 20,000 children – still a very high number.

What’s particularly interesting for Oslo is to break this down by borough. Here, not surprisingly, we see large disparities – the city appears sharply divided in the snapshot from 2022<sup>30</sup>:



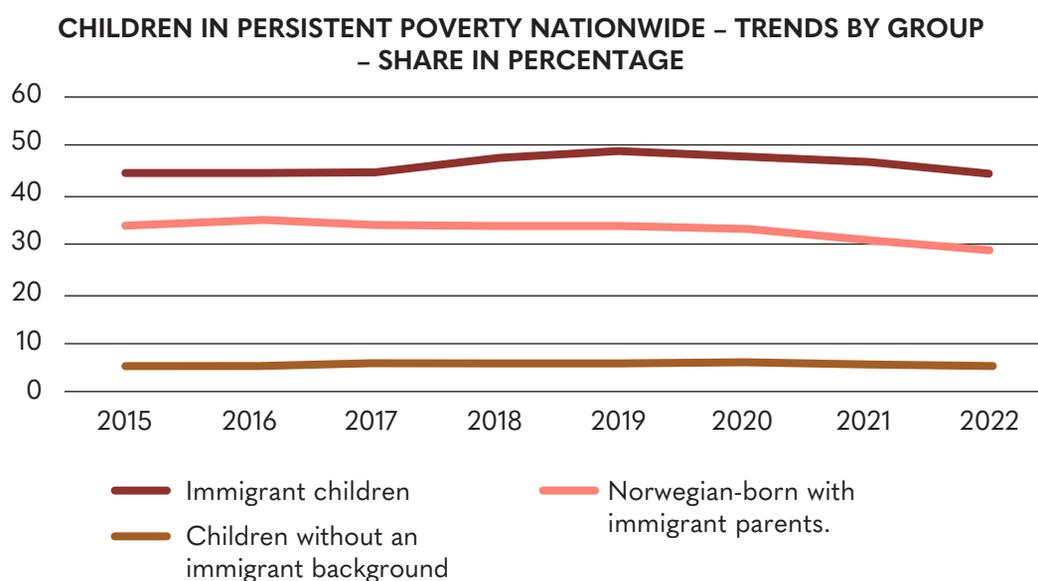
<sup>28</sup> EU's calculation standard: 60% of the median income. Calculated over a 3-year period.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/inntekt-og-formue/artikler/faerre-barn-lever-i-familier-med-lavinntekt>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.bufdir.no/statistikk-og-analyse/monitor/barnefattigdom/omfang/?primary=03&regions=030115&regions=03011105&regions=03011004&regions=030112&regions=030109&regions=030101&regions=03010603&regions=030108>

While the borough of Ullern has just 3.6% of children growing up in poverty, the borough of Sagene has a rate as high as 35.5%. Generally, there is a clear East–West divide in the city, but even more striking are the contrasts between boroughs located geographically close to each other. Perhaps most surprising to the general public is that Frogner borough is at the Oslo average, just under 15%, and that Stovner, often associated with poverty, actually has a lower rate – just under 12%.

All boroughs have seen a moderate decline since 2015, except for the borough of Grorud, where child poverty has increased from 25% in 2015 to nearly 30% in 2022. This overall decline is likely driven in large part by reduced poverty among immigrant children and Norwegian-born children with immigrant parents in Norway.



Although this is a positive trend, it is important to note that Norway had lower immigration levels from the outbreak of COVID in 2020 until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. A new rise in child poverty is already being observed as a result of the influx of Ukrainian refugees<sup>31</sup>, and there is little reason to be overly satisfied with the decline.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/inntekt-og-forbruk/inntekt-og-formue/artikler/faerre-barn-lever-i-familier-med-lavinntekt>

## Poverty in the lives of children and youth affects much of their childhood

Groups particularly at risk of experiencing poverty include:<sup>32</sup>

- Children of single parents
- Children with immigrant backgrounds
- Children in households with low labor market attachment
- Children with disabilities or chronic illness
- Children in households where the primary income earner has low education
- Children in households receiving more than half of their income through public transfers

The main reason children in poverty should be considered a critical group is due to the long-term consequences during upbringing:<sup>33</sup>

- Frequent relocation and instability in their neighborhoods
- Poor housing standards
- Physical and mental health problems
- Limited school participation
- Loneliness and social exclusion
- Lack of participation in leisure activities

The report “When Children Have to Be Adults” (Red Cross, 2022)<sup>34</sup> is based on surveys with 214 young people across the country who have grown up in persistent poverty. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 8 of them, offering detailed everyday accounts of their experiences.

In addition to material deprivation, the youth reported feeling excluded from important arenas for learning and experiences. Of those living in towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants, 63% said they could not afford to participate in any form of leisure activity.

When the youth were asked to provide recommendations to the authorities, free school meals and increased child benefits topped the list. In third and fourth place came **free social activities and free recreational activities**—before reducing unemployment appeared in fifth. The last three points are particularly relevant for civil society.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.bufdir.no/fagstotte/produkter/veileder-fattigdom>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.rodekors.no/globalassets/\\_rapporter/barn-og-unge/nar-barn-ma-vare-voksne\\_rode-kors.pdf](https://www.rodekors.no/globalassets/_rapporter/barn-og-unge/nar-barn-ma-vare-voksne_rode-kors.pdf)

Access to information about one's rights in society is also a challenge. This is confirmed in the report "In the Best Interest of the Child?" (Red Cross, 2023)<sup>35</sup>, which focuses on how NAV (the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) addresses children's needs when parents apply for financial assistance. One reason for the investigation was the nearly 10% increase in social assistance recipients from 2021 to 2022. The survey revealed that over half of the parents questioned felt that the financial support was insufficient to cover their children's needs. The problem is that standard assessments based on statistics are used when calculating aid for families with children, which leads to very uneven results. Regulations stipulate that these cases should be assessed based on individual needs, but this is too often not followed. This suggests that the main issue is not the regulations or finances, but rather knowledge, coordination, and implementation. There is a clear lack of information, particularly for new users of support systems. This is one area where volunteers and civil society could step in and play an important role.

### **Poverty among youth is emerging as a root cause of violence and crime**

Real and perceived poverty is a root cause of one of the most pressing social challenges currently facing Oslo: youth crime. While only a minority of children growing up in poverty end up involved in crime, they are among the most vulnerable. They are at significantly higher risk of being exploited by cynical criminal networks. Below, we outline the perspectives of the police and substance abuse prevention workers.

### **The Police Perspective**

At Beveg Oslo's annual leadership day in 2023, the section head of the crime prevention unit in Oslo East Police Department, Hans Magnus Gjerlaug, presented a picture of the situation involving youth in eastern Oslo. He has extensive experience working closely with youth in the boroughs of Søndre Nordstrand, Alna, Grorud, and Stovner through trust-based relationship-building initiatives. The police are currently witnessing an escalating situation of increased crime, more violence, and more confrontations with police. He outlined four underlying and interrelated causes:

- Domestic violence during childhood
- Criminal environments/networks adept at recruiting youth
- Pop culture: a gangster culture that portrays established social structures as the enemy

In a VG interview on January 3, 2023<sup>36</sup>, Gjerlaug described situations involving large families living in overcrowded homes. This leads to unfortunate consequences for older children. He said youth referred to themselves as “outdoor kids”:

*“It’s about the homes being so small that parents have to prioritize quiet for the younger siblings to sleep (...). [The teenagers] had ‘outdoor time.’ They had to wait before going home because there were too many people inside. (...)”*

This situation makes youth vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups, who are present and ready when teens are forced to spend time outside the home.

### **The Substance Abuse Prevention Perspective**

Maritastiftelsen (The Marita Foundation) has close ties to many churches in Oslo and has partnered with them over the past 30 years through the work of Maritakafeen in central Oslo—a service for drug users and people involved in prostitution. They also have a long history of preventive and awareness-raising work among youth regarding substance abuse. While this remains important, they are observing new and concerning trends. CEO Dag Jacobsen told us:

*“We’re used to seeing that those committing violence and crime were usually people under the influence or struggling with addiction. That has now changed. Violence and crime are now more often committed by sober young people.*

***The biggest challenge we face now is new poverty among children and youth.*** *We are seeing a new picture where young people are being recruited into crime, and the motivation is to afford what everyone else has—a new phone, clothes, and other status symbols. Then they get trapped, and the cycle continues. The drugs come later.”*

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/i/L165gV/politiet-paa-mortensrud-noen-barn-kaller-seg-utebarn>

Churches are challenged to build a presence in neighborhoods where poverty is a particular problem.

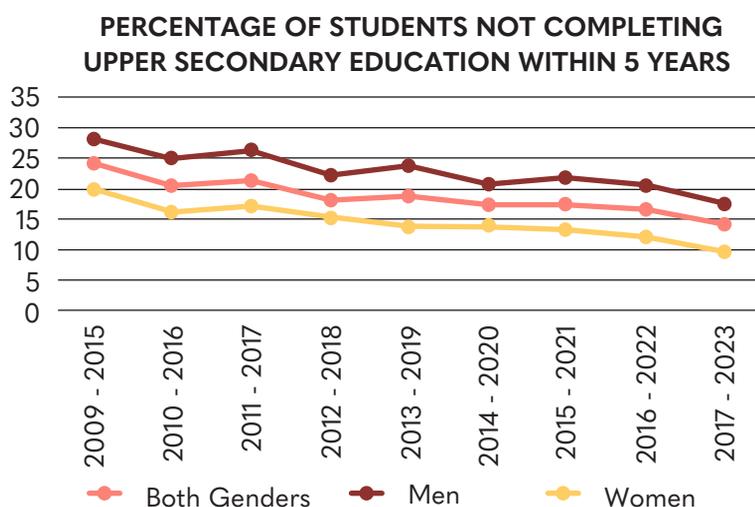
Free leisure activities for children and youth, as well as parental guidance services, are two key focus areas. At Beveg Oslo's leadership day in 2023, Hans Magnus Gjerlaug from the police issued a direct challenge to the churches with the following list:

- Be an active part of the local community (few youth live in the city center where most free churches are located)
- Provide digital literacy training for adults with minority backgrounds
- Relieve overwhelmed parents
- Offer homework help, jobs, and a seat at the dinner table

## 7.2.2 The Number of Children Dropping Out of School Is Decreasing

This is a positive development. Since 2015, there has been a clear decline in the proportion of students who do not complete upper secondary education within 5 years. In the period leading up to 2015, the dropout rate in Oslo was as high as 24%, but this fell to 13.5% in 2023. The reduction has been equal for both genders, but since boys were clearly overrepresented to begin with, there are now twice as many boys as girls dropping out.

There are significant differences within Oslo, but it is worth noting that much of the decline is due to substantial improvements at several schools in East Oslo that previously had high dropout rates. School-level data is not entirely comparable to Statistics Norway's (SSB) municipal-level data, as schools only measure the percentage of students who started in August and dropped out during the school year between October 1 and the end of June. At Hellerud Upper Secondary School, for example, 12.5% dropped out in the 2013/14 school year, while this figure has steadily declined to 3.1% in 2021/22<sup>37</sup>.





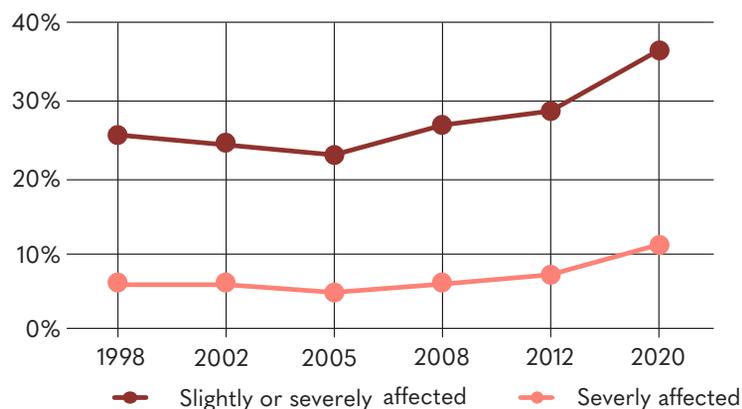
But for the vast majority of couples, it is still important to emphasize the value of preventing problems and strengthening families during difficult periods in their relationships. A breakup can have major consequences even if it appears non-dramatic, and many people can receive life-changing help if they seek it early enough.

*Churches may have a particular capacity to help prevent relationship breakdowns. In this regard, we encourage the fostering of a culture of openness, where relationship struggles are not met with shame, but where honesty about the situation can be the first step toward restoration.*

*For those who do go through a breakup, it is vital to be present for the children, ensure they are listened to, help them process what has happened, and give them time to adjust. Church communities can play a crucial role in this—if they are aware and intentional about it.*

### 7.3 RQ 5: DO WE HAVE A LONELINESS EPIDEMIC, AND ARE THERE CERTAIN GROUPS THAT STAND OUT?

The proportion of the population that feels lonely has clearly increased since 2012. This is shown by figures from Statistics Norway (SSB):<sup>42</sup>



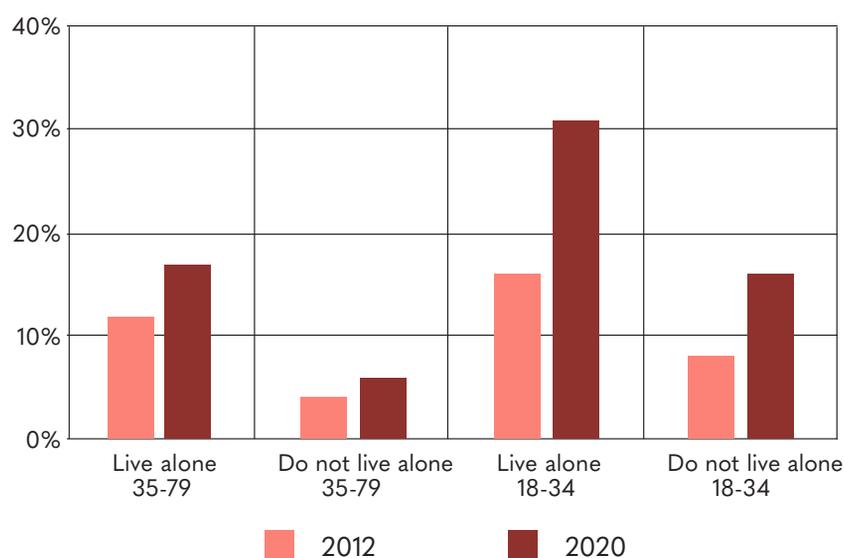
Source: Surveys on Living Conditions related to Health and the Quality of Life Survey 2020, Statistics Norway.

The table is based on the Quality of Life Survey and questions about how lonely respondents had felt in the past 14 days. After a relatively stable and fluctuating trend up until 2012, there was a clearer increase toward 2020. It is emphasized that the survey was conducted partly before and immediately after the COVID lockdown in March of that year, and there is no indication that the lockdown itself influenced these figures. Other surveys suggest that the trend has continued to increase after the pandemic, although comparable data is currently lacking.

However, the most important aspect of these figures is which age groups are contributing to this rise. Anders Barstad writes the following in the introduction to the SSB analysis:<sup>43</sup>

*“(...) **The increase from 2012 to 2020 is particularly pronounced among young people under the age of 35** and among those living alone. While there was hardly any increase among people who live with others and are older than 34, the proportion who were severely affected by loneliness rose by as much as 15 percentage points among individuals aged 18–34 living alone.”*

The following table shows those who are severely affected by loneliness, by age and whether they live alone or not:<sup>44</sup>



Source: Quality of Life Survey 2020, Statistics Norway

Loneliness is a subjective feeling that is not easy to measure. How can we respond to this in a more concrete way than simply being aware and more welcoming as individual fellow human beings? The figures presented in OM 1 were followed by a call for churches to be mindful of loneliness within their own communities. **Since then, the problem has only grown.**

<sup>43</sup> Ssb; Blir vi stadig mer ensomme? (Barstad 2021)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

*To the extent that we have a loneliness epidemic, it is among young adults who live alone. We challenge the churches to seek to address this loneliness in everything they do. Does the community created for the majority unintentionally exclude the minority? And more concretely: are there contact-creating initiatives and gathering spaces that could become more widespread and sustainable over time if churches and organizations join forces?*

### **7.3 RQ 6: CHURCH ACTIVITIES – WHAT ARE THEY DOING, AND IS THE WORK SUSTAINABLE AND TARGETED?**

An essential part of our survey has been to map the churches' activities in socially oriented work and their thoughts on collaboration in this area within Oslo. We asked which areas they are engaged and active in, how this engagement is expressed, and how much resources in terms of staff and volunteer time are dedicated to it.

At the same time, we gave respondents the opportunity to provide additional comments, offering insight into attitudes and thought processes surrounding social engagement. This has been just as interesting as looking at the numbers themselves.

#### **7.4.1 Purpose and Goals**

The purpose and goals of this section are:

1. To help churches become more aware of how they spend their time and who they are actually reaching through their social engagement.
2. To highlight for both churches and other actors the level of effort being made, the willingness to contribute, and that all churches form an important part of the ecosystem working toward a better city for everyone.
3. To stimulate more targeted and coordinated efforts through increased knowledge, where the city's needs and the churches' capacity for involvement are greatest.



## 7.4.2 Responses and Non-Responses

This chapter is also based on responses from 39 churches. However, several indicated that it was difficult to answer when it came to quantifying volunteer hours. On this point, we experienced 9 non-responses, and are therefore basing this section on 30 answers.

The lack of response was often due to a lack of oversight of members' involvement, or more principled difficulties with quantifying acts of care—while also being certain that such work was indeed taking place.

A good illustration of this came from one of the respondents who did not provide numbers:

*"It's difficult to classify this type of work since it's about relationships, friendship, a fellowship of faith that carries one another (...) we don't consider it work, but the reason we exist."*

Based on feedback from some of the 30 who did report numbers, it appears that we may be seeing some underreporting, particularly regarding volunteer engagement. As another respondent said in a follow-up conversation, loosely paraphrased:

*"I think I underreported. There's a significant amount of volunteer work that isn't directly organized by the congregation, but where members come together to take responsibility in a different organization. We don't have a full overview of that."*

In both cases, respondents described a dynamic and motivation within the churches that isn't easily captured by numbers. What they all have in common is a core attitude that caring at every level is part of the church's DNA.

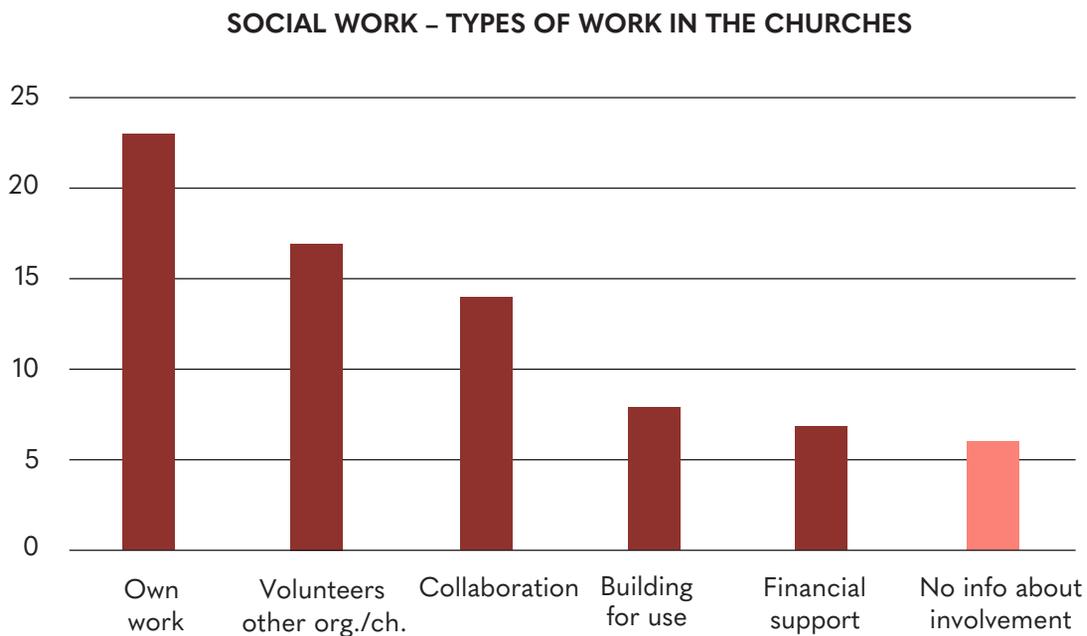
### 7.4.3 Prevalence of Social Work in the Churches

The first thing we asked was how the churches engage in social/diaconal work in Oslo, specified as “organized work of any kind aimed at the poor, marginalized, sick, or vulnerable groups.”

We provided options intended to reflect different approaches among the churches. These were:

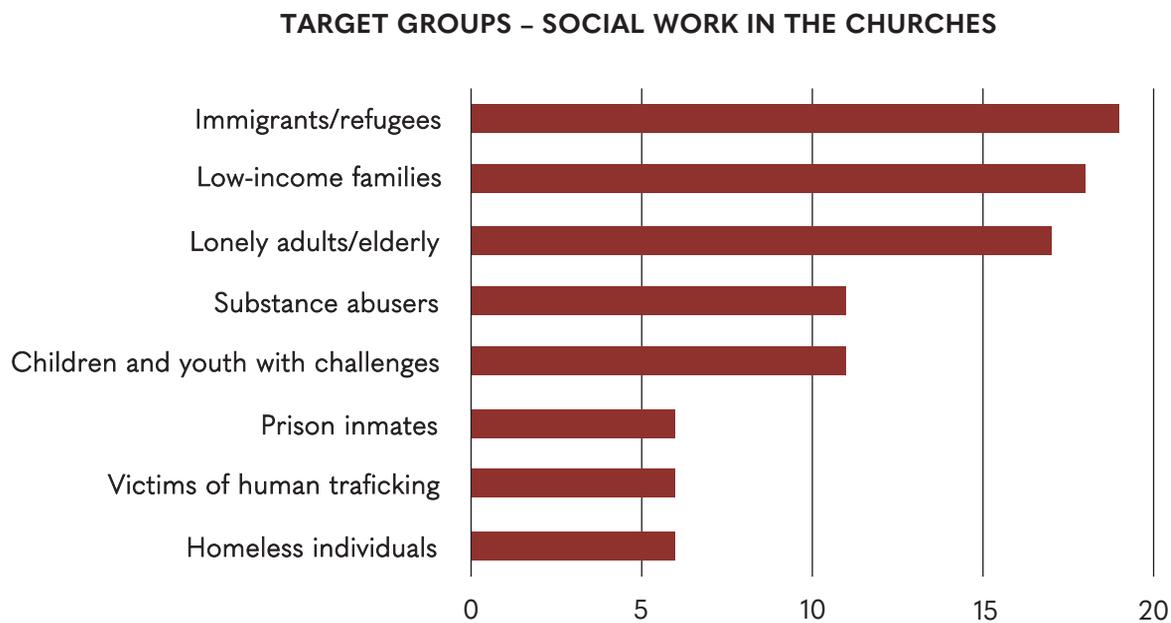
1. Own work run by the congregation
2. The congregation collaborates with others on specific efforts
3. Volunteers from the congregation contribute to another church/organization, etc.
4. The congregation provides its building for use
5. The congregation gives financial support
6. No information about involvement in social work

Multiple responses were possible – and the distribution was as follows:



This shows that the vast majority are engaged in some form of work, and 23 out of 39 respondents report having their own initiatives. Only 6 stated that they have no social work or no information about members’ involvement.

This was followed up with a question about which groups the engagement was directed toward. The target groups were based on categories highlighted in the Red Cross report. Of the 33 who answered that they engaged in some form of work, the distribution was as follows:



The results show the highest level of effort directed toward *immigrants/refugees (19)*, *low-income families (18)*, and *lonely adults/elderly (17)*. In the middle range we find *substance abusers (11)*, as well as *children and youth with challenges (11)*, while there is a lower percentage for groups such as *inmates (6)*, *victims of human trafficking (6)*, and *homeless individuals (4)*. There are several caveats to note here, such as the fluid boundaries between categories and that the type of help/work within the groups varies. We therefore allowed space for clarification. The most frequently mentioned types of work were food distribution, social meeting places, and language training. This aligns well with the areas that stood out and are activities that churches can more easily mobilize around. **Several churches are doing important work here.** Among the groups that had a lower proportion in the survey, it is typically more resource-intensive populations or those requiring a greater degree of professional support. In these cases, churches more often collaborate with organizations that have the necessary expertise, such as Kirkens Bymisjon, the Marita Foundation, the Red Cross, and others.

## 7.4.4 Scope of Social Work in the Churches – Room for Growth

### Volunteering

After mapping how churches are involved, we wanted to understand the extent of this engagement. We therefore asked about the resources used in various churches for this purpose. We inquired about:

- 1 Number of volunteers
- 2 Number of volunteer hours per week
- 3 Number of paid (staff) hours per week

We also wanted to cross-check this with the number of hours used for internal diaconal work within the churches. As noted in the methodology chapter, this is a point where churches define things somewhat differently. For some churches, this includes a significant number of hours, and should be seen in connection with outward-facing social engagement.

30 of the 39 respondents provided data for this overview, showing that there are 691 volunteers contributing an average of 796 volunteer hours per week to outward-directed social work (N=30). This gives an average of 1.15 hours per volunteer per week.

If we add "internal diaconal work", this number increases to 1,502 volunteers using 1,731 hours per week. This totals 90,116 hours per year, which corresponds to 51 full-time equivalents (FTEs). *Half of these hours come from respondents affiliated with the Salvation Army (11/30).*

The Church of Norway has its own data on the number of volunteers. In 2023, there were 1,501 registered volunteers in the area of diaconal work in the Diocese of Oslo. There is no data available on weekly hours used, but if we apply the same average of 1.15 hours per volunteer per week, this equals 1,726 hours per week, which corresponds to 51 FTEs, the same as in our survey.

To make a conservative estimate for the remaining churches in Oslo, we chose to calculate this based on the median of the survey results. This gives a total of 363 volunteers, contributing 472 hours per week, equivalent to 14 FTEs

*We can confidently state that the churches in Oslo contribute at least the equivalent of 117 full-time positions in volunteer resources to the social sector in Oslo. This is in addition to all other voluntary work done within the churches.*

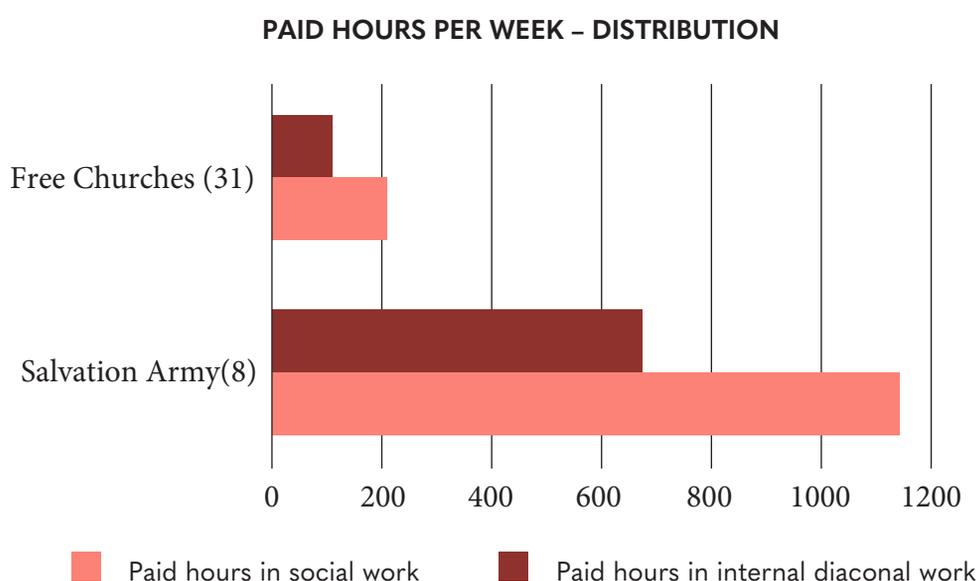
<sup>45</sup> Here we only asked about hours used per week. Assuming the same average of 1.15 hours per volunteer per week as for "outward-directed social work," the number of volunteers for "internal diaconal work" is estimated at 809.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ssb.no/a/metadata/conceptvariable/vardok/2744/nb>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.kirken.no/globalassets/bispedommer/oslo/dokumenter/arsmeldinger/obd%20arsrapport%202023.pdf>

## Paid Resources

We also asked about the churches' use of paid staff resources in social work. This resulted in a total of 2,143 hours per week (N39), which corresponds to 65 full-time equivalents (FTEs). As expected, there is a significant difference between churches affiliated with the Salvation Army and the other respondents, which the table clearly shows:



Excluding the Salvation Army, the result for the 31 free churches is 326 paid hours per week, which equals 10 FTEs. Interestingly, there is a higher proportion of paid resources allocated to what the free churches themselves describe as “outward-directed social work” than to internal diaconal work – with the former comprising 6.5 FTEs. These are generally not dedicated positions, but parts of pastors' or other staff members' time spent on direct involvement in the work and/or coordination of volunteers.

It is also worth highlighting the Salvation Army's significant contribution in Oslo, with 55 FTEs according to our registration alone.

The Church of Norway has defined diaconal positions, which according to the accounts amount to 32 FTEs in the Oslo diocese. Additionally, there are full-time priest positions linked to prisons (Ila, Bredtvedt, and Oslo Prison) and hospitals (Diakonhjemmet, Lovisenberg, Bærum, and Oslo University Hospital), which would naturally fall under our definition, along with an unknown number of hours from other priest positions.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.kirken.no/globalassets/bispedommer/oslo/dokumenter/arsmeldinger/obd%20arsrapport%202023.pdf>

*In total, the churches in Oslo contribute at least 100 FTEs in paid resources in this area. This is a broad field where collaboration and synergies across sectors and professions are essential — especially concerning the distribution between public and nonprofit funding, as well as professional expertise. This may be worth exploring further as a potential follow-up to this report.*

## **Comparison with Volunteering in Broader Civil Society**

It may be of interest to compare the figures from the churches with broader public data on volunteering. A 2017 survey on volunteering in Oslo showed that the city's residents contributed a total of 2,103 FTEs through various associations and organizations in the comparable areas of "social services" and "health, care, and rescue work." In 2017, this equated to 0.1 hours per week per resident, adjusted for population size.

It is worth noting that we have since experienced a pandemic, during which a decline in volunteer engagement across most areas has been reported. More studies are expected in this field, but for now, this comparison must be made with natural caveats.

Still, if we compare with our 2023 data, we see that the estimated 117 FTEs from churches equal approximately 0.15 hours per week per active person within a comparable segment of voluntary work — i.e., social work/diaconal service. This number should not be overemphasized, but it is reasonable to assert that the churches' voluntary social engagement in the city (average ~0.15) holds up well compared to the general population (average ~0.10).

*Even though church-based voluntary engagement compares favorably to the broader population, the real question is whether it aligns with how the churches themselves view their role and capacity.*

## Potential for Improvement

As shown in the survey, the number of hours devoted to social volunteer work varies greatly between churches. A few stand out with high volunteer engagement; the two top-contributing churches report an estimated 200 and 144 volunteer hours per week, far exceeding the rest. To better understand the general picture, we calculated the median number of volunteer hours per week, which shows 8 hours of volunteer engagement per church per week in outward-directed social work (N30). Comparing this to the number of active members, we find that 4% of church members are involved in socially-oriented volunteer work, each contributing an average of 1.15 hours per week. We lack exact data for internal diaconal volunteers, but since the total hours are roughly the same, we can estimate that 8% of active churchgoers are involved in social/diaconal service, spending just over 1 hour per week.

*We believe these findings point to a clear potential for growth in this area. While it's important to acknowledge the caveats — including efforts made outside of the churches' formal structures — there is still reason to say this potential exists. Not necessarily that each individual should increase their hours, but that more people could find a role, and that efforts should be more intentionally aligned with real needs. So, what is needed to create the desired momentum? We believe it is:*

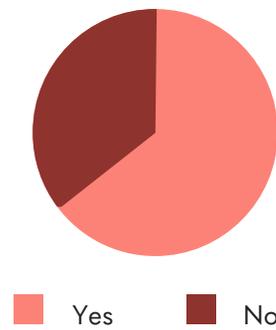
- 1 *Increased understanding of actual needs*
- 2 *Targeted action*
- 3 *Collaboration and coordination with relevant organizations and authorities, as well as among the churches themselves*

The last point is addressed in the final part of our survey.

### 7.4.5 Collaboration

We asked the churches whether they engage in collaboration in the social field, and what type of institutions they cooperate with. Two-thirds reported some form of partnership.

**HAS SOME FORM OF COLLABORATION**

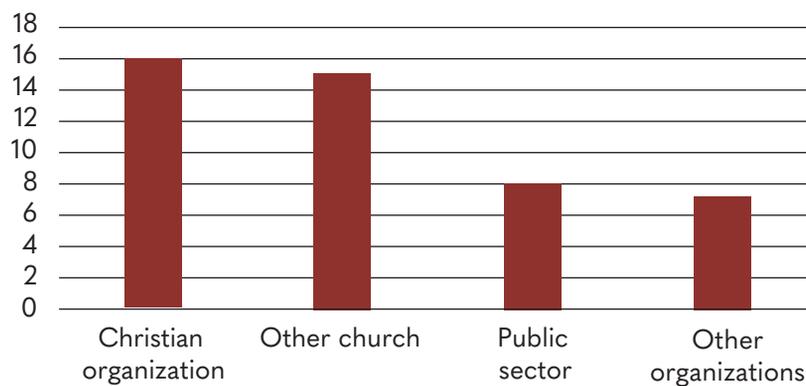


Of the 26 who answered yes, we asked about the type of partners, with the following options:

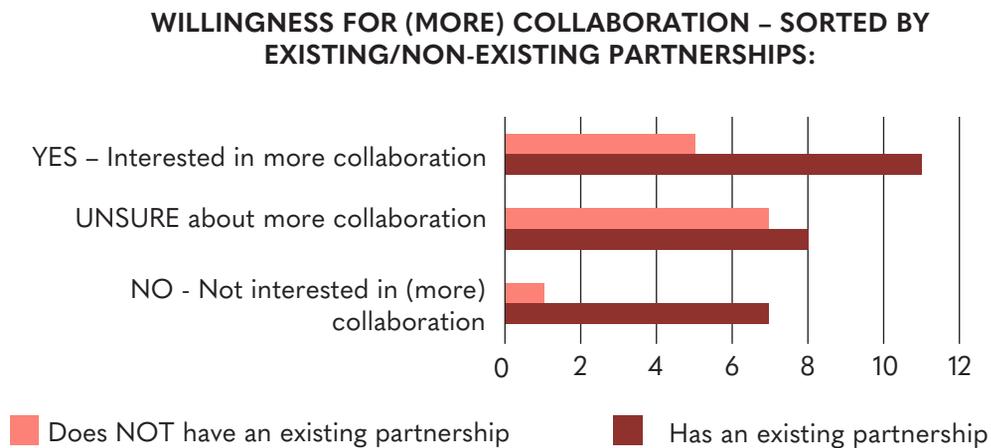
- Other churches
- Christian organizations
- Other organizations
- Public authorities

Multiple answers were allowed. The responses were distributed as follows:

**CHURCHES' COLLABORATION PARTNERS**



Next, we asked about interest in further collaboration:



This reveals a complex picture. Among those already in collaboration, most are open to expanding it. Those who answered no or were unsure mainly indicated they prefer to develop their existing collaborations. This shows that there is a strong desire for collaboration in some form among the churches.

*We believe that collaboration in various formats is key to unlocking unused volunteer potential and ensuring the sustainability of current efforts. The survey indicates that there is a solid basis for expanding collaboration in this area.*

## 7.5 CONCLUSION

After examining societal needs and the churches' potential, the areas where churches can make a difference stand out as:

Free leisure activities, Adult presence in local communities, Coordinated and relieving support for parents

24% of all children experience parental separation, often taking it harder than adults may realize. We believe that churches have a unique opportunity to help prevent relationship problems, while also supporting those who have gone through separation in an inclusive manner.

Likewise, there is a need for churches to be aware of the increasing loneliness among young and single adults. Since the release of OM 1, which brought this issue to light, it has grown significantly for this group. We believe that in addition to raising awareness, there is a need for new approaches in this area, potentially resulting in concrete initiatives.

We encourage churches to make support and initiatives in these areas a shared agenda. On all these issues, collaboration with experienced actors is key. There is a willingness within the churches to collaborate, which should make this possible. When we see that 8% of active church members are engaged in social/diaconal work for an average of 1.15 hours per week, we believe this shows significant untapped potential, and that it is possible to do more — but it will require prioritizing these efforts within the churches.

*We believe there is unrealized potential in most churches, and more people could contribute if the churches choose to prioritize social engagement. One way to unleash this potential is through coordinated joint initiatives in selected areas, such as: Support for the lonely, free leisure activities for children and youth, guidance for parents on their rights and opportunities, language learning, and practical life skills.*



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# 8. Analysis — Cultural Challenges

In this context, cultural challenges refer to systemic challenges, and from our perspective, we have examined these in light of social pain. Several actors address the authorities through their reports to highlight weaknesses they believe can be resolved either through increased funding or systemic changes. The most striking point was made by the Secretary General of the Red Cross in the introduction to the report “Social Pulse”, which we addressed at the beginning of Chapter 7: that resources are not finding each other, and that the most vulnerable fall through the cracks. This is more fundamental than something the authorities can simply allocate funds to fix; here, civil society must contribute. We will examine specific insights from some actors closely associated with the churches.

## 8.1 Low-Income Families and Housing Challenges

In Oslo, challenges for low-income families are largely related to housing. Price levels, overcrowding, housing quality, and utilization are all factors that impact the poorest the hardest. As the police report noted (Chapter 7), large families living in cramped conditions pose a challenge, with older children spending more time outside the home. This is inextricably linked to low income.

The Salvation Army has been involved in housing policy in Oslo for many years, including through the initiative “Familiebosatt”, which assists families in securing dignified living conditions. In the report “Living with Dignity”, they present the experiences of many with the lowest incomes in the housing market. These families experience long-term stress, having to look for jobs, deal with the welfare agency (NAV), and care for their children, all while urgently needing a place to live. A major issue is the requirement to have secured housing before receiving housing support from NAV. As a result, many end up with the only available options—often from unscrupulous and exploitative landlords. One Familiebosatt employee describes it as follows:

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<sup>50</sup> <https://frelsesarmeen-web.s3.eu-north-1.amazonaws.com/frelsesarmeen/Last-ned-Frelsesarmeens-boligsosiale-melding.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0CRSc38xhP4o8wpiKk7-aXiQPvshzRPbqzPEziki1HrVZ4IKul6sx12Pg>

*Time and again, we've seen families with children living with mold, damp, rot, bedbugs, drafts, no escape route, inadequate kitchens, and unsanitary conditions outside with used needles and trash (...) ("Living with Dignity," Salvation Army 2023, p. 9)*

NAV lacks the capacity to monitor the conditions of the dwellings they subsidize, creating an almost impossible situation for families. Familiebosatt offers guidance on rights and practical help with the additional challenges these families face.

The Salvation Army calls for several governmental measures, including better supervision of rental properties, minimum standards for such properties, and better coordination of services for low-income families, with greater collaboration between public agencies and nonprofit organizations. In their report "Where the Shoe Pinches", published every four years before the parliamentary elections, the Salvation Army identifies key societal challenges and follows up with recommendations. In the latest report ahead of the 2025 parliamentary election, their housing recommendations include:

- Improved coordination of services for low-income families through dedicated coordinator roles, with stronger collaboration between public and nonprofit actors for a more holistic approach.
- Non-commercial actors that can rent out properties at reasonable rates, ideally through "rent-to-own" models or similar schemes.

*We believe that churches have the potential to contribute more systematically by providing guidance on rights and opportunities, including language assistance when needed.*

*Regarding the housing market, we call on actors in real estate and business to collaborate with nonprofit organizations in general—and the Salvation Army in particular—to help meet these needs. We also believe that families within the churches who have rental properties can contribute with flexible and fair rental arrangements in cooperation with the Salvation Army and other experienced actors.*

## 8.2 Work and Education

It goes without saying that being unemployed while supporting a family is difficult. As the Salvation Army points out, many in low-income families are far removed from stable employment, have weak labor market attachment, and are reliant on various support schemes. For many, assistance along the way is critical to eventually securing a job. This also applies to individuals emerging from situations involving substance abuse or crime, where work can provide purpose, structure, and dignity. This requires strong partnerships between businesses willing to take a chance and public institutions offering support. There is also a significant need for volunteers to support existing initiatives, as substantial follow-up is often necessary. Many businesses operate with tight margins and lack the capacity for the intensive support these situations demand. Here, combining professional efforts with volunteer involvement can be an effective solution.

Success in school and work can provide the essential starting capital for young people facing various challenges. Not all young people are equipped to manage the demands of everyday life, school, and work. As noted in Chapter 7, it is encouraging that high school dropout rates are declining, but many still struggle with the combined pressures of housing, school, or work.

The situation is complex, and current regulations prevent youth under 18 from receiving housing support while attending school. This creates significant challenges for those who cannot live at home, and more flexible rules are needed.

*We encourage businesses connected to churches to establish job training programs. We also urge churches to contribute volunteer support to initiatives run by experienced organizations in this area.*

*The Marita Foundation's housing community "Marita Bo" has had success recruiting young adults from churches in Oslo to live alongside youth in need of basic housing skills and daily life support. This creates a very positive synergy for both the mentors and the youth and is a practical way for young adults/students in churches to help others build daily routines and follow up with school or work.*

## 8.3 CONCLUSION

Cultural challenges, in the sense of systemic deficiencies, are fortunately much less prevalent in Norwegian society than in many other countries. Trust in authorities makes it natural to listen and collaborate on solutions. However, it remains important to regularly point out existing systemic shortcomings and to strive to be part of the solution where civil society must step up to bring about change.

The Red Cross's point about the lack of coordination among resources is a key criticism of the system. In response, we believe churches can help by offering coordinating and guiding resources for groups in need.

Another significant issue in Oslo is the complex procurement rules tied to housing support, combined with a lack of oversight of rental housing. This leads to the exploitation of the most vulnerable, where substandard and hazardous housing is rented out using public funds. The Salvation Army's Familiebosatt initiative directly addresses this issue by helping families through the process, and we encourage support and strengthening of this and similar efforts.

Furthermore, work and education are keys to escaping poverty. There is a need for more businesses willing to invest in such efforts and for volunteers at experienced organizations where follow-up needs are significant. Training in independent living, alternative school programs, and other measures that help youth complete their education remain essential. A concrete recommendation to authorities is to loosen regulations so that youth under 18 can receive housing support while attending school.



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# 9. Recommendations

In conclusion, we present some recommendations and appeals to the churches. First, we emphasize the recommendations made by the main actors referenced in this report, as well as those closely connected to the churches.

Many of the efforts and initiatives already carried out by churches are not included in these recommendations. While we aim to offer clear guidance and highlight desired priorities, **this does not mean** we recommend that churches stop their current engagements. On the contrary, we are encouraged by the wide variety of church initiatives that involve cooperation with different actors to reach people in need. However, as shown in the mapping of voluntary social engagement within the churches, we believe there is untapped potential for more volunteer hours and effort during a regular week. To realize this potential, we recommend focusing on joint initiatives that have the potential to be sustained. This is not an exhaustive list, but as concrete and targeted as possible based on the signals and findings we have identified.

**Churches** are encouraged to prioritize and implement initiatives in cooperation with each other and with relevant organizations to:

- Offer free and inclusive activities for children and youth in their local communities, with a particular focus on young boys in East Oslo.
- Provide guidance and support to families, with special emphasis on employment rights, language training, digital literacy, and housing opportunities.
- Develop tools and meeting places that can help identify and prevent loneliness among young adults.

**Businesses and organizations** are encouraged to:

- Partner with churches to facilitate job training opportunities.
- Enable and mobilize church members to offer non-commercial housing rentals at reasonable prices, with a special focus on low-income families.

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