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Handling of immigrants' personal names in the Norwegian National Population Register

1. Introduction

The Norwegian Names Act of 2002 (see LOV 2002) aims to cover both Norwegian and immigrant name customs. For immigrant cultures, the most focus is on customs among Muslims, Tamils and Eastern Europeans. In terms of surnames, this may include both given names and surnames being transferred as surnames, as well as surnames being transferred in gender-specific forms.

Given names used by immigrants are sometimes in conflict with existing Norwegian names from other categories, i.e. names associated with the opposite gender and existing surnames. Conflicts also exist concerning protected surnames, double surnames without a hyphen, and prefixed surnames.

Due to lack of written documentation, there is sometimes weak and incomplete evidence of a surname's historical use in a particular family which is applying to use it, or for the origin or tradition of a given name for the relevant gender. Such issues are often solved by identifying alternative transcription variants for names originally written in non-Latin alphabets or character systems. They may also be solved by evaluating the probability of their use based on relevant historical or local knowledge.

This article is based on my background which includes participating in the working group drafting the current Norwegian Names Act of 2002, teaching courses for case managers and seminars in the Population Register, and for acting as an adviser for about one thousand name cases since the 1990s. The article is not based on systematic studies of the archives of the Norwegian National Population Register, due to limited resources.

I have previously discussed the changes made from the former to the current Act in UTNE 2002, 2005a, and 2006a; and accommodations to customs in the current Act in UTNE 2005b, 2006b, 2008, 2012a, and 2012b. These publications also present selected relevant name customs in immigrant cultures. The same themes have partly been investigated for other countries, *inter alia* in the Danish and Swedish preparations for revising their name legislations in the 2000s (Betaenkning 2004; SOU 2013:35).



This article presents an overview of the most relevant rules concerning immigrants and their descendants (subsection 2.), followed by comments on how particularly complex cases are solved or not solved in favour of the immigrants' traditions (subsection 3.).

2. Overview of the Act

The Norwegian Names Act regulate the choice and change of names, relevant rules for surnames and given names, how different rules handle origin and tradition, deviant names, and principles of citizenship related to name rules.

2.1. Choice and change of names

Like the name rules of most countries, the Norwegian Names Act requires giving at least one given name and one surname when naming a person (LOV 2002: section 1). There may also be a middle name of surname type and/or a double surname with a hyphen between the names (LOV 2002: sections 1 and 2).

All types of personal names may be changed according to the rules of the Act. The main rule for name changes is that 10 years must pass between each change (LOV 2002: section 10-2). A change back to former names for a person is not included in that restriction. More frequent changes are also allowed in exceptional circumstances.

2.2. Surnames

For surnames, there are two main rules. One rule deals with protected, free and new surnames, i.e. the number of bearers decides if a name is free for all or protected for the bearers. This rule is referred to as *the number rule* in this text. (LOV 2002: section 3). The other rule regards kinship names, i.e. a right to take names from the family as a surname subject to specified restrictions (ibid.: section 4). The number rule is relevant only to applicants who do not fulfil the requirements for kinship related to the name.

All surnames a person can access may also be used as middle names (LOV 2002: section 9; Circular 2002: 3.9., 5.3.). A middle name is a type of surname inserted between one or more given names and the surname, usually a surname from the family. In Norway a middle name cannot be a given name.

Two surnames may also be combined into a double surname. For such names, a hyphen is required to avoid misidentifying them as a middle name-surname combination (LOV 2002: section 7; Circular 2002: 3.7., 3.9.2.).



2.2.1. Free, protected and new surnames (number)

Names held by more than 200 citizens in Norway as identical surnames are free to take for everyone (LOV 2002: section 3-1; Circular 2002: 3.2).

Names held by 200 people or fewer as surnames are protected (LOV 2002: section 3-2). Access to these names requires approval from everyone holding the surname with identical spelling. For children under 18 years, this approval must be given by the parents or guardians. Surnames used outside of Norway are not counted, mainly because it is often not possible to do so. Immigrants' surnames are part of the statistics when they are registered in the Norwegian National Population Register. In most cases these surnames will be protected because the number will be 200 or less.

Each spelling variant is a separate surname, and different spellings are not counted together (Circular 2002: 3.3.). This means that *Husseini*, held by 185 people, is protected, while *Hosseini*, held by 456 people, is free (as of 1 January 2025).

A third category is new surnames, which are names that are not in use as surnames for any citizens settled in Norway. They may exist as surnames in other countries, as middle names (surname origin) in Norway today, or may have been used previously as a surname in Norway (LOV 2002: section 3-3; Circular 2002: 3.4.; UTNE 2012a: 106–108). Such surnames are free for anyone in Norway.

2.2.2. Kinship ties

Kinship ties for names relate to surnames held by family members, and if this is the case, they may be given without regard to rules for protected surnames (LOV 2002: section 4). This includes transfer of identical surnames, surnames with another gender suffix, and given names as surnames for children and/or wives. These rules require names with similar spelling, except for gender endings (Circular 2002: 3.4., 3.8.1.). Details are presented below.

- a) Surnames or middle names from great-great-grandparents or from partners (LOV 2002: section 4-1-1).

This is the most common practice in Norway and may also be used for all immigrants settled in Norway. In that sense, it is a culturally neutral rule.

- b) Surnames from the parents (fathers) or husband (wife) with gender-specific endings (LOV 2002: section 6-2; Circular 2002: 3.8.3).

In parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and some other areas, there are suffixes in surnames that express gender (UTNE 2006b: 96–98; 2012b: 89–90). When a Ukrainian father's names are *Mykolay Oleksandrovych*

Ihorskyy (given name, patronymic (see type c below), and surname), his wife may be called *Yuliya Stanislavina Ihorska*, and their daughter may be named *Oksana Mykolayivna Ihorska*.

c) Surname based on given names of one of the parents with an ending expressing descent (LOV 2002: section 4-1-2).

This is the patronymic tradition used in many European cultures, mostly as a middle name between the given name (or names) and the surname, for instance in Scandinavia, Russia, Ukraine and some other areas in Central Asia (see examples in type b). In Iceland this is the common way of forming surnames; it is also implemented as an alternative in the various names acts in Scandinavia.

According to the Norwegian Names Act, the choice of suffix in patronymic names is not dependent on personal background such as language or culture (LOV 2002: section 9; Circular 2002: 3.5.3). The requirement is that the suffix must be used in some culture, i.e. *Hassansdatter*, *Kristianivna* or *Kristianovna* may be accepted. (-*datter* is one of the Norwegian suffixes for daughter, and -*ivna* is one of the Ukrainian, and -*ovna* one of the Russian ones) (UTNE 2012a: 96–102; 2012b: 89–90).

d) Given names from one of the parents, without endings (LOV 2002: section 4-1-3; Circular 2002: 5.2.1 and 3.4).

Traditions involving a father's given name are common among Muslims, Tamils and Eritreans, and in some other cultures in Asia and Africa (UTNE 2008: 87–89, UTNE 2012b: 86–89).

Muslim names are often used for three generations. This means that a citizen's given name may be followed by the father's and the grandfather's given names (UTNE 2002: 79–82, 87–88; 2008: 87–89; 2012b: 86–88). The father's name may be *Hasan Jamal Ibrahim*, and his son may be called *Yusuf Hasan Jamal*. In other cultures, only the father's given name is used.

e) Given names from one partner as surname for the other partner without ending (LOV 2002: section 4-1-5; Circular 2002: 5.2.1., 3.4 (the paragraph about LOV 2002: section 3-3-3)).

This is practiced mainly in the Tamil naming culture but may also be present in other Southeast Asian cultures, where the husband's given name becomes surname for the wife (UTNE 2008: 89–90; 2012b: 89). In this culture with the surname before the given name the wife may be called *Jeyamohan Jayanthini* when the husband is *Ravichandran Jeyamohan*.



For acceptance by the Norwegian National Population Register of types b, d, and e, it is required that the surname comes from a culture with such a gendered tradition (LOV 2002: section 6-2; Circular 2002: 3.8.3, 5.2.1.).

In the Norwegian Names Act, all the rules for types a–e are gender-neutral, even though this is not always the tradition where the customs are common (UTNE 2012b: 91). This includes given names of mothers and wives, surnames with gender suffixes and given names with endings expressing descent (called matronymics) as surnames for children and husbands. For example, *Fatimasdatter* and *Gryevna* from Muslim *Fatima* and the Nordic girls' name *Gry*.

According to the Norwegian Names Act, surnames may also be added or replaced, even if this conflicts with rules in the person's country of citizenship (Circular 2002: 5.1.). See 3.4.4.

2.3. Given names

Given names are personal names, either in first position or, in some countries, in other positions such as Hungary or Southeast Asia, where they are in the last position. Normally given names are gendered, but in some cultures many names are used for both genders. For given names, the main rules in Norway are:

- Given names are usually gendered. This is not expressed in the Act but included as a requirement in the circular related to the section for significant disadvantages and other strong reasons (LOV 2002: section 10-1; Circular 2002: 2.3.7.1; UTNE 2012b: 83–85). See 2.5.
- Surnames cannot be used as given names (LOV 2002: section 8, UTNE 2012b: 86).
- Given names and surnames are normally not acceptable when they can lead to significant disadvantages or should not be used for other strong reasons (LOV 2002: section 10-1). This means that the names resemble words that are considered deviant for personal names, referred to as *deviant names* in this text.

Permitted exceptions:

- Given names for the opposite gender to what is tradition in Norway are acceptable when they fulfil the requirements of origin or tradition as given names for the relevant gender (Circular 2002: 2.3.7.1; UTNE 2012b: 83–85). See 2.4.
- Surnames as given names are acceptable when they fulfil the requirements of origin or tradition as given names for the relevant gender (LOV 2002: section 8; Circular 2002: 2.3.7.1; 4., 3.4 parallel to section on instructions for surnames 3-3-3; UTNE 2012b: 86). See 2.4.

- Deviant names are in most cases accepted in Norway when they have traditional use without deviant meaning in other cultures (LOV 2002: section 10-1; Circular 2002: 5.4., 2.3.7.1; UTNE 2012b: 93–94).

2.4. Origin and tradition

For given names, there are rules for proving whether a name is valid for the relevant category, i.e. girl's name, boys' name or surname (LOV 2002: section 8, 3-3-3; Circular 2002: 4., 2.3.7.1., 3.4., 5.2.1.; UTNE 2012b: 85–89). This means there is a requirement of origin or tradition. Origin and tradition mean the existence of the name for the relevant category somewhere in the world, whether at the present time or in the past.

Giving an original name means creating a new name without copying a name from another category of personal names (Circular 2002: 2.3.7.1.; UTNE 2012a: 76–80). It may be from words, or by a free combination of characters or from parts of other names. These are usually names created in the past.

The main requirement for establishing whether a name has tradition is providing evidence for use of the name by at least five people at least one generation back in time (about 20 years) in countries where there are name acts (UTNE 2012a: 81–82; 2012b: 85). Otherwise, the requirement is at least 500 people. Countries without name acts include the US and the UK, and some other countries.

2.5. Significant disadvantages and other strong reasons—deviant names

Deviant names can mainly be divided into those causing *significant disadvantages* for the citizens themselves and those with other *strong reasons* against them from other citizens' point of view and from society at large (LOV 2002: section 10-1; Circular 2002: 2.3.7.; UTNE 2012a: 84–91; 2012b: 93–94).

The *significant disadvantages* category relates to names that are expected to put the bearers in a bad light. Typical cases involve names that may resemble or even be identical to words for diseases, medicines, lower parts of the body, excrement, swear words, negatively charged terms, terms that otherwise seem offensive, taboo words, harmful things and substances, destructive actions, negative attitudes, religious content (*Jesus* is accepted), negative religious references (profanity) or animals regarded as ugly (not nice) in society (based on NOU: 3.3.2. and on decisions since 2003). Examples would be *Cancer*, *Morfine* (*Morphine*) and *Analius*. See 3.4.3.

The *other strong reasons* category refers to names that other people than the bearer may feel uncomfortable using, or it may be unclear whether they are in fact personal names. This includes cases like those in the significant disadvantage category, as well as other types of linguistic expressions, such as



titles, single letters, numerals, acronyms (mainly without vowels), or notations that cannot be pronounced as words (*Chr, Edv, Ths*).

The distinction between girls' and boys' names is also included in this section of the act. This is regarded as a significant disadvantage or other strong reason depending on the actual case. See 2.3.

2.6. Domicile and citizenship principles

Two international legal principles outline which national acts shall be applied to citizens outside the country of their citizenship: the domicile principle and the citizenship principle (UTNE 2012a: 98). The former entails that one should follow the rules (legislation) in the country where one lives and is settled, while the latter means following name rules (legislation) in the country where one has one's citizenship (passport).

The main principle in Norway is the domicile, which implies that the Norwegian Names Act applies to name choices and name changes for all individuals who live in Norway and intend to stay in the country permanently or at least for some years (LOV 2002: section 14-1; Circular 2002: 2.3.8.).

3. Comments on complex cases

This section of the text comments on methods for handling difficult cases of acceptance or refusal, when evaluating name applications. These methods include considering who is handling the cases, documentation of former use of names in the specific family and name traditions in societies, handling choices and changes of names, accommodation and conflicts related to the Act, and possible needs for revisions of legal practice or the Act.

3.1. Administrative handling of name applications

Naming cases are normally handled by the executive officers at the National Population Register, with a team situated in two locations. Each month, I am consulted on a couple of cases as a name researcher. This concern searching for origin or tradition of the names or verifying documentation for kinship use of names. Complaints from the applicants are handled by the regional commissioners (representatives of the Norwegian government) (Circular 2002: 2.1., 2.2.; UTNE [in press]).

3.2. Documentation

Cases with complications related to documentation mostly have to do with transcription between the Latin alphabet and other alphabetic systems or other character systems (Eastern Asia) or weak and incomplete documentation.



3.2.1. Transcription

Transcription plays a crucial role in transferring names from non-Latin alphabets or character systems to variants of Latin alphabets both at immigration and when changing names later. From any one alphabet or other character system to another there are many different transcription conventions. This depends on spelling systems in target languages, varying pronunciations in the source language, and it also builds on one-to-one character transfer (transcription). While there are some official transcription standards, unofficial systems may also be used (UTNE 2002: 83–87; 2005b: 88–93; 206b: 108–116; 2012b: 91–92).

Transcription variants are an important factor in fulfilling requirements for kinship names and for changing surnames that conflict with the protection rule (LOV 2002: section 4, 3-2).

Transcription variants may also be used to prove a name's origin or tradition for the relevant gender, meaning that various transcription variants may be considered equally valid (LOV 2002: section 8).

3.2.2. Weak and incomplete documentation

For immigrants, there is often weak or missing information due to less formal use of names, lack of registration systems available in their home countries, or lack of contact with their former country. This may be important in terms of verifying the existence of kinship ties to names or origin and tradition for the wanted name category.

One such application concerned a Muslim surname which was a protected surname in Norway. The intention was to bring back a Muslim name formerly used in the family. The applicant was registered with names transcribed to a Latin alphabet from Chinese in a spelling very different from the original Muslim name. The Chinese registration had been transcribed from a Muslim name, and the given name and surname were registered in reverse order, so that the names were confused in the documents. The Norwegian National Population Register and I processed this based on a description of historical facts which seemed credible and trustworthy. The Muslim names were approved as applied for by this applicant (LOV 2002: section 4-1-9; Circular 2002: 3.5.8., 5.2.1.).

Not all cases with weak or incomplete documentation are solved in accordance with the applicant's wishes. Citizens without kinship ties to a name may compensate for such a lack of documentation by citing rules of quantity, as described in 3.4.2 (below).



3.3. Choice and change of names

Choice of names concerns names for children. Change of names normally concerns people who want to change a name registered at immigration. See also 2.1.

3.3.1. Choice of names

The requirement of at least one given name and one surname is motivated by practical reasons. Some cultures use neither surnames nor patronymics. Such customs exist in Myanmar, Rwanda, Burundi and Indonesia.

Parents from a culture without surnames may want to give their children a surname which is traditionally a given name in their "home" culture. In most such cases there are two given names which are not shared in the family; these cases are most complex when the last (second) given name is similar to a protected surname. If the last name is not in conflict with protected surnames, it is accepted as a surname. Other cases may be solved as an exception to the rule (LOV 2002: section 4-1-9; UTNE 2012b: 95–96), or by citing number rules (see 2.2.1.).

3.3.2. Change of names

Common reasons for name changes among immigrants include wanting other names than those that were registered at the time of immigration. As registering of foreign names was often restricted in the former Act, name changes may be to accommodate to the current Norwegian Names Act (UTNE 2002: 87–89; 2005a: 315–325). The reason may also be lack of communication at the time of immigration. A third type is simplifying of names which are long and complicated to use in Norway.

Changes may be because of the following former rules, which are changed in the current Act:

- Categorisation of names. Tamils were not allowed to register the father's name as a surname for children (UTNE 2005a: 315–321). Tamils could also not use the husband's name as a surname for the wife (ibid.).
- Gender suffixes in middle names or surnames concerning patronymics and surnames from Eastern Europe were not accepted.

Changes due to lack in communication during immigration may include:

- Selection of names for cultures without a strong fixed name system, which often occurs in Muslim tradition. The names presented at immigration were a selection of their names, and the applicants want to rectify this. This may be solved by presenting documentation or by



entering given names, middle names, and surnames which are accepted according to the current Act.

- Spelling. Some applicants want to correct spellings that are different from that of former names of themselves or their family members. This is solved by alternative transcriptions or by proving use by other people in the same family (Circular 2002: 2.3.5.).
- Name order. Given names and surnames may have been swapped. This may be corrected for names in cultures where the same names are used both as given names and surnames. (LOV 2002: section 4-1-9, Circular 2002: 3.5.8).

Changes of long and complicated names may include:

- Names composed of multiple parts and spellings that are unfamiliar in Norway. Such names may be changed to simpler names, often names the person uses, and names similar to protected surnames are accepted. This is a practice not expressed in the Act (Circular 2002: 2.3.5.).

3.4. Accommodations and conflicts

The implementation of immigrants' name customs in the Norwegian Names Act of 2002 largely concerned accommodation of customs for given names of fathers and husbands as surnames for descendants and for wives (partners), and customs for gendered surnames. (See 2.2.2.) The intention for this was to avoid special rules dependent on ethnicity and cultural background (Circular 2002: 5.1.). The rules were intended to be based on the name's tradition, not the individual's ethnicity and cultural background (Circular 2002: 5.2.1.). Muslims with European names must follow European customs, and individuals with Norwegian background may follow Muslim tradition (through the Act) if they have taken a Muslim given name (also as adult).

Rules for given names were also liberalised to enable easier accommodation of foreign given names such as names for the opposite gender or surnames in Norway, and foreign spelling and pronunciations (Circular 2002: 5.1.; UTNE 2012b: 93–94).

The Act from 2002 upholds Norwegian traditions like restriction against protected surnames, unhyphenated double surnames, new prefixed surnames, and main rules for keeping gendered given names and separating given names and surnames (see introduction to 2.2.).

Most cases with immigrant names are easily solved. An important way of solving difficult cases relating to the opposition between accommodation and conflicts is to examine a name's relation to origin and traditions. Other issues related to this opposition are protected surnames, deviant names and some other minor conflicts. This is treated in the following subsections.

3.4.1. Origin and tradition

Solving cases regarding origin or tradition requires finding information on customs and names from the internet and printed sources (UTNE 2012a: 76–84; UTNE 2012b: 85). The sources must be credible and professional, preferably assessed independently. Private internet pages may have invented names, may give inaccurate information about customs, and cannot be trusted.

Verifying origin and tradition often involves reading sources in foreign languages and non-Latin alphabets. For this, translation programs are useful (i.e. Google Translate) because of lack of funds available to purchase translation services. Also, additional information and communication with the applicants, family and local community are useful. The situation described regarding weak and incomplete documentation above (3.2.2) is also relevant.

Many applications from immigrant families for given names for children are solved in these ways. This requires a large amount of work.

3.4.2. Conflicts with protected surnames

Citizens without a proven valid kinship tie to a name may have their requests fulfilled by citing rules of number. The overview below is based on my experience from cases discussed in courses, seminars at the Population Register, and elsewhere.

a) Choosing a free surname

The concept of free surnames enables changing to some surnames from immigrant cultures as well as other frequent surnames in Norway, like *Olsen* (secondary patronymic) or *Berg* (from a farm name).

A few surnames from recent immigrant cultures exceed the limit and are classified as free surnames, including *Kahn*, *Nguyen* and *Hussaini*, as well as given names used as frequent surnames, such as *Ali*, *Ahmed*, and *Hassan*.

b) Trying to get permission to use a protected surname

Most surnames that have come to Norway through immigration since the mid-1900s have been used by fewer than 201 citizens, and such surnames are therefore protected here, like *Husseini* and *Musavi*.

However, if you get approval from all the name bearers of a certain name, you could change to the name. For immigrants, there may be issues linked to communicating with all the bearers and getting answers from them concerning the approval request. They often do not understand how to ask for permission, due to difficulties in mastering Norwegian administrative rules and language. Also, immigrant bearers often do not understand what they are being asked in these cases.



c) Adding together transcription variants

In certain circumstances, for names from non-Latin alphabets the sum of transcription variants may be counted together to exceed the limit for free surnames (LOV 2002: section 4-1-9; Circular 2002: 3.5.8). Examples of summation (number of people on 1 January 2025) are *Mosavi* (46), *Mosawi* (40), *Mousavi* (76), *Moosavi* (10), *Musavi* (18) and *Musawi* (19), totalling 209.

d) Creating a new surname with a transcription variant

A solution in some cases may be to create a new name in Norway in accordance with the rule for new surnames (see 2.2.1). This can be a transcription variant so different that it cannot be confused with protected surnames. It may be achieved by at least introducing another vowel (*a, i, u* as alternatives to *e*), another consonant, a single vs. double surname, or a double surname with or without a hyphen. Examples of Muslim names would be *Al-Hussayn*, *El-Hussein*, *Alhussayn*, *Elhussein*, *Alhussayni*, *Elhusseini* and *Housseini*.

The working group that prepared the Names Act proposed to make all new surnames free, among other things to make it easier to establish surnames for immigrant cultures (NOU: 8.2.3.1). This was not adopted into the final Act (Ot.prp.: 5.3.).

3.4.3. Significant disadvantages and other strong reasons

Some names from foreign languages resemble Norwegian words that may conflict with the rules above. The names may still be accepted because of cultural traditions (UTNE 2012b: 93–94). In the case of tradition in another culture (family background), the applicants/parents must be informed of possible disadvantages in Norway (Circular 2002: 5.4.). The parents will then decide what to do. A real case is *Diaree* (meaning ‘diarrhoea’). *Jesus* will be accepted because of tradition in many countries. Other examples of immigrant names may be *Kukka* (Finnish girls’ name meaning “flower” in Finnish), *Kukku* and *Kúko* (Greenlandic given name for both genders and surname; unknown meaning), *Drita* (Albanian girls’ name meaning “light, light up”), *Fjolla* (Albanian girls’ name meaning ‘snowflake’). These names resemble the Norwegian words *kukk* = ‘penis’, *drita* = ‘drunk’, and *fjolle/-a* = ‘a person acting like a fool’.

Names resembling titles are often accepted because of similarity with the name tradition in another country (Circular 2002: 5.4.). Single letter names (initials) are normally not accepted (UTNE 2012a: 87–88). This may be solved by using full names.



3.4.4. Other possible conflicts

Applications from Spanish, Portuguese and South American immigrants may conflict with the Norwegian system due to these countries' rules for double surnames without a hyphen. The same may be true regarding prefixes in new surnames, and the US convention of given names as middle names (UTNE 2005b: 79, 82, 84–85). Such requests are not accepted, as mentioned in 2.2.

Occasionally some applicants with foreign citizenship want a name that conflicts with rules in the country where they have citizenship. This may be an application to change into surname forms that are not according to the gendered surname style in Eastern Europe, into names that do not have a Thai form, or to leave an Icelandic patronymic surname.

Conflicts related to citizenship have sometimes occurred when foreign wives have taken their Norwegian husbands' surnames which don't match the names in their own passport from another country. Sometimes they may have changed back to the names in their passports when they travel to their country of citizenship. After multiple changes back and forth this is denied because the intention of the rule is name stability (LOV 2002: section 10-1, 10-2). The solution is to adjust to the passport from the country of citizenship, i.e. outside Norway.

3.5. Future

For the future we may expect more adjustment to customs in other countries (UTNE [in press]). This means even more liberal rules for given names related to gender and given names based on surnames, use of prefixes in new surnames, and ways of solving issues with unhyphenated double surnames based on customs in conflict with current Norwegian Names Act. Most of these cases regard customs in Western and Southern Europe and in the US.

4. Concluding remarks

The Norwegian Names Act is meant to accept culturally determined use of names that differs from the Norwegian traditions. The Act has a main principle of equal treatment of individuals of all cultural backgrounds, including immigrants and former Norwegians. Names are treated according to the traditions they are a part of. This means if a person has got a Muslim given name or an Eastern European surname, their family can transfer the names according to the rules for these names, independent of his or her ethnic background.

Most cases are solved through documentation of names origin and tradition, supplemented by liberal transcription routines. However, this may be difficult



in cultures with limited administration routines and often unstable governments.

Despite this, there are also rules based on Norwegian tradition that conflict with foreign cultures and thereby also the traditions of immigrants. This includes protected surnames, forming new unhyphenated double surnames or prefixed surnames.

For the future, we may expect more adjustment to customs in other countries. This means even more liberal rules for given names (related to gender and use of surnames as given names), use of prefixes in new surnames and ways of resolving the issue of double surnames based on customs in conflict with the current Norwegian Names Act.

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Abstract

Rules for processing of applications for immigrants' names in the Norwegian National Population Register relate mostly to kinship ties for surnames, the distinction between free and protected surnames, gender-specific regulations for given names, separation of given names and surnames, and foreign surname traditions. There is a need to account for names and name traditions from a wide range of cultures. This includes a culturally determined tradition for given names as surnames and for gender variants of surnames, as well as gender-specific given names in use in the relevant part of the world. Some applications will not normally be approved, due to a strong Norwegian tradition, including for instance the use of surnames as given names, and the use of gender-neutral given names. The Act promotes greater gender equality in the use of surnames than what is the tradition in some immigrant cultures, such as surnames from both father and mother. However, due to the domicile and citizenship principles, name changes approved in Norway may not necessarily be accepted in the country outside Norway where the person has citizenship.

Keywords: immigration, surnames, given names, transcription, Norwegian Names Act

