

LIECHTENSTEIN 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Most cases involved Muslim immigrants who suffered verbal harassment. Other examples included right wing or anti-Semitic graffiti and internet websites disseminating discriminatory rhetoric.

The U.S. Ambassador, embassy officers, and visiting U.S. officials encouraged the promotion of religious freedom in discussions with government officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 37,000 (July 2013 estimate). Religious group membership by percentage is as follows: 76 percent Roman Catholic, 7.6 percent Protestant, 5.4 percent Muslim, 2.8 percent religious but with no formal religious group, 1.1 percent Christian Orthodox, 1.7 percent other religious groups, and 5.4 percent no religious affiliation.

The great majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominately from Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The Jewish community consists of approximately 26 people and there is no formal organizational structure. The Association of the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem represents the Jewish community's interests. There are no synagogues or Jewish cemeteries in the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no distinct separation between church and state. The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom. The criminal code prohibits any form of discrimination against or debasement of any religion or its adherents. According to the constitution, Roman Catholicism is the state religion

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“with full protection from the state.” As such, it holds a guaranteed role in education and religious teaching in schools, and has a voice in the political and legal decision-making process.

Funding for religious institutions comes from the municipalities and from the general budget, according to parliamentary or municipal decisions. The government provides Catholic and Protestant churches annual contributions in proportion to membership; smaller religious groups are eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. All religious groups have tax-exempt status.

Religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools. Catholic or Protestant religious education is compulsory in all primary schools, but the authorities routinely grant exemptions for children whose parents request them. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Some primary schools offer Islamic education.

At the secondary school level, parents and students choose between traditional confessional education which their religious community organizes and a course in religion and culture. The government provides financial support to some smaller denominations that choose to offer religious education classes at their places of worship outside regular school hours.

The government does not issue visas for religious workers. It grants short-term residency permits, however. To receive such a permit, applicants must have completed theological studies, be a member of a nationally recognized religious group, and be sponsored by a registered member of the official religious group’s clergy. The Immigration and Passport Office normally processes immigration requests for clergy.

The government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government grants short-term residency permits primarily to the imams of the Turkish Association and other foreign Muslim institutions who agree not to allow or preach sermons that incite violence or advocate intolerance.

The government and the Catholic Church allow Muslims to be buried in all of the country’s cemeteries, although not according to Muslim tradition. There is no Muslim cemetery or mosque in the country. The Muslim community owns two prayer rooms.

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Government Practices

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) noted in a report issued on February 19 that the country's only monitoring agency for cases of anti-Semitism and racism (the Equal Opportunity Office) was not independent and therefore had a limited scope of dealing with cases of discrimination and intolerance.

The two main representative bodies of the Muslim community, the Islamische Gemeinschaft and the Tuerkischer Verein (the Islamic Community and the Turkish Association) continued to collaborate with the government to establish an umbrella organization to receive state contributions to be used equitably for all Muslims residing in the country.

The Roman Catholic parish of Ruggell opened its chapel to other denominations during the year. In 2012, the government provided three Roman Catholic chapels in three different parishes for Muslims to hold funeral services. Two chapels (one in the parish of Eschen and one in the parish of Mauren) were inaugurated in 2013. Eight primary schools offered Islamic education taught in German to approximately 70 students between the ages of seven and 13.

In 2012, the government granted five residency permits to religious workers. No residency applications were filed during the year. Previously issued permits remained valid, however.

On January 30, the government held a public Holocaust commemoration ceremony at the Liechtenstein National Museum. Several high-ranking politicians and diplomats gave speeches, including Foreign Minister Aurelia Frick. As part of the commemoration, the government honored Paul Gruniger, who helped Jews escape the Nazis along the Swiss-Austrian border.

Schools continued to teach Holocaust education. In February and October, the International Tracing Service provided training and materials to interested teachers. Eschen's high school included Holocaust education in the curriculum and several teachers coordinated related events with other schools. Since 2003, secondary schools have held discussion forums on the Holocaust to mark the Day of Remembrance on January 27.

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The municipalities of Balzers, Triesen, and Planken continued to supervise the religious curriculum in primary schools most closely.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. For example, the ECRI reported women wearing headscarves were repeatedly discriminated against when applying for housing and jobs.

ECRI also noted several incidents of anti-Semitic graffiti on public and private property in several cities in 2012.

The government's Equal Opportunity Office received no complaints of religious discrimination during the year. The government's racism monitoring report and ECRI, however, noted increased collaborative efforts between local, Austrian, German, and Dutch racist groups that also posted discriminatory and anti-Semitic rhetoric on online platforms.

The right wing organization Europaeische Aktion (European Action) used extreme language on the internet and in flyers and booklets against some religious groups. Observers noted that the ideas had been formulated in a way that rendered them non-punishable within the framework of criminal law.

The Umbrella Organization for Islamic communities of Eastern Switzerland (DIGO) also represented Muslim interests in the country.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officers from the U.S. Embassy in Switzerland discussed religious freedom issues with the Office of Foreign Affairs.