

DENMARK

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) is the state church, and it enjoys some privileges not available to other religious groups.

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, such as anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, harassment, and vandalism, reflecting tensions between young Muslims and other young persons.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community, and sponsored a variety of programs promoting religious tolerance for public servants, leaders, and citizens.

Section I. Religious Demography

Based on 2011 official statistics, approximately 80 percent of the population belongs to the ELC. Although only 2 to 3 percent of citizens attend services regularly, approximately 50 percent of them utilize the church at least once annually for baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and religious holidays.

As a result of immigration trends, the second largest religion is Islam, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population (approximately 230,000 individuals). Muslim communities tend to concentrate in the largest cities, particularly in Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include (from largest to smallest): Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Jews, Baptists, Buddhists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Pentecostals.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution stipulates that the ELC is the state church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of the church, and the state shall support it. The ELC is the only religious organization that receives state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 14 percent of the church's budget is paid by all taxpayers; the balance of the budget comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. The ELC performs nonreligious activities, such as management of nonsectarian cemeteries and registration of civil unions, births, deaths, and other vital statistics.

The criminal code prohibits blasphemy, defined as public mockery of or insult to the doctrine or worship of a legally recognized religion. The maximum penalty for a violation of this provision is a fine and up to four months in prison. Since 1938 the government has not prosecuted any cases under the blasphemy provision; prosecutors have routinely dismissed alleged blasphemy as protected free speech. The law also prohibits hate speech and penalizes public statements that threaten, insult, or degrade individuals on the basis of their religion or belief.

The country mandates compulsory military service, but provides an exemption for conscientious objectors. In lieu of military service, conscientious objectors may be required to serve outside of the military.

Religious symbols, such as headscarves, turbans, Jewish skull caps, and crucifixes, as well as political symbols, are banned from judicial attire.

In addition to the ELC, the government, through the Ministry of Justice, grants official status to other religious groups. Prior to 1970, a total of 11 religious communities received approval in the form of recognition by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities. Since then the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has registered 116 religious groups including several Muslim groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and followers of the indigenous Norse belief system Forn Sidr. Registered religious groups enjoy certain special rights, including the right to perform marriage ceremonies with legal effect, baptize children, obtain residence permits for foreign preachers, establish cemeteries, and receive tax exemptions.

Religious communities not recognized by either royal decree or registered by the Ecclesiastic Ministry are entitled to practice their religion without any licensing requirement. Members of non-recognized religious groups often have a

ceremonial wedding service at their church or temple but legally marry at a city hall. Unrecognized religious communities are not granted tax-exempt status.

The current Guidelines for Approval of Religious Organizations require religious groups seeking registration to submit the following items: a document on the group's central traditions; descriptions of its most important rituals; a copy of its rules, regulations, and organizational structure; an audited financial statement; and information about the group's leadership and each member with a permanent address in the country. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law.

All public and private schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. The Evangelical Lutheran religion is taught in public schools in accordance with the Public School Act; however, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Additionally, the law requires that a Christian studies course covering world religions and philosophy and promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs be taught in public school. The course is compulsory, although students may be exempted if a parent presents a request in writing. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption. According to the Ministry of Education, on average only 1.3 percent of students in the greater Copenhagen sample area, which has the highest concentration of non-Christians, opted out of the Christian studies course, taking another class of their choice, not necessarily on religion.

The law allows Muslim, Jewish, and Christian prayers to be substituted for collective prayer in such venues as school assemblies, as long as the prayer is invoked without preaching.

Legislation requires most foreign religious workers (citizens of Turkey excepted) to pass a Danish language test within six months of entering the country to be able to obtain an extension of their residence permits as religious workers. Critics claimed that the measure violates the European Convention on Human Rights and is aimed at restricting the entry of Muslim clerics.

The government is a member of the 25-country Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Second Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and the day after Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom. Authorities from the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs cite the constitution as the singular body of laws or policy that governs religious freedom. The constitution states that “No person can, because of his religious belief or descent, be deprived of access to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights.”

Approximately 10 years ago, the Church of Scientology was denied official approval. The Church has no plans to apply in the future and continues to meet and worship. Leaders stated that there were no instances of religious discrimination during the year.

Because 14 percent of the ELC’s budget is paid by taxpayers, members of other religious groups have argued that the system is unfair and that the government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom.

Since 2006 the country has allowed congregations outside of the ELC to establish their own cemeteries and granted the same property tax exemptions that the ELC receives. There are currently 15 Muslim cemeteries, 14 Catholic, six Jewish, and one from another faith. Additionally, the country allows ELC cemeteries to have areas dedicated to other religious communities.

After a well-publicized debate over whether there should be freestanding mosques with domes and minarets in the country, two city councils adopted plans to build a mosque. Copenhagen Employment and Integration Mayor Anna Mee Allerslev stated, “We have freedom of religion and free speech in Denmark, and therefore it is quite natural to have two beautiful mosques in Copenhagen. As long as there is not anything illegal, we have no power to prevent an ideological building project.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were occasional reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice such as reports of anti-Semitic and anti-

Islamic insults, harassment, and vandalism, mostly reflecting tensions between increasing numbers of young Muslims and other young persons. For example, the police in West Zodiac reported that there was a Facebook group that spoke “disparagingly of Muslims.” Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. The country, nevertheless, has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment under the law, and the number of such reports remained low.

The Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), in cooperation with local and national police, publishes an annual report on hate crimes. Religiously motivated hate crimes make up one section of the report. The report is available to the public and details examples of the most noteworthy crimes that occurred the previous year as noted below.

In November PET released its annual report on religious- and race-related crime reported in 2010. It included 10 incidents attributed specifically to religious motivation, down from 21 incidents in 2009. The most publicized incident was the attempted assassination of cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, who continued to receive security protection at year’s end due to threats on his life in response to his controversial cartoon depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005.

There were isolated anti-Semitic incidents. For example, it was reported that one Jew was hit in the face and called a “Jew pig.” According to victims’ reports, the perpetrators were mainly immigrants, many of them from Arab and other Muslim countries. Most incidents involved vandalism, such as graffiti, and nonviolent verbal assaults

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by several political parties to ban the group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officials regularly worked with government and civil society to address religious freedom issues to counteract anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Semitism. In 2011 the embassy sponsored a trip for eight government officials, including high-ranking police officials and the mayor of Aarhus, to the United States to discuss and learn about religious tolerance and how American authorities combat hate crimes. The U.S. Department of State also brought the deputy sheriff for immigrant outreach of the Los Angeles Police, a Muslim, to the country to

discuss his department's handling of racial and religiously motivated crimes. The embassy sponsored other programs including leadership training for Muslim students, Jewish cultural activities, and sponsored a number of iftars (evening meals during Ramadan).