

IRELAND

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.

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government engaged in a variety of measures to promote religious freedom. The U.S. government discussed issues of religious freedom in a frank and open manner. The ambassador hosted an annual Thanksgiving interfaith reception with leaders from all of the country's religious communities. In addition, the U.S. embassy promoted a number of new initiatives aimed at encouraging religious tolerance through the Generation Change program, a Facebook-based communication platform to engage youth.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2011 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 84.1 percent Catholic, 2.8 percent Church of Ireland, 1.07 percent Muslim, 0.99 percent Orthodox Christian, 0.90 percent unspecified Christian, 0.53 percent Presbyterian, less than 0.1 percent Jewish, and 5.88 percent unaffiliated.

Christian and Muslim Africans, Muslims from North Africa and the Middle East, Muslims and Hindus from South Asia, and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in larger urban areas.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution prohibits promotion of one religious group over another as well as discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. The government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion.

The constitution provides that “publication or utterance” of “blasphemous matter” is an offense punishable in accordance with law, but it does not define blasphemy. In the absence of legislation and in the uncertain state of the law, the courts have not prosecuted anyone for blasphemy in several years.

There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religious belief or group.

The government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Most public and private primary and secondary schools are confessional, and their boards of management are governed partially by trustees who are members of religious denominations. Under the terms of the constitution, the Department of Education provides equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Muslim and Jewish schools, as well to nonconfessional schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum of most schools, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

Publicly funded church-linked schools are permitted to refuse to admit a student not of that religious group if the school can prove the refusal is essential to the maintenance of the “ethos” of the school (for example, too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim “ethos”). However, there have been no reports of any children refused admission to any school for this reason. By law a religious school may select its staff based on their religious beliefs.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Saint Patrick’s Day (the country’s national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and Saint Stephen’s Day.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were isolated reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

For example, the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign posted comments on the Israeli embassy's Facebook page in November that called the Israeli government "fascist" and "genocidal." Subsequently, the campaign disrupted the Israeli embassy-sponsored Israeli Film Days festival at the end of November by smashing windows and threatening the organizers. Responding to this action, the deputy prime minister (who is also foreign minister) criticized acts of intimidation and offered to hold the festival in government buildings. He also attended and spoke at the opening of the festival. During the film festival, there were reports that protesters shouted anti-Israel and anti-Semitic comments; police officers removed approximately 50 protesters from the event.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy continued its engagement program aimed at promoting religious freedom. The U.S. government discussed issues of religious freedom in a frank and open manner. The embassy's annual interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue and understanding of religious freedom among governmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as among religious and community leaders. The reception also assisted U.S. government outreach to members of all of the country's religious groups. In addition, the U.S. government promoted a number of new initiatives aimed at encouraging religious tolerance through the U.S. Department of State's Generation Change program, a Facebook-based communication platform to engage youth. The embassy also had an ongoing relationship with the Glenree Peace and Reconciliation Center and was developing a program for Muslim youth.