

ITALY 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of religion and the right of religious communities to establish their own institutions. It specifies the state and the Roman Catholic Church are independent, with their relations governed by treaties, including a concordat granting the Church a number of specific privileges and benefits, and financial support. Twelve other religious groups have accords granting many of the same benefits in exchange for a degree of government monitoring. Religious groups must register to request an accord. Unregistered religious groups operate freely but are not eligible for the same benefits as groups with accords, although they may apply separately for benefits. The Muslim community, which does not have an accord, continued to experience difficulties acquiring permission from local governments to construct mosques. From March 8 to May 18, the government banned public gatherings, including all religious services in all places of worship, due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Italian Catholic Bishops Conference objected to these COVID-19 measures, and the government allowed the Catholic Church to resume services outdoors starting on May 10 and other religious groups on May 18. On February 10, a Rome court convicted and sentenced 24 persons to up to three years and 10 months in prison for racial and ethnic hate speech, defamation, and threats against Jews, migrants, and some public figures. Politicians from several political parties again made statements critical of Islam. On January 20, League Party leader Matteo Salvini said the large numbers of immigrants from Muslim majority countries had increased anti-Semitism in the country. On June 6, Jewish Member of Parliament Emanuele Fiano reported he had received an envelope in the mail containing an image of Adolf Hitler and subtitled “In the Oven.” The President of the Senate appointed 25 members to an extraordinary committee to fight intolerance, anti-Semitism, and hate crimes, as proposed by Senator for Life and Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre and approved by parliament in 2019. In July, the European Court for Human Rights ruled as admissible an appeal by the president of a Bangladeshi cultural association in Milan, who was sentenced to prison and fined in 2019 for hiring a construction company to convert a storage site into a place of worship without prior local government approval. The case marked the first time a court imposed criminal rather than administrative penalties for this type of violation. The Court of Cassation (the country’s highest court of appeal) suspended the prison sentence and fine associated with this case following the appeal.

There were reports of anti-Semitic incidents, including harassment, discrimination, hate speech, and vandalism. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Anti-Semitism Observatory of the Jewish Contemporary Documentation Center Foundation (CDEC) recorded 224 anti-Semitic incidents during the year, compared with 251 in 2019 and 181 in 2018. Of the incidents, 117 involved hate speech on social media or the internet. The press reported examples of anti-Semitic graffiti and posters, including depictions of swastikas on walls, anti-Semitic stereotypes, and praise of neo-Nazi groups in cities such as Rome, Pavia, and Forli. The private research center STATISTA reported an estimated 15.6 percent of Italians believed the Holocaust never happened. While there was no official government data from institutions or public agencies on anti-Muslim incidents, local and European NGOs reported several physical attacks and verbal harassment against Muslims, especially involving hate speech. The NGO Vox Diritti reported 67,889 tweets, representing 59 percent of the total mentioning Islam, containing negative messages against Muslims during the year, compared with 22,532, or 74 percent of the total, in 2019.

Representatives from the U.S. embassy and consulates general met with national and local government officials to encourage respect for religious freedom and equal treatment for all faiths during the year. They also discussed efforts to integrate new migrants – many of whom were Muslim, Orthodox, or Hindu – and second-generation Muslims living in the country, and the prospect for an accord between the government and Muslim communities. In October, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and other senior officials met with religious leaders and government officials to advance priority issues, including the fight against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and regional and local rules that impede the establishment of new places of worship. Embassy, consulate, and senior Department of State officials met with religious leaders and civil society representatives to promote interfaith dialogue and awareness, social inclusion, the empowerment of faith groups through social media, and the mobilization of youth leaders among faith groups. In September, embassy officials met with the national coordinator for the fight against anti-Semitism, the president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), and Rome Jewish community leaders to discuss how to support their efforts to counter anti-Semitism among self-defined far-right groups and civil society. The embassy and consulates general consulted with the country's Jewish communities and concerned authorities to develop the Department of State's *Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act Report* for the country, which was published on July 29. The report highlighted the government's commitment to the Terezin Declaration and its goals and objectives as well as areas where the government had not followed through with a

government commission's recommendations to identify survivors of targeted persecution in World War II or their heirs who are entitled to unclaimed property. The embassy also worked with the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad to engage on issues surrounding a development that could affect a Jewish cemetery in Mantua. The embassy and consulates continued to use their social media platforms to acknowledge major Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holidays as well as to amplify initiatives that promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue at the local level.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 62.4 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to a 2019 study (the most recent available) conducted by IPSOS, an independent research center, 69 percent of the population identifies as Catholic, and another 12 percent does not participate in religious activities. The IPSOS study indicates non-Catholic Christian groups account for approximately 16 percent of the population and include Eastern Orthodox, Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, the Methodist and Waldensian Churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), the Union of Pentecostal Churches (UCP), and several other smaller Protestant groups, including other evangelical Christian groups. According to the national branch of the Church of Jesus Christ, there are approximately 26,000 adherents in the country. According to national newspaper *La Repubblica*, most followers are in Lombardy, Sicily, and Lazio Regions. According to government officials, non-Christian religious groups that together account for less than 10 percent of the population include Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, Sikhs, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha, an Indian spiritual movement.

The UCEI estimates the Jewish population numbers 28,000. According to the legal counsel of the Italian Federation of Progressive Judaism (FIEP), FIEP has a prayer room in Milan and between 500 and 600 members, including Jews who are registered and unregistered in the local communities. The country's progressive Jews are organized into four congregations in Rome, Florence, and Milan.

A 2019 report on immigration released by independent research center IDOS estimated 1.73 million Muslims – approximately 3 percent of the population – live in the country. According to the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the national agency for statistics, the Muslim population includes native-born citizens, immigrants, and resident foreigners, but most of its growth comes from large

numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, the majority of whom live in the north. Moroccan- and Albanian-origin Muslims make up the largest established groups, while Tunisia and Pakistan are increasingly prominent sources of Muslims arriving as seaborne migrants. The MOI reports Muslims are overwhelmingly Sunni.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all citizens are equal before the law regardless of religion and are free to profess their beliefs in any form, individually or with others, and to promote them and celebrate rites in public or in private, provided they are not offensive to public morality. According to the constitution, each religious community has the right to establish its own institutions according to its own statutes as long as these do not conflict with the law. The constitution stipulates the state may not impose special limitations or taxes on the establishment or activities of groups because of their religious nature or aims. The constitution specifies the state and the Catholic Church are independent of each other, and treaties, including a concordat between the government and the Holy See, govern their relations.

Insults against religions or against their followers in public are considered an administrative offense punishable by a fine ranging from 51 to 309 euros (\$63-\$380). The penal code punishes other public offenses to religion, such as offenses against objects used for religious rites or offenses expressed during religious ceremonies, with a fine of up to 5,000 euros (\$6,100) or a prison sentence of up to two years. Those who destroy or violate objects used for religious ceremonies may be punished with up to two years in prison.

The constitution states all religious groups are equally free, and relations between the state and non-Catholic groups, including state support, are governed by agreements (“accords”) between them. Relations between the state and the Catholic Church are governed by a concordat between the government and the Holy See. Representatives of a non-Catholic faith requesting an accord must first submit their request to the Office of the Prime Minister. The government and the group’s representatives then negotiate a draft agreement, which the Council of Ministers must approve. The Prime Minister then signs and submits the agreement to parliament for final approval. Twelve groups have an accord: The Confederation of Methodist and Waldensian Churches, Seventh-day Adventists,

Assemblies of God, Jews, Baptists, Lutherans, Church of Jesus Christ, Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate, Italian Apostolic Church, Buddhist Union, Soka Gakkai Buddhists, and Hindus.

The law provides religious groups with tax-exempt status and the right to recognition as legal entities once they have completed the registration process with the MOI. Legal registration is a prerequisite for any group seeking an accord with the government. A religious group may apply for registration by submitting to a prefect, the local representative of the MOI, an official request that includes the group's statutes; a report on its goals and activities; information on its administrative offices; a three-year budget; certification of its credit status by a bank; and certification of the Italian citizenship or legal residency of its head. To be approved, a group's statutes must not conflict with the law. Once approved, the group must submit to MOI administrative monitoring, including oversight of its budget and internal organization. The MOI may appoint a commissioner to administer the group if it identifies irregularities in its activities. Religious groups that are not registered may still operate legally as cultural associations and obtain tax-exempt status, legal recognition of marriages, access to hospitals and prisons, and other benefits, but those benefits are more easily obtained if a group has an accord with the government. The Catholic Church is the only legally recognized group exempted from MOI monitoring, in accordance with the concordat between the government and the Holy See.

An accord grants clergy automatic access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks; allows for civil registry of religious marriages; facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals; and exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. Any religious group without an accord may request these benefits from the MOI on a case-by-case basis. An accord also allows a religious group to receive funds collected by the state through a voluntary 0.8 percent of personal income tax set-aside on taxpayer returns. Taxpayers may specify to which eligible religious group they would like to direct these funds.

National law does not restrict religious face coverings, but some local authorities impose restrictions. Regional laws in Liguria, Veneto, and Lombardy prohibit the wearing of burqas and *niqabs* in public buildings and institutions, including hospitals.

The concordat with the Holy See provides for the Catholic Church to select teachers, paid by the state, to provide instruction in weekly "hour of religion" courses taught in public schools. The courses are optional, and students who do

not wish to attend may study other subjects or, in certain cases, leave school early with parental consent. Church-selected instructors are lay or religious, and the instruction includes material determined by the state and relevant to both Catholics and non-Catholic religious groups. Government funding is available for only these Catholic Church-approved teachers. If a student requests a religion class from a non-Catholic religious group, that group must provide the teacher and cover the cost of instruction; it is not required to seek government approval for the content of the class. Some local laws provide scholarship funding for students to attend private, religiously affiliated schools, usually but not always Catholic, that meet government educational standards.

Schools are divided into “state-owned,” “state-equivalent,” and private categories. The “state equivalent” category includes public (municipal, provincial, regional, or owned by another public entity) and some private schools, which may be religiously affiliated. All state-equivalent schools receive government funding if they meet criteria and standards published every year by the Ministry of Education. The funding is released through the regional offices for education. Most private schools are run by religious entities and may not issue certificates or diplomas. Private school students must take final annual exams in “state-owned” or “state-equivalent” schools.

Since 2019, Lombardy regional law has prohibited local authorities from dividing burial plots by religious belief.

According to law, hate speech, including instances motivated by religious hatred, is punishable by up to four years in prison. This law also applies to denial of genocide or crimes against humanity.

All missionaries and other foreign religious workers from countries that are not EU members or signatories of the Schengen Agreement must apply for special religious activity visas before arriving in the country. An applicant must attach an invitation letter from his or her religious group to the application.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On March 8, the government temporarily banned public gatherings, including all religious services in all places of worship, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Following an April 26 statement by the Italian Catholic Bishops Conference

rejecting the government measures as limiting religious freedom, the government allowed the Catholic Church to resume services outdoors starting May 10. The Catholic bishops highlighted the difference between the government's responsibility "to adopt health provisions" and the Catholic Church's "to organize activities of the Christian community in full autonomy, respecting the provisions decided [by the government]." On May 15, the government signed agreements with representatives of Muslim, Jewish, and other religious communities authorizing the resumption of religious services outdoors on May 18.

On February 10, a Rome court convicted 24 persons belonging to an association called Stormfront to up to three years and 10 months in prison for racial and ethnic hate speech, defamation, and threats against Jews, migrants, and some public figures. In 2011, the group had established a forum on the U.S. website of the same name promoting white nationalist and supremacist ideologies and published a list of Jewish communities, schools, shops, and restaurants, including addresses and telephone numbers, appealing to its members "to act as they like" based on that information.

Interviewed by Israeli daily *Israel Ya-Yom* on January 20, League Party leader Salvini stated that "the presence of large numbers of migrants coming from Muslim countries provokes an increase in anti-Semitism also in Italy." The Union of the Islamic Communities in Italy (UCOII) issued a press statement expressing "concerns regarding Salvini's statement, which ascribes the causes of social hate against minorities to Muslims and thus lays the ground for hate and Islamophobia. Anti-Semitism is equal to Islamophobia." The UCOII's press statement contained a list of types of discrimination that many Muslims faced, including difficulties in opening new places of worship.

On June 6, Member of Parliament Emanuele Fiano, a member of the Jewish community, announced in a Facebook post that he had received an envelope containing an image of Adolf Hitler and subtitled "In the Oven."

On February 6, the President of the Senate appointed 25 members to an extraordinary committee to fight intolerance, anti-Semitism, and hate crimes, as proposed by Senator for Life and Holocaust survivor Liliana Segre and approved by parliament in 2019.

According to the FIEP's legal counsel, because relations between the government and the country's Jews are governed by an accord between the state and UCEI, the UCEI defined the terms of Jewish identity and practice in the country. According

to the counsel, the growth of progressive Judaism in the country continued to encounter resistance from the largely orthodox UCEI. For example, the UCEI continued not to recognize progressive Jewish rabbis, who were therefore ineligible for Italian visas and residence permits, could not perform marriages having civil validity, and whose congregations were ineligible for government financial benefits.

On December 30, parliament passed the budget law for 2021 that amended a 1955 law on compensation to Holocaust survivors, Jewish victims of persecution, and their heirs to facilitate access to a 500 euro (\$610) per month government benefit. The amendment simplified procedures to obtain the benefit, easing the requirement of proving that discrimination occurred. The budget law also allotted 6.5 million euros (\$7.98 million) to modify a shopping center project in Mantua, including changes solicited by Jewish rabbis to prevent desecration of a Jewish cemetery there. The Jewish community had lobbied for both provisions in the budget.

According to leaders of the Rome Islamic Cultural Center, the government again did not make significant progress on an accord despite ongoing dialogue with Muslim religious communities. The MOI continued to recognize as a legal religious entity only the Cultural Islamic Center of Italy, which administers the Great Mosque of Rome. The government recognized other Muslim groups only as nonprofit organizations.

Regional governments and Muslim religious authorities continued to recognize five mosques, one each in Colle Val d'Elsa (in Tuscany), Milan, and Rome, and two in the Emilia-Romagna Region, in Ravenna and Forli, respectively. In addition, local governments continued to recognize many sites as Muslim places of worship, although these were not considered full-fledged mosques by Muslim authorities because they lacked minarets or other key architectural features.

According to weekly magazine *Panorama*, there were also an estimated 800 to 1,200 unofficial, informal places of worship for Muslims in 2019 (the most recent figure), known colloquially as “garage” mosques. According to the press, authorities allowed most to operate, but they did not officially recognize them as places of worship.

According to media reports, Muslim leaders stated they had difficulties acquiring permission from local governments to construct mosques. Local officials, who were entitled to introduce rules on planning applicable to places of worship,

continued to cite lack of zoning plans allowing for the establishment of places of worship on specific sites as a reason for denying construction permits.

On October 14, the Association of Muslims of Bergamo, Lombardy Region, announced a judge had ruled that the regional government's acquisition in 2018 of a former chapel that the association intended to turn into a mosque was discriminatory and the chapel should be returned to the Muslim community. The Muslim community bought the chapel at auction in 2018 from the main public hospital in Bergamo, which was owned by regional authorities. After the purchase, the governor, a member of the League Party, required the association to sell it back under a law allowing public authorities to buy assets deemed to be of cultural significance.

On July 1, the Lombardy Regional Administrative Court ruled that the municipality of San Giuliano Milanese excessively limited the constitutional principle of religious freedom after it denied in 2019 the use of two separate venues by a Muslim community and an evangelical Christian church. Following the ruling, the Muslim and evangelical Christian communities were able to use their sites as places of worship.

On July 15, the lawyer of Abu Hanif Patwery, president of the Bangladesh Cultural and Welfare Association, announced the European Court for Human Rights had ruled as admissible Patwery's appeal against a 2019 conviction for violating Milan city regulations. Patwery was convicted because his group contracted a company to convert a storage site into a place of worship without prior local government approval. His lawyer argued that the conviction violated freedom of religion because the Lombardy region, including Milan, had adopted laws that de facto prevented Muslims from building new mosques. The Court of Cassation had sentenced him in 2019 to six months in prison and the payment of a 9,000-euro (\$11,000) fine, the first time that a court imposed criminal rather than administrative penalties for this type of violation. Both the sentence and the fine were suspended following the appeal.

On September 14, the Council of State, the country's highest administrative court, ruled that the 2019 order by the municipality of Monfalcone blocking the conversion of a former supermarket into a mosque was legitimate. The municipality had concluded that the building was inappropriate for religious services due to structural reasons. A local Muslim association had purchased the facility in 2017 and requested authorization to reconvert it into a mosque in 2019.

On November 26, the city of Pisa decided not to appeal a July 1 ruling by the Tuscany regional administrative court which annulled city council plans in 2019 to prevent the Pisa Islamic Association from building a mosque on land it had purchased. Pisa city officials had stated at the time that the lot was not large enough for the planned building, while a local imam said the city council had always been hostile to the mosque's construction. On September 24, the local office for the preservation of cultural and environmental assets approved the mosque's construction, rejecting an appeal by Mayor Michele Conti. Construction had not begun by year's end.

According to media, on August 3, the MOI expelled an Egyptian imam in San Dona di Piave, near Venice, for expressing extremist views in his sermons. In a statement, the MOI said the imam "was a follower of an Islamic religious orientation based on orthodox Salafism" and also had ties to extremist elements.

In January, the MOI announced that for reasons of state security it had deported a Moroccan imam back to his home country because of what it said was his support for ISIS and its leadership.

On February 7, the Milan City Council published a zoning plan authorizing two Buddhist temples, seven evangelical Christian churches, three Orthodox churches, four Islamic places of worship (a designation determined by Islamic authorities in the country), and seven Catholic churches. Only places of worship authorized in the zoning plan have legal status; the new places of worship would be in addition to 25 existing places of Islamic and approximately 100 evangelical Christian churches in Milan.

On September 20, the Forza Nuova (New Force) association, commonly characterized as far-right, staged a rally against the establishment of a temporary facility to host Muslim worshippers in an area used as parking lot in Milan. Both the League Party and New Force opposed the decision to establish the temporary facility to celebrate Eid al-Adha.

Local governments continued to rent out public land at discounted rates to non-Muslim religious groups, usually Catholic, for constructing places of worship. Government funding also helped preserve and maintain historic places of worship, which were almost all Catholic.

Approximately 60 local governments maintained dedicated burial spaces for Muslims. Muslim associations said there were insufficient spaces to meet the

needs of Muslim communities in Lombardy, Lazio, and other regions. UCOI president Yassine Lafram reported UCOI had requested additional dedicated areas in 150 municipalities. Muslim leaders expressed concerns regarding a measure approved by the Lombardy Regional Council on February 19 banning the allocation of burial areas to nongovernmental entities based on sex, ethnicity and religion. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the bodies of several Muslims could not be moved to their countries of origin, placing additional stress on the limited Islamic burial spaces in Italian cemeteries. On March 26, Milan mayor Giuseppe Sala authorized the burial of non-Italian Muslims whose corpses could not be repatriated due to the closure of borders. In August and in October, the National Association of Italian Municipalities and some representatives of Muslim communities discussed ways to increase the burial spaces made available to Muslims in all regions. On September 12, the Lombardy Regional Administrative Court overturned a decision by the city of Magenta denying a Muslim association's request for space to establish an Islamic cemetery.

On June 3, a member of the municipal council of Fiumicino, Senator William De Vecchis, publicly opposed a local Bangladeshi Muslim association's proposal to establish an Islamic cemetery with up to 16,000 burial places because it did not take in account other local citizens' wishes and he did not want his municipality to bury Muslims from other municipalities.

In June, Catholic bishops challenged proposed legislation that would include sexual orientation, gender identity, as well as gender-based hate crimes and hate speech under an existing law that makes discrimination, violence, or incitement to violence based on someone's race or religion a crime punishable by up to four years in prison. The bishops stated the proposed legislation could criminalize the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. The president of the Conference of Italian Bishops, Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, said the bill would limit "personal freedom, educational choices, the way of thinking and being, the exercise of criticism and dissent," adding that "there are already adequate safeguards with which to prevent and repress any violent or persecutory behavior" towards sexual minorities. The bill was approved by the Chamber of Deputies in November and was awaiting Senate action at year's end.

In September, some leaders of the Italian Evangelical Alliance expressed their longstanding concerns regarding the 2012 opinion of the Council of State on the implementation of the 1929 law on religious freedom requested by the government. In particular, the alliance objected to the council's recommendation to recognize only the ministers of religious groups meeting two criteria: reliability

and morality, and having a community of at least 500 followers. The alliance representatives said they considered this requirement discriminatory against minority religions whose communities had a limited number of members.

Politicians from several parties, including the League Party, Brothers of Italy, and Casa Pound, a political association widely considered to be far-right, again made statements critical of Islam.

In a January interview with Israeli daily *Israel Hayon* regarding anti-Semitism in Europe, League Party leader Salvini said “the massive presence of migrants coming from Muslim countries is spreading anti-Semitism in Italy as well.” In July, in response to Turkey’s plans to reconvert the Hagia Sophia Museum, which was a church until 1453 and a mosque from 1453 until 1935, back to a mosque, Salvini said in a tweet “the arrogance of certain types of Islam is incompatible with the values of democracy, freedom, and tolerance of the West.”

Authorities investigated instances of hate speech against Silvia Romano, an Italian aid worker kidnapped by Islamic militants in Kenya in 2018 and released in May. Romano converted to Islam during her captivity. On May 13, League Party MP Alessandro Pagano referred to her as “a new terrorist, because al-Shabaab [is a terrorist organization].” Chamber of Deputies Vice President Mara Carfagna immediately censured his comment, stating that “it is unacceptable to characterize Silvia Romano as a terrorist [in this assembly].”

On April 17, the Court of Cassation ruled against the city of Milan for prohibiting the Union of Atheists, Agnostics, and Rationalists from circulating materials on the grounds that it would have offended all religions. The court stated that “10 million Italians have a good life without God.” The court reiterated the need to respect not only all faiths but also the right not to embrace any faith and the freedom of conscience, to include the right to promote atheism.

On September 12, the Casa Pound and New Force groups organized a rally in Milan during which Veneto Fronte Skinhead leader Stefano Odorico spoke about the “Islamic danger,” concluding that “there will be one day in which we will off the invaders of our country.”

On January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Sergio Mattarella hosted a ceremony to commemorate the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp and stressed the need to remain vigilant against “the virus of discrimination, hate, abuse of power, and racism.”

On January 27, Mayor Virginia Raggi organized a commemoration in Rome to honor two Holocaust survivors and stated that “preserving the memory helps build a better future and avoid the mistakes of the past.”

The city of Rome continued to foster collaboration among the Jewish community, Waldensian Evangelical Church, the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, and the Italian Buddhist Union to promote better understanding and awareness of different faiths, primarily among students. Cultural events and presentations in public schools to increase awareness of religious diversity were significantly reduced compared with previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

During the year, the CDEC recorded 224 incidents of anti-Semitism, compared with 251 in 2019. Reports of anti-Semitic incidents published on CDEC’s website included discrimination, verbal harassment (particularly at soccer matches and other sporting events), online hate speech, and derogatory graffiti. Internet and social media hate speech and bullying were the most common forms of anti-Semitic incidents according to CDEC, which continued to operate an anti-Semitism hotline for victims of, and witnesses to, anti-Semitic incidents.

The national police’s Observatory on Security against Acts of Discrimination (OSCAD) reported 448 discriminatory crimes in 2019 (the latest available data), of which 92 were based on religious affiliation and 216 on ethnicity, compared with 360 in 2018. OSCAD defined discriminatory crimes as crimes motivated by ideological, cultural, religious, and ethnic prejudices. For example, on April 16, middle school students assaulted a classmate belonging to a Jewish family in the gym, yelling “when we will grow up we will reopen the Auschwitz [camp] and put all [expletive] Jews in the ovens.”

In its periodic review of social media posts, independent NGO Vox Diritti reported 8 percent of all monitored tweets (104,347) contained anti-Semitic messages during the year, compared with 7 percent of all tweets monitored in 2019 (15,196). Many anti-Semitic tweets came from accounts based in Rome, Milan, and Turin. The NGO said spikes in tweet traffic correlated with the national celebration of the Liberation from the Fascist regime and the birthday of Holocaust survivor and

Senator for Life Liliana Segre. On September 9, the president of UCEI, Noemi Di Segni, said anti-Semitism was on the rise, especially online. On November 24, an unknown Facebook user published a cartoon denying the Holocaust. A study sponsored by National Coordinator on Anti-Semitism Milena Salterini and conducted by the Catholic University of Milan identified 104,347 tweets posted during the year from Italy-based accounts containing anti-Semitic comments. Approximately 900 of those tweets released between March and May included insults and conspiracy theories alleging “Jewish financial interests” exploited the COVID-19 pandemic for financial gain.

According to a Pew Research Center study, the most recent of its kind and published in October 2019, 55 percent of Italians had negative opinions of Muslims and 15 percent had negative opinions of Jews. Negative opinions of Muslims were prevalent among the least educated (57 percent) and elderly (66 percent).

A Vox Diritti study of intolerance on social media showed that 59 percent of all monitored tweets regarding Islam over a six-month period in 2020 were negative, compared with 74 percent of those monitored over a three-month period in 2019. According to political observers, the decrease in anti-Muslim messaging was in part due to a change in the country’s leadership. Most anti-Muslim tweets originated in Northern regions. There was an observed spike in negative tweets after Silvia Romano, an Italian national who had been kidnapped in Kenya, returned home and told press she had converted to Islam while she was held captive.

In February, the Pew Research Center published findings on attitudes towards democratic principles, such as regular elections, free speech, and free civil society as well as religious freedom, in 34 countries based on interviews it conducted in its *Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey*. According to the findings, 61 percent of Italian respondents considered religious freedom to be “very important,” ranking it among the highest of their priorities for democratic principles of the nine tested.

The private research center STATISTA reported that an estimated 15.6 percent of the population believed the Holocaust never happened. In its *Italy 2020 Report*, the private Eurispes Institute of Political, Economic, and Social Studies reported nearly 16 percent of respondents believed the Holocaust was a myth, while 16 percent of respondents said the number of Holocaust victims had been “exaggerated.” Of those sampled, 47.5 percent considered recent acts of anti-Semitism in the country to be a “dangerous resurgence of the phenomenon,” while

37.2 percent viewed the recent acts as “bravado carried out for provocation” or as a “joke.”

As in previous years, the press reported examples of anti-Semitic graffiti and posters, including depictions on walls of swastikas, anti-Semitic stereotypes, and praise for neo-Nazi groups. These appeared in Rome, Milan, Pisa, and other cities, especially after International Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27. On September 15, authorities discovered graffiti depicting a Star of David with the text “equal to virus.” On February 10, authorities found graffiti depicting a Star of David with the text “Jude” (“Jew” in German) on a door of a private residence in Turin.

On February 7, individuals painted swastikas on the door of a house where Jewish concentration camp survivor Arianna Szoreny had lived in San Daniele del Friuli. As a gesture of solidarity, local residents overpainted the swastikas with hearts and held a small demonstration on February 8 to protest the anti-Semitic graffiti. On January 30, four members of the municipal council of the same town received a letter that read “after 75 years ... a Jew is always a Jew,” a reference to municipal celebrations of the anniversary of the Allied forces’ defeat of Nazi Germany, according to media reports. Media reported authorities were investigating the graffiti and the letters. Later, regional president Massimiliano Fedriga condemned the graffiti and letter.

On August 4, Daniele Belotti, a member of the Chamber of Deputies affiliated with the League Party, wrote to the Bergamo bishop Francesco Beschi to express opposition to a Catholic bishop’s recommendation that local priests support Eid al-Adha celebrations. Belotti said the Catholic Church should defend Christian identity and “contain” Islamic practices, including the slaughter of animals.

The FIEP reached limited agreements with some local Jewish communities to permit religious practices, such as circumcision.

On January 16, as anti-Semitic speech increased, the Catholic Church marked its 31st annual Day of Jewish-Christian Religious Dialogue with a discussion between Rome’s chief rabbi and a Catholic priest, according to the *Catholic News Agency*.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Representatives from the embassy and consulates general met with representatives of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the MOI, the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, the national coordinator for the fight against anti-Semitism, and local government officials in Rome, Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice to discuss the establishment of new places of worship requested by religious groups, relations between the government and Muslim religious communities, the prospect for an accord between the government and Muslim communities, and anti-Semitic incidents. During these meetings, embassy and government officials also discussed the integration of asylum seekers and migrants, many of whom were Muslim, Orthodox (including Romanian, Russian, and Bulgarian Orthodox), or Hindu.

The embassy and consulates general and visiting Department of State officials met with the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities to stress the importance of interfaith dialogue and to share U.S. best practices regarding education, integration of second-generation Muslims, and social media networking.

In October, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and other senior officials visited Rome and met with a wide range of religious leaders and government officials, including at the Rome Cultural Islamic Center, the Italian Evangelical Alliance, and at the Prime Minister's Office, to advance priority issues including the fight against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and regional and local rules that impede the establishment of new places of worship.

Embassy and consulate general officials continued to meet with representatives of civil society groups, including Catholic-affiliated Caritas and Sant'Egidio, as well as with Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish leaders in cities throughout the country. U.S. officials urged the social inclusion of immigrants, many of whom were Muslim, as well as dialogue among various religious groups, and monitored groups' ability to practice their religion freely.

Embassy officials met with the government coordinator on anti-Semitism, the president of UCEI, and Rome's Jewish community leaders and civil society representatives to discuss how to support their efforts to counter anti-Semitism. The embassy and consulates general consulted with Jewish communities and concerned authorities to develop the Department of State's JUST Act report for the country, which was published on July 29. The report highlighted the government's commitment to the Terezin Declaration and its goals and objectives and areas where the government had not followed through with a government commission's recommendations to identify survivors of targeted persecution in World War II or their heirs who are entitled to unclaimed property. The report engendered appreciation and positive feedback from the country's Jewish communities for

spotlighting the issue. The embassy also worked with the Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad to engage on issues surrounding a development that could affect a Jewish cemetery in Mantua.

The embassy and consulates continued to use their social media platforms to acknowledge major Christian, Muslim, and Jewish holidays as well as amplify initiatives that promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue at the local level. They also retweeted Department of State statements and tweets on the International Religious Freedom Act and related topics.