

LIECHTENSTEIN 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates everyone is free to choose his or her faith. It makes the state responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the people” and establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion. It stipulates other religions may practice their faith within the bounds of morality and public order. There are criminal penalties for public incitement to hatred towards a religious group, religious discrimination, or “debasement” of any religion. The state-subsidized, nonprofit Liechtenstein Institute said Muslims remained unable to obtain local authorities’ permission to establish their own cemetery or build a mosque, and the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein was unable to establish a prayer room. In April, the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association (LHRA), a consortium of nongovernmental organizations, reported there had been no additional steps toward separating church and state in terms of financing religious communities and religious instruction. For the first time, the government invited religious communities to participate in its annual dialogue with nongovernmental organizations. On January 30, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Foreign Minister Katrin Eggenberger spoke on the importance of remembering and raising awareness of the Holocaust.

The Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association reported in August that it continued to operate the only Muslim prayer room in the country. There were no mosques, and no groups applied for permits to build one following government rejections of such applications in prior years. Religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request. The Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association rented property intended for a second prayer room, but according to the Office for Construction and Infrastructure, had not applied for the requisite permit to convert the property into a prayer room.

The U.S. Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, which is responsible for diplomatic relations with the country, continued to encourage the promotion of religious freedom in discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), focusing primarily on access to religious education, particularly by Muslims, and the establishment of religious infrastructure, such as a mosque or Muslim burial sites. Embassy staff discussed religious freedom issues, such as the extent of societal discrimination and the difficulties Muslims encountered in establishing religious infrastructure, with the Liechtenstein Institute and the LHRA.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 39,000 (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2015 census, religious group membership is as follows: 73.4 percent Roman Catholic, 6.3 percent Protestant Reformed, 5.9 percent Muslim, 1.2 percent Lutheran, 1.3 percent Christian Orthodox, 1.8 percent other religious groups, 7 percent no religious affiliation, and 3.3 percent unspecified.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, a majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. The Jewish community consists of approximately 20 individuals. Immigrants, who comprise approximately one-third of the country's population, come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and belong predominantly to the same religious groups as native-born citizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states that all persons shall have the freedom to choose their faith, and the state shall be responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the people.” The constitution specifies Roman Catholicism is the state religion, which “shall enjoy full protection from the state.” The constitution stipulates other religions may practice their beliefs and hold religious services “within the bounds of morality and public order.”

Municipalities provide the Catholic Church with certain unique benefits that vary by municipality, including financial support and state maintenance of buildings and grounds owned by the Church.

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may organize themselves as private associations, which enables registration in the commercial registry, and must do so to receive government funding for such activities as providing religious education in schools or executing projects to promote social integration of religious minorities, such as offering language courses for foreigners. To register in the commercial registry, the association must submit an official letter of application to the Office for Justice, including the organization's name, purpose, board members, and head

office location, as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization's statutes.

All religious groups are exempt from certain taxes. The government has not indicated how it determines whether groups not registered in the commercial registry are religious groups entitled to the tax exemptions.

The law prohibits the slaughter of animals without anesthetization, making kosher and halal slaughter illegal. Importation of such meat is legal.

The criminal code prohibits any form of public incitement to hatred or discrimination against, or disparagement of, any religion or its adherents by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. The criminal code also prohibits the denial, trivialization, and justification of genocide and other crimes against humanity by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. Penalties may include a prison sentence of up to two years. The criminal code prohibits refusing service to a person or group of persons based on religious affiliation as well as membership in any association that aims to promote discrimination against a person or persons based on religious affiliation.

The law requires the inclusion of religious education in the primary and secondary public school curriculum. Catholic or Protestant Reformed religious education is compulsory in all primary schools. Parents may request exemptions for their children, without providing a reason, from the Office of Education. Children exempted from religious education or who are neither Catholic nor Protestant must attend a class called "Ethics and Religions." The law also grants the Office of Education the right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. Catholic, Protestant Reformed, and Muslim groups provide the teachers for religious instruction, and the Office of Education pays for some or all of their salaries. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Other religious groups registered as associations may provide teachers for optional religious classes if there is a demand for them and may apply for partial funding of the teachers' salaries from the government's integration budget.

At the secondary school level, parents and students may choose between a Catholic religious education course, which the government finances and the Catholic religious community organizes, and a general course in religion and culture taught from a sociological perspective.

To receive residency permits, foreign religious workers must have completed theological studies, command a basic level of German, belong to a “nationally known” religious group (the law does not define “nationally known”), and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the same religious group.

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

Government Practices

In April, the LHRA published its 2019 report, which found no further steps toward the separation of church and state in the areas of financing the religious communities and the design of denominational religious instruction, which remained different among religious communities.

According to the LHRA, efforts to establish Muslim memorials, cemeteries, and additional places of worship remained unsuccessful. The Liechtenstein Institute said Muslims had still not been able to obtain permission from local authorities to establish an Islamic cemetery or build a mosque in the country. The Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association reported in August that it continued to operate the only Muslim prayer room. The association rented property for a second prayer room, but was unable to convert the property into a prayer room without a permit. According to the Office for Construction and Infrastructure, the government had yet to receive a building application from the association for a permit to convert the space.

All religious groups, including Muslims, remained able to bury their dead in cemeteries owned by municipalities.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, municipalities did not categorically oppose mosques, but there was little political will to address the issue. No group applied for a permit to build a mosque following government rejections of such applications in prior years.

The institute also stated the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein remained unable to establish a prayer room in the country. The institute reiterated that Muslims faced difficulties in finding suitable rental space for use as prayer room spaces due to societal skepticism and wariness towards Islam.

Public schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum. Eschen Secondary School commemorated International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 30 with a memorial hour in its auditorium.

According to the MFA, 42 elementary school students attended Islamic religious education, which was offered as an elective subject in one municipality for first through fifth graders in the 2019-2020 school year.

Funding for religious institutions continued to derive mainly from the municipalities. Municipalities provided Catholic and Protestant Reformed churches annual subsidies in proportion to membership. The MFA stated municipalities allocated funding for specific purposes, such as paying the rent for places of worship, and it remained in regular contact with religious representatives regarding the funding.

According to the LHRA, the government failed to consider the draft Religious Communities Act, which would enshrine in law the recognition and promotion of various religious communities. In a report issued in May, the Swiss Center of Expertise in Human Rights stated that experts said the lack of movement was “due to the country’s longstanding strong Catholic tradition and the privileged status of the Catholic Church.”

According to the Liechtenstein Institute’s 2020 Human Rights Report, in response to a member of parliament’s question in November, 2019 as to whether the government intended to submit a constitutional amendment to Article 37, which states the Roman Catholic Church is the national church and as such shall enjoy the full protection of the state, and the Religious Communities Act to Parliament, the government stated that the consensual, transactional resolution of specific issues with individual religious communities was preferable to a comprehensive legal solution.

The government immigration and passport office continued to issue residency permits to religious workers, valid for five years, instead of visas. Religious workers from Schengen area member countries did not require permits or visas. According to the MFA, the government issued residency permits for an imam of the Turkish Association in Liechtenstein and a Roman Catholic chaplain for the parish of Vaduz.

On January 30, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Foreign Minister Eggenberger hosted government officials and the public for film

screenings and discussions on moral guilt, radicalization, the maintenance of historical records, and ways of dealing with the truth about the Holocaust.

In November, the MFA invited religious communities to participate in its annual dialogue with nongovernmental organizations organized in accordance with a recommendation from the UN Human Rights Council, and asked the communities to inform the government of their concerns and expectations. The MFA described the dialogue as an opportunity for exchange with the religious communities, during which the communities could request annual contributions and extend invitations to the government to participate in religious services.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There continued to be no mosques in the country; there was one Islamic prayer room, operated by the Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association, in leased space in Triesen. The Islamic Community of Liechtenstein had a prayer room in the canton of St. Gallen, in neighboring Switzerland.

According to the MFA, religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups. For example, the Catholic Church of Schaan continued to make its church available to the Christian Orthodox community to hold an Orthodox Easter Sunday service.

A report issued in May by the Swiss Center of Expertise in Human Rights stated that some immigrants, including Muslims and others who did not speak the language or had a darker complexion, felt they were not well accepted. According to the report, Muslims wished, in a framework of equality, for a greater societal openness toward the wearing of headscarves, access to larger places of worship and Islamic cemeteries, and the opportunity to pray and fast in the workplace. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize discrimination as being solely based on religious identity.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy staff continued to discuss ways to promote religious freedom with the MFA's specialist for human rights and international law, focusing on access to religious education by different religious groups, particularly the Muslim community, and the establishment of religious infrastructure, such as a mosque or Islamic burial sites.

Embassy staff continued to discuss the effects of laws on religious practices and the extent of societal discrimination with the Liechtenstein Institute and the LHRA.