



## Religion

## Population

## Area

- Christians : **64.5%**
- Muslims : **19.9%**
- Ethnoreligionists : **15.1%**
- Others : **0.5%**

28.033.000

238.537 Km<sup>2</sup>

## Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Ghana is one of the most politically stable countries in Africa. This is true with respect to fundamental human rights as well as economic development. Although Ghana's economic growth has fallen, from 4.2 percent in 2014 to 3.5 percent in 2016 – a record low for the past 26 years – the medium-term outlook remains favourable, as evidenced by recent IMF growth forecasts.<sup>[1]</sup>

The stable economic and political situation contributes to what in many respects are exemplary relations between Ghana's various religions and other faith communities. Social tensions tend to be less acute in areas in which poverty is less prevalent. In December 2016, Ghana had its seventh democratic elections since the first multi-party elections of 1992. As in 2000 and 2008, the transition of power was peaceful when Nana Akufo-Addo defeated incumbent President John Dramani Mahama (elected in 2012).<sup>[2]</sup>

A former British colony, Ghana gained independence in 1957, becoming the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to do so. Its religious diversity is particularly notable.<sup>[3]</sup> About two-thirds of the population is Christian, and a much smaller group are Muslim. Pentecostals and members of the Charismatic Movement predominate among Christians, followed by Protestants and then by Catholics.<sup>[4]</sup> For the most part, the country's Muslims are Sunnis. Islamic extremism is rare in Ghana.

Within the Ghana Conference on Religion and Peace, which includes the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, Christians and Muslims are working constructively towards the shared goal of peaceful coexistence.<sup>5</sup> The foundation for the peaceful coexistence of religions is laid down in Article 21 of the country's constitution, which establishes the right to religious freedom.<sup>[6]</sup> Although all religious communities are required by law to register with the authorities, in practice this obligation is not respected by many of the traditional African communities. To date, however, no action has been taken

against those who have failed to register.<sup>[7]</sup>

Generally speaking, non-profit, religiously motivated activities, such as charity work or education, are tax-exempt. There were no signs of difficulties regarding the coexistence of different faith communities during the period under review.<sup>[8]</sup>

This freedom makes it possible for the Catholic Church in Ghana to play an important role in shaping society. In addition to its pastoral work, the Church is also involved in social activities in a variety of ways. Within the Catholic world, the Ghanaian Church is highly regarded both inside and outside the country. An example of this is the worldwide appeal by Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, that the papal encyclical 'Laudato Si' should be taken seriously and put into practice. For him, this encyclical contains not only an ecological message, but above all a social one.<sup>[9]</sup>

One problem facing not only Ghana but many other West African countries is the mass exodus of young people. Many are drawn to Europe by way of the western or central Mediterranean.<sup>[10]</sup> The country's bishops have frequently called on citizens not to emigrate to Europe. The continent is no guarantee of prosperity, the bishops said in a statement issued in June 2016, which was also signed by the Christian Council of Ghana. In their statement the bishops said: "We are saddened by the news of many African migrants perishing in the deserts of northern Africa and the Mediterranean Sea and call on African states and Governments to institute proactive measures to curb this tragedy."<sup>[11]</sup> They also criticised a new trend of migration to South America. This journey was "becoming an emerging danger", the statement's signatories noted. The bishops wrote: "[Africans] must not assume that Europe and other places outside Africa guarantee automatic comforts and pleasure."<sup>[12]</sup> Religious leaders also addressed the danger of religious fanaticism in which "[s]ome so-called men and women of God are blatantly displaying their religious prowess and making gullible people believe that they have answers to all their problems"<sup>[13]</sup>

The Catholic bishops' public appeal had a positive response, not least in the political realm. At the first synod of the Catholic Church in Ghana dedicated to the topic of youth and vocation, the speaker of the Ghanaian Parliament, Joseph Osei-Owusu said: "In our country today, there is a growing emphasis on prosperity, especially among the youth. Society basically says: the richer you are, the better off you are. That is pretty much true if you live by the standard of secular society."<sup>[14]</sup>

The synod on 125 years of Catholic Mission in Accra: Renewing Our Commitment to Evangelization was held in advance of the 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, the theme of which is Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment and which will be hosted in the Vatican in October 2018.

## | Incidents

There were no significant violations of religious freedom during the reporting period. As indicated above, the reason for this is the climate of religious tolerance traditionally found in Ghana. The phenomenon of rising Islamic jihadism in West Africa has not yet manifested itself in Ghana in the form of violent attacks.

## | Prospects for freedom of religion

Due to the country's political stability, there is a high likelihood that the security of the religious communities represented in Ghana will remain intact. While improving economic development could provide relief, the problem of sizeable waves of migration to non-African countries is expected to persist.

## | Endnotes / Sources

