



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **60.1%**
- Agnostics : **29%**
- Muslims : **6.5%**
- Atheists : **2%**
- Buddhists : **1.2%**
- Others : **1.2%**

16.980.000

41.542 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands protects freedom of religion. Article 6 provides: “Everyone shall have the right to profess freely his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law.”^[1] The government may restrict the exercise of this right “for the protection of health, in the interest of traffic and to combat or prevent disorders”.^[2]

All citizens are to be treated equally and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief is prohibited by the constitution.^[3] Discrimination complaints may be made to a national government helpline as well as the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights. Complaints about online discrimination can be made to the internet discrimination hotline (MiND Nederland).^[4] Local governments also establish antidiscrimination boards to register complaints.^[5]

The Dutch Criminal Code makes it a crime to make or distribute public intentional insults on the basis of religion, as well as to engage in verbal, written, or illustrated incitement to religious hatred.^[6]

There is no legal requirement for religious groups to register with the government, but to receive tax-exempt status religious groups must be “of a philosophical or religious nature”, contribute to the general welfare of society and be non-profit and nonviolent.^[7] The government requires all clerics, including imams and pastors, from outside the EEA, Switzerland or Turkey to learn Dutch as part of the compulsory integration process.^[8]

The law permits employees to be exempted from working on certain days for religious reasons, but employers may deny employees such an exception, depending on the nature of the work, such as employment in the health sector.^[9]

Education provided by public authorities must pay “due respect to everyone’s religion or belief”^[10] and the government provides funding to religious schools and institutions.^[11] Religious schools are regulated by law, with regard given to the

freedom to educate according to their religions or ideologies. These schools may be inspected to ensure the religious education does not incite criminal offenses.^[12]

In March 2018, a Dutch animal welfare party proposed a ban on all slaughter of animals without stunning. In 2012, the law made a religious exception to a similar ban for the production of meat and in 2017 Jewish and Muslim leaders signed a contract with the government to regulate slaughter without stunning.^[13]

The parliament approved a ban on face-covering clothing, including burqas and niqabs, in public places such as government buildings, schools, hospitals, and on public transport in November 2016.^[14] As of the end of March 2018 the law had not been passed by the senate, as it waited for the Home Ministry to answer questions that had been raised about the law in July 2017.^[15]

Parliamentary elections were held in March 2017, with the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid) (PVV) coming in second with 20 seats.^[16] Party leader Geert Wilders had called for the “de-Islamisation” of the country including prohibiting headscarves in public, closing all mosques and Islamic schools, banning the Qur’an, and stopping any asylum seekers or immigrants from “Islamic countries”.^[17]

In December 2016 a court found Geert Wilders guilty of inciting discrimination against a racial group for comments he made about Moroccans at a rally in 2014 but imposed no punishment. The court cleared him of the charge of inciting hatred.^[18]

The Forum for Democracy (FvD), formed just six months before the March election and opposed to “mass migration” and public face coverings and supporting a so-called “Dutch Values Protection Act”, won 1.8 percent of the vote. As of February 2018, FvD polled at 10 per cent of the vote.^[19]

In May 2017 a court ruled that the municipality of Utrecht was justified in lowering a Muslim woman’s welfare benefit in 2013 when she refused to remove her niqab during work training due to the reduced chances of finding work while wearing it. The court held that the infringement on religious freedom (a ban on wearing a niqab during work training) was “necessary in the interests of the protection of the rights and freedom of others”.^[20]

The government launched an anti-discrimination campaign in September 2016 and signed agreements with social media platforms to counter discrimination.^[21]

The government provided security to both mosques and Jewish institutions. An organisation called “Security Pact against Discrimination”, consisting of Jews, Muslims and Christians, as well as other local citizens initiatives, provided extra security to mosques in the aftermath of an attack on a Quebec mosque in 2017.^[22]

Incidents

Related to Judaism

Official police figures for 2016 (the most recent available) included 335 hate crimes or incidents motivated by anti-Semitism.^[23]

In its 2016 report, Centre Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) indicated a 13 percent decrease in anti-Semitic incidents, with 109 incidents registered, as compared to 126 in 2015.^[24] In 2017, however, the number of incidents rose slightly overall, with vandalism incidents increasing to a 10-year high. The government hotline MiND recorded 236 complaints of internet-based anti-Semitism in 2017.^[25]

In its annual report on racism, anti-Semitism, and extreme violence in the Netherlands, the Verwey-Jonker Institute – Anne Frank Foundation also reported a decrease in anti-Semitic incidents in 2016 (the most recent year available) with 35 incidents, compared to 57 in 2015. The number of incidents of anti-Semitic name-calling or insults increased from 424 in 2015 to 761 in 2016.^[26]

CIDI reported that in September 2016, two men assaulted a Jewish man on the street after addressing him with an anti-Semitic slur. A couple, visibly identifiable as Jewish, was assaulted and seriously injured in October 2016.^[27] In 2017, CIDI registered four physical assaults including an attack on two Israeli orthodox tourists.

Attacks against property included swastika graffiti on a synagogue and in a cemetery and “stolpersteine” commemorating Holocaust victims were stolen.^[28] In August 2016, anti-Semitic threats including “ISIS” and “Kill all Jews” were spray-painted on a school building and twenty houses in Voorburg.^[29] A man waving a Palestinian flag smashed the windows of a kosher restaurant one day after US President Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December 2017.^[30]

Related to Islam

Official police figures for 2016 (the most recent available) reported 352 hate crimes or incidents motivated by bias against Muslims and civil society organisations reported 73 incidents.^[31]

The Verwey-Jonker Institute – Anne Frank Foundation report noted a decrease in anti-Muslim incidents in 2016 (the most recent available), with 364 incidents compared to 466 in 2015. One explanation for the higher number in 2015 was the social tensions relating to terrorist attacks in Europe and the large influx of refugees.^[32]

Of the incidents reported in 2016, 16 were physical assaults. Examples included a woman wearing a headscarf being chased down the road, insulted, and beaten.^[33] Turkish Forum Netherlands reported that a group assaulted two people and vandalised a mosque as worshippers broke their fast during Ramadan in June 2016 and a woman wearing a face veil was severely beaten in a train station in October 2016.^[34]

Destruction of property included vandalism on a mosque reading “Kill all Muslims”. After the July 2016 terrorist attack in Nice, France, the windows of a mosque were smashed and a Muslim woman’s car was destroyed. Pigs were used to threaten and insult Muslims, including a pig’s head and feet being thrown into the garden of a Muslim family and pork being left at mosques or other Muslim buildings.^[35]

In January 2018 far-right extremists targeted a mosque in Amsterdam by placing a decapitated doll with its head hanging on a fence above the body. A note opposing the construction of a ‘mega-mosque’ was left at the scene.^[36]

Related to Christianity

In December 2016 a church in Utrecht was vandalized, resulting in thousands of euros in damage^[37] and in January 2017 a church in Amersfoort was the victim of arson twice in a week.^[38]

| Prospects for freedom of religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. If certain anti-migrant political parties continue to gain popularity, however, there may be an increased risk of legislative proposals leading to increased restrictions on religious freedom for minority religions, particularly for Muslims. Additionally, there is an increased risk of societal intolerance against minority religions, some of which may be a backlash to global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to certain religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiment in the Netherlands.

Endnotes / Sources

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