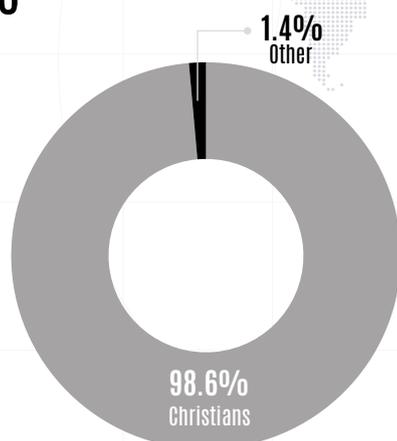




# ROMANIA

## RELIGIONS

1.4%  
Other98.6%  
Christians

Population

**19,388,362**

GDP per capita

**23,313 US\$**

Area

**238,391 Km<sup>2</sup>**

GINI INDEX\*

**36.0**

\*Economic Inequality

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Article 29 (1–4) of the Romanian constitution proscribes any restrictions on freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, and religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> No one may be forced to espouse an opinion or religious belief contrary to their convictions. All religions are independent from the state, and are free to organise “in accordance with their own statutes, under terms defined by the law”.

Article 29 (5) also states that religious denominations shall be autonomous and enjoy state support, including help to facilitate religious assistance in the Armed Forces, hospitals, penitentiaries, retirement homes, and orphanages. The right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their own convictions is guaranteed (Article 29, 6).

Article 30 (1–8) protects freedom of expression, but prohibits incitement to religious hatred or discrimination.

The 2007 Law on the Freedom of Religion and the General Status of Denominations<sup>2</sup> reaffirms the fundamental rights recognised in the constitution; it also outlines the country’s classifications of religious communities (Article

5). Religious communities with a “distinct legal entity status” are “denominations and religious associations” and those without such a status are “religious groups” (Article 5, 2; Article 6). Religious communities are free to choose their legal structure, but all must observe the country’s laws and constitution, and must not “threaten public safety, order, health, morality” or “fundamental human rights and liberties” (Article 5, 3 and 4).

Religious groups, as defined by the aforementioned law (Article 6), are groups of people who adopt, share, and practise the same religion but have not registered as a legal entity. Religious associations are legal entities (Article 6) comprised of at least 300 citizens, which have attained a legal status through registration with the Registry of Religious Associations (Article 40). Religious associations do not receive government funding but get limited tax exemptions (Article 44). To be eligible for state support, after 12 years of continuous activity and with a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population, a religious association must apply to become a legally recognised denomination, as specified in Article 18.

Under Article 7, denominations are given a higher status than groups and associations. The “important role” of the Romanian Orthodox Church and “that of other churches

and denominations as recognized by the national history of Romania and in the life of the Romanian society” is acknowledged in Article 7, but Article 9 provides for state neutrality “towards any religious or atheistic ideology” as well as equality of the denominations before the law. There are 18 recognised religious denominations.<sup>3</sup>

Article 7 of the 2007 Law on the Freedom of Religion and the General Status of Denominations protects “freedom of religious education in accordance with the specific requirements of each faith”.<sup>4</sup> Students who belong to recognised denominations, regardless of the number of students, are guaranteed religious education in their own religion. Such religious classes are optional; parents of minors and students 18 years or older may opt out.<sup>5</sup>

The restitution of property confiscated from the Jewish community and other religious groups during WWII and the communist era is governed by law. Holocaust survivors and their immediate relatives are eligible for a monthly pension or other compensation. A separate law provides for the return of properties to the Greek Catholic Church from the Romanian Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup>

## INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

In 2018 and 2019, as in previous years, the Greek Catholic Church reported delays in court decisions in restitution cases and problems obtaining the return of previously confiscated properties. Other groups, including the Federation of Jewish Communities, the Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches reported similar delays.<sup>7</sup>

Greek Catholic priests continued to report harassment and intimidation at local level, particularly in rural areas, from Romanian Orthodox priests who encourage members of their congregations to do the same. Romanian Orthodox priests have denied Greek Catholics access to cemeteries and churches.<sup>8</sup>

The US Department of State reported that in 2018 and 2019 Jehovah’s Witnesses in several areas of the country encountered opposition to their activities as well as threats of violence, including from Romanian Orthodox priests.<sup>9</sup>

In June 2020, prompted by objections from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Romanian Parliament passed a law replacing mandatory sexual education with an “education for life, including [a] health education” course, requiring parental consent.<sup>10</sup> The Constitutional Court of Roma-

nia upheld the constitutionality of the law in September 2020.<sup>11</sup> However, on 16th December 2020, the same court declared unconstitutional a June 2020 law banning “activities aimed at spreading gender identity theory or opinion” in educational settings.<sup>12</sup>

A Jewish cemetery in Huși was vandalised in mid-March 2019, with more than 70 tombstones destroyed. The president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania expressed indignation and sorrow over the event.<sup>13</sup> The incident occurred less than a year after the childhood home of Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel in Sighetu Marmatiei was vandalised in an anti-Semitic attack in August 2018.<sup>14</sup>

In March 2020, the government created the position of high representative for fighting anti-Semitism and appointed Silviu Vexler, the parliamentarian who introduced both the Law for Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitism in 2018, and the Law for the Establishment of the National Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust in 2019. Both pieces of legislation were adopted by the Romanian Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

A law imposing a jail term of three months to 10 years for anti-Semitic crimes was enacted in July 2018.<sup>16</sup> A law establishing the National Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust was signed by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis in October 2019. On Holocaust Remembrance Day in January 2020, President Iohannis said that education about the Holocaust should remain a national priority, but “We should not stop here, because the danger of xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes resurfacing is always present. Jewish cemeteries are vandalized, public actors claim the supremacy of certain races, the monstrosities of the Holocaust are relativized publicly, detestable criminals from our history are praised, and Roma citizens are not rarely humiliated or discriminated.”<sup>17</sup>

In May 2020, the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination fined Google Bucharest for permitting the name of the country’s largest Orthodox cathedral, the People’s Salvation Cathedral (Catedrala Mantuirii Neamului), to appear for several days as the People’s Foolishness Cathedral (Catedrala Prostirii Neamului) on Google Maps.<sup>18</sup>

During a June 2019 visit to Blaj to beatify seven Greek Catholic bishops, victims of Romania’s former communist regime, Pope Francis said that the bishops left Romanians a “precious legacy” of “freedom and mercy”, which includes the freedom to live a “diversity of religious expressions”. The Pope also asked the Roma community for

forgiveness over past discrimination.<sup>19</sup> A bust of the pontiff was unveiled in Bucharest in June 2020.<sup>20</sup>

During the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, the government imposed a range of restrictions on public gatherings, including religious services. In the lead-up to Christmas 2020, government public health officials met with representatives of religious denominations, which resulted in guidelines to permit religious activities, including in-person services, with health protection measures in place.<sup>21</sup>

## PROSPECTS FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION

During the period under review, the authorities enacted laws against anti-Semitism, and the issue appears to be one of importance to officials. The continued hostility of some Romanian Orthodox against non-Orthodox believers remains problematic. There does not appear to be any significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom and the situation remains mostly unchanged at a societal level.

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