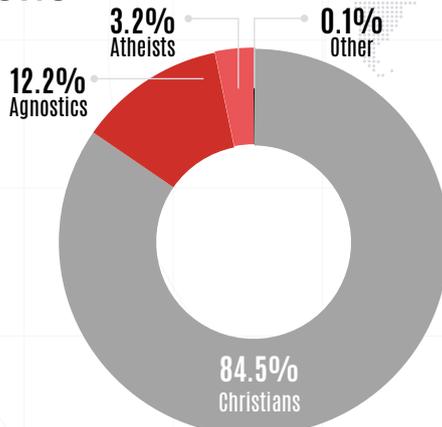




SLOVAKIA

RELIGIONS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND ACTUAL APPLICATION

Article 24 (1) of the Slovakian constitution guarantees freedom of “thought, conscience religious creed and faith”, as well as the right to change religions or to have no religious affiliation at all.¹ People have the right to practise their faith in private and in public, alone or with others (Article 24, 2). Churches and religious communities may manage their own affairs, including appointing clergy, establishing religious orders, and teaching religion (Article 24, 3). These rights may be restricted only “by law, if such a measure is necessary in a democratic society to protect public order, health, morals, or the rights and freedoms of others” (Article 24, 4). There is no state religion or ideology (Article 1, 1).

Discrimination on the basis of religion or faith is prohibited (Article 12, 2) and conscientious objection to military service is protected (Article 25).

The religious freedom law² reiterates many of the above rights (Sections 1 and 2) and outlines the registration procedure for religious societies and Churches. Groups are not required to register with the Ministry of Culture, but

the state only recognises registered groups (Section 4). The registration application must contain the organisation’s founding and operational documents, basic articles of faith, a statement that the organisation will respect the laws and will be tolerant of other religions, along with affidavits of at least 50,000 adult members who are citizens or permanent residents of Slovakia showing basic understanding of the religion and expressing their support for their group’s (Section 12).

The law governing state subsidies was amended in 2019 and went into effect on 1st January 2020.³ Non-registered religious societies and churches may register as civic associations, but they are not officially identified as religious groups.⁴ Clergy from unregistered religious groups cannot officially celebrate marriages or minister to their faithful in prisons or public hospitals.⁵

The 18 registered churches and religious societies are: the Apostolic Church, Bahá’í Community, The Brotherhood Unity of Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Brotherhood Church, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Evangelical Methodist Church, Greek Catholic Church, Christian Congregations, Jehovah’s Witnesses, New Apostolic Church, Orthodox Church,

Reformed Christian Church, Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholic Church, and Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities.⁶

Due to a small number of members, the Muslim community have not been able to legally register as a religious society.

In 2019, the law prohibiting burial earlier than 48 hours following death was amended, effective January 2020, to permit burial 24 hours after death.⁷ The author of the amendment noted that adherents to some religions had to violate their religious rules to comply with the 48-hour rule.⁸

Religious education for children up to 15 years of age is determined by their parents or guardians.⁹ Most schools teach Catholicism, but parents may request that teaching of other religions be included. All curricula must be consistent with the Ministry of Education's guidelines. Ethics classes are offered as an alternative to religious education.¹⁰

Religious slaughter of animals for meat is permitted.¹¹

The Penal Code¹² prohibits the establishment, support, or promotion of a group, movement, or ideology that endorses religious hatred (Section 421) and expressions of sympathy for such a movement or ideology (Section 422). Denial, justification, or approval of the Holocaust, crimes of a fascist or communist regime or ideology are illegal (Section 422d). Public defamation of a group of persons based on their religion or non-religiosity (among other characteristics) is a crime (Section 423) and incitement to violence or hatred based on the same is also prohibited (Section 424).

INCIDENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS

According to the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), in 2019 “Islamophobia in Slovakia manifested itself mainly in social networks, political campaigns”, and in the media. It also noted that the “legislative position of Muslims [did not] deteriorate.”¹³ In 2019, the Islamic Foundation reported two anti-Muslim hate crimes to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE): a Turkish Muslim woman carrying a baby was assaulted by a man who used her headscarf to strangle her, as well as an assault on a Syrian Muslim student on a bus.¹⁴ There were four hate crimes reported to the OSCE in 2018, all of which involved attacks on women

wearing headscarves.¹⁵

In August 2018, high-level government officials, including President Andrej Kiska, publicly vowed to fight anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial with “zero tolerance for extremism”, including on the Internet.¹⁶

In October 2020, Marian Kotleba, a leader of the People's Party – Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS), was sentenced to four years in prison after being convicted of illegal use of neo-Nazi symbols. In 2017, he donated 1,488 euros (a number with a symbolic meaning to neo-Nazis) to three families. The Supreme Court rejected the prosecutor general's request for a ban on the ĽSNS party as a neo-Nazi extremist group.¹⁷

On 9th September 2019, Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini participated in the annual Victims of the Holocaust and of Racial Violence memorial service at the Holocaust Memorial in Bratislava.¹⁸ The commemoration in 2020 was attended by both government and opposition party officials.¹⁹

Two anti-Semitic incidents were reported to the OSCE in 2019.²⁰ In December 2019, two Jewish cemeteries were targeted by vandals who knocked over and damaged a total of 80 tombstones.²¹ Restoration efforts took place in April 2020, supported by people from Israel, Austria, Germany, Australia, and Switzerland, as well as Slovakia.²²

During the spring of 2020, because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Slovakian government suspended public religious celebrations and imposed control measures on entry to places of worship for six weeks.²³ Due to a second surge of infections in September 2020, the government imposed new measures forbidding all public events, including religious ceremonies. Slovakia's Bishops Conference criticised the move as “disproportionate” and one that only the bishops should impose. “This is not something the state can do without their consent.”²⁴

PROSPECTS FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review. Anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric remain a problem, particularly on the Internet, but the overall societal situation remains stable.

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- 3 “Law on Financial Support for the Activities of Churches and Religious Societies 2019,” Slov-Lex, <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2019/370/20200101> (accessed 25th September 2020).
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- 6 “Registered churches and religious societies in the Slovak Republic,” Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, <http://www.culture.gov.sk/posobnost-ministerstva/cirkvi-a-nabozenske-spolocnosti-registrovane-cirkvi-a-nabozenske-spolocnosti-f9.html> (accessed 4th November 2020).
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- 14 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “2019 Hate Crime Reporting – Slovakia,” Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/slovakia?year=2019> (accessed 6th November 2020).
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