

SWEDEN 2016 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for “the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others” and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The government facilitates revenue collection for 16 religious groups through the taxation system, and it distributes publicly funded grants to 43 applicant religious groups in proportion to membership. The government also provided grants to religious groups for religious education and spiritual work in the healthcare sector, refugee reception and integration efforts, and security measures. Some Muslim groups continued to express concerns about profiling in anti-terror legislation. The police continued to implement and develop a national strategy to combat hate crimes. The government funded a project to train up to 300 teachers on how to combat anti-Semitism. Some Muslim and all Jewish communities expressed concern about restrictions on animal slaughter. A newspaper revealed the minister for housing and urban development had stated in 2009 that Israelis treated Palestinians in the same manner as Jews were treated during the Holocaust. There were several instances throughout the year of representatives of the Sweden Democrats Party (SD) making anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic remarks. SD Members of Parliament (MPs) sought through separate bill proposals to ban the Islamic call to prayer and to limit a specific Jewish family’s share of media ownership. The prime minister and other government officials repeatedly stated their public support for religious freedom and the protection of religious groups. A court in Malmo convicted a man of making anti-Semitic remarks against a local rabbi.

In July 50 unknown men attacked four people outside the Stockholm Grand Mosque. There were reports of threats and crimes against Christian refugees, including by Muslim refugees. Compared to the previous year, reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2015, the latest year for which figures were available, increased by 13 percent to 558, anti-Christian hate crimes by 16 percent to 388, anti-Semitic hate crimes by 4 percent to 277, and all other forms of anti-religious hate crimes by 108 percent to 331. The number of reported anti-Muslim and anti-Christian hate crimes was the highest on record.

U.S. embassy staff and U.S. government visitors met with national and local authorities to advocate for increased protection of religious minorities. The Ambassador visited religious and political leaders in Malmo to promote religious tolerance in the city. The embassy funded the visit of a delegation of Swedish

imams and Muslim civil society leaders to the United States to exchange best practices on interfaith dialogue, community organizing and fundraising, and religious education. The embassy sponsored the visit of an American reformed former white supremacist and neo-Nazi to speak to Swedish officials, academics, journalists, and civil society representatives about, among other issues, religious tolerance and diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 9.9 million (July 2016 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 63 percent of citizens are members. According to government statistics and estimates of religious groups, other Christian groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal movement, the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), together total less than 7 percent of the population. According to a 2015 study by the government's Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST), approximately 4.5 percent of the population is Muslim. According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Jews number approximately 20,000-30,000.

Smaller religious communities include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), and Mandaism.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides "the freedom to practice one's religion alone or in the company of others." The law mandates there be no limitation of rights or freedoms on the grounds of religious opinion.

The constitution instructs public institutions to combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. According to law, complaints about discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority must be filed with the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO). The DO represents an individual in the event of legal proceedings.

The constitution states “the opportunities of religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted.” No one is obliged to belong to a religious community or “divulge religious beliefs in relations with public institutions.”

There is no requirement in the law to register or recognize religious groups. Faith communities registering with the SST, however, receive tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations and are eligible to receive government funding. In order to register with the SST, a religious group must submit an application to the Ministry of Culture demonstrating the group fulfills certain requirements, including that it “be stable and have operated in Sweden for at least five years,” “have a clear and stable structure,” “be able to function on its own,” “serve at least 3,000 people [with exceptions],” “and work in different locations in Sweden.”

According to the law, animal slaughter must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize the animal’s suffering.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, for boys under the age of two months, by a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW). The NBHW certifies *mohels* (individuals who conduct ritual Jewish circumcisions) to perform the operations on boys younger than two months but require the presence of a medical doctor, who must administer anesthesia to the infant.

The government facilitates fundraising by religious groups by offering them the option of collecting contributions through the internal revenue service in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (SEK) (\$8,275) and an annual fee of SEK 21 (\$2.32) per member per year. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the scheme and freely choose what percentage of members’ annual taxable income to collect. The median collection rate is 1 percent. When an individual joins a registered religious organization, the organization informs the tax agency that said member wants to participate in the scheme. The tax agency subsequently begins to subtract a percentage of the member’s gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The contribution is then noted on the member’s annual tax record. The member’s contribution is not deductible from income tax. Sixteen religious organizations participate in the scheme, including the Church of Sweden, the Roman Catholic Church, three Muslim congregations, and two Syriac Orthodox churches.

The government provides publicly funded grants to registered religious groups through the SST, which is under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. The grants are proportional to the size of a group's membership. Registered religious groups may also apply for separate grants for specific purposes on an individual group basis, such as for security expenses.

The military offers food options compliant with religious dietary restrictions and allows leave for mourning in accordance with labor laws. Each military district has a chaplain who holds the position regardless of his or her religious affiliation. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all chaplains seconded to the armed forces belong to the Church of Sweden. Regardless of religious denomination, chaplains are required to perform religious duties for other faiths or refer service members to spiritual leaders of other faiths if requested. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe their particular religious holidays in exchange for not taking time off on public holidays.

Religious education to include all world religions is compulsory in public and private schools. Teachers use a curriculum that encompasses lessons about the major world religions without preference for any particular religious group. Parents may send their children to government-supported independent religious schools that must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curricula, including religious education.

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief. Penalties for hate speech range from fines to a sentence of up to four years in prison, depending on the severity of the crime.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes. Authorities can add a hate crime classification to the initial reporting or to existing charges during an investigation, as well as at the trial and sentencing phase of a crime, as appropriate. In such cases, the penalties would increase.

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

Government Practices

Some Muslim groups continued to criticize authorities' implementation of antiterrorism laws. Without citing specific examples, these critics reported there were incidents of profiling directed at Muslims and a political discourse that risked stigmatizing and placing collective blame on the country's Muslim community as a whole.

A court in Malmo convicted an 18-year-old man on May 31 of a hate crime directed at a rabbi in 2015. The perpetrator was sentenced to pay a fine of SEK 2,000 (\$221) for the crime of "harassment with a hate crime motive." The size of the fine was based on calculations of the man's disposable income. The culprit had yelled an anti-Semitic remark from a passing car at the rabbi and his family as they were walking to their synagogue.

According to a migration expert at a Christian charity, authorities' response to religious hate crimes was at times inadequate and under-prioritized, particularly on the local level. The migration expert also reported a widespread lack of religious knowledge among authorities, including the police, negatively affected their ability to take seriously and prosecute antireligious hate crimes, particularly those directed at Muslims and Jews.

On November 24, the government released a "national plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility, and hate crimes," including anti-religious hate crimes. The plan contained an additional SEK 40 million (\$4.4 million) to combat anti-religious sentiments and other forms of hate crimes in 2017, expand the mandate and funding for the Living History Forum (a program which combats religious and other discrimination, including in government agencies), and carry out a study on hate crimes perpetrated online.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency conducted training for religious communities to educate them in crisis management and promote dialogue with authorities. Representatives from the national police trained regional police officers to detect hate crimes and visited high schools to raise awareness of such crimes and encourage more victims to report abuses. The government made available information in several languages for victims of hate crimes and provided interpreters to facilitate reporting. Police hate crime units existed throughout the country.

The Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the City of Malmo, and the Jewish Congregation of Malmo funded and launched a project in October to teach 7,000

students in Malmo about Jewish culture and history in an effort to combat anti-Semitism.

Some Muslim groups and all Jewish groups continued to state they considered the law requiring stunning of and/or administration of anesthetics to animals prior to slaughter conflicted with their respective religious rituals. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the production of kosher meat. Most halal and all kosher meat was imported.

The SST distributed a total of SEK 80.7 million (\$8.90 million) in funding for day-to-day operations to 43 religious groups in 2015, the latest year for which figures were available, including to 17 Orthodox churches, 16 Protestant churches, six Muslim groups, the Roman Catholic Church, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the Mandaean-Sabian Association of Sweden, and the Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council. The 2015 total was slightly more than the SEK 77.6 million (\$ 8.56 million) distributed in 2014.

Out of a total of SEK 7 million (\$772,000) the government appropriated for specific projects for religious groups in 2015, the SST distributed SEK 1.8 million (\$199,000) to nine religious groups in 2015 for material security measures, e.g. security cameras. The nine recipients comprised Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist groups and were the only groups to apply for security grants during that year. Effective March 31, religious groups could, for the first time, apply for grants to hire security personnel, and several groups received such financial support.

A senior representative of the Jewish community stated that he was dissatisfied with police protection of synagogues and other Jewish facilities, citing a lack of police presence at religious services and other community events. Although the SST provided SEK 200,000 (\$22,070) in security grants to the three Jewish congregations in 2015, they still spent an “unsustainable share of membership fees on security” (for example, 20 percent for the Stockholm congregation), according to the representative.

Additionally, as part of the government’s response to the refugee crisis, the SST distributed SEK 10 million (\$1.10 million) to support 22 religious organizations’ refugee reception and integration efforts in 2015. The largest recipients were the Ecumenical Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Church.

Other Christian groups, Muslim groups, Buddhist groups, and the Mandaean also received such funding.

The government announced on November 25 that it would distribute in 2017 an additional SEK 8 million (\$882,700) directly to the Church of Sweden and SEK 2.5 million to other religious groups via the SST for refugee assistance.

The SST also distributed SEK 15 million (\$1.66 million) to 20 religious groups for religious education and spiritual work in the healthcare sector in 2015.

A newspaper reported in April that Minister for Housing and Urban Development Mehmet Kaplan had stated at a 2009 seminar that “Israelis today treat Palestinians very similarly to how Jews were treated in Germany in the 1930s.” The minister issued an apology and resigned on April 18, following publication of the story and separate allegations of contacts with Turkish far-right extremist groups.

There were multiple reports that representatives of the SD, the country’s third largest political party, made denigrating comments about, or proposed action against, religious minorities. On December 20, the Svea court of appeal convicted a local SD politician from Norberg for hate speech directed at Muslims, sentencing him to a suspended sentence and a fine. The verdict concerned anti-Muslim comments that the politician posted on the Facebook page of SD in Norberg on December 13, 2014: “Muslims who live in the ‘diaspora’ are always at war. A Muslim who lives in Sweden thereby lives in a war zone in which it is a Muslim right, according to the Koran, to rape a woman. They are permitted to have sex with women conquered in war, i.e. the infidels’ women. The easiest thing for horny ‘Swedish’ Muslims is of course to join ISIS where they can act on their sick, satanic lusts. Talk about a sick religion.”

Newspaper *Jonkopings Posten* reported in April that a local SD politician in Habo had posted anonymous anti-Muslim comments online and stated he had targeted and killed Muslim civilians during his time as a United Nations peacekeeper in the Middle East and North Africa. The man had reportedly written “the only Muslim you can trust is a dead Muslim.” The man denied the report and resigned in September. Newspaper *Ornskoldsviks Allehanda* wrote in January that a local SD politician in Ornskoldsvik had stated on social media that he hated Muslims and called them “scum.”

In October three SD MPs proposed a bill to ban the Islamic call to prayer. Another SD MP, Anna Hagwall, proposed a bill in September with the stated goal of

limiting the share of Swedish media owned by a specific family with Jewish roots. “No family, ethnic group, or company should be allowed to own more than 5 percent of media,” the MP stated in writing in October. The SD dismissed the MP on December 5 and party leader Jimmie Akesson publicly condemned anti-Semitism.

In a speech in June, SD Party Secretary Richard Jomshof stated “you are stupid if you do not view Islamization as a threat... there are similarities with how things were during the emergence of Nazism and fascism. People do not understand what is happening with Islam. Back then many people warned about what would happen. Others looked at Germany and said ‘he has got things under control.’” Jomshof added in a subsequent interview “the same mindset [of Nazism and fascism] surrounds the way people talk about Islam, even if it is not exactly the same thing.” In October media and political opponents criticized SD spokesperson on economic policy Oscar Sjostedt after an online source published a video from 2011. In the video, Sjostedt recounted, laughing, an episode while working in a slaughterhouse in which two neo-Nazi coworkers had kicked slaughtered sheep while calling them “the Jews.”

Government-owned television broadcaster SVT cancelled the airing of a documentary on the effect of terrorism on Jews, stating, according to Danish newspaper *Berlingske*, the documentary did not fit its journalistic standards and attempted to prove a single point. *Berlingske* reported critics, including the documentary’s director, said SVT cancelled the airing because of political correctness. Commenting on the cancelled broadcast, editorialist Erik Helmersen wrote in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* that, among some people in the country, “Islamophobia is feared more than showing that terrorism is committed in the name of Islam.”

Prime Minister Stefan Lofven spoke at the Malmo synagogue on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27. He stated that “here in Europe, here in Sweden, we see anti-Semitic attacks against synagogues, rabbis, women, men, and children ...It is shameful...” Addressing the Jewish community, the prime minister said, “Your right to live freely and securely in Sweden is an unwavering task for our country ...So anti-Semitism must be combated wherever and in whatever form it appears.”

The government-funded Living History Forum continued its efforts to educate youths about intolerance to Jews, Muslims, and other groups, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point. The forum hosted a

number of exhibits on religious tolerance and disseminated information to schools about past crimes against humanity.

Schools continued to sponsor visits to Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz as educational tools. Students participated in such trips regardless of religious background.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the government's National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP), individuals reported 1,554 anti-religious hate crimes to the police in 2015 – the most recent year for which figures were available – an increase of 25 percent over the 1,248 incidents recorded in the previous year. The NCCP said anti-religious hate crimes were vastly underreported, meaning that increased or decreased reporting figures did not necessarily correspond to a change in the number of criminal acts. The NCCP cited several possible but unverified explanations for underreporting by victims, including a sense of shame, fear of retribution by the perpetrators, fear of secondary victimization from the justice system, belief the victim would not be believed, and ignorance the incident was a criminal act or a hate crime.

The NCCP reported anti-Muslim hate crimes increased by 13 percent to 558 in 2015, compared to 492 in 2014. This was the highest figure since the category was first included in hate crime statistics in 2006. The most common incidents involved unlawful threats/harassment (44 percent), hate speech (18 percent), vandalism/graffiti (14 percent), and violent crimes (8 percent). The 46 violent anti-Muslim crimes reported in 2015 represented a decrease of 23 percent compared to the previous year. Women wearing veils were again the target of a majority of reported anti-Muslim crimes.

According to the NCCP, reports of anti-Christian hate crimes increased by 16 percent to 388 in 2015, which constituted the highest figure on record. The most common incidents were vandalism/graffiti (48 percent), unlawful threats/harassment (35 percent), and violent crimes (8 percent). The 32 violent anti-Christian crimes reported in 2015 represented an increase of 23 percent from the previous year.

NCCP reported anti-Semitic hate crimes increased by 4 percent to 277 in 2015, from 267 the prior year, the highest registered level of anti-Semitic crimes since 2009. The most common categories were unlawful threats/harassment (46 percent); hate speech (37 percent); defamation (6 percent); and vandalism/graffiti (5 percent). The eight violent anti-Semitic crimes reported in 2015 represented a decrease of 33 percent from the previous year. According to the NCCP and Jewish leaders, events in the Middle East regularly sparked an increase in anti-Semitic acts, and Jews were at times blamed for Israel's policies.

The NCCP reported "other anti-religious hate crimes" increased by 108 percent to 331 in 2015, compared to 159 in 2014. The 2015 total was the highest since the category was introduced in 2011. The NCCP did not know why the number of incidents in this category had more than doubled, stating the higher figure could reflect a higher incidence of crime, more reporting of crimes, or better identification of hate crimes by police. The NCCP defined "other anti-religious hate crimes" as those directed at religions other than Islam, Christianity, or Judaism; between denominations of the same religion; and related to conversions from one faith to another. The most common forms of hate crimes in this category were unlawful threats/harassment (70 percent); violent crimes (11 percent); and vandalism/graffiti (7 percent). Reported violent crimes decreased by 3 percent to 37 percent in 2015. According to the NCCP, victims in approximately 20 percent of such cases told police the perpetrators had expressed support for such groups as ISIS or Al Qaeda.

According to the NCCP, 10 percent of all reported anti-religious hate crimes occurred in asylum centers in 2015, compared to 0-7 percent for other types of hate crimes.

In June approximately 50 unknown men attacked four people outside the Stockholm Grand Mosque. The assailants punched and threw objects at the victims and yelled anti-Muslim slurs. The Stockholm police classified the incident as a suspected hate crime. They had made no arrests by year's end.

Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity. On January 29, as many as 100 people, who media described as neo-Nazis, carried out a number of assaults on migrants in Stockholm. The perpetrators covered their faces and, according to a witness, targeted "people of foreign appearance," many of them homeless youths of Moroccan origin. According to the internet site *Nordfront*, they had gathered in order to "sort out the criminals coming in from North Africa."

Police authorities increased their presence in the city center and deployed anti-riot and helicopter units.

There were reports of threats against Christian refugees throughout the year. A migration expert with a Christian civil society group reported that many instances of reported violence between asylum seekers of different faiths and denominations could be attributed to political rather than religious causes, predominantly stemming from armed conflicts in the home country. The expert nevertheless identified three known incidents at asylum housing facilities as clearly attributable to religious sentiment.

A Christian civil society leader reported that several men stabbed a fellow asylum seeker for planning to convert from Islam to Christianity and wearing a crucifix. Public broadcaster SVT reported in June that asylum seekers physically assaulted and threatened a family seeking asylum in the region of Jamtland for being Christian. Authorities relocated the family to secure housing.

In May newspaper *Expressen* reported that in two separate cases Muslim asylum seekers threatened roommates for converting to Christianity.

A young civil society leader continued to report receiving numerous threats during the year as a result of his work to promote religious tolerance and combat anti-Semitism.

In June two Swedish researchers published a report on anti-Semitism in select European countries, with a particular focus on Sweden, for Tel Aviv University. The paper was based on a 2012 survey of Jewish community perceptions and experiences of anti-Semitism by the European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights' (FRA) and a 2013 survey of attitudes toward Jews by the NGO the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). According to the 2013 ADL survey, only 4 percent of the population harbored "classic" anti-Semitic views, the lowest of any European country surveyed and the third lowest of any country worldwide. On the other hand, according to the 2012 AFR survey, 2.6 percent of Swedish Jews surveyed said they had been verbally or physically attacked because of their religion and 6.7 percent said they had witnessed someone being verbally or physically attacked because they were Jewish. Both these figures were the second highest among eight European countries surveyed. In addition, 60 percent of Swedish Jews said they frequently or always avoided wearing items that could identify them as Jews and 3.8 percent avoided visiting Jewish sites or events because they did not feel safe there. Both figures were the highest among the eight European countries surveyed.

in 2012. Among Swedish respondents who reported being attacked or threatened because of their Jewishness in the previous five years, 51 percent stated they believed the perpetrator had been someone with “Muslim extremist views.” The perpetrators were suspected of having left-wing political views in 25 percent of cases and right-wing political views in 5 percent of cases.

There were reports of arson attacks against Islamic places of worship and against asylum centers. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many actions as being solely based on religious identity. On April 13, a court in Boras convicted a man to a three-year prison sentence for committing arson against a local mosque on January 17. The mosque suffered damage requiring months of repair, but there were no reports of injuries. According to the verdict, the man “had previously expressed xenophobic views” and was aware the building was a mosque. In a separate incident, police in Malmo arrested a man in December suspected of throwing a fire bomb in October into a local Iraqi-Shia cultural center that also functioned as a mosque. There were no reports of injuries.

According to the national police, 112 fires occurred at asylum centers in 2016. In 20 cases the fires were determined to be accidents, 37 fires were set by resident asylum seekers, two fires were set by outside perpetrators, and 53 fires were set by unknown perpetrators.

On November 11, a court in Malmo charged a man with an anti-Christian hate crime for breaking into and vandalizing a local Church of Sweden church in June. The man broke 14 windows and yelled anti-Christian epithets. At year’s end, the man was undergoing a psychological evaluation before standing trial.

On November 25 unknown assailants attacked a mosque in Stockholm, throwing firecrackers and painting three swastikas and the words “kill Muslims” on the walls. Police have labeled the incident a hate crime but did not arrest any suspects by year’s end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Ambassador and other embassy officials continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, the SST, the National Coordinator to Combat Violent Extremism, and national and local police on issues related to the increasing number of anti-religious hate crimes, overcoming religious tensions, increasing religious tolerance, and ensuring the safety of specific religious groups.

In May the embassy funded the travel of a delegation of local imams and Muslim civil society leaders to three U.S. cities to exchange best practices on interfaith dialogue, community organizing and fundraising, and religious education.

The U.S. embassy sponsored the visit of an American reformed former white supremacist and neo-Nazi in September to speak to local officials, academics, journalists, and civil society representatives about religious tolerance and diversity.

The Ambassador visited Malmo in June and met separately with Muslim and Jewish leaders before convening an interfaith meeting at which she reaffirmed U.S. support for religious minorities and encouraged continued dialogue among religious groups.