

# AUSTRIA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

Historical and modern constitutional documents provide for freedom of religious belief and affiliation and prohibit religious discrimination. The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against religious groups and classifies registered religious groups into one of three categories: religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. The 16 groups recognized as religious societies receive the most benefits. Unrecognized groups may practice their religion privately if the practice is lawful and does not offend “common decency.” The Federal Chancellery’s Documentation Center for Political Islam researched, disseminated information on, and organized workshops pertaining to what it described as Muslim extremism. The Jewish Community (IKG) partnered with the government to hold workshops for teachers and personnel working with immigrant and refugee groups to combat antisemitism among the latter groups. In July, parliament amended the law pertaining to Muslims as part of an antiterrorism package providing for stricter annual government monitoring of the finances of mosques and Muslim cultural associations, focusing on financial flows from abroad. The Islamic Religious Authority of Austria (IGGO) opposed the amendment, which it said applied only to the Muslim community, was discriminatory, and interfered with religious freedom. In May, the Documentation Center for Political Islam created a website with an “Islam Map” listing Islamic institutions in the country. Religious and civil society groups criticized the map—and the center for publicizing it—stating it violated data privacy rules and endangered the lives of Muslims in the country by giving right-wing extremist groups the ability to target them. In January, the government presented its strategy to combat antisemitism, which called for enhancing education about Judaism, improving security of Jewish sites, and more-vigorous prosecution of antisemitic crimes, and launched an office in the Federal Chancellery to coordinate the strategy. A survey commissioned by parliament found antisemitism had become more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic and that more than a quarter of respondents agreed with statements that Jews dominated the business world and took advantage of having been victimized by the Nazis. Citing the study, the parliamentary president said the country could not afford to view antisemitism as just a marginal phenomenon.

According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 20 antisemitic and three anti-Muslim crimes reported to police in the first half of the year. For all of 2020, the ministry cited 36 antisemitic and 16 anti-Muslim crimes, compared with 30 and six

crimes, respectively, in the previous year. In 2020, the most recent year for which it had data, IGGO reported 1,402 anti-Muslim incidents, one-third more than in the previous year. The IKG reported 562 antisemitic incidents in the first half of the year, more than double the number over the same period in the previous year; there were 585 such incidents in all of 2020. Most incidents involved hate speech, especially on the internet, but there were also incidents of assault. For example, in Vienna in May, a man threw rocks at a Jewish family wearing traditional religious clothing. Government figures, unlike those from the IKG and IGGO, only included incidents in which authorities filed criminal charges. In September, the Brussels-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 18 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Austria said they had negative feelings towards Jews.

U.S. embassy representatives met with officials from the Federal Chancellery and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior to discuss religious freedom, the protection of religious minorities, and measures to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The Ambassador and Charge d'Affaires met with leaders from the IGGO, IKG, Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, and various Orthodox churches to discuss their relations with the government, instances of discrimination and interreligious dialogue, and the impact on their respective communities of the COVID-19 crisis. In February, the embassy cohosted a virtual live event with the Muslim Youth Organization with an American professor who spoke about the important role of youth in social movements. Embassy officials continued to serve on the advisory board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency, a governmental agency that promotes Holocaust remembrance. In April, the Charge d'Affaires was interviewed for a Mauthausen Committee video commemorating World War II. In September, the embassy cohosted with a local NGO that focuses on antisemitism and the Holocaust a discussion with a group of Holocaust survivors. In July, embassy staff hosted a lunch with representatives of the Jewish community to discuss Holocaust education. Throughout the year, the embassy used social media platforms to deliver messages about religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.9 million (midyear 2021). According to religious groups and government estimates, Roman Catholics constitute 55 percent of the population, and Muslims – predominantly Sunni – 8 percent, while approximately 25 percent is unaffiliated with any religion. According to estimates from religious groups, Eastern Orthodox churches

(Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Antiochian, and Bulgarian) constitute 5 percent of the population, and Protestants (Augsburg and Helvetic confessions) 3.2 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and other Christian and non-Christian religious groups.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

A combination of historical and modern constitutional documents guarantees freedom of "conscience and creed." The law provides for freedom of religious belief and the rights of all residents to join, participate in, leave, or abstain from association with any religious community. The law stipulates, "Duties incumbent on nationals may not be impeded by religious affiliation."

Several constitutional provisions protect religious freedom. The main pillars are historical laws on fundamental rights and freedoms, including religious freedom, and treaties and conventions, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, which form part of the constitution. Antidiscrimination legislation prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against a church group, religious society, or other religious group if the incitement is perceivable by "many people," which an official government commentary on the law and the courts interpret as 30 or more individuals. The prohibition also applies specifically in the case of incitement in print, electronic, or other media available to a broad public. The law also prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against religious groups, if such action violates human dignity.

The law divides registered religious groups into three officially recognized legal categories (listed in descending order of rights, privileges, and legal responsibilities): religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Members of religious groups not legally recognized may practice their religion at home, "insofar as this practice is neither unlawful nor offends common decency."

There are 16 recognized religious societies: the Roman Catholic Church; Protestant churches (Augsburg and Helvetic confessions); the IGGO; Old Catholic

Church; IKG; Eastern Orthodox Church (Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, and Antiochian); The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; New Apostolic Church; Syrian Orthodox Church; Coptic Orthodox Church; Armenian Apostolic Church; Methodist Church of Austria; the Buddhist Community; Jehovah's Witnesses; Alevi Community in Austria; and Free Christian Churches.

The law grants registered religious societies the right to public practice and independent administration of their internal affairs; to participate in the program requiring mandatory church contributions by church members; to bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers; and to provide pastoral services in prisons and hospitals. Under the law, religious societies have "public corporation" status, permitting them to engage in several public or quasi-public activities, such as government-funded religious instruction in both public and private schools, which the government denies to confessional communities and associations. The government grants all recognized religious societies tax relief in two main ways: donors do not pay taxes on donations, and the societies receive exemption from property tax for all buildings dedicated to the active practice of religion or administration of such. Additionally, religious societies are exempt from a surveillance charge, otherwise payable when the state provides security to religious groups, and administrative fees for garbage collection and other municipal services. Responsibilities of religious societies include a commitment to sponsor social and cultural activities that serve the common good and – like all religious groups – to ensure their teachings do not violate the law or ethical standards, which the law does not define.

Religious groups seeking to achieve religious society status for the first time must apply for recognition with the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery. Religious groups recognized as societies prior to 1998 retained their status. The government grandfathered in 14 of the 16 recognized religious societies under this provision of the law. To gain recognition as a religious society, religious groups not recognized prior to 1998 must have membership equaling 0.2 percent of the country's population (approximately 17,700 persons) and have existed for 20 years, at least five of which must have been as a confessional community. The government recognizes Jehovah's Witnesses and Alevi Muslims as religious societies under these post-1998 criteria. Groups that do not meet these criteria may still apply for religious society status under an exception for groups that have been active internationally for at least 100 years and active as an association in the country for 10 years. Groups sharing a broad faith with an existing society or confessional community, for example Christianity, may

register separately as long as they can demonstrate that they have a different theology.

The law allows religious groups not recognized as societies to seek official status as confessional communities with the Office for Religious Affairs. The government recognizes 10 confessional communities: the Baha'i Faith, Movement for Religious Renewal-Community of Christians, Pentecostal Community of God, Seventh-day Adventists, Hindu Community, Islamic-Shia Community, Old-Alevi Community in Austria, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, United Pentecostal Community of Austria, and Sikhs.

A recognized confessional community has the juridical standing needed to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in its own name and contracting for goods and services, but it is not eligible for the financial and educational benefits available to recognized religious societies. Contributions to confessional communities' charitable activities are tax deductible for those who make them and tax free for the groups receiving them, but the communities are not exempt from property taxes. Confessional communities may provide pastoral care in prisons and hospitals.

To gain government recognition as a confessional community, a group must have at least 300 members and submit to the Office for Religious Affairs its statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members as well as membership regulations, a list of officials, and financing information. A group must also submit a written description of its religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any previously recognized religious society or religious confessional community. The Office for Religious Affairs determines whether the group's basic beliefs are consistent with public security, order, health, and morals and with the rights and freedoms of citizens. A religious group seeking to obtain confessional community status is subject to a six-month waiting period from the time of application to the chancellery. After this period, groups that have applied automatically receive the status unless the government issues a decree rejecting the application.

Religious groups not qualifying for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become legal associations, a status applicable to a broad range of civil groups. Some groups organize as associations while waiting for the government to recognize them as confessional communities.

The Church of Scientology and several smaller religious groups, such as Sahaja Yoga and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have association status.

According to the law, any group of more than two persons pursuing a nonprofit goal qualifies to organize as an association. Groups may apply to the Ministry of Interior to obtain such status. To become an association, a group must submit a written statement citing its common, nonprofit goal and commitment to function as a nonprofit organization.

Associations have juridical standing, the right to function in public, and many of the same rights as confessional communities, including the right to own real estate and to contract for goods and services. Associations may not offer pastoral care in hospitals or prisons or receive tax-deductible contributions.

Pursuant to the law governing relations between the government and the Roman Catholic Church, the Church is the only religious group to receive government funding for pastoral care it provides in prisons. The law also makes various Catholic holidays official national holidays.

The law governing relations between the government and the IGGO and Alevi Muslim groups stipulates that funding for the day-to-day operations of mosques must be derived from domestic sources, Islamic teachings and practices must not violate federal law (compliance with which is determined by the Office for Religious Affairs), and Islamic institutions should “take a positive stance” toward the state and society. The law provides an explicit legal definition of, and legal protection for, Islamic practices, such as circumcision and preparation of food in conformity with religious rules, and states Muslims may raise children and youth in accordance with Islamic traditions. Muslim groups with at least 300 members and a theology not distinct from a pre-existing Islamic religious society or confessional community are considered cultural communities and fall under the umbrella of the pre-existing, legally recognized Islamic religious society or confessional community. This includes the IGGO and the Alevi Community in Austria, which are both religious societies, or the Islamic-Shia Community and the Old-Alevi Faith Community in Austria, both of which have confessional community status. The law allows for Islamic theological university studies, which the University of Vienna offers.

An amendment to the law pertaining to Muslims passed in July as part of an antiterrorism package provides for stricter annual government monitoring of the

finances of mosques and Muslim cultural associations, focusing on financial flows from abroad. The legislation, which entered into force September 1, also allows the Federal Chancellery to request a list of all Muslim officials and associations and makes it easier to close mosques to “protect public security,” with the approval of the IGGO. The IGGO must report changes in Muslim associations, such as changes in by-laws, leadership, and funding to the Office for Religious Affairs, so that authorities have up-to-date information on such associations. The law also empowers Ministry of Interior officials, who already review requests to establish new associations, to scrutinize such requests to ensure that they are not “cover organizations” for religious groups attempting to bypass the transparency requirements for mosques. The antiterrorism package also introduced a new statutory offense banning “religiously motivated extremism.”

Separate laws govern relations between the government and each of the other 14 state-recognized religious societies. The laws have similar intent but vary in some details, since they were enacted at different times over a span of approximately 140 years. As with the Muslim community, a law provides explicit protections for Jewish religious practices, including circumcision and ritual slaughter.

The law bans full-face coverings in public places as a “violation of Austrian values,” with exceptions made only for artistic, cultural, or traditional events, in sports, or for health or professional reasons. Failure to comply with the law is an administrative violation. The law prescribes a 150 euro (\$170) fine but does not entitle police to remove the face covering.

In accordance with a Constitutional Court ruling in 2020 that overturned a headscarf ban for children in elementary school, children of all ages may wear headscarves and other head coverings in schools.

The government funds, on a proportional basis, religious instruction for any of the 16 officially recognized religious societies by clergy or instructors provided by those groups for children in public schools and government-accredited private schools. The government does not offer such funding to other religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. Attendance in the respective religion classes is mandatory for all students who are members of those religious groups unless they formally withdraw at the beginning of the school year; students younger than age 14 require parental permission to withdraw from religion classes. Religious instruction takes place either in the school or at sites organized by religious groups. Some schools offer ethics classes for students not

attending religious instruction. Religious education and ethics classes include the tenets of different religious groups as comparative religious education.

The curriculum for both public and private schools includes compulsory antibias and tolerance education, including religious tolerance, as part of civics education across various subjects, including history and German-language instruction.

Holocaust education is part of history instruction and is also part of other courses such as civics.

The Equal Rights Agency, an independent agency falling under the jurisdiction of the Federal Chancellery Minister for Women, Family, Youth, and Integration, oversees discrimination cases, including those based on religion. The agency provides legal counseling and mediation services, and it assists with bringing cases before the Equal Treatment Commission, another independent government agency. In cases where it finds discrimination, the commission makes a recommendation for corrective action. In a case of noncompliance with the recommendation, the case goes to court. The commission may issue expert reports for plaintiffs to present before the court. Only a court may order corrective action and compensation.

The law bans neo-Nazi activity and prohibits public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification “of the National Socialist genocide” or other Nazi crimes against humanity in print, broadcast, or other media.

The law prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against a group because of its members’ race, nationality, religion, or ethnicity if the statement violates human dignity, and it imposes criminal penalties for violations.

On January 1, a law on hate speech, including religiously motivated hate speech, went into effect requiring online platforms to identify and delete posts that can be classified as hateful or defamatory. It broadens the definition of hate speech to include single offenses, cyberbullying, and photographs taken surreptitiously, for which a person may be prosecuted in court. The law also facilitates means of recourse by allowing individuals subjected to online hate speech to seek redress directly with the relevant communication platform, rather than go through civil courts. It mandates companies to designate a contact person to whom affected individuals and government authorities can send complaints, and it requires platforms to issue annual reports on how they received and processed hate speech complaints. Repeated failure by the platform to comply could lead to fines of up to

10 million euros (\$11.34 million). The law applies only to large for-profit communication platforms with more than 100,000 users and revenues of 500,000 euros (\$567,000) or more per year. Videos on video-sharing platforms such as YouTube or Facebook are excluded, as they are subject to a separate EU law, but comments on the videos fall under the new law.

The law extends citizenship to direct descendants of Austrian victims of Nazi crimes. Descendants may obtain citizenship by reporting to Austrian consulates. Dual citizenship is also possible.

The law bans certain symbols the government considers extremist, including those pertaining to the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, al-Qaida, Hizballah, and the Croatian Ustasha.

The government requires a visa for visitors from non-visa-waiver countries or individuals who would stay beyond 90 days, including religious workers of confessional communities or associations. Foreign religious workers of groups recognized as confessional communities or associations must apply for a general immigrant visa that is not employment or family based and is subject to a quota. Foreign religious workers belonging to religious societies also require immigrant visas but are exempt from the quota system. Religious workers from Schengen or EU-member countries are exempt from all visa requirements.

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

### **Government Practices**

The IGGO expressed objections to the amendment of the law pertaining to Muslims enacted in July as part of the government's antiterrorism legislation, stating it was discriminatory and interfered with religious freedom and the internal affairs of the Muslim community. The provisions in the amendment pertained only to Islam. IGGO president Umit Vural said he was also disappointed the government did not engage with the IGGO on the provisions of the amendment. Responding to his criticism, both Justice Minister Alma Zadic and Integration Minister Suzanne Raab stated the new legislation was in no way designed to target a specific religious group. The Office for Religious Affairs stated all religious groups in the country must adhere to the same restrictions concerning foreign funding and violating federal law and that only Islamic groups had violated either of these restrictions.

The Federal Chancellery’s Documentation Center for Political Islam, which was established in 2020, continued its research on what it described as politically motivated Muslim extremism. It stated that it made its research available to the general public to promote awareness of Muslim extremism, pluralism, and religious freedom, while also staging workshops and publishing studies relevant to Muslim extremism. In October, the Federal Chancellery hosted the Vienna Forum on Countering Segregation and Extremism in the Context of Integration, which brought together officials from Austria, Denmark, Belgium, and France as well as experts in the field to find avenues for cooperation on fighting “political Islam.” The four countries agreed to begin joint cooperation projects in fighting radicalization and Islamic extremism, focusing on exchanging best practices and cooperation in research. The Federal Chancellery said it would host the forum annually and seek cooperation with other countries as well.

In May, the Documentation Center for Political Islam created a website featuring an “Islam Map” compiled by the University of Vienna’s Institute for Muslim Theological Studies, listing Islamic institutions in the country, including mosques, Muslim associations, and prayer rooms. The Islam Map had already been available through the university’s website, but it only became widely known publicly after the government posted it to the Documentation Center’s website in June. Religious, political, and civil society groups criticized the map. Green Party integration spokeswoman Faika El-Nagashi called it “the opposite of what integration policy and dialogue should look like on an equal footing,” while IGGO President Umit Vural called it dangerous and said attacks against Muslims rose after the posting of the map. Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, the head of the Catholic Church in the country, called it “dangerous to give the impression that one of the religious communities is under general suspicion,” and asked why one of the country’s many religious communities was singled out. In June, following the posting of the map, individuals began to use the map to “out” certain locations as Muslim with posters and signs reading or “Beware! Political Islam is here.” The government briefly took the map down in June before reposting it online a few weeks later. Also in June, the Muslim Youth Organization of Austria filed a complaint against the University of Vienna professor who compiled the map, the University of Vienna, and the Documentation Office on Political Islam, stating the map violated data privacy rules.

In January, the Federal Chancellery Minister for the EU and Constitution, Karoline Edtstadler, presented a national strategy to combat antisemitism and established an office in the Federal Chancellery to coordinate measures by all ministries to implement the new strategy. The strategy focused on addressing antisemitism

when educating new refugees and establishing security for the Jewish community, guidelines for tracking and prosecuting antisemitic incidents, and standards for EU-wide data comparison. It recommended increasing protection of synagogues, improving education about Judaism in schools and awareness campaigns, more vigorous prosecution of hate speech, and closing loopholes in the law pertaining to right-wing extremist groups and their symbols. Edtstadler stated that combatting antisemitism was a central priority of the government. Vice Chancellor Werner Kogler said the strategy reflected the country's historic responsibility to combat antisemitism, and he warned against right-wing extremists exploiting protests against COVID-19 restrictions to spread antisemitism. Jewish community president Oskar Deutsch welcomed the strategy, saying it would ensure the security and continuity of Jewish life in the country.

The Federal Office of Sect Issues offered advice to persons with questions about groups that it considered "sects" and "cults." The office was nominally independent but government funded, and the Minister of Women, Family, Youth and Integration appointed and oversaw its head.

In June, the government declared it had fulfilled the responsibilities of the Arbitration Panel for In Rem Restitution under the Law on the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism. Parliament unanimously took note of the Final Report of the Arbitration Panel. The Arbitration Panel was established in 2001 under the provisions of the Washington Agreement to decide on applications for in rem restitution of publicly owned property and movable assets for the previous owners and their heirs.

In August, an appellate court in the Styrian provincial capital of Graz ruled that nine police raids against Muslim Brotherhood individuals and associations in 2020 were illegal. The Graz appellate court ruled that raids targeting terrorist financing were illegal because they were not based on probable cause or reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing. The court said there was no evidence that every member of the Muslim Brotherhood was "also a member of or promoted a terrorist organization, in particular Hamas." Individuals detained in the raids, who were reportedly questioned and released, had told media the raids were "mere guesswork by the police" and that there was no evidence of terrorist financing.

Revenue authorities continued to investigate Islamic associations that they said might have evaded taxes, which would result in the loss of charity status for those associations. At year's end, authorities had not stripped any Islamic associations of their charity status.

The Federal Office for Foreigner Affairs and Asylum (BFA) continued to refuse to issue or renew residence permits for foreign imams financed by foreign sources. There were no reports that other religious groups faced similar problems in obtaining residence permits for their foreign clerics, as those clerics are not financed by foreign sources according to the BFA.

At year's end, the Vienna-based, Saudi Arabia-funded King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue remained open, despite a foreign ministry announcement in 2019 that it would close the center, consistent with a nonbinding parliamentary resolution calling on it to do so because of Saudi Arabia's human rights record. In October, Saudi Arabia announced it would move the center to Lisbon, although it did not indicate a timetable for the relocation.

In January, four online platforms, not publicly identified, sought an exemption from the new law on hate speech, stating it should not apply to them because they had offices in Ireland, but the Vienna Commercial Court rejected the claim. Officials in the Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs and the Federal Chancellery reported companies were complying to varying degrees, and some proceedings to penalize noncompliant companies were underway, but they did not provide details. By year's end, KommAustria, an independent telecommunications supervisory authority responsible for monitoring compliance with the law, had not levied penalties on any companies.

Following the IKG's April presentation of its annual report on antisemitic incidents in 2020, EU and Constitution Minister Edtstadler said much remained to be done and that it was important to implement the government's strategy to fight antisemitism adopted in January. Vice Chancellor Kogler also stated combatting antisemitism remained a major challenge.

In March, Parliamentary President Wolfgang Sobotka presented the results of a survey of citizens commissioned by parliament that found antisemitism had become more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the circulation of conspiracy theories regarding the pandemic's origin. Of 2,000 persons polled in late 2020, 28 percent agreed with the statement that "Jews today try to take advantage of the fact that they were victims during the Nazi era." Another 26 percent agreed that "Jews dominate the international business world." Forty-nine percent of respondents agreed that it was citizens' "moral responsibility to stand by Jews" in the country. The study's authors, the Institute for Empirical Social

Research and the Demox research institute, said that, despite better efforts to combat antisemitism in the country, a vocal minority exploited public frustration with health and safety restrictions and demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions as public platforms to make antisemitism more visible and exploit the right to assemble to spread conspiracy theories against Jews. Sobotka praised the study, saying it offered a chance to “grow awareness of the problem of antisemitism, which in turn is the basis for an actual change in the attitudes of Austrians,” adding that the country could not afford to view antisemitism as just a marginal phenomenon in society. Sobotka also criticized opposition Freedom Party (FPÖ) Floor Leader Herbert Kickl for his participation at demonstrations in March against COVID-19 restrictions, where Sobotka said right-wing extremists had spread antisemitic messages equating persons affected by COVID-19 restrictions with Holocaust victims. In his speech at a demonstration against COVID-19 restrictions, Kickl accused Israel of “vaccination apartheid.”

The international NGO Anti-Defamation League continued to conduct teacher-training seminars on Holocaust awareness in schools in the country, reaching approximately 100 teachers. School councils and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Research continued to invite Holocaust survivors to talk to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

In September, Parliamentary President Sobotka presented the restored grave of the Epstein family, a renowned Jewish family that lived in Vienna in the 19th century, at the historic Waehring Jewish cemetery in Vienna to the IKG. Parliament had financed and organized the restoration project. Sobotka stated the cemetery was a “unique memorial for Jewish life in Vienna.”

The Vienna Prosecutor’s Office declined to prosecute the FPÖ for incitement after the party posted slogans that equated traditionally dressed Muslims with radical, violent Islamism during Vienna municipal elections in October 2020. The Association of Social Democrat Academics had sought incitement charges against the FPÖ.

In May, Education Minister Heinz Fassmann announced the establishment of a research office on right-wing extremism and antisemitism with the Documentation Center of the Austrian Resistance Movement, an NGO that monitors right-wing extremism. The center also provided schools with material for Holocaust education and supported investigations into right-wing extremists.

The government continued to allow headwear for religious purposes in official identification documents, provided the face remained sufficiently visible to allow for identification of the wearer.

According to statistics presented by Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg in September, the government granted citizenship to 6,600 descendants of Austrian victims of Nazi crimes, including persons from the United States, Israel, and the United Kingdom.

The city of Vienna continued work on the Campus of Religions, which it financed and launched in 2019. Vienna unveiled the winning design for the campus in September, which contains eight buildings on 2.5 acres of land and is expected to be completed in 2028. The campus is planned as a site where the Catholic, Evangelical, and Orthodox Churches, as well as Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and members of the New Apostolic Church will exercise their own religious activities, while also working together. Its designated function is to serve to promote faith, respect, diversity, and ideological tolerance. Alongside the interfaith University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems, the campus is designed to be a meeting point that encourages dialogue between religions, science, and education, and it will include access for the general public.

The government did not impose any COVID-19 restrictions on religious gatherings, relying on religious organizations to regulate their own gatherings. Religious groups worked with government officials to establish COVID-19 guidelines that mirrored each other, which Catholic and Muslim leaders stated helped create unified restrictions that eliminated confusion and risk among their congregations. There were no reports of widespread dissatisfaction among religious community members about the restrictions.

In October, the country opened its redesigned exhibit at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum commemorating the victims and acknowledging the role of Austrian perpetrators in the Holocaust.

The government inaugurated the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna in November listing the names of the country's 66,000 Jewish Holocaust victims.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 20 antisemitic and three anti-Muslim crimes reported to police in the first half of the year. In all of 2020, there were 36 antisemitic and 16 anti-Muslim crimes, compared with 30 and six such crimes, respectively, in 2019. The ministry said its figures included only incidents that were reported to it and in which authorities filed criminal charges, and the ministry attributed all the crimes in the three years to right-wing extremists. Most incidents, according to the ministry, involved hate speech. The ministry did not provide details on any of the incidents.

The IGGO's Documentation Center on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism reported that there were 1,402 anti-Muslim incidents in 2020 (1,051 in 2019). The 2020 data were the most recent available. In 2015, the first full year in which it collected such statistics, IGGO reported 156 anti-Muslim incidents. The IKG reported 585 antisemitic incidents (550 in 2019) in the same year. From January to June, the IKG recorded 562 incidents, more than twice the 257 in the first half of 2020. Most incidents in 2021 consisted of hate speech or insults on the internet, although there were also 11 cases of violent threats and eight physical assaults. The data were the most recent available. Both groups included incidents regardless of whether they were reported to police or criminal charges were filed. Most 2020 antisemitic and anti-Muslim cases concerned hate speech and insinuations of violence on the internet (1,019 cases), followed by insulting language and property damage. Eight cases involved physical assaults. The IGGO reported men were more likely to experience anti-Muslim behavior on the internet, while Muslim women were more likely to experience it in person in significant part because of their visible face or head coverings.

The IKG reported antisemitic incidents in the first half of the year included eight physical assaults, 58 cases of property damage, 154 mass mailings, and 331 threats. Examples of antisemitic incidents included one in Vienna in May in which a group of teenagers were apprehended for throwing rocks at a Jewish family in traditional clothes, and antisemitic graffiti at the Vienna Jewish Museum in May. The IKG attributed the increase in incidents in part to antisemitic messages at demonstrations against COVID-19 restrictions.

In July, the Ministry of Interior presented its first report on hate crimes. The report listed 1,936 hate crimes between November 2020 and April 2021, primarily directed against persons of a different religion, opinion, or ethnicity. The report stated 309 of the cases were religiously motivated.

In May, two days before the annual event commemorating the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp, police disbanded a demonstration against COVID-19 restrictions attended by approximately 30 persons in Mauthausen after the organizer played a Hitler video.

In May, on the International Day against Racism and Violence, the Ministry of Interior reported several antisemitic postings on its Facebook site and launched investigations to identify the authors.

In May, demonstrators chanted “Allahu Akbar” and “Child Murderer Israel” and waved Palestinian flags during an anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian rally in Vienna. The IKG appealed to its members to stay away from the area of the demonstration and warned that the political situation in Israel could pose a threat to Jewish communities in Europe. Police launched investigations into the use of antisemitic slogans during the demonstration, while Integration Minister Raab and then Interior Minister Karl Nehammer warned that the right to assemble should not be abused to make antisemitic statements. Authorities arrested and questioned 11 individuals but released them without filing charges.

In May, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement against Israel held demonstrations with pro-Palestinian groups to protest Israeli house evacuations in East Jerusalem.

In a video on Twitter that became publicly known in January, Martin Sellner, head of the pan-European nationalist Identitarian movement, widely described as right-wing extremist, called People’s Party member of parliament Martin Engelberg an infamous hypocrite, antipatriotic traitor, despicable person, and “destroyer of the homeland” who has “abandoned any Christian values.” Sellner was reacting to a December 2020 statement in which Engelberg criticized FPOe Parliamentary Floor Leader Kickl for not distancing himself from the Identitarian movement. Sellner also praised Kickl for “taking a stance” against persons like Engelberg. EU and Constitution Minister Edtstadler condemned Sellner’s message as antisemitic and also called upon the FPOe and Kickl to distance themselves from the Identitarian movement. In June, Engelberg obtained an injunction from the Vienna Commercial Court that ruled that Sellner must cease the slanderous statements about Engelberg.

In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey based on data from December 2019-January 2020. According to the survey, 18 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-

75 in Austria said they had negative feelings towards Jews, and 26 percent said they would be “totally uncomfortable” or “uncomfortable” with having Jewish neighbors. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they agreed or disagreed. The proportion who responded “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” with the following statements were: “The interests of Jews in this country are very different from the interests of the rest of the population” (26 percent); “there is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world” (30 percent); “Jews have too much influence in this country” (21 percent); “Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society” (28 percent); “Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (22 percent); “many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later” (17 percent); “Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them” (19 percent); “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” (40 percent).

At the July presentation of a Council of Europe survey on online hatred against Muslims conducted among Muslim associations in eight European countries, the council’s special representative on antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred cited the country’s “Islam map” as a negative example fueling discrimination. The study stated the authors of hate postings were usually “anti-migration, right-wing groups, and – especially in Austria – the Identitarian movement.”

A counseling center in Vienna managed by the Society Against Sect and Cult Dangers, an NGO that described itself as an organization working against harm caused by “destructive cults” such as Scientology, continued to distribute information to the general public and provide counseling for former members of such groups. All provinces funded family and youth counseling offices that provided information on “sects and cults.”

In October, the Graz Provincial Court for Criminal Matters convicted a Syrian man of assaulting Graz Jewish Community president Elie Rose in Graz in 2020 and vandalizing the Graz synagogue and a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex community center. The court sentenced him to three years in prison, stating the man could not be dissuaded from his anti-Jewish sentiments. In response to the attack, the Graz Jewish Community continued to receive additional police protection, and the government continued to provide orientation and values courses on antisemitism for refugees.

According to the IGGO report covering 2020, in June of that year a woman insulted and hit a Muslim woman on the head with a newspaper, causing her hijab

to slip off on one side. The woman complained that none of several persons sitting in a nearby sidewalk cafe came to help her. In September 2020, a woman assaulted another woman wearing a headscarf on a city bus in Vienna, spitting on her, pulling on her headscarf, and shouting she should go back to Turkey. Property damage cited in the report included an arson attack against a Somali cultural association and prayer room in Vienna in May 2020.

A report presented in June by the NGO Initiative for Discrimination-Free Education listed a total of 186 cases of discrimination in schools in 2020 (403 cases in 2019), of which it attributed 15 percent to anti-Muslim sentiment and 2 percent to antisemitism. While the NGO said the sharp drop in total discrimination cases was due to the reduced physical presence of students in schools due to COVID-19, the percentage of incidents motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment (approximately 31 percent of total discrimination cases in 2019) and antisemitism (approximately 11 percent of total cases) also dropped significantly. Examples included statements by a physics teacher in Vienna who said in 2020 in front of her Muslim students that Muslims were responsible for a November 2020 terrorist attack in Vienna by a man police identified as an ISIS sympathizer. In another example, a sports teacher suggested to a 12-year-old student who was wearing a headscarf that she should go to another country if she wanted to continue wearing it.

The organizers of the annual May gathering of Croatians and Bosnians in Bleiburg, Austria to commemorate Nazi-allied Croatian troops and civilians killed in 1945 canceled the event after parliament passed a resolution in 2020 prohibiting the event.

In June, a court in the Carinthian provincial capital of Klagenfurt convicted a man of neo-Nazi activity and illegal possession of weapons and sentenced him to a 19-month prison sentence. The man had a Nazi symbol tattoo on his testicles.

In January, the court in Klagenfurt convicted a man of neo-Nazi activity and sentenced him to 24 months in prison, 16 months of which were suspended. The man had performed the Hitler salute in 2019 and had a swastika tattoo.

In January, the Vienna Criminal Court issued a six-month suspended prison sentence on incitement charges for an imam whom it convicted of making antisemitic statements in a sermon in 2018. The imam said, “Allah hates the Jews; they are the worst *kuffars* (unfaithful).”

Fourteen Christian groups, consisting of the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, and eight Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches, continued to meet twice a year within the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria to discuss religious cooperation. The Christian groups coordinated with other religious groups and the government to create a unified set of COVID-19 restrictions on all religious services in 2020 and 2021. Baptists and the Salvation Army had observer status on the council. Two permanent working groups on “Religion and Society” and “Media” remained in place.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Ambassador, Charge d’ Affaires, and other embassy representatives met regularly with government officials – including from the Federal Chancellery’s Office of Religious Affairs; the Federal Chancellery’s Ministry for Women, Family, Youth and Integration; the Division of Dialogue of Cultures at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Ministry of Interior – to discuss religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities. Topics included the concerns of religious groups, integration of Muslim refugees, cooperation with religious groups in combating terrorism, and measures to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The Ambassador and Charge d’ Affaires met with religious group representatives from the IGGO, IKG, and Roman Catholic Church to discuss their relations with the coalition government, instances of discrimination, and interreligious dialogue, as well as how their communities were handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Embassy officers also met with religious youth groups, such as the Muslim Youth Organization of Austria and the Jewish Student Association, to discuss issues such as antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. Embassy officers met with Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim leaders to discuss interreligious relations, especially relating to the rise of antisemitism and the government’s strategy combating “political Islam.”

Embassy representatives continued to serve on the International Advisory Board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency to promote Holocaust remembrance and education.

The embassy continued its engagement with the Muslim Youth Organization of Austria (MJOe) to promote religious dialogue and tolerance both in-person and virtually. In February, the embassy cohosted a virtual live event with the MJOe featuring an American professor who spoke about the important role of youth in

social movements. The speaker shared lessons from the U.S. civil rights movement with religiously diverse youth audiences across the country.

In continuing to highlight members of diverse faith groups, the embassy's Women's History Month social media campaign featured two Muslim Austrian women, including the president of MJOe, as well as a youth reporter and former participant in an embassy-sponsored exchange program. Their video commentaries were shared across embassy platforms to an audience that is not often exposed either to Muslims or to women from other religious groups.

The embassy also continued to work closely with the Jewish community to promote religious tolerance and fight antisemitism. In April, the Charge d' Affaires was interviewed for a Mauthausen Committee video created as part of World War II commemoration events. In September, together with a local NGO that focuses on antisemitism and the Holocaust, the embassy hosted a discussion with a group of Holocaust survivors. Family stories and personal memories shared during the program are to become part of a podcast project to reach younger audiences. The embassy amplified the event on social media, which garnered attention from several influential Jewish entities in Vienna.

In July, embassy staff hosted an event with representatives of the Jewish community to discuss Holocaust education. In May, the embassy again supported the annual commemoration of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp through messages on its social media channels that focused on the importance of religious freedom and Holocaust remembrance.