

# HUNGARY 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The Fundamental Law, the country's constitution, provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to choose, change, or manifest religion or belief, cites "the role of Christianity" in "preserving nationhood," and values "various religious traditions." The Law prohibits religious discrimination and speech violating the dignity of any religious community and stipulates the autonomy of religious communities. There are four tiers of religious groups, all of which may receive state funding and income tax allocations from taxpayers, provided they have concluded cooperation agreements with the state. In January, the government informed the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) that it was "no longer possible" to pay restitution for heirless Jewish property. The WJRO and the government resumed discussions on the issue in October. The Church of Scientology (COS) said the Data Protection Authority (DPA) raided its office in Budapest and confiscated its files, and the National Tax Authority (NAV) raided the homes of COS members in a criminal case involving alleged tax fraud. The Constitutional Court rejected a COS appeal related to the seizure of documents from the COS office in 2017. In June, a court ordered a newspaper to pay a Member of Parliament (MP) from the Christian Democratic People's Party compensation and issue an apology for publishing a satirical cartoon of the government's chief medical officer and the crucified Jesus. The newspaper published the apology but said it had asked the Supreme Court to review the decision. Senior government officials, including Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orbán, continued to make statements in defense of what they called a "Christian Europe" and against Muslim immigration. In September, Orbán said present-day migrants were "all Muslims" who changed the cultural identity of Europe. Other politicians made antisemitic and anti-Muslim statements.

The Action and Protection Foundation, which monitors antisemitism, reported 30 antisemitic incidents in 2020, compared with 35 incidents in the previous year. These were six cases of vandalism, one threat, one case of discrimination, and 22 cases of hate speech. In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 13 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Hungary said they had negative feelings towards Jews. Muslim leaders said that physical assaults against Muslims were rare, but verbal insults were frequent, and there were cases of anti-Muslim discrimination. In June, a soccer fan affiliated with Kispest, a Budapest Honvéd football club, posted a photo on social media with a text that ended, "Heil

Hitler.” In September, independent media reported that Kispest Youth, also called Militant Jugend Kispest, painted swastikas and 88 (a common symbol for “Heil Hitler,” as H is the eighth letter of the alphabet) onto buildings in the Kispest district and wore red-white-black shirts with swastikas on photos that were posted on social media.

In meetings and discussions with the government, including officials from the PMO in charge of church and Jewish issues, the Charge d’ Affaires and embassy representatives advocated for restitution of heirless Jewish property seized during the Holocaust and discussed provisions of the religion law, including the registration process for religious groups. In June, the Charge d’ Affaires dedicated a room in the embassy building to the memory of Carl Lutz, credited with saving the lives of over 62,000 Hungarian Jews. The embassy maintained regular contact with leaders of various religious communities, including the four historical groups, as well as Muslims, the COS, and religious groups that lost incorporated church status in 2011, such as MET, Bet Orim, and Sim Shalom, to understand their concerns. During these discussions, embassy officials discussed the effects of the religion law, antisemitism, and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.7 million (midyear 2021). According to the 2011 national census (the 2021 census was postponed because of COVID-19), which included an optional question on religious affiliation, of the 73 percent of the population that responded, 51 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 16 percent as Hungarian Reformed Church (Calvinist), 3 percent as Lutheran, 2 percent as Greek Catholic, and less than 1 percent as Jewish; 23 percent reported no religious affiliation; and 2 percent said they were atheists. Other religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), the COS, Russian and other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, Muslims, and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness. The Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET or the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood) has approximately 8,500 members, according to a 2013 news report, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church approximately 9,300 members, according to the 2011 census. Local Jewish organizations estimate approximately 100,000 citizens with Jewish heritage live in the country, primarily in Budapest. Other religious groups are distributed throughout the country.

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

## Legal Framework

The Fundamental Law, the country's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience and religion, including freedom to choose or change religion or belief, and freedom – alone or in community with others and in public or in private – to manifest religion or belief through religious acts or ceremonies, or in any other way, in worship, practice, and observance. It prohibits religious discrimination, as well as speech “aimed at violating the dignity” of any religious community.

The constitution's preamble states, “We recognize the role of Christianity” in preserving the nation and “value the various religious traditions” in the country. The constitution stipulates separation between religious communities and the state, as well as the autonomy of religious communities. According to the constitution, the state may, at the request of religious communities, cooperate with them on community goals. A 2020 constitutional amendment states that children must be guaranteed an “upbringing based on values stemming from our country's constitutional identity and Christian culture.”

Per a 2019 amendment to the 2011 law on religion, the law establishes a four-tier system of, in descending order, “established (or incorporated) churches,” “registered churches” (also called “registered II”), “listed churches” (also called “registered I”), and “religious associations.” The term “church” in the law refers to any religious community, not just Christian ones, and religious groups in any category may use “church” in their official names. All previously incorporated religious groups retained their status in the first tier of the system as established churches. Parliament must approve recognition of churches as established. The Budapest-Capital Regional Court has jurisdiction to rule on applications for registration within the other three categories. Religious groups in all four tiers have legal personality, which grants them legal rights, such as the right to own property.

Religious entities that do not apply for legal status in one of the four tiers are still able to function and conduct worship but are not eligible to receive state funding or income tax contributions from taxpayers. The law states constitutional protection of freedom of religion also applies to unregistered groups.

To qualify for established church status, a religious group must first have registered status and then conclude a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the state for the purpose of accomplishing community goals. The government

submits the comprehensive agreement to parliament, which must approve it by a two-thirds majority vote. A registered church becomes an established church from the day parliament approves the comprehensive agreement. Established churches are eligible to benefit from significant state subsidies for the performance of public service activities.

To qualify for registered church status, a religious group must have received tax allocations from an average of 4,000 persons per year in the five-year period prior to the application. This status also requires that the group either have operated as a religious association for at least 20 years in the country, or at least 100 years internationally, or have operated as a listed church for at least 15 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for listed church status, a religious group must receive tax allocations from an average of 1,000 persons per year in the three-year period prior to the application for status and have operated as a religious association for at least five years in the country or for at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for religious association status, a religious group must have at least 10 members.

The law allows the government to negotiate individual cooperation agreements with all four tiers of religious groups for the performance of public service activities and support of faith-based activities. The agreements' duration depends on the status of the religious community, ranging from a five-year maximum for religious associations to 10 and 15 years for listed and registered churches, respectively, and unlimited duration for established churches. These agreements may be prolonged.

Religious groups that agree not to seek state (including personal income tax allocations) or European Union (EU) funding for their religious activities may qualify as registered or listed churches without fulfilling the requirement regarding the number of personal income tax allocations. The applicant religious community must perform primarily religious activities and may not be a criminal defendant or have been convicted of a crime during the previous five years, under sanction for "repeated violation of accounting and management rules," or considered a national security threat. The court decides whether to grant status as a registered or listed church based on an examination of the criteria above. In reviewing these applications, the court may consult church law, church history, or ecclesiastical or academic experts, and may also seek the opinion of the national security services.

Religious groups that agree not to seek government or EU funding but accept financial support at a later stage must report it to the court within 15 days of the disbursement of the aid. To avoid losing its status or a reclassification to the lower association tier, the religious group has eight days to declare to the court that it has returned the funds, requested cancellation of its religious registration status, or complied with the individual tax allocation requirement to become a registered or listed organization. The religious group or prosecutor's office may appeal the court's decision on the status of the group to the Budapest-Capital Court of Appeal.

The law stipulates the minister responsible for church issues, based on information received from the court, shall manage an electronic database of religious groups with legal status, accessible to the public free of charge. The database is publicly accessible at the government's central webpage, [kormany.hu](http://kormany.hu).

The law allows taxpayers to allocate 1 percent of their income taxes to any religious community in any of the four tiers, starting with the 2020 tax year. Religious groups may use these funds as they wish. Only established and registered churches (the two highest tiers) are eligible to receive a state subsidy supplementing the 1 percent tax allocations.

According to the law, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court may dissolve a religious community with legal status – with the exception of established churches – if its activities conflict with the constitution or law or if the court rules its registration should have been denied. Parliament may dissolve an incorporated church if the Constitutional Court finds it is operating in violation of the constitution. If a religious community is dissolved without a legal successor, its assets, after satisfying creditors, become the property of the state and shall be used for public interest activities.

Thirty-two churches have established (previously known as “incorporated”) status. These include the Roman Catholic church; a range of Protestant denominations; a range of Orthodox Christian groups; other Christian denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Salvation Army; three Jewish groups, the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH), and the Hungarian Autonomous Orthodox Jewish Community; two Muslim organizations; a Buddhist umbrella organization; and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the sole Hindu group registered as a church.

By law, the state may neither operate nor establish any institution for controlling or monitoring religious groups. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Copyright law protects their names, symbols, and rites, while criminal law protects buildings and cemeteries.

The constitution establishes a unified system for the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsperson). The ombudsperson investigates cases related to violations of fundamental rights – including religious freedom – and initiates general or specific measures for their remedy. These measures do not have the force of law.

Treaties with the Holy See regulate relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church, including financing of public services and religious activities and settling claims for property seized by the state during the Communist era. These treaties serve as a model for regulating state relations with other religious groups, although there are some differences in the rights and privileges the state accords to each of the religious groups with which it has agreements. The state has also concluded formal agreements with the Hungarian Reformed Church, Hungarian Lutheran Church, Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz), and four Orthodox churches.

According to the law, established, registered, and listed churches may perform pastoral services in prisons and hospitals. Other laws indicate religious associations may also have the right to provide services at these facilities.

Military and law enforcement personnel may freely practice their religion in private and also at their workplaces if their religious practice does not violate their mandatory service duties. The Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches, and Jewish congregations (which the government generally calls “historical churches”) may provide chaplain services to the military without seeking permission. Other religious groups must seek permission to offer such services.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion and provide them with special diets, such as kosher, vegetarian, and pork-free meals. Historical churches may provide pastoral services in prisons without special permission, but other religious groups may do so only within official visiting hours as outlined in individual agreements and with permission from the penitentiary. Similarly,

historical churches receive automatic access to patients in hospitals to provide pastoral services, while other groups may do so only under certain conditions, such as providing services only during visiting hours.

One hour per week of education in faith and ethics or general ethics is mandatory through the first eight grades of public school. Parents and students choose between the faith and ethics class offered by an established church of their choosing or a secular ethics course taught by public school teachers. Other religious groups are not entitled to provide religious education as part of the mandatory curricula in public schools but may offer extracurricular, optional religious education in public schools at the request of parents or students. Private schools are not required to offer faith and ethics or general ethics classes.

All religious groups registered in one of the four categories have the right to open their own schools. The state provides a subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, for employee salaries at all such schools. Only established churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for the schools' operating expenses. Other religious groups may apply for a supplementary operational subsidy, and the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC) may sign an individualized contract with them to cover these costs.

The law also affords all religious groups with legal status the right to assume operation of public schools if more than 50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school sign a petition to do so and the MHC approves the change. In these cases, the state may continue to fund the schools. Whether newly established or converted from public status, religious schools are free to conduct their own religious teaching without government input and to make faith education mandatory and not substitutable with an ethics class. The state inspects both religious and public schools every two years to ensure they conform to legal standards.

The constitution prohibits speech that violates the dignity of any religious community. The law prohibits both incitement to violence and incitement to hatred against a religious community or its members, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. The law provides a maximum punishment of three years in prison for impeding others through violence or threats from freely exercising their religion or abusing individuals because of their religious affiliation.

Assault motivated by the victim's actual or presumed religious affiliation is a felony punishable by one to five years in prison. Violence against a member of the

clergy is classified as violence against an “individual providing public service” and is also punishable with a prison sentence of one to five years. Any person who engages in preparation for the use of force against any member of a religious community is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding two years.

The law prohibits public denial, expression of doubt, or minimization of the Holocaust, genocide, and other crimes against humanity committed by the National Socialist or Communist regimes, punishing such offenses with a maximum sentence of three years in prison. The criminal code makes wearing, exhibiting, or promoting in public the swastika, the logo of the Nazi SS, or the symbol of the Arrow Cross – a fascist, antisemitic party that allied with Nazi Germany – in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of Holocaust victims a misdemeanor, punishable by five to 90 days’ detention.

The law provides for the lifting of official immunity of an MP who incites hatred against religious groups or publicly denies crimes of the Communist or National Socialist regimes. No MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

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

### **Government Practices**

During the year, the government provided 134 billion forints (\$410.64 million) to established churches (compared with 216.4 billion forints – \$663.15 million – during 2020), of which 91 percent – 122.3 billion forints (\$374.79 million) – went to the four historical churches. The Roman Catholic Church received 80 billion forints (\$245.16 million), the Reformed Church 34.1 billion forints (\$104.50 million), the Evangelical Church 5.2 billion forints (\$15.94 million), Mazsihisz 2.2 billion forints (\$6.74 million), EMIH 524 million forints (\$1.61 million), and the Jewish Orthodox community 260 million forints (\$797,000). The religious groups that received the bulk of the government’s financial support used the funds for such activities as building maintenance; public educational and social services; religious instruction and cultural activities; community programs and investments; employee wages, and faith-based activities for citizens living abroad.

According to statistics the tax authority published on September 13, 136 churches and religious groups received 1 percent personal income tax allocations during the year. As in previous years, the churches receiving the most allocations were the Roman Catholic Church, with 740,326 persons contributing 4.3 billion forints

(\$13.18 million); Hungarian Reformed Church, with 309,825 persons contributing 1.8 billion forints (\$5.52 million); and Lutheran Church, with 82,701 persons contributing 508 million forints (\$1.56 million). The Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness ranked fourth, with 73,890 persons contributing 472 million forints (\$1.45 million). MET, which collected 1 percent personal income tax allocations for the first time since the 2011 modification of the religion law, ranked fifth, with 39,815 persons contributing 315 million forints (\$965,000). Among Jewish groups, Mazsihisz received the largest allocation.

According to the PMO, during the 2021-2022 school year, churches or church-run higher educational institutions operated 19.6 percent of elementary and secondary schools (compared with 17.1 percent in 2019-20), and religious associations operated 0.4 percent. Churches or church-run higher educational institutions operated 9.2 percent of preschools (with students aged three to seven), compared with 10 percent run by incorporated churches in the previous year, and religious associations operated 0.2 percent. There were 217,169 students – 52.6 percent of whom were in Catholic schools – studying at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by churches and religious organizations, compared with 222,944 in the previous year.

Independent media reported in August that the government provided 10 billion forints (\$30.64 million) to the preschool development program of the Roman Catholic Church during the year. The government also allotted an additional 3.5 billion forints (\$10.73 million) for educational development projects of the Reformed Church and the Catholic Churches.

For the school year beginning in September, the MHC withdrew complementary funding from MET's educational institutions, attended by approximately 2,200 mostly Roma children.

Works of writers widely viewed as antisemitic, including member of the Arrow Cross Party Jozsef Nyiro and convicted war criminal Albert Wass, remained mandatory reading material in elementary and secondary public schools.

In a program broadcasted by public Kossuth Radio in March, a historian discussed the *Numerus Clausus* Law of 1920 and stated the law was not about the deprivation of rights, but only the limitation of rights. The law, enacted under Regent Miklos Horthy, capped the number of Jews allowed to attend universities and is regarded by the Jewish community as the first antisemitic law in the country's interwar period. (Horthy was the leader of the World War II-era

Hungarian state. He allied the country with Nazi Germany and deported more than 400,000 Jews to Nazi death camps.)

In January, the first instance Budapest-Capital Regional Court rejected a complaint filed by MP and deputy faction leader of the Christian Democratic People's Party Imre Vejkey regarding a cartoon by Gabor Papai published by the daily independent *Nepszava* in 2020. The cartoon showed the chief medical officer, who oversaw the government's COVID-19 pandemic response, looking at Jesus on the cross and saying, "his underlying conditions caused" his death. According to media commenters, the cartoon satirized what critics viewed as the chief medical officer's attempt to minimize the number of deaths in the country that were attributable to COVID-19. The appeals court stated on June 3 that the cartoon infringed the plaintiff's right to human dignity as a member of the Christian community. The ruling also ordered the newspaper to pay 400,000 forints (\$1,200) plus court costs to Vejkey and to publish an apology on the front page. The newspaper published the apology on June 25, but it announced on July 2 that it had requested the Supreme Court (*Curia*) to review the lower court's decision. At year's end, there was no information on whether the Supreme Court had agreed to review the case.

On February 5, the Constitutional Court ruled in a seven-year-long case involving the cover page of independent weekly newspaper *HVG*, entitled "Nagy Haracsony" (a play on words with the terms "Great Christmas" and "great grab-all"). The Constitutional Court ruled that the cover was protected by freedom of speech and was not intended to offend the Christian community.

In February, media reported a local municipality in Budapest did not extend a property use agreement with the town's only Jewish broadcaster, *Heti TV* (Weekly TV). The municipality said that due to financial difficulties, it intended to make the space available to bidders. Station founder Peter Breuer criticized the move and the station continued to operate at a new location.

In March, Deputy PM Zsolt Semjen signed a cooperation agreement with the Hungarian Jewish Prayer Association (*Zsima*), a Jewish organization established in October 2020. The agreement entailed state funding in the amount of 51 million forints (\$156,000) annually until 2025.

The COS reported that on April 28, the DPA raided the storage facility of its Budapest mission and seized one-third of its religious files on its members. The DPA confiscated the remaining folders on May 26. These raids were the

continuation of the DPA's 2017 investigation into the COS's alleged criminal abuse of personal data, in which the DPA seized COS documents at the group's offices in Budapest and Nyiregyhaza and fined the COS 40 million forints (\$123,000). The Constitutional Court rejected the appeals petition of the Nyiregyhaza COS mission of the DPA's 2017 seizure of its documents, while a similar appeals petition of the Budapest COS mission remained pending at year's end.

On May 27, the NAV raided the homes of dozens of COS members in a criminal case involving alleged tax fraud. The NAV took four persons to its headquarters in handcuffs. The COS also reported that the NAV put a lien on the building of the Central Church. According to the COS, its appeals of government decisions to revoke the residence permit of a Russian Ukrainian missionary couple in 2019 and expel a Kazakh missionary in 2020 were unsuccessful and the decisions became final.

The list of religious associations and listed churches was available at a dedicated webpage maintained by the PMO. Court decisions regarding the registration process for registered churches, listed churches, and religious associations were available at the central website of the courts, [birosag.hu](http://birosag.hu).

The PMO reported that some religious groups were eligible for a simplified registration procedure. Under the simplified procedure, religious groups did not need to establish the number of persons making income tax allocations to them in prior years or allocations from before 2012, the year when the religion law entered into force. A total of 15 groups reapplied under the simplified procedure. At year's end, there were 234 groups registered as religious associations and 12 listed as churches, including 10 groups which had had applications pending before the amendment to the religion law entered into force in 2019. According to the PMO, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court rejected two applications, and one remained pending. The two rejected religious groups were registered as religious associations. The number of established churches remained unchanged at 32.

The PMO also stated no religious groups qualified for registered church status during the year because they could not meet the requirement of receiving income tax allocations from an average of at least 4,000 persons per year in the previous five years, a period which could only begin in 2019 or later. The number of registered churches therefore remained zero. MET appealed the Budapest-Capital Regional Court's decision to register it as a listed church and requested

classification as a registered church. That appeals process was ongoing at year's end.

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) – or TASZ in Hungarian – an NGO that represented some religious groups deregistered following the 2011 adoption of the religion law that established a new reregistration process and a tiered system for churches, reported it would not continue domestic or international legal challenges after the Constitutional Court in 2020 rejected its petition that the amended religion law was discriminatory and did not sufficiently address concerns related to its 2011 version.

The HCLU continued the monitoring of, and international advocacy for, the enforcement of the 2014 European Court of Human Rights ruling that the religion law violated freedom of religion and caused monetary damages to the deregistered churches. The 2014 judgment required the government to reach an agreement with the applicant churches on the restoration of their status and on just compensation for any damages. The HCLU said it was also assessing whether state financing for certain churches led to their overrepresentation in educational and social institutions, thereby compromising the state's neutrality in religion.

In February, the NAV debited MET's bank account for what it said were tax and social security arrears in the amount of approximately 250 million forints (\$766,000). MET's leader, Pastor Gabor Ivanyi, stated MET would be able to pay its outstanding bills if the state would compensate it for damages sustained in 2016-2019 stemming from the group's loss of church status. The pastor added that losing its established church status had also made MET ineligible to receive a government supplement matching the 1 percent personal income tax allocations from Church members. Separately, in September 2020, MET concluded an agreement with the state-owned utility company to delay payment of outstanding bills until April. The company had threatened to disconnect MET's institutions from the gas network in 2020 due to nonpayment. MET stated that its deregistration as a state-recognized church in 2011 and state administrative measures against the Church in 2020 and 2021 were a retaliation for MET's leader and Pastor Ivanyi's public criticism and questioning of PM Orban's claims that he governed by Christian principles.

The government concluded a research project it had been conducting for several years regarding the value of Jewish heirless and unclaimed property, but in January, in a letter addressed to the WJRO, the government stated for the first time that its 2007 settlement with the WJRO represented "definitive satisfaction of

compensation claims” and that under the constitution adopted by the government in 2011, it was “no longer possible to pay restitution for any abandoned Jewish property, whether in or outside Hungary.” The WJRO disagreed with the government position and sought further negotiations. Discussions between the government and the WJRO on the compensation issue resumed in October, but by year’s end, the government had not proposed a negotiation roadmap or target date.

In April, Mazsahisz announced that two Orthodox Jewish groups, EMIH and the Hungarian Orthodox Jewish Community, had requested the revision of the government-paid restitution annuity for confiscated Jewish properties, and sued Mazsahisz at the Jerusalem Supreme Rabbinical Court. In June, the court (which holds no legal jurisdiction in Hungary), in a nonbinding injunction, called on the government to freeze the payments until new criteria for the division of the annuity were defined. At year’s end, the government had not changed the distribution of the restitution annuity.

According to the COS, the Csongrad County Government Office again failed to act on a certificate of occupancy application by the COS for its headquarters in Budapest. The application had remained pending since 2017, despite a 2017 Budapest Administrative and Labor Court ruling that the county office process the COS’s application by March 2018. The COS said it had received no explanation for the continued delay. An extant court order allowed the COS to continue to use the building.

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary (OMH) reported that the municipality-owned Budapest Funeral Institute provided cemetery space for Muslims, but that Islamic burials required a permit issued by the Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC), the other Muslim organization, for which the HIC charged a fee of approximately 50,000 forints (\$150). OMH members expressed concerns about this practice. Other than in the capital, OMH reported there was a limited amount of cemetery space in the city of Pecs. The restoration of the state-owned Yakovali Hasan Mosque in Pecs, ongoing since 2019, remained pending, which prevented the local Muslim community from using the mosque as a place of worship.

On June 10, the renovated Rumbach Synagogue in Budapest – which served as a Jewish deportation point in 1941 – reopened as a place of worship and culture for the first time since the 1950s. The government supported the renovation with 3.2 billion forints (\$9.81 million). Senior officials of the World Jewish Congress attended the opening ceremony.

On August 29, a ceremony marked the completion of the renovation of a Mazsihisz-operated Jewish hospital in Budapest. Minister of Human Capacities Miklos Kasler stated at the opening ceremony that the government provided five billion forints (\$15.32 million) for the reconstruction of the hospital as part of its efforts to ensure that hospitals run by faith-based groups played a significant role in the national healthcare system. The facility was the only Jewish hospital in the country and served both Jewish and non-Jewish patients, some of whom were Holocaust survivors.

According to the OMH, Muslims serving prison sentences continued to receive meals containing pork meat or pork fat regularly, despite complaints that it violated their religious dietary practices.

On May 1, Fidesz cofounder and media personality Zsolt Bayer wrote in the government-aligned newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* that the U.S. Secretary of State, who has Hungarian ancestry, was a “rootless Hungarian” and a “rootless American,” which many interpreted as a classic antisemitic trope. Bayer has a long history of antisemitic writings and statements. He has high profile platforms on government-aligned media outlets and received a prestigious government award in 2016.

In June, Laszlo Toroczkai, president of the Mi Hazank (Our Homeland) Party, which is widely described as extreme right and has seats in parliament and in local municipalities, wrote that European nations should stand on their own feet and needed “neither Jews nor Palestinians.” In August, he commemorated the members of Ragged Guard, a paramilitary unit active in the interwar period, whose leader Ivan Hejjas was responsible for killing and robbing hundreds of Jews. On his social media channel, he said in October that certain influential businessmen and politicians with Jewish roots were using the COVID-19 pandemic to create a new world order. In February, the deputy president of the Mi Hazank Party, Elod Novak, gave a speech at an event commemorating Regent Horthy.

In September, the Hungarian Baptist Church signed a cooperation agreement with the government to carry out religious, educational, social, and cultural activities.

On September 12, Prime Minister Orban met with Pope Francis, who celebrated the closing Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress, a week-long gathering of the Roman Catholic Church held in Budapest. Following their meeting, PM Orban wrote on his Facebook page, “I asked Pope Francis not to let Christian Hungary perish.”

At an international conference on antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance on October 13 in Sweden, Minister for Family Affairs Katalin Novak said that [Holocaust] remembrance was “extremely important” for the government. She called for a continuous fight against manifestations of antisemitism.

Government officials continued to make statements in defense of a “Christian Europe” and against Muslim immigration. On September 1, PM Orban stated at the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia that present-day migrants were “all Muslims” who changed the cultural identity of Europe. On September 9, he said at the opening of the academic year at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium, a private educational institution, that during the “Muslim flood [of immigrants],” the West was unable to confront its own historical mission. On September 27, Orban stated at a church consecration, “Hungarians can only survive as Christians, and each new church is a bastion in the nation’s struggle for freedom and greatness.” He added that since 2010, there had been 150 new churches built and more than 3,000 churches renovated in the country and in the Carpathian basin (former Hungarian territories currently inhabited by ethnic Hungarians).

On October 14, head of the PMO Gergely Gulyas stated at a government-sponsored conference organized in the framework of the country’s Council of Europe presidency, “In Western Europe, we can no longer speak of Christian democracy in its original and Central European sense.”

In October, Peter Barnabas Farkas, deputy mayor in the town of Ozd and member of the Jobbik Party, resigned from his position after two photos of him from 2018 emerged in which he appeared to be giving a Nazi salute in front of the Holocaust Museum in Poland. Farkas later apologized and visited the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest.

On October 23, the anniversary of the 1956 revolution, PM Orban accused the opposition of competing to represent the interests of a certain Jewish-American financier and the EU, who were aiming to “take Hungary from the hands of Mary and place it at the feet of Brussels.”

In November, the Chief Rabbi of EMIH, Slomo Koves, told press that the House of Fates, a proposed new Holocaust museum and education center in Budapest owned by EMIH, would likely be ready to open by 2024. Leading Jewish groups and Holocaust scholars have criticized the museum concept as an attempt to obscure

the role of the World War II-era Hungarian state and its leader, Miklos Horthy, in the Holocaust.

In a report on the instrumentalization of antisemitism in European politics issued in February, the Anti-Defamation League, an international NGO, stated the government used coded antisemitism in campaigns – beginning at the end of 2015 – against EU migration policies, following the arrival of more than a million migrants from the Middle East. The report cited what it described as the government’s demonization of a well-known Jewish-American financier of Hungarian origin.

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

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

In January, the independent online news outlet *444.hu* published a documentary about the crimes committed by a group of Hungarian Arrow Cross Party members against Jewish inhabitants of Budapest's twelfth district during World War II, and about the controversial *turul* statue erected in the district in 2005. While the statue officially commemorates civilian victims of the Allied bombing and the Soviet siege of Budapest in 1944-45, experts have stated that the *turul* bird (a large, mythical bird of prey) was a well-known symbol of right-wing extremist groups during the interwar period and that the statue continued to serve as a gathering place for such groups. Historians said in 2019 that the names carved into the statue contain at least 22 Arrow Cross gang members who massacred Jews in Budapest, including current Fidesz district mayor Zoltan Pokorni’s grandfather. In a press conference on February 1, Pokorni, who in 2020 had ordered that his grandfather's name be removed from the statue, rejected historians’ suggestion that the memorial be turned into one for fallen World War I soldiers. He proposed that the statue remain but that it should include “a very detailed guide” to the *turul* symbol.

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, 25 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-25 in Hungary said they had negative feeling toward Jews. Thirty-six percent said they would be “totally uncomfortable” or “uncomfortable” with having Jewish neighbors. The survey cited stereotypical statements regarding 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” (34 percent); “there is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world” (39 percent); “Jews have too much influence in this country” (28 percent); “Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society” (30 percent); “Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (27 percent); “many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later” (16 percent); “Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them” (31 percent); “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” (39 percent).

The Foundation reported 30 antisemitic incidents in 2020, the most recent data available, compared with 35 in the previous year. These were six cases of vandalism, one threat, one case of discrimination, and 22 cases of hate speech.

In July, Mazsihisz president Andras Heisler presented the results of a 2019-2020 survey prepared by Median independent public opinion pollster and commissioned by Mazsihisz. Heisler stated that while the number of physical attacks and vandalism cases was low compared with Western Europe, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and antisemitism in public life increased between 2019 and 2020, and the Mi Hazank Party, widely described as extreme right, was among the most common perpetrators of antisemitic incidents and hate speech. According to the survey, there were 70 antisemitic incidents in 2020, up from 53 in the previous year. Citing 2019 data, head of the Median public opinion pollster Endre Hann said that 36 percent of Hungary’s adult population could be characterized by some degree of antisemitism, including antisemitic prejudice and attitudes toward Jews.

Muslim organizations stated they did not collect statistical data because, according to one member, they lacked the capacity to do so. However, OMH reported that while physical assaults were rare, verbal insults and hateful emails and phone calls were frequent, in particular against persons wearing headscarves or who had darker skin and spoke a foreign language. For instance, according to OMH, individuals often referred to Muslims as “terrorists” and told them to “get out of here.”

OMH also reported a higher number of online insults on social media during the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. According to OMH, the majority of the population regarded Muslims with suspicion.

As in previous years, domestic and international extreme-right and neo-Nazi groups marked the anniversary of the breakout attempt by Hungarian and German troops on February 11, 1945, during the Soviet Red Army’s siege of Budapest. Despite COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on public gatherings, approximately 100

persons took part in an organized reenactment hike along the route of the attempted siege-breakers in Budapest. The Hungarian chapter of the international neo-Nazi group Blood and Honor organized the event. Ahead of the event, one of its organizers published an opinion piece in the government-aligned media outlet *Magyar Nemzet* entitled “Glory to the Heroes.” In the article, the author compared Hungarian and German soldiers who attempted the breakout to the great heroes of Hungarian history.

In June, a soccer fan affiliated with Kispest, a Budapest Honved football club, posted a photo on social media with a text that ended, “Heil Hitler.” In September, independent media reported that Kispest Youth, also called Militant Jugend Kispest, painted swastikas and 88 (a common symbol for “Heil Hitler,” as H is the eighth letter of the alphabet) onto buildings in the Kispest district and wore red-white-black shirts with swastikas on photos that were posted on social media.

In July, TEV reported that swastikas were painted on a company’s building in Szeged and on the pavement in Szolnok. Also in July, a private property in Leanyfalu displayed a picture of Hitler with the text “Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer.” Police initiated an investigation. In 2020, an SS flag was hung from the facade of the same house. Police first dismissed that case, but the prosecutor’s office reopened it as involving public use of a totalitarian symbol. In June, a passerby told two Jewish teenagers in Budapest to “go to Auschwitz,” and in May, a guard at a drugstore in Budapest was fired for calling a customer a “filthy Jew.”

According to press reports, a team of international volunteers was working to restore the neglected Kozma Street Cemetery in Budapest, one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in the world, with an area of 77 hectares (190 acres) and containing approximately 300,000 graves. At midyear, the volunteers had reportedly cleaned up 20 percent of the cemetery.

In October, the Christian-Jewish Council, an informal platform for discussion among Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist Churches and Jewish groups, held a conference on the role of families in religion, with the participation of members of Christian and Jewish groups.

During a visit to the country in September, Pope Francis met with representatives of Christian churches and Jewish communities and said that antisemitism is a “fuse which must not be allowed to burn.”

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

In meetings and discussions with the government, including officials from the PMO in charge of church and Jewish issues, the Charge d’Affaires and embassy representatives advocated restitution of heirless Jewish property seized during the Holocaust and discussed provisions of the religion law, including the registration process for religious groups.

The Charge d’Affaires and embassy officials also discussed heirless property restitution with the WJRO.

In June, the Charge d’Affaires dedicated a room in the embassy building to the memory of Carl Lutz, credited with saving the lives of more than 62,000 Hungarian Jews. As a Swiss vice consul, Lutz operated out of the building, likely from the room where the ceremony was held, while Switzerland looked after U.S. property and interests between 1942 and 1945. Members of the Jewish community attended the event, which the embassy also highlighted on its social media accounts.

In August, the Charge d’Affaires delivered a speech at an event commemorating the birth of Swedish diplomat and honorary citizen of the United States Raoul Wallenberg, who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews while serving in Budapest between 1944 and 1945. His speech emphasized the importance of education about the Holocaust and the rejection of antisemitism, and the embassy highlighted it on its social media accounts. In November, the Charge d’Affaires joined the global initiative of the International March of the Living, an international educational program on the history of the Holocaust, to call attention to the anniversary of Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, the 1938 Nazi pogrom. In his remarks delivered in front of the Dohany Street Synagogue in Budapest, he highlighted the U.S. commitment to Holocaust remembrance and combating antisemitism, racism, and intolerance.

Embassy officials also facilitated cooperation between U.S. and Hungarian authorities regarding proper handling of Jewish historic artifacts stolen from Jewish communities in the country during World War II, including from Hungary, that were set to be auctioned in the United States.

The embassy maintained regular contact with leaders of various religious communities, including the four historical groups, as well as Muslims, the COS, and religious groups that lost incorporated church status in 2011, such as MET, Bet Orim, and Sim Shalom, to understand their concerns. During these discussions,

embassy officials discussed the effects of the religion law, antisemitism, and anti-Muslim rhetoric.