

# **LIECHTENSTEIN 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution stipulates everyone is free to choose his or her faith. It makes the state responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the people” and establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion. The constitution stipulates individuals may practice other religious faiths within the bounds of morality and public order. There are criminal penalties for public incitement to hatred towards a religious group, religious discrimination, or “debasement” of any religion. The Liechtenstein Human Rights Association (LHRA) continued to report the government took no additional steps toward separating religion and state in terms of financing religious communities and religious instruction in public schools. Prime Minister Daniel Risch announced after his election in March his intent to revisit this issue during the current legislative session. On January 27, government officials invited the entire population to attend virtually an event in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, hosted by former foreign minister Katrin Eggenberger. According to an analysis conducted by the Swiss Competence Center for Human Rights in May 2020, the government promoted religious pluralism and enhanced support for religious equality through increased assistance in integrating immigrants of different faiths, including Muslims.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, Muslims continued to face discrimination in society, particularly Muslim women in the labor force who wore a headscarf, especially in academia. The Muslim community reported it had problems constructing a second prayer room, creating an Islamic cemetery, and operating a prayer house, due in part to government inaction, but also due to the reluctance of private property owners. Additionally, limited availability of available building plots and high property prices made finding a suitable location difficult. As a result, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein met in Sevelen, directly across the border in Switzerland. The Islamic Community of Liechtenstein filed a petition in August calling for the establishment of an Islamic cemetery and a prayer room. Parliament received the petition, called “Equality for Muslims,” favorably and referred it to the government for a final decision. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups. For example, the Catholic church in Schaan continued to make its church available to the Christian Orthodox community to hold an Orthodox Easter Sunday service.

The U.S. embassy in Bern, Switzerland, which is responsible for diplomatic relations with the country, continued to encourage the promotion of religious freedom in discussions with the MFA, focusing primarily on a second prayer room and Islamic cemetery. Embassy staff also discussed religious freedom issues with the LHRA, such as what the organization saw as the extent of societal discrimination and the difficulties Muslims encountered in establishing religious houses of worship and cemeteries.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 39,000 (midyear 2021). According to the 2020 census, religious group membership is as follows: 70 percent Roman Catholic, 8 percent Protestant Reformed, 6 percent Muslim, and 10 percent with no religious affiliation.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, a majority of Muslims is Sunni, predominantly immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. Muslims are organized in three associations: the Turkish-Islamic Community Liechtenstein; the Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association; and the Islamic Community Liechtenstein. The Jewish community consists of fewer than 20 individuals. Immigrants, who comprise approximately one-third of the country's population, come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and belong predominantly to the same religious groups as native-born citizens.

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

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution states that all persons shall have the freedom to choose their faith, and the state shall be responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the people.” The constitution specifies Roman Catholicism is the state religion, which “shall enjoy full protection from the state.” The constitution stipulates other religious denominations may practice their beliefs and hold religious services “within the bounds of morality and public order.”

The state and municipalities provide the Catholic Church with certain unique benefits that vary by municipality, including financial support and state maintenance of buildings and grounds owned by the Church. Priests are

employees of the municipalities. The Protestant Reformed Church and the Reformed-Lutheran Church also receive financial support from the state and municipalities.

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may organize themselves as private associations, which enables registration in the commercial registry. Religious groups, however, must register to receive government funding for such activities as providing religious education in schools or executing projects to promote social integration of religious minorities, such as offering language courses for foreigners. To register in the commercial registry, the association must submit an official letter of application to the Office for Justice, within the Ministry of Infrastructure and Justice, to include the organization's name, purpose, board members, and head office location, as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization's statutes.

All religious groups are exempt from certain taxes. The government has not indicated how it determines whether groups not registered in the commercial registry are religious groups entitled to the tax exemptions.

The law prohibits the slaughter of animals without anesthetization, making kosher and halal slaughter illegal. Importation of such meat is legal.

The criminal code prohibits any form of public incitement to hatred or discrimination against, or disparagement of, any religion or its adherents by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. The criminal code also prohibits the denial, trivialization, and justification of genocide and other crimes against humanity by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. Penalties may include a prison sentence of up to two years. The criminal code prohibits refusing service to a person or group of persons based on religious affiliation as well as membership in any association that aims to promote discrimination against a person or persons based on religious affiliation.

The law requires the inclusion of religious education in the primary and secondary public school curriculum. Catholic or Protestant Reformed religious education is compulsory in all primary schools. Parents may request exemptions for their children, without providing a reason, from the Office of Education, which is part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Education, and Sports. Children exempted from religious education or who are neither Catholic nor Protestant must attend a class called "Ethics and Religions." The law also grants the Office of Education the

right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. Catholic, Protestant Reformed, and Muslim groups provide the teachers for religious instruction, and the Office of Education pays for some or all of their salaries. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Other religious groups registered as associations may provide teachers for optional religious classes if there is a demand for them and may apply for partial funding of the teachers' salaries from the government's integration budget.

At the secondary school level, parents and students may choose between a Catholic religious education course, which the government finances and the Catholic religious community organizes, and a general course in religion and culture taught from a sociological perspective.

To receive residency permits, foreign religious workers must have completed theological studies, command a basic level of German, belong to a "nationally known" religious group (the law does not define "nationally known"), and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the same religious group.

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

### **Government Practices**

Prime Minister Risch, who entered office on March 25, said he intended during the current legislative period ending in 2025 to revisit the issue of separation of religion and state, specifically in the areas of financing for religious communities and the design of denominational religious instruction, which varied among religious communities. The most recent effort to change the legal framework concerning the relationship between religion and state occurred in 2012.

According to sources, the legislation did not enter into force because two of the country's 11 municipalities could not agree with the Archdiocese of Vaduz on property rights, which prevented the conclusion of a concordat between the Catholic Church and the Holy See.

According to an analysis published by the Swiss Competence Center for Human Rights in May 2020, the government promoted religious pluralism and enhanced support for religious equality through increased assistance in integrating immigrants of different faiths, including Muslims. The center undertook the analysis at the government's request.

Media and the LHRA reported that efforts to build another prayer room, an Islamic cemetery, and a community house with a prayer room remained pending. The LHRA said that while reluctance from potential property owners and local authorities remained a problem, another challenge was also the limited number of suitable properties. In August, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein filed a petition entitled “Equality for Muslims” with parliament, calling for an Islamic cemetery and a prayer room. Parliament responded favorably and referred the petition to the government in September for a final decision. The executive council, which includes the Prime Minister and four Ministers, is responsible for making the final decision.

All religious groups, including Muslims, were able to bury their dead in cemeteries owned by municipalities.

Public schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum. In January, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, sixth grade students at one secondary school attended a virtual tour of the former concentration camp Dachau.

According to the MFA, 49 elementary school students attended Islamic religious education in the 2020-21 school year, compared with 42 students offered in the previous school year.

Funding for religious institutions continued to derive mainly from the municipalities. Municipalities provided the Catholic and Protestant Reformed Churches annual subsidies in proportion to their membership. The MFA stated that municipalities allocated funding for specific purposes, such as paying the rent for places of worship, and it remained in regular contact with religious representatives regarding the funding. The Liechtenstein Institute noted that while taxes helped to finance Catholic and Protestant churches, Muslim associations did not receive any funding from the state or municipalities. The MFA noted that with the exception of the Catholic Church, religious communities are defined as private associations and may apply for state funding. According to the MFA, state support for Islamic religious communities is tied to the condition that the communities establish a joint umbrella organization. As no umbrella organization existed by year’s end, the three Muslim associations active in the country did not receive direct financial support from the government.

The government immigration and passport office continued to issue residency permits to religious workers, valid for five years, instead of visas. Religious workers from Schengen area member countries did not require permits or visas.

On January 27, the government invited the entire population to attend a virtual event in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day hosted by former foreign minister Katrin Eggenberger.

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

There was one prayer room in the country, which was operated by the Turkish-Islamic Community of Liechtenstein in leased space in Triesen. The Islamic Community of Liechtenstein used a prayer room in Sevelen, in neighboring Switzerland. Members of the Islamic Community told media that the Muslim associations wanted to open a second prayer room and an Islamic burial site, but they were unable to obtain land and proper permits due in part to the reluctance of private property owners.

According to the MFA, religious groups in every municipality opened their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups. For example, the Catholic church in Schaan continued to make its facilities available to the Christian Orthodox community to hold an Orthodox Easter Sunday service. According to the MFA, there was no centralized information on whether and how select religious groups allowed other faiths to use their places of worship.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, Muslims continued to face discrimination in society, particularly Muslim women in the labor force who wore a headscarf, especially in academia. One Muslim woman reported that her landlord wanted to terminate the lease immediately upon discovering that she wore a headscarf. The institute said societal discrimination persisted due to prejudices associating Muslims with ISIS or Islamic extremism.

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

Embassy staff continued to discuss ways to promote religious freedom with the MFA's specialist for human rights and international law, focusing on access to religious education by different religious groups, particularly the Muslim community, and the establishment of religious infrastructure, such as Islamic burial sites and an additional prayer room.

Embassy staff continued to discuss the effects on religious practices of the lack of separation between religion and state, an Islamic cemetery, and space for prayer rooms, as well as the extent of societal discrimination, with the Liechtenstein Institute and the LHRA. During a September visit to the country, embassy staff discussed with the MFA and LHRA suggestions put forward by the Muslim community to the government to facilitate their religious practices in the country, such as the establishment of an Islamic cemetery and additional space for prayer rooms.