

SWEDEN 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects “the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others” and prohibits discrimination based on religion. In July, the Skurup and Staffanstorp municipalities appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court to overturn a regional court’s verdict that a ban on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other face- and hair-covering garments for students and employees in preschools and elementary schools introduced in 2020 was illegal. On May 20, the Malmo police granted Danish party Hard Line (Stram Kurs) leader Rasmus Paludan permission to hold an anti-Muslim demonstration with the purpose of drawing an image of the Prophet Muhammad. In a May 1 speech, then prime minister Stefan Lofven stated that no new independent schools with religious orientations should be established, reaffirming the Social Democratic Party’s promise to introduce a ban in 2023. The Center Party revoked its 2019 decision to work for a ban on nonmedical circumcision for boys younger than age 18. In an April report, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Scandinavian Human Rights Lawyers, in partnership with five Christian organizations, criticized the Migration Agency’s asylum decisions for Christian converts as arbitrary. Several faith leaders described the government’s easing of COVID-19 restrictions as discriminatory when places of trade and culture were allowed more visitors per square meter than locations used for religious purposes. Some politicians from the Sweden Democrats, the country’s third-largest political party, made denigrating comments about Jews and Muslims. The then prime minister Lofven and other politicians condemned antisemitism and religious intolerance. The Equality Ombudsman (DO) concluded its third, and final, inquiry into a Jewish doctor’s allegations of antisemitism at New Karolinska Hospital (NKS) in 2017 and found there was insufficient evidence to prove the surgeon’s allegations of reprisals by the employer. The government hosted the International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism in Malmo on October 13. As a part of the government’s pledges ahead of the forum, on September 13, it announced several initiatives totaling 95 million kronor (\$10.53 million). In April, the government announced it would appoint an all-parliamentary committee to review legislative options for criminalizing Holocaust denial.

On January 20 and 24, unknown individuals threw several Molotov cocktails at the Spanga Church in the northeast region of the country. Police investigated the acts as hate crimes and linked them to an incident earlier in the month when unknown persons overturned 300 tombstones in a nearby cemetery. Jewish leaders stated

their community registered increased antisemitic acts and threats from immigrant Muslim communities linked to the May conflict between Israel and Palestinians. On January 26, the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, five antisemitic acts of vandalism took place in Linköping, Norrköping, and Gothenburg. On March 27, the first night of Passover, antisemitic messages and symbols were placed outside a synagogue in Norrköping. In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 3 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Sweden said they had negative feelings towards Jews. During the year, courts convicted leading Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) members for hate speech directed against Jews. On November 24, Archbishop of the Church of Sweden Antje Jackelen apologized to the country's indigenous Sami community for what she said were centuries of mistreatment perpetrated by the Church of Sweden.

On October 13, the Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources headed the U.S. delegation to the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, which also included the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the Charge d'Affaires, and other U.S. government and embassy officials. The Charge d'Affaires and other embassy representatives continued to meet with the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), parliament, police, and local government officials on religious freedom issues, supporting government efforts to improve security for religious groups and highlighting threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants. The Charge d'Affaires met with four leading members of the Jewish community in May to discuss the challenges facing the Jewish community. Embassy officials underscored the importance of religious tolerance with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmo and Stockholm.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.3 million (midyear 2021). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 56 percent of citizens are members. According to government statistics and estimates by religious groups, other Christian groups – including the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal Movement, Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) – together total less than 6 percent of the population. The Finnish Orthodox Church and Georgian Orthodox Church are also present in the country. According to a

2016 Pew Research Center estimate (the most recent available), 8.1 percent of the population is Muslim, mainly located in the urban areas of Malmo, Stockholm, and Gothenburg. According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Jews number approximately 15,000, concentrated mainly in larger cities, including Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

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

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

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

The constitution instructs public institutions to combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. According to law, complaints regarding discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority must be filed with the DO. The ombudsman investigates each case and issues a decision that is not legally binding. The decision includes recommendations to prevent future discrimination. The ombudsman takes some cases to court each year, in part to create legal precedent. The DO may represent the individual making a complaint in the event of legal proceedings if he or she requests it.

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

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

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes, issuing them every two years. Law enforcement authorities may add a hate crime classification to an initial crime report or to existing charges during an investigation. Prosecutors determine whether to bring hate crime charges as part of the prosecution, and the defense has an opportunity to rebut the classification. In cases where the criminal act involves a hate crime, the penalties increase.

There is no requirement in the law for religious groups to register or otherwise seek recognition. Only those faith communities registering with the Swedish Agency for Support for Faith Communities (SST), however, are eligible to receive government funding and tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations. To register with the SST, a religious group must submit an application to the Ministry of Culture demonstrating the group fulfills certain requirements, including that it has operated in the country for at least five years, has a clear and stable structure, is able to function independently, serves at least 3,000 persons, and has several locations in the country.

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

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

The government facilitates fund raising by religious groups by offering them the option of collecting contributions through the Tax Agency in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (\$8,300) and an annual fee of 21 kronor (\$2) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee because it, unlike other religious groups participating in the program, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the program. Religious groups choose what percentage of members' annual taxable income to collect, with a median collection rate of 1 percent. The Tax Agency subtracts a percentage of the member's gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The member's contribution is not deductible from income tax. Nineteen religious organizations participate in the plan: Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, Swedish Alliance Mission, Roman

Catholic Church, Baptist Union of Sweden, Evangelic Free Church in Sweden, The Salvation Army, United Methodist Church of Sweden, Pentecostal Movement, Syrian-Orthodox Church, Bosniak Islamic Association, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese, Hungarian Protestant Church, Uniting Church in Sweden, Union of Islamic Cultural Centers, United Islamic Associations of Sweden, Swedish Muslim Federation, Islamic Shi'ite Association of Sweden, Islamic Fatwa Council of Sweden, and Swedish Islamic Society.

The government provides publicly funded grants to registered religious groups through the SST. The grants are proportional to the size of a group's membership. Registered religious groups may also apply for separate grants for specific purposes, such as security expenses.

The military offers food options that are compliant with religious dietary restrictions. Each military district has a chaplain. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all current chaplains seconded to the armed forces belong to the Church of Sweden. Regardless of religious denomination, chaplains are required to perform religious duties for other faiths or refer service members to spiritual leaders of other faiths if requested. The law specifically exempts Jehovah's Witnesses from national military service. Other conscientious objectors may apply for unarmed military service but are in practice not inducted into the military. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe their particular religious holidays in exchange for not taking leave on public holidays.

Religious education is compulsory in public and private schools. Teachers use a curriculum designed by the National Agency for Education that encompasses lessons about the major world religions without preference for any particular religious group. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, which the government supports through a voucher system and which must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curricula, including religious education. Such schools may host voluntary religious activities outside the classroom, but these activities may not interfere with adherence to government guidelines on core academic curricula.

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

Government Practices

The Sweden Democrat political party continued to advocate local and national bans on the Islamic call to prayer. On March 4, Stina Isaksson, a Sweden Democrat politician in Hylte Municipality, proposed that the municipality board ban the Islamic call to prayer and said allowing it was “a direct infringement on the individual’s religious freedom” and a violation of the country’s constitution. On March 4, the Hylte Municipality board rejected the proposal.

On May 20, the Malmo police granted Danish party Hard Line (Stram Kurs) leader Rasmus Paludan permission to hold an anti-Muslim demonstration with the purpose of drawing an image of the Prophet Muhammad, citing freedom of speech as grounds for the approval. The Malmo police declined a similar May 18 application from Paludan but approved the May 20 application, with the condition of moving the demonstration from downtown Malmo to a remote parking area outside the city. On the same evening, Paludan and a few supporters held the demonstration surrounded by police and met a counterdemonstration of approximately 200 persons, speaking and praying in Arabic.

On June 17, the Malmo District Court sentenced five persons between 15 and 20 years old to juvenile correction service for participation in violent riots that followed an August 2020 illegal demonstration in Malmo in which supporters of Stram Kurs burned a Quran and kicked a second Quran. In addition, the court sentenced one woman to a year in prison and a man to six months in prison for inciting the riot.

On June 23, the Gothenburg Court of Appeals upheld the Malmo Administrative Court’s 2020 ruling that found Skurup and Staffanstorp Municipalities’ ban on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other head- and face-covering garments for students and employees in preschool and elementary school was contrary to the constitutional provision on religious freedom and to the European Convention on Human Rights. On July 19, the Staffanstorp Municipality, backed by the Skurup Municipality, appealed the decision to the Supreme Administrative Court. According to the Staffanstorp Municipality, the ban was a part of its integration plan and not motivated by religion. The appeal remained pending at year’s end. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders continued to state that the ban constituted an infringement on religious freedom.

On January 7, Louise Erixon, commissioner of the Solvesborg Municipality, said in an interview in the *Expressen* newspaper that she wanted to implement a ban on hijabs and other head coverings for students in preschools and kindergartens, elementary schools, secondary schools, adult education, and for employees at

municipal agencies. On March 18, Charlie Weimers, a Sweden Democrat member of parliament, wrote an opinion piece in *Expressen* advocating for a national ban on hijabs, following the Swiss example of a ban on face coverings. On March 22, Ebba Busch, Party Leader of the Christian Democrats, and three other Christian Democrats stated their party's intention to work towards banning hijabs for students in kindergarten and primary schools in an article in *Expressen*. They wrote that such a ban was not intended to curtail the right to religious freedom, but to protect girls' rights to their body and education.

The Center Party voted at its September national convention to revoke its 2019 decision to work for a ban on nonmedical circumcision for boys under the age of 18 years, including for religious reasons. The World Jewish Congress's Nordic Representative, the Jewish Youth Association, and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities welcomed the decision on social media and thanked the Center Party. Jewish and Muslim representatives reported a continuing discussion with the National Board on Health and Welfare and the Health and Social Care Inspectorate on how the required use of anesthesia when conducting circumcisions complicated the procedures for the Jewish community. All six health-care regions continued to offer circumcision, which is performed almost exclusively in religious communities, although the National Board of Health and Welfare had no statistics on how many children were circumcised during the year.

Some Muslim groups and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities continued to state they considered the law requiring stunning of and/or administration of anesthetics to animals prior to slaughter to be in conflict with their religious practices. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the domestic production of kosher meat. Most halal meat and all kosher meat continued to be imported.

In a May 1 speech, then prime minister Lofven stated that no new independent schools with religious orientations should be established, reaffirming the Social Democratic Party's promise to introduce such a ban in 2023 following a 2020 government inquiry committee's proposal. Representatives from Jewish and Christian communities said they believed the ban to be an attempt by the government to fight radical Islam, not as a way to target their communities, but suggested stricter controls from the School Inspectorate would be more efficient than a ban. In January 2020, a government inquiry committee presented its findings on how a ban on the creation of new independent schools with a religious orientation could be introduced. In October, in an interview on schools with

religious orientations, Minister of Education Anna Ekstrom said, “The schools that are run in Sweden must follow the requirements of the curriculum. For example, they should not divide boys and girls contrary to the requirements of the curriculum.” The committee proposed a ban on establishing such schools starting in 2023 and recommended that no approvals be granted to private entities that wished to operate a faith-based preschool class, compulsory (elementary) school, compulsory special needs school, upper secondary school, upper secondary special needs school, or after-school center. The independent National Agency for Education estimated 9,400 students, or approximately 1 percent of all elementary and preschool students, were enrolled in the 72 registered schools having a religious orientation in 2020. Representatives from the Christian and Jewish communities stated the government commission’s proposal of banning religious private schools would infringe on their communities’ way of life. They said they deemed it incompatible with both the constitutional right to religious freedom and the European Convention on Human Rights. On September 28, then prime minister Lofven promised that Jewish schools would not be impacted by the proposed ban in an interview with newspaper *Jewish Chronicle* and said, “It was never our intention to obstruct Jewish schools.”

During the year, seven of eight political parties represented in parliament, the Christian Democrats being the exception, continued to support banning the establishment of new religious independent schools. Representatives of several religious groups, including the Church of Sweden, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the Christian Council of Sweden, and Sweden’s Young Catholics, continued their opposition to the proposed ban. The groups stated that schools with a religious orientation helped ground the students in their minority culture and that a ban could be contrary to legislation regarding minority rights. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Teachers’ Association, and the municipalities of Stockholm, Malmo, Uppsala, and Gavle publicly supported the proposed ban.

In April, the NGO Scandinavian Human Rights Lawyers, in partnership with five Christian organizations, published a follow-up to its 2019 report on the Migration Agency’s management of asylum processes involving Christian converts. The report repeated the earlier criticism of the Migration Agency for rejecting asylum applications from Christians – primarily those who converted to Christianity while in the country – who said they risked religious persecution in their home countries if they would be forced to return. The authors of the report concluded the Migration Agency’s asylum process for Christian converts had improved slightly

since 2019, but they continued to state that the agency had a poor understanding of religious conversion and its decisions on converts continued to be arbitrary.

In September, deputy secretary general of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Jacob Rudenstrand again said Christian refugees, including but not limited to converts, faced harassment, particularly from Muslim refugees who were new to the country. Representatives from other Christian churches said the situation for Christians refugees and converts had improved during the last two years.

Several faith leaders described the government's easing of COVID-19 restrictions as discriminatory when retail and cultural establishments were allowed more visitors per square meter (with a cap at 500 persons) than places used for religious purposes (with a cap at eight standing or 50 seated persons). On March 21, Bishop Fredrik Modeus of the Church of Sweden wrote an opinion piece in the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper in which he stated, "The right to practice one's religion is constitutionally protected. Yet churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques are treated differently as society slowly reopens."

In June, the DO concluded its third and final investigation into reports by a Jewish neurosurgeon at NKS of continuing reprisals stemming from his 2017 complaint that the hospital's chief of neurosurgery subjected him and two other Jewish colleagues to antisemitic harassment and discrimination. During its investigation, the DO said it was unable to substantiate the neurosurgeon's allegations that NKS violated the prohibition on retaliation in the Discrimination Act.

On March 9, Richard Jomshof, the party secretary of the Sweden Democrats, the country's third largest political party, said in a televised debate that many Muslim societies are characterized by democratic deficits, persecution of persons, oppression of women, and violence. "I suffer with the people who are forced to be born in those countries. Islam is, in my opinion, an abominable ideology and religion," he said. Sweden Democrat Member of Parliament Bjorn Soder tweeted, "Richard Jomshof speaks plainly about Islam as an abominable religion." On August 12, Jomshof wrote in the *Blekinge Lans Tidning* newspaper, "We need to help young people and Muslims with wavering faith with alternatives. However, it would have been preferable if they chose a completely different religion or no religion at all."

On May 24, Stockholm Municipality endorsed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, including its list of examples. Media reported in February that the Djurgardens IF soccer club

also adopted the IHRA definition of antisemitism. Djugardens CEO Henrik Berggen stated, “We will accept and integrate the IHRA definition of antisemitism as a constructive and proactive measure to strengthen our own capacity to combat antisemitism and, to the best of our ability, educate others.” The World Jewish Congress and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities welcomed the endorsement.

On January 27, then prime minister Lofven and Speaker of Parliament Andreas Norlen commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day with a virtual ceremony in parliament. Lofven condemned antisemitism in a January 27 opinion piece in the Dagens Nyheter newspaper and announced that the country’s Holocaust Museum was to open in Stockholm in July 2022. The government allocated 30 million kronor (\$3.32 million) to the establishment of the museum. Lofven also announced that the country would take over the IHRA presidency from March 2022 to February 2023. On January 27, Foreign Minister Ann Linde issued a press statement as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe noting, “The passing of the last witnesses to the Holocaust puts a clear responsibility on all participating States to document their testimonies, to educate the next generation, to support research of the Holocaust, to remember, and never to forget. This responsibility applies equally to all genocides or mass atrocities.”

In response to a 12-year-old Jewish student’s complaint to the police about antisemitic harassment she received at school in May, Member of Parliament Gulan Avci of the Liberal Party said, “Jewish children that grow up in a country that cannot guarantee their safety is a failure for our society.”

The Media Council, a government agency whose primary task is to promote the empowerment of minors as conscious media users and to protect them from harmful media influences, continued its “No Hate Speech Movement,” which included efforts to stop the propagation of antisemitic conspiracy theories. The council offered classroom and online material for students and suggestions on how to address these issues with children.

On October 13, the government hosted the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, marking the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration that created the IHRA, with more than 300 participants, including Holocaust survivors, high ranking representatives from more than 35 countries, and leaders of civil society organizations. Then prime minister Lofven called for concrete measures to combat antisemitism, “anti-

Gypsyism,” and other forms of racism and discrimination, and to advance Holocaust remembrance in the form of pledges from attending states and organizations, which was welcomed by national and international Jewish organizations. Lofven acknowledged that antisemitism was present today in “extreme right-wing groups, parts of the Left, in Islamist environments, and among ordinary citizens... [and]among adults and children who fled to Europe from countries where hatred of Jews is promoted in schools and through state-propaganda.” Lofven acknowledged Malmo’s problems with antisemitism but said that the city and its mayor were working hard to combat the phenomenon. Aron Verstandig, president of the Official Council of Swedish Communities, welcomed the conference and described how Holocaust survivors arrived at Malmo port on Yom Kippur 1945 and immediately went to the Malmo Synagogue to pray. He also said that the situation for Jews in the country remained problematic and antisemitism was present in far-right neo-Nazi groups, far-left groups, and within the Muslim community. Moshe David Hacohen, former rabbi of the Malmo Jewish community, noted a positive development of increased interfaith cooperation between Muslims and Jews in the community. Forum participants criticized social media platforms for not better policing antisemitic hate speech online.

The government allocated six million kronor (\$665,000) to the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism and the Living History Forum (LHF) (a public agency “commissioned to work with issues related to tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point”) to increase opportunities for student and teacher study visits to Holocaust memorial sites for 2021-22. On March 18, the government stated that two million kronor (\$222,000) of these funds were earmarked for planning and preparing for how to resume remembrance trips to the Holocaust memorial sites for high school students and teachers after trips were canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its continuing *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes* and as a part of the government’s pledges ahead of the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Anti-Semitism, on September 13, the government announced several initiatives totaling 95 million kronor (\$10.53 million). The government announced it would increase the annual grant for security measures to religious organizations and civil society to 34 million kronor (\$3.77 million), compared with 22 million kronor (\$2.44 million) in 2020. A wide range of civil society organizations, including religiously oriented NGOs, remained eligible for funding from the Legal, Financial, and

Administrative Services Agency to improve their security by, for example, purchasing security cameras and hiring security guards.

The government provided 10 million kronor (\$1.11 million) to fund educational efforts to combat racism and support tolerance, including religious tolerance, in schools, and increased support to civil society. It allocated an additional 10 million kronor (\$1.11 million) to the Police Authority to prevent and investigate hate crimes, including those related to religion. The government announced it would appoint a government inquiry commission to develop a strategy to promote Jewish life in the country and establish language centers for Yiddish and Romani. The Swedish Defense Research Agency was scheduled to receive 2 million kronor (\$222,000) to map antisemitism in digital environments. The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities and the Nordic branch of the World Jewish Congress welcomed the government's pledges but underscored the need for implementation on the national, regional, and local levels and requested a specific government strategy targeting antisemitism. Part of the funding was earmarked for the Police National Operations Department, which assisted the country's regional authorities with investigations of hate crimes.

The SST continued to collaborate with other government agencies and civil society to promote dialogue between the government and faith communities as well as to contribute to the public's knowledge about religion. During the year, the SST continued to cooperate with several municipalities and regions to set up interreligious dialogues with a focus on democracy promotion, countering violent extremism, and educating municipal employees on issues of religion and religious freedom. As part of the government's implementation of the *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes*, SST cooperated with Muslim congregations to increase knowledge of safety measures for mosques, and it published a report in March. According to the report, the agency visited 12 Muslim congregations across the country and held conferences that educated 168 individuals on safety measures for mosques. On September 9, the government tasked the agency with continuing to map the vulnerability of Muslim congregations.

The SST continued to partner with government entities, including law enforcement authorities, the Civil Contingencies Agency, Defense Research Agency, Public Health Agency, National Agency for Education, Government Offices (comprising the Prime Minister's Office, government ministries, and the Office for Administrative Affairs), Crime Prevention Agency, Migration Agency, and others in supporting government inquiries, coordinating COVID-19 responses, and

facilitating meetings with different faith communities, including groups not registered with the SST. The SST cooperated with 12 religious leaders to make informational videos about COVID-19 ahead of religious holidays in the spring for distribution on social media. Representatives from the SST and the government praised faith community leaders for their successful efforts to inform community members of the COVID-19 pandemic and for their solutions to carry on religious services despite the pandemic. The SST continued offering courses in family law and movements within Islam and an interfaith mentorship course for female leaders. The agency continued to fund, publish, and promote publications aimed at educating the public about religious minorities, such as the report *Participation, Influence and Leadership among Women in Denominations*, published in June.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society provided grants to civil society organizations working to combat religious intolerance and a special grant related to COVID-19 for organizations working with socially vulnerable people. Grants included five million kronor (\$554,000) to the Church of Sweden and three million kronor (\$332,000) to the Islamic Shia Community.

On August 27, the Raoul Wallenberg Academy hosted a virtual memorial lecture in honor of its namesake, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in Hungary. In her speech at the event, Crown Princess Victoria underscored the need for humanity and civil courage like that shown by Wallenberg.

On April 14, the government announced it was considering criminalizing Holocaust denial and would appoint an all-party parliamentary committee to review the possible contours of such legislation. “The Holocaust is the greatest crime against humanity in world history, and it should not be forgotten,” said Minister of Justice Morgan Johansson. The government said the growth of far-right extremism, the increased spread of propaganda enabled by social media, and the declining number of Holocaust survivors motivated the new legislation. The government had not by year’s end announced a deadline for the committee’s work. The World Jewish Congress, The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, and the Swedish Jewish Youth League welcomed the initiative but underscored the need to implement existing hate crime legislation.

On October 19, media reported the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism and Jewish Central Council criticized a guide on teaching controversial issues in schools published on the Swedish National Agency for Education website. The

guide encouraged teachers to have students debate whether the Holocaust happened, including supporting their arguments with information from the internet.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2020 (the most recent year for which statistics were available), 3,709 hate crimes were reported, according to a report released in December by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Of those, 9 percent were anti-Muslim, 5 percent antisemitic, and 2 percent anti-Christian, and other antireligious hate crimes accounted for 2 percent. Authorities said most victims of hate crimes did not report them to police.

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, 3 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Sweden said they had negative feelings towards Jews. Four 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 statements follow: “The interests of Jews in this country are very different from the interests of the rest of the population” (5 percent); “There is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world” (9 percent); “Jews have too much influence in the country” (3 percent); “Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society” (4 percent); “Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (4 percent); “Many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later” (4 percent); “Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them” (4 percent); “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” (11 percent).

Jewish leaders stated that their community experienced increased antisemitic acts and threats from immigrant Muslim communities linked to the May conflict between Israel and Palestinians. On May 26 in Gothenburg, several men assaulted a non-Jewish man who was wearing a kippah, and at least one of the attackers called the man a “Jewish bastard.” The Gothenburg police opened an investigation for assault in the case. According to media, on January 26 – the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day – four antisemitic acts of vandalism took place at Linköping City Hall and three media outlets in Linköping and Norrköping, small cities approximately 120 and 100 miles from Stockholm, respectively. The perpetrators posted antisemitic messages and stars on building

facades and left behind cans of unidentified powder. The Linköping police opened four investigations into incitement against ethnic groups but had not, as of year's end, identified any perpetrators. Also on January 26, the words "The Holocaust is a hoax" were projected onto a crane in Gothenburg for approximately 10 minutes. The Gothenburg police confirmed January 28 that they had initiated an investigation into the incident.

On January 20 and 24, unknown individuals attacked the Spanga Church, Church of Sweden, in northeast Stockholm with several Molotov cocktails. The Stockholm police investigated the attacks as hate crimes and linked them to an incident at the Northern Cemetery earlier in January in which unknown individuals overturned 300 tombstones. Member of parliament from the Social Democratic Party Anders Osterberg described it as "an attack on the Swedish cultural heritage and an attack on religion and Christianity." Minister of Culture Amanda Lind said on February 4, "We see how hate crimes are increasing overall, even the Christophobic hate crimes. And we really need to do what we can to combat it." According to figures from the Crime Prevention Council, there had been more than 800 suspected hate crimes against churches since 2012. Police reports of hate crimes against Jewish and Muslim religious sites had also increased since 2012.

Aron Verstandig, the president of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, said on May 17 that the tone of criticism against Israel in schools and on social media was very harsh and that Jewish congregations had strengthened their security measures as a result of renewed clashes between Israel and Palestinians. On May 12, police arrested a man on suspicion of hate speech after singing the antisemitic Khaybar chant at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Malmö. In May, a 12-year-old Jewish girl filed a police report stating that her schoolmates in a Malmö school had subjected her to antisemitic harassment, which had intensified during the conflict. On May 17, Palestinians and Jews held a joint demonstration in Malmö against the war and against antisemitism in solidarity with the girl. On May 19, media reported that antisemitism flourished on the social media app Clubhouse. Antisemitic messages on the application, including death threats against Jews and praise for Hitler, were directly connected to the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. One journalist, Negar Josephi, filed a police report citing death threats and hate speech she received on social media after reporting on the issue. The Gothenburg police opened an investigation for assault in that case. On May 13, the Muslim-Jewish interfaith cooperation organization Amanah urged calm and respect between all religious communities in Malmö. On May 20, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities and the United

Islamic Association of Sweden issued a joint statement condemning antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred related to external conflicts.

According to media, on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a bag marked with a Star of David and containing soap and antisemitic literature was found outside the Norrköping City Museum, where an exhibit entitled “Nazism and Norrköping Now and Then” was on display. No suspects were detained.

On March 27, the first night of Passover, baby dolls splashed with red paint were strung outside a synagogue in Norrköping next to a flyer with antisemitic messages. In a Twitter post, the Norrköping police announced it opened a hate crime investigation on March 28. The Anti-Defamation League linked the display to the NRM after NRM published a picture of the display on its website. On April 5, Verstandig stated on Facebook that the NRM was responsible for the display. The NRM had not claimed responsibility by year’s end.

In March, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention published a report on anti-Muslim hate crimes based on 50 interviews with Muslim leaders and an analysis of 500 reported hate crimes that took place between 2015 and 2018. The most common types of crime among the reports were threats and harassment (44 percent of the reports), followed by incitement against ethnic groups (23 percent), defamation (10 percent), and violent crime (8 percent). The report found that anti-Muslim comments were frequent online and that wearing religious articles increased the risk of harassment. This was particularly the case for Muslim women wearing hijabs or niqabs. The quantitative data derived from police reports showed that seven of 10 perpetrators were men, and one in five were between 50 and 59 years old.

In March, the Malmö Municipality published a report on antisemitism in schools in which 26 interviewed staff members and 14 Jewish students said they had experienced antisemitism in Malmö schools and kindergartens. School staff indicated antisemitic expressions in Malmö’s schools were connected to the conflict between Israel and Palestinians, geopolitical relations in the Middle East, and pan-Arab nationalism. The Stockholm Municipality announced it would conduct a similar study in 2021.

A study commissioned by the government agency Living History Forum, based on a 2020 survey with 3,500 respondents and released June 1, showed that negative attitudes and perceptions about Jews were declining in the country. According to the study, antisemitism persisted to a higher degree among older age groups,

persons with certain religious or party affiliations, and extremist groups. For example, the report showed that antisemitic beliefs were 19 to 30 percent higher among respondents who identified as Muslim compared to the reference group, depending on which antisemitic attitude, such as related to Israel and conspiracy theories, was investigated. The reference group consisted of respondents without religious affiliation. There was also a higher degree of antisemitic beliefs among those who sympathize with the Sweden Democrats (20 percent higher), the Moderates (9 percent) and Christian Democrats (approximately 7 percent) than those who sympathized with the Social Democrats. On June 1, Verstandig commented to the press that the study reaffirmed the community's perception of which groups were most antisemitic, and that these groups, such as within the immigrant Muslim population and within extremist organizations, had become more active in recent years. Verstandig said he believed the results would have been different if the survey had been conducted during the year, due to the renewed conflict between Israel and Palestinians in the spring.

In April, Archbishop Jackelen announced a pause of the use of the social media app Twitter after receiving threats and messages of hate. Cardinal Anders Arborelius, the Catholic Bishop of Stockholm, reported a similar experience of hate messaging on social media.

During the year, courts convicted several leading members of the NRM of hate speech and death threats on social media directed at Jews. In September, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice sentenced the former publisher of NRM's online magazine *Northern Front (Nordfront)* Marcus Hansson to a suspended sentence and fines for hate speech directed toward LGBTQI+ individuals, Jews, and migrants in nine publications between September 2019 and September 2020.

In November, several outdoor events and memorials were held in multiple cities in remembrance of Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass). The Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism, the organization Holocaust Survivors in Sweden, the Jewish Community in Stockholm, and the Living History Forum held a memorial in the Great Synagogue in Stockholm, where Center Party leader Annie Loof gave a speech. In Umea, a lecture with Holocaust survivor Piotr Zettinger took place on the town square and was broadcast live via Facebook.

On November 24, Archbishop Jackelen issued a public apology to the country's indigenous Sami community for centuries of mistreatment that contributed to what it described as "legitimized repression" conducted by the Church of Sweden. "We need to own up to our dark past, no matter how painful it may be. In failing the

Sami people, we've also failed ourselves and God," Jackelen said. Sami representatives gave testimony of the Church's mistreatment and repression of their culture, life, and religion. The Sami representatives said the Church's treatment furthered racial biology research on the Sami people. The apology was scheduled to be repeated in October 2022 during a conference dealing with the Church's past treatment of the Sami. In addition to the apology, the Church of Sweden earmarked 40 million kronor (\$4.43 million) to promote the inclusion of Sami spirituality and traditions in its services, as well as for the revitalization of Sami languages.

On September 19, the Church of Sweden held elections for the General Synod, and for the diocesan parish levels. One of the main topics of the election campaign was whether priests should be obliged to carry out marriages for same-sex couples. In a comment on the Church elections, then prime minister Stefan Lofven said the Church must not become a platform for right-wing extremism. Sweden Democrat Party leader Jimmie Akesson accused Lofven of smearing his party and complained that the Church had become a "safe space" for left-wing activism. Christian leaders said they wished Church elections to be free from party politics and for the state to leave Church politics to the Church and its members.

As part of the Jewish-Muslim Amanah project in Malmo, Imam Salahuddin Barakat and Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen continued their joint efforts to speak to students during the year about religious tolerance, conducted several interfaith workshops, and started a podcast to discuss religious texts and spiritual queries. The Malmo municipality and the SST provided partial funding for the project.

Interfaith groups continued to operate in the country, including the National Interfaith Council of Sweden, established as a meeting place for national religious leaders in Uppsala in 2010 with a mandate to address issues related to religion and religious freedom. Member groups included the Christian Council of Sweden, Muslim Council of Sweden, Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, and Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council. Representatives from the Alevi Muslim, Baha'i, Church of Jesus Christ, Hindu, Mandaean, and Sikh communities also participated in the group. During the year, the council arranged a national study circle on interfaith cooperation, hosted a dialogue on interfaith efforts against climate change, and held several online lectures among other projects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources headed the U.S. delegation to the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism on October 13, which also included the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the Charge d’Affaires, and other U.S. government and embassy officials. The Secretary of State participated via a prerecorded video announcing U.S. pledges to allocate \$1 million to counter online antisemitic hate speech in the Middle East and North Africa; to start an expanded series of International Visitor Leadership programs to collaborate with government and civil society representatives to confront Holocaust distortion and antisemitism in North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and South America; and to work with the U.S. Congress to provide another one million dollars to Central European countries to support the IHRA and its Global Task Force Against Holocaust Denial and Distortion. The U.S. delegation also attended an October 12 event at the Malmo Synagogue that celebrated Jewish life in Sweden and met with Jewish and other faith leaders.

The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SST, parliament, police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom, including improving security for religious groups, and to highlight threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants, Christian converts, and Jews.

In May, the Charge d’Affaires met with four Jewish community leaders to hear about their involvement with and views on the October 13 Malmo forum and to learn about the challenges facing the country’s Jewish population.

Embassy officials spoke to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmo and Stockholm throughout the year regarding their security concerns and threats to religious freedom more broadly.

The embassy highlighted on social media a September visit by the Charge d’Affaires and other embassy representatives to Malmo, during which the Charge met with Muslim and Jewish community leaders to discuss religious freedom, interfaith cooperation, and the value of societal inclusion. During a visit to the Malmo Synagogue, the Charge d’Affaires tweeted, “The U.S. supports Jewish community of Sweden’s efforts to practice its faith and celebrate its rich culture! Honored to visit the stunning Malmo Synagogue. There is no place for antisemitism in society!”

On October 14, the Charge d’Affaires tweeted, “A moving visit to Lund University to view the Ravensbrueck archive with SEHI to conclude the important #MalmoForum and support US commitments outlined by @SecBlinken. The importance of teaching new generations about the #Holocaust can’t be stressed enough. #RememberReAct.”

On May 12, the U.S. embassy tweeted, “Upon the arrival of a new crescent moon, the entire @usembassysweden community sends our warmest greetings to all Swedes and Swedish residents celebrating Eid al-Fitr. Eid Mubarak!”