

MONACO 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and its public expression and prohibits compelling participation in religious ceremonies. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and state ceremonies often include Catholic rituals. Religious groups must apply to the government to build a public place of worship and to receive recognition, which provides certain legal rights and privileges. Optional Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools. The Jehovah's Witnesses' 2019 case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for recognition as a religious group remained pending at year's end. In July, the ECHR formally notified the government of the case. Without recognition, the government and Jehovah's Witnesses both stated that the group could not open a place of worship in the country.

The only private religious schools are Catholic. According to the government, while the law permits private, non-Catholic religious schools, there was insufficient demand for them. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives again said there was no need for them to open a religious school. A member of the Muslim community stated the community did not want to be officially recognized because most members did not practice their religion and it would be too expensive to build a place of worship.

In November, the U.S. Consul General in Marseille, who is accredited to the government of Monaco, discussed the state of religious freedom in the country with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In September, representatives from the Consulate General in Marseille discussed issues pertaining to religious freedom with leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Catholic and Protestant Churches. Consulate general officials spoke several times with representatives from the Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss religious concerns, including the government's refusal to recognize the Jehovah's Witnesses. In November, consulate general representatives met with Jewish and Muslim religious communities to discuss religious freedom and diversity in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31,000 (midyear 2021), of whom 10,000 are citizens. The U.S. government estimates 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Protestant officials said Protestants represent at

least 2 percent of the population, with 200-220 families, mainly of British and American descent. According to press reports and observers in the country, the Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 300 members. According to the European Jewish Congress and the local Association Culturelle Israelite (Jewish Cultural Association), approximately 1,000 residents, most of whom are noncitizens, are Jewish. According to a long-time Muslim resident, there is a small Muslim community of approximately 200 persons, most of whom are noncitizens from North Africa. The Jehovah's Witnesses report 150-200 members who work in the country, 20 of whom reside there. A small number of residents adhere to other religious beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees individuals freedom of religion and public worship and protects the freedom to express opinions on all issues, provided no crimes are committed in the exercise of those freedoms. No one may be compelled to participate in the rites or ceremonies of any religion or to observe its days of rest.

The constitution states that Roman Catholicism is the state religion. The Catholic Archbishop of Monaco occupies the highest government office below the sovereign and the Minister of State.

Religious associations seeking to establish an office or place of worship, own or lease property, or hire employees must first obtain official recognition from the Ministry of the Interior. The ministry must respond to such requests within one month or approval is automatic. The government has granted recognition to the Protestant, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities.

In addition to obtaining official government recognition, any religious group wishing to construct a place of worship in a public space must receive prior approval from the Ministry of Interior.

The government does not tax religious institutions.

Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools as an option and requires parental authorization. Private schools, including those operated by religious groups, must apply for government authorization. If approved, the schools may provide instruction in religions other than Catholicism.

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

Government Practices

In September 2019, the Jehovah's Witnesses took their case for recognition as a religious group to the ECHR, which formally notified the government of the case on July 15. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the principality was studying the case and would reply officially as required by the court. The case remained pending at year's end. The government had rejected the group's three previous applications – the most recent in 2019 – despite a Supreme Court ruling annulling the first two rejections. In its filings with the Supreme Court, the government had described the group as a danger to public order, as extreme and intolerant, and hostile to the Catholic Church and to other religious groups.

The Jehovah's Witnesses stated that without government recognition, they remained unable to establish a headquarters in the country where they could worship and welcome new members. The Jehovah's Witnesses also noted that dozens of their members visited the principality as tourists every year and often asked how to access religious services. Catholic rituals continued to be a part of many state ceremonies, including annual national day celebrations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

As in previous years, the only private religious schools were Catholic. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives again said there was no need to open a religious school. These religious representatives reported that they did not request approval to open a religious school but believed the government would likely agree, if asked, to the request.

According to religious groups, building new places of worship was difficult due to high real estate prices. There were no mosques in the country.

A Muslim community member stated the community did not request official recognition because most members did not practice their religion and it would be too expensive to build a place of worship. Muslims worshiped at a mosque in Beausoleil, just across the border in France, and in private prayer rooms in their own residences. The Jehovah's Witnesses also worshiped in nearby locations in Menton, Beausoleil, and Nice in France.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In November, the Consul General in Marseille discussed the state of religious freedom in the country with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In September, consulate general staff spoke with the Catholic Archbishop of Monaco about the relationship between the principality and the Church, the degree to which other religions were allowed to practice in Monaco, the status of Jehovah's witnesses, Catholic and non-Catholic schools, and social services the Church provided to people in need, especially in a COVID-19 environment.

Representatives from the consulate general spoke with Jehovah's Witnesses representatives several times to discuss religious freedom concerns, including the government's refusal to recognize the group. In September, consulate general staff spoke with the pastor of the United Protestant Church – one of the country's two Protestant churches – and a representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In November, staff spoke with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim religious communities.