

FINLAND 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits religious discrimination “without an acceptable reason” and provides for the right to profess and practice a religion and to decline to be a member of a religious community. The law prohibits breaching the sanctity of religion, which includes blasphemy, offending that which a religious community holds sacred, and disturbing worship or funeral ceremonies.

According to representatives of their respective groups, immigration authorities continued to deny asylum applications of Jehovah’s Witnesses members from Russia, as well as Ahmadi Muslims from Pakistan. In February, a court convicted a former Finns Party chair of ethnic agitation for comments against Muslims and immigrants. In March, a Helsinki District Court dismissed all charges against Christian Democrat Member of Parliament (MP) Paivi Rasanen, a former Minister of the Interior, for ethnic agitation and incitement to hatred on the basis of sexuality in connection with a booklet she published in 2004 and a 2019 tweet.

On April 6, European Commission Coordinator on Combatting Antisemitism Katharina Von Schnurbein asserted that awareness of antisemitism and the knowledge of various ways that antisemitism manifests were both low in the country during an address to parliament. Attempts to build a large grand mosque in the south of the country continued to face opposition; some Muslim community leaders identified politicization of zoning laws, anti-Muslim and racist attitudes in some local communities, and deep divisions across the diverse Muslim community as contributing factors. The nondiscrimination ombudsman’s office received 35 complaints of religious discrimination and nine complaints based on belief in 2022, compared with 34 religious or belief-based discrimination complaints in 2020. There were several demonstrations by neo-Nazi or nationalist groups. Citizens reported antisemitic graffiti and defacing of public property with antisemitic writing in Helsinki. Religious groups and the media reported an increase in websites and social media platforms spreading antisemitic language and conspiracy theories.

U.S. embassy staff engaged with government ministries to discuss government support for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, government and police

responses to antisemitic incidents, and the treatment of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and Ahmadi Muslims seeking asylum. Embassy staff engaged with government officials, civil society, and foreign missions to draw attention to the potential impacts of a draft law that would limit religious practices of animal slaughter. Embassy staff met with the Jewish and Muslim communities to discuss their shared concerns about the impact of government guidelines discouraging male circumcision and addressed religiously motivated crimes. Embassy staff also discussed the state of religious freedom with these communities, other religious minority groups, and interfaith networks. With the Muslim community, Embassy staff also reviewed continuing problems establishing or maintaining mosques sufficient for the diverse Muslim population.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.6 million (midyear 2022). According to Finnish government statistics from December 2021 that count only registered members of registered congregations, 66.6 percent of the population belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELC) and 1.1 percent to the Finnish Orthodox Church, while 0.4 percent (approximately 21,000) have official membership in Islamic congregations, and 30.5 percent do not identify as belonging to any religious group. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Anglicans, Baptists, evangelical Lutherans, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Multiple sources indicate the Muslim population has grown rapidly in recent years due to a significant inflow of immigrants. Muslim religious leaders estimate the actual number of Muslims rose to between 65,000 and 180,000 in 2021, of which approximately 80 percent are Sunni and 20 percent Shia. In 2017, the latest year for which statistics are available, the Pew Research Center estimated 2.7 percent of the population, or approximately 150,000 persons, were Muslim. According to a survey by academic researchers of pupils' religious choices in basic education, the Muslim population (that they estimated to number between 110-120,000) can be divided into 46 registered Islamic communities and 87 Islamic associations. According to the Islamic Society of Finland, discrepancies among these sources and between them and official government statistics may occur because only a minority of Muslims register with registered Islamic societies. Apart from Tatars,

who immigrated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as well as during the existence of the Soviet Union, most Muslims are immigrants or descendants of immigrants who arrived from Somalia, North Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. There are 300 registered members of the Ahmadi community, according to leaders of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Finland.

In a report released in 2020, the Institute of Jewish Policy Research estimated the Jewish population at 1,300, while Jewish community leaders estimate the population at 2,000. There are between 18,000 and 20,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country, according to church representatives. According to Catholic Diocese statistics from 2021, there are 14,795 registered Catholics in the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion "without an acceptable reason." It stipulates freedom of religion and conscience, including the right to profess and practice a religion, to express one's convictions, and to be a member or decline to be a member of a religious community. It states no one is under the obligation to participate in the practice of a religion.

The law criminalizes blasphemy or the "breach of the sanctity of religion," which includes "blaspheming against God," publicly defaming or desecrating to offend something a religious community holds sacred, and disturbing worship or funeral ceremonies. Violators are subject to fines or imprisonment of up to six months. The amount of a fine is dependent both on the severity of the offense and the financial standing of the offender. Authorities have occasionally applied the law, most recently in 2021, and often in addition to charges of incitement.

The constitution cites the ELC, the only religious group it mentions, stating, "Provisions on the organization and administration [of the ELC] are laid down in the Church Act."

It is considered a crime of ethnic agitation if any person makes available or spreads to the public an expression of opinion or any other message that threatens, defames, or insults a certain group on the basis of race, skin color, birth status, national or ethnic origin, religion, belief, sexual orientation, or disability. This includes the distribution of hate material intended to incite discrimination in print or in broadcast media, books, or online newspapers and journals. Punishment includes a fine based on the severity of the defamation or insult or up to two years' imprisonment. If the ethnic agitation involves incitement or enticement to serious violence, a person may be charged with aggravated ethnic agitation, which carries a punishment of imprisonment of between four months and four years. Hate speech is not a separate criminal offense but may constitute grounds for an aggravated sentence for other offenses. In principle, any act that is considered a crime in legislation may be a hate crime, depending on the underlying motive. The victim does not need to be a part of a defined group for a crime to be considered a hate crime; it is enough that the perpetrator assumes the victim to be a member of the group.

The law prohibits religious discrimination and establishes the position of a nondiscrimination ombudsman who is responsible for supervising compliance with the law, investigating individual cases of discrimination, and having the power to issue fines in noncriminal cases. The ombudsman advocates on behalf of victims, offers counseling, promotes conciliation, and lobbies for legislation, among other duties and authorities. The ombudsman may also refer cases to the National Nondiscrimination and Equality Tribunal (NDET), which also enforces fines issued by the ombudsman and assists plaintiffs seeking compensation in court. Individuals alleging discrimination may alternatively pursue legal action through the NDET, which may issue binding decisions that may be appealed to the courts or through the district court system. Litigants may appeal the decisions of the NDET and district courts to the higher Administrative Court. Neither the ombudsman nor the NDET has the authority to investigate individual cases of religious discrimination involving employment. Such cases fall under the purview of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority.

Individuals and groups may exist, associate, and practice their religion without registering with the government. To be eligible to apply for government funds, however, religious groups other than the ELC and the Orthodox Church must register with the Patent and Registration Office as a religious community. To

register as a religious community, a group must have at least 20 members, the public practice of religion as its purpose, and a set of rules to guide its activities. A registered religious community is a legal entity that may employ persons, purchase property, and make legal claims. A religious group may also acquire legal status by registering as an association with a nonprofit purpose that is not contrary to law or proper behavior. Registered religious communities and nonprofit associations are generally exempt from taxes. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), as of October, there were 160 registered religious communities, most of which had multiple congregations.

According to the MEC, several additional religious communities are organized under the name the Pentecostal Church of Finland but have registered as associations and not as separate religious communities. Similarly, other organizations, such as revivalist congregations of the ELC, have independent theological or functional operations but have remained administratively under the ELC and have not registered as independent religious communities. Persons may belong to more than one religious group.

Citizens who belong to either the ELC or Finnish Orthodox Church pay a church tax, collected together with their income tax payments. Parishes set their respective church tax rates separately. Church tax rates generally fall between 1 to 2 percent of a member's income. Those who do not want to pay the tax must terminate their ELC or Orthodox congregation membership. Members may terminate their membership by contacting the official congregation or the local government registration office, either electronically or in person. Local parishes have fiscal autonomy to decide how to use funding received from taxes levied on their members.

Registered religious communities other than the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church are eligible to apply for state funds in lieu of the church tax. In addition to receiving the church tax, the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church may also apply for state funds. The law states registered religious communities that meet the statutory requirements, including ELC and Orthodox congregations, may apply to receive an annual subsidy from the government budget in proportion to the religious community's percentage of the population.

The law requires the ELC to maintain public cemeteries using its general allocation from state funds and church taxes and to account for monies used for this purpose. Other religious communities and nonreligious foundations may maintain their own cemeteries. All registered religious communities may own and manage property and hire staff, including appointing clergy. The law authorizes the ELC and Finnish Orthodox Church to register births, marriages, and deaths for their members in collaboration with the government Digital and Population Data Services Agency. State registrars do this for other persons.

Parents may determine their child's religious affiliation if the child is younger than 12. The religious affiliation of children between the ages of 12 and 17 may only be changed by a joint decision of the child and his or her parents or guardian, and the family must pursue specific administrative procedures with their religious community and the local population registration officials to change or terminate the religious affiliation.

All public schools provide religious teaching in accordance with students' religion. All students must take courses either in religious studies or ethics, with the choice left up to the student. Schools must provide religious instruction in religions other than the Lutheran faith if there is a minimum of three pupils representing that faith in the municipal region, the religious community in question is registered, and the students' families belong to the religious community. Municipalities may arrange for students from different schools to take a combined course to meet this requirement. Students who do not belong to a religious group or belong to a religious group for which special instruction is not available may study ethics. Students aged 18 or older may choose to study either the religious courses pertaining to their religion or the ethics courses. If a student belongs to more than one religious community, the parents decide in which religious education course the student participates. The national and municipal governments fund private, including religiously based, schools. Despite the name, private schools are in fact completely financially dependent on government funding to ensure equitable education nationwide. With the exception of international and foreign-language schools, private schools by law may not charge tuition. They do not practice selective admission based on students' religion.

Religious education focuses on familiarizing students with their own religion, other religions, and on general instruction in ethics. Teachers of religion must

have state-mandated training for religious instruction. The state appoints them, and they are not required to belong to any religious community. The National Board of Education provides a series of textbooks about Orthodox and Lutheran Christianity, Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam, as well as a textbook on secular ethics.

By law, conscientious objectors, including those who object on religious grounds, may choose alternative civilian service instead of compulsory military service. Conscientious objectors who refuse both military and alternative civilian service may receive custodial sentencing in prison or require electronic monitoring for terms of up to 173 days, one-half of the 347 days of alternative civilian service. Regular military service ranges between 165 and 347 days.

The law requires that animals be stunned prior to slaughter or be stunned and killed simultaneously if done pursuant to religious practice.

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

Government Practices

On June 16, the Blue Black Movement (*Sinimusta Liike*), a self-described radical ethno-nationalist movement with a goal of an ethnically and culturally homogenous Finland, registered as a political party after collecting 5,000 signatures. On September 27, the newspaper *Turun Sanomat* reported that Blue Black Movement Party Chair Tuukka Kuru had said he was under investigation for incitement for a 2020 tweet in which he suggested the country criminalize Judaism during an online discussion on the topic of circumcision. In a self-distributed press release, Kuru said that his views were an expression of his party's health policy platform.

The Finnish office of Amnesty International stated in its submission to the country's Universal Periodic Review, which falls under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council, that alternative nonmilitary service amounted to the country's longest period of conscripted service, more than double the shortest period of military service, placing a burden on those who exercised their right to conscientious objection, including those who did so on religious grounds. In 2019, the country repealed a legal provision exempting members of Jehovah's

Witnesses from military and nonmilitary service, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses have objected that persons who refuse military and nonmilitary service continue to be convicted and given custodial sentences of six months.

In October, leaders of minority religious communities stated that there were no chaplains for religious communities other than the ELC.

Yle News in September reported that the Kanta-Häme District Court cleared seven police officers and security guards of all charges stemming from female asylum seekers claiming officers forced them to remove their head coverings during registration photos in 2017 in the city of Hämeenlinna. National Police Board guidelines for registration photos state that religious adherents who wear a headscarf or veil should have pictures both with and without the covering. Women asylum seekers stated that police restrained them to remove their head coverings by force and that the restraining methods caused "nonminor" injuries. The court found that the defendants did not intend to hurt the women and that the use of force was necessary and justifiable.

In September, the Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture submitted to parliament proposed changes to animal welfare laws. Proposals included a section on the stunning of animals before slaughter and explicitly did not include religious exemptions for ritual slaughter. Muslim and Jewish organizations, interfaith dialogue groups, and other religious organizations opposed these legal changes, which would affect kosher and halal practices in the country, and they claimed they would potentially violate freedom of religion. Religious community leaders said that the animal welfare law included exemptions for hunting, boiling of crawfish, and sport fishing under the justification that they were part of the country's cultural heritage, but the law explicitly excluded an exemption that would protect the cultural heritage of religious minorities. NGOs and human rights organizations further raised that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry did not consider the human rights or potential future economic impacts of the proposed law.

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health guidelines for immigrants' health and wellbeing discouraged the circumcision of males and continued to withhold public healthcare funding for such procedures. In its guidelines, which were recommendations rather than requirements per prior Supreme Court rulings, the

ministry stated only licensed physicians should perform nonmedical circumcision of boys, a child's guardians should be informed of the risks and irreversibility of the procedure, and the procedure should not be carried out without their consent on boys old enough to understand the procedure. The ministry termed nonmedical male circumcision a violation of child bodily integrity and self-determination. Members of the Muslim and Jewish communities continued to express disagreement with the guidelines as expressions of antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. Muslim community leaders reported that because circumcision was only available through a small number of private clinics and was not part of the publicly funded health care system, many families had to travel abroad to have their sons circumcised. The leaders added that this was a heavy financial burden to some communities.

In September, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare sent a questionnaire to over 40 government and civil society stakeholder organizations on the topic of "Cultural Diversity" as part of the Childhood without Violence Action Plan. The survey asked organizations to "start a discussion about the age limit [for circumcision], i.e. to postpone circumcision until the boy can participate in decision-making himself." The survey asked each organization to provide a short description of factors that promoted or impeded implementation of the discussion and requested information on actions taken since summer 2021. The Finnish Jewish Community noted that the framing of the questions was stigmatizing, not consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and perpetuated incorrect information about the practice of Judaism in the country. Members of various Muslim communities also criticized the survey.

During 2022, according to representatives from Jehovah's Witnesses, the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS) rejected more than 50 percent of claims by members of Jehovah's Witnesses from Russia and continued to state that asylum adjudicators did not consider membership in the church alone to be sufficient basis for an asylum claim. In the first half of 2022, there were nine cases pending before the Supreme Administrative Court. At least four families or members facing deportation to Russia received positive interim decisions by the UN Human Rights Committee. Some Jehovah's Witnesses obtained the right to remain in the country due to work-related reasons after FIS denied their asylum appeal while others departed to a third country.

According to representatives of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Finland, the FIS continued to deny most asylum applications for Ahmadi Muslims from Pakistan. The representatives said the FIS only considered “prominent persons” or “persons who have experienced direct violence” in the Ahmadi community to be in danger, while other Ahmadis should be able to move to safer areas of Pakistan instead of seeking asylum. The representatives said that when deportation orders were appealed, authorities requested proof that the individuals in question were in danger instead of considering the systematic persecution Ahmadis faced in Pakistan. Ahmadi community leaders said they were never consulted on how to confirm or verify the membership or persecution status of asylum seekers. They said that asylum applications continued to decrease because individuals who faced persecution were unwilling to start the asylum process, knowing that it would ultimately be unsuccessful. NGOs working with refugees and asylum seekers in Finland said that there was a need for additional training on religious persecution issues in asylum decision-making.

According to a senior military officer, the military continued to maintain a zero-tolerance policy regarding hate speech and hate crimes, including religiously motivated incidents. According to senior officials, there were no reports of religiously motivated hate crimes in the first half of 2022 (the latest period for which statistics were available). For past suspected acts violating equality with potential religious motivations, unit commanders initiated investigations of reported incidents. If a commander judged the infraction to be minor, he or she administered a formal reprimand or other punishment. For more serious offenses, the commander reported the investigation up the chain of command, and military authorities might refer the case to civilian courts. The officer also stated that the military accommodated, per regulation, religious dietary needs and fasting requirements and granted religious leave and prayer time to all personnel equally. Some religious community leaders raised concerns that there have been gaps in accommodating all religious dietary needs, particularly for service members observing strict kosher or halal diets, and they said that it was difficult to find information on accommodations. Religious leaders suggested that additional chaplains representing additional religious communities were necessary to ensure appropriate dietary and leave accommodations.

Religious community leaders stated that reported hate crime statistics continue to significantly undercount incidences of hate crimes. A member of the National

Forum for Cooperation of Religions (CORE Forum), an interfaith dialogue group, stated that many members of Muslim communities, particularly women who wear hijabs, encountered verbal and physical harassment that had gone unreported because previous reports were unaddressed. Several Muslim community members reported that harassment on public transportation was particularly prevalent. After the tabloid *Ilta-lehti* revealed that Left Alliance MP Suldaan Said Ahmed had the highest taxi expenses from September 2021 to March 2022, parliament's Director of Administration Pertti Rauhio confirmed that Said Ahmed had been told not to use public transport due to security concerns. Rauhio did not confirm whether the security issues were related to religiously or ethnically motivated harassment or violence.

On February 18, a district court in the southwest of the country found Jyrki Aland, former chairperson of the Turku local association of the Finns Party, guilty on two charges of ethnic agitation for statements he made in 2019 and 2021 in which he threatened violence and expressed the hope that more Muslim immigrants would die of COVID-19. The court sentenced Aland to 60 day-fines totaling €1,200 (\$1,300). The severity of a sentencing fine reflects the number of day-fines, while the monetary value of the day-fine is set by one's income level.

On March 30, a Helsinki district court dismissed all three charges against Christian Democrat MP and former Minister of the Interior Paivi Rasanen, whose trial centered around negative written and verbal statements she made about homosexuality and LGBTQI+ persons. While the court stated that the statements underlying the charges were offensive, it found that they did not reach a level of incitement to hatred outside the protection of freedom of expression. In April, the state prosecutor submitted an appeal, and the Court of Appeals scheduled a hearing, to begin in August 2023. Rasanen defended her statements as expressions of her deeply held religious beliefs. The court also dismissed related charges against Dr. Juhana Pohjola, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland, for distribution of a 2004 booklet that included Rasanen's statements.

In April, Oulu District Court upheld the conviction of Finns Party MP Sebastian Tynkkynen on charges of ethnic agitation in connection with Facebook posts from 2017 that were part of a municipal election campaign. In the posts, Tynkkynen published several pictures and texts referencing "the criminal behavior of Muslim

asylum seekers and immigrants towards women and children.” Tynkkynen denied all charges, stating that his posts were moderate and in accordance with freedom of expression. The court determined that the posts were not an expression of acceptable criticism of immigration policy within the limits of freedom of expression and that they met the criteria for incitement against a minority group.

Several Muslim groups reported that there continued to be a shortage of appropriate cemetery space and that they faced political difficulties associated with purchasing, funding, and maintaining burial sites. One community organizer said that 16 cities in the south had rejected bids for the establishment of a Muslim cemetery. Members of the Ahmadi community said that discussions for establishing a Muslim cemetery in Turku collapsed because the city said it would limit the cemetery only to the 20 to 30 Ahmadis living in the city and would not open it to additional Ahmadis from other cities or other Muslims.

Religious leaders, education officials, and educators discussed shortcomings in the national curriculum, teacher training, and teaching for religious education. While the National Board of Education issues a basic curriculum for Islamic education, municipalities may decline its use, sometimes creating gaps in religious education. Muslim community leaders highlighted that some teachers of Islamic education were not practicing Muslims, were unfamiliar with some religious tenets, or were not appropriately trained to teach Islam. While education officials said that being a practicing Muslim should not be a prerequisite for teaching Islamic education classes, several officials also agreed that there is a lack of understanding of the ethnic, cultural, and social heterogeneity within the Muslim population.

In many municipalities, students whose families were registered members of the ELC had to take Lutheran religious education classes even if they preferred to take secular ethics classes. Muslim community members also raised concerns that although the Islamic education curriculum addressed “the diversity of Islam,” the actual education focused on a “general” conception of Islam that could lead to discrimination and the stigmatization of some students who represent minority religious tenets.

Ministry of the Interior and MEC statistics indicated the government allocated €119 million (\$127 million) to the ELC, compared with €118 million (\$126 million) in 2021, and €2.6 million (\$2.8 million) to the Finnish Orthodox Church, equal to

the amount allotted in 2021. The MEC allotted a total of €824,000 (\$880,000) to all other registered religious organizations, equal to the amount allotted in 2021. This sum includes €674,000 (\$720,000), distributed across communities, based on the number of registered members, and €150,000 (\$160,000) to the Helsinki Jewish Congregation to continue its investments in security at facilities and events, following antisemitic incidents. Leaders of minority religions indicated concern over the funding allocation. Several Muslim community leaders noted that congregants' lack of cultural understanding of or opposition to registering their own religious affiliation hurt funding for Muslim communities.

The MEC awarded €80,000 (\$85,000) to promote interfaith dialogue, consistent with funding in 2021. Three organizations split the funding: the CORE Forum, composed of representatives from the largest religious denominations; Fokus, an interfaith and intercultural organization; and Ad Astra, an organization promoting dialogue, interfaith projects, and inclusivity for children in schools, preschools, and daycare facilities.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

On April 6, European Commission Coordinator on Combatting Antisemitism Katharina Von Schnurbein asserted during an address to parliament that awareness of antisemitism and the knowledge of various ways that antisemitism manifests itself were both low in the country. Von Schnurbein noted that only 17 percent of Finns recognize antisemitism as a problem. She highlighted Holocaust denial and distortion and narratives drawing parallels between the oppression of Jewish people in Nazi Germany and governments enforcing COVID-19 vaccinations as two examples of societal antisemitism in the country.

Despite the ban on the self-described Pan-Nordic neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) in the country, members continued to organize under other organizational names, made statements promoting discrimination or violence against Jews and Muslims, and participated in demonstrations. Authorities stated that in 2020, Finnish members of the NRM began operating as part of the Towards Freedom group, considered to be the NRM's successor by the National Bureau of Investigation.

Attempts to build a large grand mosque in the south of the country continued to face opposition; some Muslim community leaders identified politicization of zoning laws, anti-Muslim and racist attitudes in some local communities, and deep divisions across the diverse Muslim community as contributing factors. In January, a comparative study of the mosque project theorized that politicians had acted as gatekeepers in a 2017 decision by the city of Helsinki to reject a grand mosque proposal. The study found that despite making statements in support of religious freedom, policymakers misrepresented religious communities and funding sources. The study concluded that there is a danger of Finnish Muslims being excluded from urban spaces, and it noted that many politicians would be proud of the exclusion.

In February, a Helsinki district court filed ethnic agitation charges against five individuals of Towards Freedom for events held on International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2020. Details of the charges are not yet public.

Finnish researchers studying online extremism stated that public neo-Nazi activities continued to decrease following the ban of the NRM. In its national security assessments, however, the country's Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) reported that there was an increased security threat from supporters and sympathizers of far-right terrorist activity. Supo concluded that lone operators and small groups constituted the most significant danger to national security arising from domestic extremism and highlighted the role of online radicalization in encouraging acts of violence by individual right-wing extremists in the country.

Stickers and posters with antisemitic images and messages appeared on public property throughout the year. Sources stated the vandalism was both random and targeted. Citizens reported antisemitic graffiti and the defacing of public property with antisemitic writing in Helsinki. Representatives of the Jewish community reported that despite available video and photographic evidence of those responsible, police made no arrests in these cases.

In September, a lone protestor disrupted a "March of the Living" event commemorating the Holocaust, shouting antisemitic statements.

In July, protestors wearing swastikas interrupted a Helsinki Pride event organized at a public library. The protestors did not use antisemitic language or messaging.

Anti-Muslim and antisemitic organizations were active across a variety of social media platforms. “Replacement theory” references spread on Facebook, Twitter, the Russian social media network VK, and the American social media network Gab. The European Jewish Congress and leaders of the Helsinki Jewish community reported antisemitic incidents on European social networks, including posts in Finnish, throughout the year. Telegram, VK, Gab, and Twitter spread Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories of Jewish “world domination.”

NGOs working with migrants, including the Finnish Refugee Advice Center, continued to raise concerns about the ability of religious minorities housed in migrant reception centers to worship without harassment from other migrants housed within the same center. Other NGO organizations stated that there were insufficient resources and spaces for LGBTQI+-identifying Muslims to practice their faith free from harassment and threats of violence.

Leaders of Muslim religious organizations were divided concerning the need for additional houses of worship that could accommodate the growing and diverse Muslim community. Representatives from multiple Muslim groups said that they continued to seek adequate houses of worship, but that they were hindered from purchasing property due to insufficient funds and political and neighborhood opposition. Except for a handful of purpose-built mosques, most mosques were located in converted commercial spaces. Other members of the Muslim community said that, in sum, the spaces available were sufficient, but that persons from some religious or ethnic backgrounds may not feel comfortable using the currently available spaces. According to one community leader, while the number of prayer rooms was sufficient, there were not enough spaces providing community services, particularly for women and children, or prayer services in Finnish.

Representatives of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Finland stated that municipalities in the south of the country continued to block their plans to build a self-funded mosque and community center. The city of Espoo denied a proposal in 2022, saying that land identified by the community could not be zoned as a religious space. A representative of one Muslim organization attempting to build a mosque noted that some municipalities would not consider building proposals until after organizations had already purchased land, but that organizations were

not able or willing to purchase land without an agreement in place, as all previous mosque proposals had been denied.

During the year, the nondiscrimination ombudsman's office reported receiving 35 complaints of religious discrimination and nine complaints based on belief, compared with 34 complaints across both categories it received in 2020.

The website *Magneettimedia* continued to post antisemitic content and to spread antisemitic conspiracy theories. In May, the website published an article titled, "Ukraine is Ruled by the Jewish Mafia, Not Volodymyr Zelenskyy" and published a series of pieces featuring antisemitic writing from famous Americans such as Henry Ford. The website also warned of what it said was a coming confrontation between the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish worlds that could lead to the destruction of Christianity.

There was no data available on hate crimes reported during the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Throughout the year, U.S. embassy staff engaged with officials from the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Foreign Affairs as well as with municipal government officials, to discuss religious intolerance, religious education, the promotion of interfaith dialogue, the provision of religious services for refugees and asylum seekers, and the treatment of religious minorities in asylum adjudications.

Embassy staff engaged with Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu clergy and religious leaders, lay activists from these communities, the Finnish Ecumenical Council, and other minority religious groups to discuss the state of religious freedom in the country. Embassy staff and members of the Jewish and Muslim communities discussed the communities' shared concerns about the proposed law that would further limit religious practices of animal slaughter, the impact of government guidelines discouraging male circumcision, and religiously motivated crimes. Embassy staff also discussed anti-Muslim discrimination and problems establishing or maintaining places of worship that fit the needs of the diverse Muslim population with representatives from different Muslim congregations.

In January, the embassy organized a virtual religious freedom roundtable with members of minority religious communities and government officials from across the country and representatives from the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism and the Office of International Religious Freedom. The roundtable brought together diverse leaders of religious communities and interfaith dialogue groups to discuss religious practice issues, including animal slaughter, training for religious education teachers in Finnish schools, and societal respect for freedom of religion.

From July through October, the Ambassador and other embassy officials engaged with cabinet-level officials across the government, political party leaders, key members of parliament, and the country's Jewish and Muslim communities to express U.S. government concerns about the law that would ban religious animal slaughter practices. The embassy coordinated with counterparts in the UK and German diplomatic missions in raising awareness of the potential religious freedom implications of the law.

Embassy staff continued to engage with representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses concerning the high rate of application denials for Jehovah's Witnesses from Russia seeking asylum on grounds of religious persecution. Embassy staff corresponded with representatives of the Ahmadi Muslim community, who expressed concerns over the high rate of denials of asylum applications for Ahmadis from Pakistan and the security situation of the Ahmadi community in the country. Embassy staff also engaged with the predominantly Muslim Uyghur community on religious freedom issues.

Embassy officials used social media to promote Holocaust awareness and also to highlight the embassy's religious freedom engagement.

In October, embassy staff hosted a meeting of the CORE Forum with representatives of other diplomatic missions to discuss religious freedom issues that affect multiple religious communities. In June, embassy staff participated in an online seminar that promoted interfaith dialogue to confront the abuse of religious minorities with participants from across the Nordic region.