

LIECHTENSTEIN 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates everyone is free to choose his or her faith. It makes the state responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the people” and establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion. The constitution stipulates individuals may practice other religious faiths within the bounds of morality and public order. There are criminal penalties for public incitement to hatred toward a religious group, religious discrimination, or disparagement of any religion.

The government’s proposed constitutional amendment to grant complete equality of religions and to formally separate church and state remained pending at year’s end. Parliament accepted the amendment in a first reading in December 2021, but the government took no further action on it during 2022. On January 27, Minister of Infrastructure and Justice Graziella Marok-Wachter held a hybrid event to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day; her remarks focused on how to confront contemporary antisemitism. The government did not make progress on the “Equality for Muslims” petition filed in 2021 by the Islamic Community of the Principality of Liechtenstein (IGFL), one of the country’s three Islamic associations, which called for the establishment of an Islamic cemetery and an additional Muslim prayer room in the country. According to the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association (LHRA), reluctance from potential landlords, the limited availability of suitable properties, and unaffordable rent costs prevented the IGFL from establishing a cemetery and another prayer room in the country during the year. As a result, the IGFL continued to meet in Sevelen, a Swiss town close to Liechtenstein’s capital, Vaduz.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, a scientific research center and academic institution, Muslims continued to face discrimination in society, particularly Muslim women who wore a headscarf when applying for jobs or housing. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), some religious groups in every municipality continued to open their facilities to other denominations and faiths upon request.

The U.S. embassy in Bern, Switzerland, which is responsible for diplomatic relations with the country, continued to encourage the promotion of religious

freedom in discussions with the government, the LHRA, and NGOs. With the LHRA and NGOs, embassy staff also discussed establishing a second Islamic prayer room and an Islamic cemetery in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 39,700 (midyear 2022). According to the 2020 census, religious group membership is as follows: 70 percent Roman Catholic, 8 percent Protestant Reformed, 6 percent Muslim, 10 percent with no religious affiliation, 4 percent choosing not to respond, and approximately 2 percent belonging to other religions.

Christian religious groups apart from the Catholic Church are organized in associations. They are: the Reformed Church Liechtenstein, Reformed-Lutheran Church in the Principality of Liechtenstein, Free Evangelical Church Schaan, and Christian-Orthodox Religious Community in the Principality of Liechtenstein. Immigrants, who comprise approximately one-third of the country's population, come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and belong predominantly to the same religious groups as native-born citizens. According to the Liechtenstein Institute, a majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. Muslims are organized in three associations: the Turkish-Islamic Community of the Principality of Liechtenstein; Turkish-Islamic Cultural Association; and IGFL. The Jewish community consists of around 30 individuals, with a Jewish association existing since 2020.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

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

The state and municipalities provide the Catholic Church with some benefits that vary by municipality, including financial support and state maintenance of buildings and grounds owned by the church. Priests are employees of the municipalities. The Protestant Reformed Church and the Reformed-Lutheran Church also receive financial support from the state and municipalities, although significantly less than does the Catholic Church, while Islamic associations do not receive any subsidies.

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may organize themselves as associations, which the commercial registry administers and which gives associations the rights of a legal entities, such as owning property and entering into contracts. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church must register to receive government funding for activities such as providing religious education in schools or offering language courses for foreigners. To register in the commercial registry, as an association, a religious group must follow the same procedures as a non-religious group: it must submit an official letter of application to the Office for Justice within the Ministry of Infrastructure and Justice that includes the organization's name, purpose, board members, and head office location, as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization's statutes. All religious groups registered on the commercial registry are exempt from certain taxes.

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

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

The law requires the inclusion of religious education in the primary and secondary public school curriculum. Students can choose, but they must attend Catholic classes, Protestant Reformed religious classes, or a secular class called “Ethics and Religions.” Should parents of Catholic or Protestant Reformed students wish for them to attend the class on ethics instead, they can do so with an application to the school leadership. The law also grants the Office of Education, which is part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Education, and Sports, the right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. Catholic, Protestant Reformed, and Muslim groups provide the teachers for religious instruction, and the Office of Education pays some or all of their salaries. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with supervision from the Office of Education. Other religious groups registered as associations may provide teachers for optional religious classes if there is a demand for them and may apply for partial funding of the teachers’ salaries from the government’s integration budget, a fund dedicated to supporting projects that enable immigrants to integrate into society.

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

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

Government Practices

The government’s proposed constitutional amendment to grant complete equality of religions and to formally separate church and state remained pending at year’s end. Parliament accepted the amendment in a first reading in December 2021, but the government did not make progress on the legislation during 2022. When he took office in 2021, Prime Minister Daniel Risch pledged to solve during the 2021-2025 legislative period the issue of separation of religion and state, specifically in the areas of state funding for religious communities and the design of denominational religious education in schools, which varied among religious communities.

The government continued to promote religious pluralism and enhance its support for religious equality. For example, in October, it hosted an integration dialogue that brought together representatives of different faiths to discuss topics that included religious freedom.

The government did not make progress on an “Equality for Muslims” petition filed by the IGFL in 2021 that called for the establishment of a dedicated Islamic cemetery and an additional prayer room in the country. In 2021, parliament received the petition favorably and referred it to the Council of Ministers, the country’s highest political body. Media and the LHRA reported that efforts to build another prayer room, an Islamic cemetery, and a community house with a prayer room remained pending without apparent government action on the IGFL petition. The LHRA said that while reluctance from potential property owners and local authorities remained a problem, there were few available properties suitable for prayer rooms, and property costs were very high. All religious groups, including Muslims, were able to bury their dead in the country’s five cemeteries, which the municipalities owned. Municipal cemeteries, however, did not meet the Muslim requirements of having a room for ritual washings or graves directed towards Mecca.

Public schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum.

Funding for religious institutions continued to derive mainly from the municipalities. Municipalities continued to provide the Catholic and Protestant Reformed Churches annual subsidies in proportion to their population in the municipalities. The MFA stated that municipalities allocated funding for specific purposes, such as paying the rent for places of worship, and the MFA remained in regular contact with religious representatives regarding funding. The Liechtenstein Institute noted that while taxes helped to finance Catholic and Protestant Reformed Churches, Muslim associations did not receive any funding from the state or municipalities. The MFA said that except for the Catholic Church, religious communities were defined as private associations and could apply for state funding. According to the MFA, state support for the three Islamic religious associations was tied to the condition that they establish a joint umbrella organization, which did not take place by year’s end. The government did not require the same condition for the two reformed church communities.

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

On January 27, during a hybrid event on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Minister Marok-Wachter emphasized publicly the importance of a lasting culture of remembrance to counter contemporary antisemitism.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Turkish-Islamic Community of the Principality Liechtenstein continued to operate the one mosque in the country, in leased space in Triesen. Lacking its own facilities in the country, the IGFL used facilities in Sevelen, a short drive away in neighboring Switzerland, as a mosque and prayer room.

The Jewish community, consisting of around 30 individuals, met at a synagogue in neighboring Switzerland.

According to the MFA, some religious groups in every municipality opened their facilities to other denominations and faiths upon request. For example, the Catholic Church in Schaan continued to make its facilities available to the Christian Orthodox community, which did not have a facility of its own, to hold an Orthodox Easter Sunday service. According to the MFA, there was no centralized information on whether and how particular religious groups allowed other faiths to use their places of worship.

According to the LHRA, Muslims continued to face discrimination in society, particularly Muslim women in the labor force who wore headscarves, especially in academia, where the LHRA said they were considered foreigners and were met with distrust. The LHRA also reported Muslim women wearing headscarves encountered discrimination in applying for jobs and housing, such as renting an apartment.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy staff continued to encourage the promotion of religious freedom in conversations with the MFA's specialist for human rights and international law.

With the LHRA and NGOs, embassy staff also continued to discuss the impact of the lack of formal separation between religion and state, Muslim proposals to create an Islamic cemetery and prayer rooms, and the extent of societal discrimination against Muslims.