



Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **61.4%**
- Agnostics : **20.1%**
- Atheists : **11.5%**
- Muslims : **5.8%**
- Others : **1.2%**

9,852,000

438,574 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The constitution of the Kingdom of Sweden guarantees freedom of religion.^[1] It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation ^[2] and, under the Swedish Discrimination Act, complaints may be filed with the Discrimination Ombudsman.^[3]

Recognition or registration of groups is not required to carry out religious activities and faith communities are taxed similarly to non-profit organisations. Religious groups officially recognised by the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST) may, however, raise revenues by collecting contributions through the tax agency and receiving publicly funded grants.^[4]

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on religious belief.^[5] Police maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes and the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) is responsible for the production of hate crime data.^[6]

Instruction covering all world religions is required in all public and private schools. Religious groups are permitted to establish private schools, provided they meet state curriculum requirements.^[7] Home schooling, including for religious reasons, is not permitted except under “extraordinary circumstances”^[8]

On 13th March 2018 the governing Swedish Social Democrats proposed a ban on all independent religious schools^[9]

There are legal restrictions on both animal slaughter and circumcision of males.^[10]

In 2016 the government appointed a Special Envoy to combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia based at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs ^[11] and in November 2016 released a “national plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility, and hate crimes”.^[12]

Incidents

With respect to reports of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim activity, it should be noted that, because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it might be difficult to determine whether an incident is motivated by racism, political conflicts, or by religious intolerance.

Official 2016 figures reported to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) include 264 crimes which were motivated by bias against Christians (32 physical assault; 92 cases of damage to property; 130 disturbances of the peace; 10 unspecified). There were five submissions by civil society groups about incidents against Christians (multiple incidents in which Christian refugees were threatened while residing in reception centres and accommodations; three incidents involving damage to property)^[13]

According to a 2017 survey by Open Doors, Christian refugees and new arrivals in Sweden experienced religiously motivated violence and discrimination, mainly at the hands of Muslim fellow refugees.^[14]

The Swedish Migration Board was criticised for administering “Christianity tests” to asylum seekers who based their asylum claims on their conversion from Islam to Christianity.^[15] In July 2017 the government’s Migration Board rejected a Christian convert’s asylum claim despite acknowledging that conversion is a crime for which she would likely be punished upon deportation to Iran.^[16]

Attacks on Christian buildings included a man who, shouting “Allahu Akbar”, smashed stained-glass windows in a church in central Malmö in June 2016,^[17] repeated vandalism against a Catholic church in Karlstad in August 2016,^[18] Islamic State graffiti on a Catholic church in Västerås in May 2017^[19] and an arson attack against a Catholic church in Luleå in July 2017.^[20]

According to the 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database, officials recorded 122 anti-Semitic hate crimes (10 physical attacks, 18 cases of damage to property, 90 disturbances of the peace and four unspecified). Civil society groups reported one incident (a bomb threat against a synagogue).^[21]

In April 2017, a Jewish association in Umeå announced it would close after repeated vandalism with swastikas and threatening messages by the neo-Nazi group Nordfront.^[22] In response, the Anti-Defamation League expressed concern about inadequate security for Jewish institutions across Sweden and urged the Prime Minister to protect them.^[23]

In reaction to US President Donald Trump’s December 2017 decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, protests in Malmö included violent anti-Semitic slogans. The spokesperson for the city’s Jewish community said there “is a latent threat against Jews in Malmö, and when things heat up in the Middle East that threat becomes more real”.^[24]

Within a few days of the December 2017 demonstrations, a Gothenburg synagogue was the victim of a Molotov cocktail attack ^[25] and burning objects were thrown at a Jewish cemetery in Malmö.^[26] The Conference of European Rabbis requested a meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister over rising anti-Semitism in Sweden.^[27]

The 2016 Hate Crime Reporting database provides official figures of 330 crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias (38 physical assaults, 64 cases of damage to property, 220 disturbances of the peace, and eight unspecified)^[28] There were no incidents reported by civil society groups.^[29]

There were multiple attacks on Islamic places of worship during the period under review. Daesh (ISIS) took responsibility for the arson at a Malmö Shi’a mosque in October 2016.^[30] In November 2016, unidentified individuals burst into a

mosque in Stockholm and spray-painted swastikas on the walls and threw firecrackers.^[31]

In April 2017, Sweden's largest Shi'a mosque, the Imam Ali Islamic Centre in a Stockholm suburb, was the victim of an arson attack.^[32] In September 2017, a mosque in Orebro was heavily damaged by arson.^[33] In December 2017, the Islamic Cultural Centre near Karlstad was attacked with a home-made bomb, with windows broken and walls hit with explosives reinforced with pellets.^[34] A Stockholm mosque was vandalised with swastika graffiti in January 2018.^[35]

Uzbek national Rakhmat Akilov, 39, was charged with committing a terrorist crime and intent to "run over unbelievers" after pleading guilty to stealing a truck and running over people in a busy shopping district in Stockholm.^[36] Five people were killed and 15 people were injured in the attack in April 2017. Uzbekistan stated that it had notified the West about Akilov, indicating that he had been radicalised after moving to Sweden in 2014. Hours after the truck attack, a Somali Muslim taxi driver in Stockholm was assaulted by a man who blamed the incident on Sweden's "openness to Muslim immigrants".^[37]

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

While it appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom in Sweden during the period under review, there appears to be an increased risk of societal intolerance against both majority and minority religions, some of which may be as a result of global terrorism or geopolitical conflicts attributed to religious groups, as well as anti-immigration sentiments in Sweden.

Sources / Endnotes

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