

DENMARK 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees the right of individuals to worship according to their beliefs. It establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) as the national church, which has privileges not available to other religious groups. Other religious groups must register with the government to receive tax and other benefits. In August a law to ban masks and face coverings in public spaces, including burqas and *niqabs*, entered into force. The government added seven new individuals, including two Americans, to a “hate preachers” list during the year, banning them from entering the country. In December parliament enacted a law instituting a handshake requirement for persons becoming citizens that critics said targeted Muslims. In June a citizen-driven petition to ban circumcision for individuals younger than age 18 acquired enough signatures to be debated in parliament. The measure, strongly opposed by the Jewish and Muslim communities, was scheduled for a vote in 2019, and a majority of political parties said they would vote against it. In January the government unveiled an action plan against what it called “ghetto” communities, which critics interpreted to mean Muslims, that included mandatory religious teaching on Christmas and Easter during day care for children receiving government benefits. The immigration and integration minister made statements critical of Islam.

Police reported 142 religiously motivated crimes in 2017, 61 percent more than in 2016. There were 67 incidents, including assault and a death threat, against Muslims and 38 against Jews. Separately, the Jewish community in Copenhagen reported 30 anti-Semitic acts in that city in 2017, including aggravated harassment, threats, and hate speech. Jewish and Muslim community leaders stated most victims did not report incidents because they believed police would not follow up. The Nye Borgerlige Party adopted a platform critical of Islam.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials regularly met with foreign ministry and other government representatives, including at the cabinet level, to raise Jewish and Muslim concerns over proposals to ban male circumcision and the prohibition on masks and face coverings. They also met with religious groups, including Jews, Muslims, the ELC, Buddhists, and humanists and atheists, as well as nongovernmental organizations, to discuss their concerns and stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 5.8 million (July 2018 estimate). According to an October estimate by Statistics Denmark, the government statistical office, 75 percent of all citizens are members of the ELC.

The University of Copenhagen's Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies estimated in October 2017 that Muslims constitute 5.3 percent of the population. Muslim groups are concentrated in the largest cities, particularly Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates other religious groups, each constituting less than 1 percent of the population, include, in descending order of size, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Jews, Baptists, Buddhists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Pentecostals, and nondenominational Christians. Although estimates vary, the Jewish Society (previously known as Mosaik) stated the Jewish population numbers approximately 7,000, most of whom live in the Copenhagen metropolitan area. A 2017 Pew Research Center poll found 30 percent of persons identified as religiously unaffiliated.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the ELC as the country's established Church, which shall receive state support and to which the reigning monarch must belong. The constitution also states individuals shall be free to form congregations to worship according to their beliefs, providing nothing "at variance with good morals or public order shall be taught or done." It specifies that, "rules for religious bodies dissenting from the established Church shall be laid down by statute." It stipulates that no person may be deprived of access to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights because of religious beliefs, and that these beliefs shall not be used to evade compliance with civic duty. It prohibits requiring individuals to make personal financial contributions to religious denominations to which they do not adhere.

The law prohibits hate speech, including religious hate speech, and specifies as penalties a fine (amount unspecified) or a maximum of one year's imprisonment. If a religious leader disseminates the hate speech, the penalties increase to a fine or a maximum of three years' imprisonment.

The law permits the government to prevent religious figures who are foreign nationals and do not already have a residence permit from entering the country if

the Ministry of Immigration and Integration determines their presence poses a threat to the public order. In such cases, the ministry places the individuals on a national sanctions list and bars them from entry into the country for a two-year period, which may be renewed.

The ELC is the only religious group that receives funding through state grants and voluntary taxes paid through payroll deduction from its members. Members receive a tax credit for their donations to the ELC. The voluntary taxes account for an estimated 86 percent of the ELC's operating budget; the remaining 14 percent is provided through a combination of voluntary donations by congregants and government grants. Members of other recognized religious communities cannot contribute via payroll deduction but may donate to their own community voluntarily and receive an income tax credit. The ELC and other state-recognized religious communities carry out registration of civil unions, births, and deaths for their members.

On May 31, the government enacted a law prohibiting masks and face coverings, including burqas and *niqabs*, in public spaces. Violators may be fined 1,000-10,000 kroner (\$150-\$1,500). The maximum fine is for those who violate the law four or more times.

The Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs has responsibility for granting official status to religious groups besides the ELC through recognition by royal decree (for groups recognized prior to 1970) or through official registration. According to the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs, there are (as of November) 315 religious groups and congregations the government officially recognizes or that are affiliated with recognized groups: 208 Christian groups, 62 Muslim, 17 Buddhist, nine Hindu, three Jewish, and 16 other groups and congregations, including the Baha'i Faith, the Alevi Muslim community, and followers of the indigenous Norse belief system Forn Sidr.

Recognized religious groups have the right to perform legal marriage ceremonies, name and baptize children with legal effect, issue legal death certificates, obtain residence permits for foreign clergy, establish cemeteries, and receive tax-deductible financial donations and various valued-added tax exemptions. A religious community law enacted in December 2017 effective on January 1 allows only religious communities recognized before 1970 to issue name, baptismal, and marriage certificates. According to the law, this privilege will expire for all religious communities except the ELC in 2023. Members of other religious

communities or individuals unaffiliated with a recognized religious group may opt to have birth and death certificates issued by the health authority.

Groups not recognized by either royal decree or a government registration process, such as the Church of Scientology, are entitled to engage in religious practices without any kind of public registration, but members of those groups must marry in a civil ceremony in addition to any religious ceremony. Unrecognized religious groups are not granted fully tax-exempt status, but they have some tax benefits; for example, contributions by members are tax-deductible.

The religious community law that came into force in January codifies for the first time the registration process for religious communities other than the ELC and eliminates the previous distinction between those recognized by royal decree and those approved through registration. For a religious community to be recognized, it must have at least 150 members, while a congregation, which the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs considers as a group within one of the major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), must consist of at least 50 adult members to be approved. For congregations located in sparsely populated regions, such as Greenland, the government applies a lower population threshold, varying according to the total population of the region. The guidelines for approval of religious organizations require religious groups seeking registration to submit a document on the group's central traditions; descriptions of its most important rituals; a copy of its rules, regulations, and organizational structure; an audited financial statement; information about the group's leadership; and a statement on the number of adult members permanently residing in the country. Groups must also have formal procedures for membership and make their teachings available to all members. The Ministry of Justice makes the final decision on registration applications after receiving recommendations from a group consisting of a lawyer, religious historian, sociologist of religion, and nonordained theologian.

The law bans judges from wearing religious symbols such as headscarves, turbans, skullcaps, and large crucifixes while in court.

All public and private schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. Public schools must teach ELC theology; the instructors are public school teachers rather than persons provided by the ELC. Religious classes are compulsory in grades 1-9, although students may be exempted if a parent presents a request in writing. No alternative classes are offered. The ELC course curriculum in grades 1-6 focuses on life philosophies and ethics, biblical stories,

and the history of Christianity. In grades 7-9, the curriculum adds a module on world religions. The course is optional in grade 10. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption. Private schools are also required to teach religion classes in grades 1-9, including world religion in grades 7-9. The religion classes taught in grades 1-9 need not include ELC theology. Collective prayer in schools is allowed if it does not include proselytizing. Prayers are optional at the discretion of each school. They may consist of ELC, other Christian, Muslim, or Jewish prayers, and students may opt out of participating.

Military conscription is mandatory for all physically fit men older than 18. Women may participate but are not obligated to do so. Military service is typically four months. There is an exemption for conscientious objectors, including on religious grounds, allowing conscientious objectors to perform alternative civilian service, which also has a period of four months, instead. An individual wishing to perform alternative service as a conscientious objector must apply within eight weeks of receiving notice of military service. The application is adjudicated by the Conscientious Objector Administration and must show that military service of any kind is incompatible with the individual's conscience. The alternative service may take place in various social and cultural institutions, peace movements, organizations related to the United Nations, churches and ecumenical organizations, and environmental organizations throughout the country.

The law prohibits ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning, including kosher and halal slaughter. The law allows for slaughter according to religious rites with prior stunning and limits such slaughter to cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens. All slaughter must take place at a slaughterhouse. Slaughterhouses practicing ritual slaughter are obliged to register with the Veterinary and Food Administration. Violations of this law are punishable by fines or up to four months in prison. Halal and kosher meat may be imported.

A law that came into force on May 1 requires clergy members with legal authorization to officiate at marriages to have an adequate mastery of the Danish language and to complete a two-day course on family law and civil rights, administered by the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs. The law also includes a requirement that religious workers "must not behave or act in a way that makes them unworthy to exercise public authority." Religious workers perceived as not complying with the new provisions may be stripped of their right to perform marriages.

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

Government Practices

During the year, the government added seven new individuals, including two Americans, to a “hate preachers” list that barred those individuals from entering the country. The Ministry of Immigration and Integration stated these individuals threatened the nation’s values and public security.

In April Minister of Justice Soren Pape Poulsen stated the government enacted the law banning face coverings because concealing the face was antithetical to the social interaction and coexistence that was crucial in a society. According to a 2010 survey by the University of Copenhagen, an estimated 150 to 200 women in the country wore a *niqab* and three wore a burqa. Widespread media reporting portrayed the ban as targeting Muslim women. Poulsen called the *niqab* “incompatible with the values in Danish society,” while Martin Henriksen, the immigration spokesperson for the Danish People’s Party, one of the country’s largest political parties, called the vote a “statement from parliament that the burqa and *niqab* do not belong in Denmark.” Religious groups and several human rights groups protested the ban. Amnesty International said the law “essentially criminalizes women for their choice of clothing, making a mockery of the freedoms Denmark purports to uphold.”

In August an estimated 1,300 Muslims and non-Muslims wearing veils marched from Norrebro, a neighborhood in Copenhagen with a high concentration of immigrants, to a local police station to protest the law banning face coverings. Ministry of Justice officials declined to prosecute protesters, stating wearing a burqa or *niqab* in this instance was an act of protest and protected as freedom of expression.

In the first six months of the ban, 109 violations were filed with the National Police, resulting in 22 charges and 13 fines; 31 other cases resulted in a warning, with the person either removing the face covering or leaving the public space. Eight other inquiries were dismissed because the violation was in connection with a demonstration. Media reports stated the first fine involved a woman who wore a *niqab* in a shopping complex. She received a 1,000 kroner (\$150) fine, and authorities asked her to remove the veil or leave the public space; she chose to leave. The Muslim community reported one family emigrated because of the law.

According to the a November 15 executive order from the minister of church affairs, the religious community law that entered into force in January incentivized individual congregations within a religious community to formally register with the government in order to receive tax benefits. Some religious groups also anticipated that under the new law, individuals would be able to make tax-deductible donations to specific congregations rather than to the broader religious community to which the congregation belonged. As such, the total number of registered religious communities and congregations was expected to increase.

In June parliament debated a citizen-driven petition to ban circumcision of individuals younger than 18. Although the petition proposed banning circumcision of minors of both sexes, the law already prohibited female circumcision. The petition acquired the necessary signatures pursuant to a new law requiring petitions with more than 50,000 signatures to be debated in parliament. According to a January poll by research firm Megafon, 83 percent of persons expressed public support for the ban. Advocates of the ban led by NGO INTACT Denmark stressed their concern for the rights of children, but Muslim and Jewish communities opposed it and formed an interreligious working group to lobby the government against it. The debate on banning circumcision also played out on social media. For example, individuals posted anti-Semitic comments – such as “bloody child abuse is part of Jewish rituals” – on INTACT Denmark’s Facebook page. On July 11, Rabbi Melchior of the Jewish Society said, “The opponents of circumcision are not anti-Semites, but if they succeed in convincing the politicians into banning it, it will be an anti-Semitic act.” Finn Rudaizky, a former leader of the Jewish Society of Denmark, stated in June that, “In addition to children’s welfare activists, many others use the situation to show that they are against Jews, Muslims, and they can express anti-Semitism and xenophobia without admitting to it.”

In October Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen linked the country’s historical rescue of the Jews in 1943 to the debate on circumcision, vowing to protect the Jews once again. A majority of parliamentarians came out against the ban on its first reading in November, and at year’s end, the bill sat with the Health and Elderly Committee for further study before a final parliamentary vote scheduled for the spring of 2019.

In January the government announced a new action plan to eliminate “parallel societies” emerging from what it called “ghetto” communities. Part of the government’s definition of “ghetto” community was a non-Western majority population, which media widely interpreted to mean Muslims. Initiatives parliament enacted during the year included doubling of penalties for crimes

committed in ghetto-designated communities and mandatory enrollment of children in day care or loss of child benefits. The Muslim community expressed concerns about the compulsory day care, which had a component of 25 hours per week of instruction, including religious teaching about Christmas and Easter.

In February Minister of Immigration and Integration Inger Stojberg wrote an article titled “The Sad Truth about Islam” for the *BT* newspaper and also posted on social media. Stojberg stated Danes had “lost” and “become scared by a religion [Islam] whose fanatics have threatened us to silence.” She said, “[I]t is primarily the followers of the so-called religion of peace, Islam, which actually engages [sic] with weapons, violence, and terror.” Citing the play *The Book of Mormon*, which had recently opened in Copenhagen, in the article, Stojberg said performing a similar play in the country about Islam was “unthinkable.” Stojberg has had round-the-clock police protection since 2015 due to numerous threats against her.

In May Stojberg called for Muslims fasting during Ramadan to take time off from work because she believed they were unable to perform their jobs safely. Colleagues from her own Liberal (Venstre) Party called for Stojberg to provide evidence to support her statement; she did not respond.

On December 20, parliament enacted into law a proposal introduced by the Conservative and Danish People’s Parties requiring persons obtaining Danish citizenship to shake hands during naturalization ceremonies. Critics said the law, scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2019, targeted Muslims, who declined on religious grounds to shake hands with members of the opposite sex. Media reported some of the mayors who conducted naturalization ceremonies objected to the law, which they called awkward and irrelevant to an applicant’s qualifications. Mayor of Sonderborg Erik Lauritzen announced he would overlook the handshake requirement if applicants showed respect for authorities another way; Mayor of Aabenraa Thomas Andresen stated he would not feel comfortable reporting a noncompliant applicant and urged the national government to administer the ceremony rather than the municipality. Imam Falah Malik from Nusrat Djahan Mosque called on applicants to show respect another way but, if a handshake was required between members of the opposite sex, to skip the ceremony. Parliamentarian and spokesperson on immigration for the Danish People’s Party Henriksen said of the law, “If one can’t do something that simple and straightforward [shake hands], there’s no reason to become a Danish citizen.”

In September TV2 Ostjylland reported the municipality of Horsens would offer citizens a chance to specifically opt out of halal or kosher meat at municipal

institutions starting in January 2019. Horsens city councilor from the Danish People's Party Michael Nedersoer said, "This is an offer for those people who don't want a Muslim prayer over their food or think halal slaughter is on the edge of animal abuse." The Danish People's Party had called on municipal authorities to try to ban halal meat from municipal institutions during local elections in November 2017. Henriksen, the party's immigration spokesperson, said at the time, "It's wrong when the food in public institutions is blessed by an imam." Opponents in Horsens to the originally proposed ban on halal meat, such as Horsens city councilor Saliem Bader from the Social Democratic Party, stated the new proposal did not ban halal meat but rather offered people a chance to opt out of eating it.

The government continued to provide armed security, consisting of police and military, for Jewish sites it considered to be at high risk of terrorist attack, including Copenhagen's synagogue and community center and schools. Officials from the Jewish Society reported continued good relations with police and the ability to communicate their concerns to authorities, including the minister of justice.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of religiously motivated incidents against Muslims, Jews, and members of other religious groups. Jewish community leaders from the Jewish Society and B'nai B'rith stated anti-Semitic behavior emanated from Muslims rather than far-right or far-left ideologues. Both Jewish and Muslim community leaders said most incidents were not reported because of a widespread belief police would not follow up or prosecute perpetrators.

According to police statistics for 2017, the most recent year for which data were available, there were 67 religiously motivated hate crimes against Muslims, 38 against Jews, and 37 against other religions. The total of 142 crimes was 61 percent higher than the 88 reported in the previous year. Forty-two crimes, typically vandalism, occurred at gravesites or religious institutions; 43 in public settings such as supermarkets, parks, or buses; 31 on the internet; 21, typically involving graffiti, at private residences; and five in the workplace or schools.

Representatives of Copenhagen's Jewish Society separately reported 30 anti-Semitic acts against Copenhagen's Jewish community, its community center, or synagogue in 2017. The acts included two cases of aggravated and physical

harassment, three cases of threats or intimidation, 24 cases of anti-Semitic slurs or language, and one uncategorized case.

In July the Copenhagen District Court charged Imam Mundhir Abdallah from the Masjid al-Faruq Mosque under the law against hate speech in religious preaching for posting a YouTube video in 2017 calling on Muslims to kill Jews. Omar El-Hussein, who committed a terrorist attack at the Jewish synagogue in Copenhagen in 2015, had attended the same mosque the day before going on his shooting spree. At year's end, the case was pending trial.

In August a woman in the city of Odense prevented a Muslim woman from taking her parking space. A video recording showed the woman stating she would not give up her parking spot because the other woman wore a headscarf. The incident received prominent national news coverage.

Among the incidents against Muslims police reported in 2017 was one where three men beat up a man in a parking lot after asking if he was Muslim. In another case, a man threatened a Muslim woman with his dog and said, "You're going to die... I don't like Muslims...you are going to hell."

In October 2017, a man posted threats of violence against Muslims as part of a self-described "poem as cultural input" on his Facebook page that authorities determined to be "macabre and threatening words." In October the Aalborg District Court convicted the man of hate speech and fined him 4,000 kroner (\$610).

In December the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) released its second survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism. EU-FRA targeted Jewish populations through community organizations, Jewish media, and social networks; 592 individuals identifying themselves as Jewish residents of Denmark responded to the online survey. One-quarter said they had witnessed other Jews being physically attacked, insulted, or harassed in the previous 12 months, and 29 percent reported being harassed over the same period. Twenty-four percent of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because of their religion or belief; 85 percent thought anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

Members of both the Jewish and Muslim communities spoke highly of each other's efforts in forming an interreligious working group to lobby government leaders against the proposed ban on circumcision.

A 2017 Pew Research Center poll found 20 percent of persons agreed that government policies should support religious values and beliefs in the country; 43 percent agreed with the statement that Islam was fundamentally incompatible with the country's culture and values.

Nye Borgerlige, a political party established in 2015 and holding a single municipal political office in the country, described Islam as incompatible with Danish values. The party, which said it would contest national elections in 2019, called on the state not to grant recognition to Muslim communities or award grants to Muslim schools and to refrain from selling public land on which to build mosques. The party also advocated a ban on headscarves in public schools and for public officeholders. In June Nye Borgerlige leader Pernille Vermund cited Mogens Glistrup, founder of the Progress Party, which was widely described as anti-Muslim, as her party's inspiration.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with foreign ministry and other government officials, including cabinet members, to raise Jewish and Muslim concerns over the ban on masks and face coverings, including burqas and *niqabs*, and the proposed ban on circumcision of minors.

Embassy officials met with various religious leaders from the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities throughout the year. In January the U.S. Department of State's Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia met with government officials and religious community leaders on ways to combat anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment.

In February the Ambassador met with Jewish community leaders from the Jewish Society to discuss the community's concern regarding the proposed ban on circumcision. In March embassy officials met with the Muslim Council, an umbrella organization of Muslim associations to discuss circumcision, the then-proposed ban on masks and face coverings, and its general views regarding religious freedom and tolerance in the country. The Ambassador also met with the bishop of the ELC to reaffirm U.S. government commitment to religious freedom and tolerance.

In February and March embassy officials met with representatives from the Buddhist, humanist, and atheist communities to discuss concerns regarding registration as religious organizations and their access to politicians. In October

embassy representatives raised concerns about the pending circumcision ban with members of parliament's Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee.

In October the Ambassador gave the keynote speech for Jewish organization B'nai B'rith, emphasizing the strong U.S. government commitment to religious freedom. Her remarks were widely shared among the organization's European branches. The embassy amplified the Ambassador's engagements with religious community officials throughout the year in embassy social media postings and on Facebook and Twitter.