



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [2010 Report on International Religious Freedom](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » [Ireland](#)

Ireland

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2010

November 17, 2010

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles and a population of 4.3 million. According to the 2006 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 86.8 percent Catholic, 2.9 percent Church of Ireland, 0.76 percent Muslim, 0.68 percent unspecified Christian, 0.55 percent Presbyterian, 0.49 percent Orthodox Christian, 0.28 percent Methodist, less than 0.1 percent Jewish, and 6 percent unaffiliated.

An estimated 57,300 immigrants arrived in the country during the reporting period; almost half of these immigrants came from other European Union states. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin.

A poll conducted October 19 to 21, 2009 for the Catholic Iona Institute, based on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,000 adults aged 18 and over, found that weekly church attendance among Catholics was 46 percent while monthly attendance was 65 percent.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The constitution prohibits promotion of one religious group over another and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion.

The constitution provides that "publication or utterance" of "blasphemous matter" is an offense punishable in accordance with law, but it does not define blasphemy. In the absence of legislation and in the uncertain state of the law, the courts have not prosecuted anyone for blasphemy in several years.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day.

There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religious belief or group.

The government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management are governed partially by trustees who are members of the Catholic Church or, in fewer cases, the Church of Ireland or other religious denominations. Under the terms of the constitution, the Department of Education must, and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum of most schools, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003 the Equality Authority declared that church-linked schools are permitted legally to refuse to admit a student who is not of that religious group if the school can prove that the refusal is essential to the maintenance of the "ethos" of the school (for example, too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim "ethos"). However, there were no reports of any children being refused admission to any school for this reason. By law a religious school may select its staff based on their religious beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

In February 2010 a Muslim man took a case to the High Court demanding that the country recognize his polygamous marriage. The man was originally from Lebanon, where polygamy is permitted. He is married to two women and has Irish citizenship. The man entered Ireland with his second wife and claimed asylum. After becoming an Irish citizen, he attempted to bring his first wife to the country, but her visa request was denied. Liam Egan, a member of the Muslim Public Affairs Conference, accused the country of discriminating against Muslims in polygamous families. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In September 2009 a Jewish prisoner complained to the High Court that his constitutional rights were infringed by the failure to serve kosher food in Cloverhill Prison. Cloverhill's deputy governor agreed to allow the Jewish Representative Council of Ireland to visit the prison and inspect the kitchens. The council found the prisoner's dietary requirements were being met.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy continued its engagement program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country.

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Embassy officials met regularly with Muslims and participated in several events hosted by both embassy staff and Muslim groups. The embassy hosted the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship aimed at deepening ties between the United States and Ireland's Muslim community. Embassy officials also met with members of the Jewish community and prominent leaders of Catholic and Protestant groups to discuss ways of promoting religious freedom and to survey the level of religious freedom experienced by various religious groups. The embassy's sixth annual interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue and understanding of religious freedom among governmental and nongovernmental organizations as well as among religious and community leaders; the reception also assisted U.S. government outreach to minority religious groups.

[Back to Top](#)