



OIDAC Europe

Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe

Report 2026







The **Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe** (OIDAC Europe) is a research-based non-governmental organisation based in Vienna, Austria. It focuses on systematically monitoring and analysing restrictions on freedom of religion, discrimination based on religious affiliation or conviction as well as violent incidents, including hate crimes and vandalism targeting Christian individuals and sites.

OIDAC Europe aims to provide objective, reliable and comparable data in order to help politicians, institutions and Christian churches to take effective measures to ensure the safety of places of worship and religious freedom in Europe.

www.intoleranceagainstchristians.eu

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Editorial Team:
Lead Editor: *Anja Tang*
Legal Research: *Victoria C. Fraile Bohorquez, C.M.*
Graphic Design: *Maria Virginia Fraile Bohorquez*

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Introduction

The human right to **freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,** as enshrined in international and European human rights law, protects the very core of human personal freedom. As this right points to the conscience of the human person, which is foundational to human dignity, it can be seen as a philosophical foundation of human rights.[1] Freedom of thought, conscience and religion, together with freedom of expression, has therefore been described as the ***"nucleus of the Bill of Rights"***[2] of the United Nations (UN).

In Europe, religious freedom is protected under the Council of Europe's **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),** which allows for individual complaints before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Nevertheless, increasing restrictions affecting Christians and other believers have been observed in recent decades.

Against this backdrop, the **Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe)** was founded in 2010 with the aim of classifying and providing **objective, reliable and comparable data** on the phenomena of intolerance and discrimination against Christians at the European level, in order to help politicians, institutions and Christian churches to take effective measures to safeguard religious freedom in Europe.

OIDAC Europe's 2026 Annual Report presents data on **(I) anti-Christian hate crimes and social hostility** (observation period: 2025), and **(II) legal restrictions** impacting the religious freedom rights of Christians in Europe (observation period: 2025-2026).



Methodology and Terminology

This report presents exploratory research of the phenomena of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe.

The term **intolerance** refers to the social dimension, i.e. social hostility and anti-Christian hate crimes, including threats or physical violence against Christians and vandalism of Christian places of worship. Data on these incidents are collected using a variety of sources, including government statistics, OSCE/ODIHR hate crime data and incidents collected by local civil society organisations, to ensure comprehensiveness and accuracy.

OIDAC Europe documents hate crimes using the **OSCE/ODIHR framework**,[3] which identifies hate crimes as criminal offence with a bias motivation.

The present report furthermore presents cases in which Christians have faced **discrimination**, referring to the denial of equal rights or disadvantages due to one's religious identity or protected beliefs, for example in the workplace.

Finally, legal restrictions describe a variety of legislation, which have a direct impact on the enjoyment of the human right to religious freedom as enshrined in international human rights law. While these restrictions are not quantifiable, the exemplary cases in this report have been chosen to illustrate the variety of incidents of anti-Christian discrimination, revealing its diverse aspects and far-reaching scope.

Due to the significant number of cases of intolerance, discrimination and legal restrictions affecting the religious freedom of Christians, this report discusses only a selection of incidents. A full list of all recorded cases is available at **www.oidac.eu.**



International Human Rights Legal Framework



FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION[4]

Art 9 ECHR

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.



PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS[5]

Art 14 ECHR

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion...



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION[6]

Art 10 ECHR

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.



PARENTAL RIGHTS AND EDUCATION[7]

Art 2 ECHR Protocol

The State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions.

International Commitments

In Resolution 2036 (2015), *Tackling Intolerance and Discrimination in Europe with a Special Focus on Christians*[8] the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calls upon Member States, inter alia, to:

- Promote a culture of tolerance and "living together" based on the acceptance of religious pluralism (6.1)
- Promote reasonable accommodation within the principle of indirect discrimination (6.2)
- Protect the peaceful exercise of freedom of assembly (6.3)
- Uphold the fundamental right to freedom of expression by ensuring national legislation does not unduly limit religiously motivated speech (6.4)

In its ***Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting 1986 (1989)***[9] **Representatives of the Participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe committed, inter alia, to:**

- Respect the right of these religious communities to (...) organize themselves according to their own hierarchical and institutional structure (16.4)
- Engage in consultations with religious faiths, institutions and organizations in order to achieve a better understanding of the requirements of religious freedom; (16.5)
- Respect (...) the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions (16.7.)
- Favourably consider the interest of religious communities to participate in public dialogue, including through the mass media. (16.11)

The OSCE/ODIHR Practical Guide (2025)[10] ***Understanding Anti-Christian Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Christian Communities*** **recommends Participating States, inter alia, to:**

Improve hate crime reporting, support victims, protect Christian communities and ensure that authorities' language and behaviour do not reinforce prejudice.

Summary of findings

ANTI-CHRISTIAN HATE CRIMES AND SOCIAL HOSTILITY

→ Based on government reports and OSCE/ODIHR data, OIDAC Europe identified **2,465 anti-Christian hate crimes and incidents** for 2025, including at least **395 attacks on individuals.**

→ The highest government-recorded totals were in **France** (843), **England and Wales** (624), **Germany** (337) and **Austria** (134). Differences in national recording methods limit comparisons. Civil-society data collected by OSCE/ODIHR recorded the highest totals in **Germany** (145), **France** (143), **Spain** (113), **Italy** (103), **Poland** (80) and the **United Kingdom** (60).

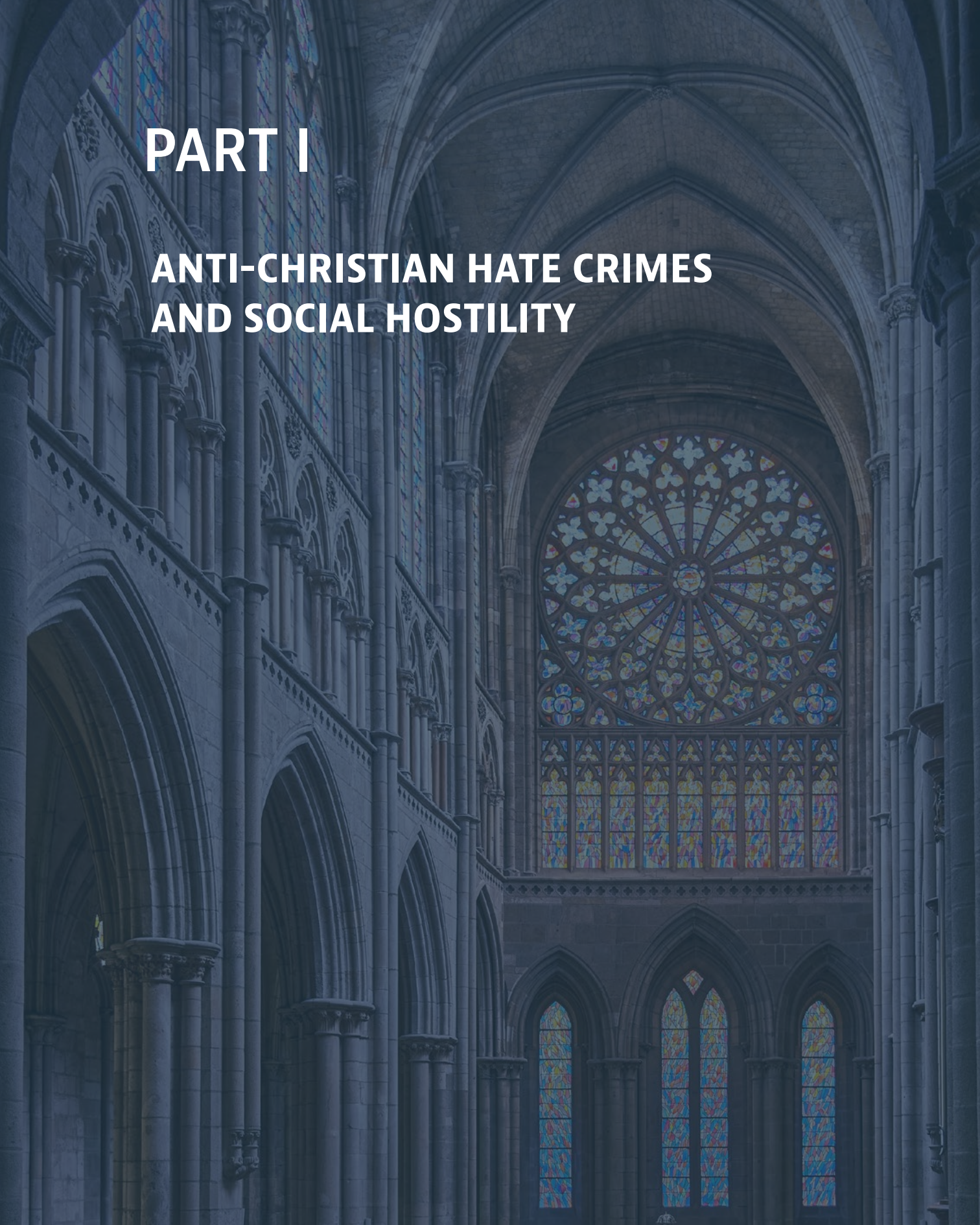
→ Although property attacks predominated, **attacks on individuals, including threats,** raised particular concern. At least **395** were identified in 2025, compared with 274 in 2024—a **44% increase** in recorded attacks. **France** recorded a **70%** increase in attacks on individuals, with physical attacks on clergy increasing **fourfold.**

→ According to OSCE/ODIHR data, at least **two Christians were murdered** in Europe: **Ashur Sarnaya,** an Assyrian Christian who fled ISIS persecution in Iraq, was stabbed to death in **France** while livestreaming about his faith; a **Catholic priest** was bound and killed in his presbytery in **Poland.** Other anti-Christian incidents documented by ODIHR included a Jehovah's Witness's death in **Russian detention,** an attempted homicide in **Germany** and a stabbing in **Spain** that injured three people.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

→ In 2025–2026, OIDAC Europe **recorded an increase in cases involving restrictions on Christians' religious freedom** compared with the previous reporting period. These included employment discrimination, restrictions on public worship and religious symbols, prosecutions over religious expression, interference with church autonomy and parental rights, and limitations on conscientious objection.

→ **Peaceful prayer** and **religious expression** continued to prompt **criminal proceedings,** including silent prayer, Sunday worship, voluntary conversation and carrying religious materials near abortion facilities. Other cases concerned **workplace discrimination,** including dismissals for expressing protected religious beliefs. Several courts upheld these freedoms, but **prolonged investigations** and repeated proceedings **discouraged lawful religious expression.**



PART I

ANTI-CHRISTIAN HATE CRIMES AND SOCIAL HOSTILITY

Anti-Christian Hate Crimes and Social Hostility

In the absence of comprehensive Europe-wide statistics on anti-Christian hate crime, this chapter draws on multiple sources to present the most complete picture possible. It compiles and compares **official police and government reports**, hate crime data from the **OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR)**, and **civil society records**, including OIDAC Europe's research.

OIDAC Europe follows the **OSCE/ODIHR definition of hate crimes** as criminal acts with a bias motive. Among others, ODIHR identifies the targeting of religiously significant buildings and the absence of other clear motives as bias indicators. Its anti-Christian data covers all self-identified Christian groups.

Anti-Christian Incidents in 2025

For 2025, OIDAC Europe identified **2,465 anti-Christian hate crimes and incidents, with at least 395 recorded attacks on individuals,** drawing on national police statistics and OSCE/ODIHR data. To avoid double counting between these datasets, the highest available figure for each country was used rather than adding potentially overlapping counts. Government data were available for Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, and England and Wales*. Some states recorded anti-Christian incidents nationally but did not submit the corresponding figures to OSCE/ODIHR.

Government data showed the **highest year-on-year increases** in France (+9% overall; **+70%** for attacks on **individuals**), **Austria** (+20%) and **England and Wales** (+24%). The increases in France and Austria followed declines in 2024.

Findings published in 2025 also indicated substantial **under-reporting,** particularly of aggression against individuals. A 2025 survey by Poland's Institute for Catholic Church Statistics (ISKK) found that nearly 50% of Catholic priests surveyed had experienced aggression in the preceding year, yet over 80% had not reported the incidents to police.

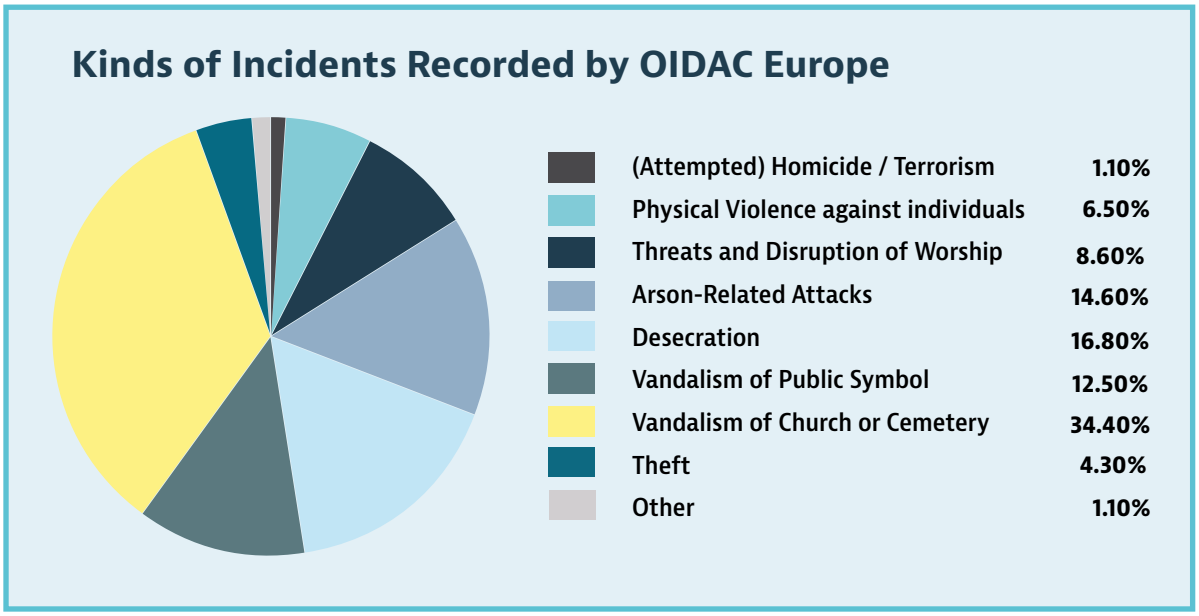
*England and Wales figures cover April 2025–March 2026; other figures concern calendar year 2025.

Kinds of Incidents

As in previous years, property attacks, including arson, vandalism and desecration of churches and religious symbols, predominated in 2025, but governments and OSCE/ODIHR reported at least **395 attacks on individuals,** including threats. According to ODIHR hate crime data, at least **two Christians were murdered: Ashur Sarnaya**, an Assyrian Christian who fled ISIS persecution in Iraq, was stabbed to death in **France** while livestreaming about his faith and a **Catholic priest** was bound and killed in his presbytery in **Poland.** ODIHR also documented a Jehovah's Witness's death in **Russian detention,** an attempted homicide in **Germany** and a stabbing in **Spain** that injured three people.

While access to detailed information remained limited for official government statistics, OIDAC Europe classified each of its **528 individually recorded cases** according to incident categories. The most frequent forms of incidents among those cases were **vandalism** of churches or cemeteries (184 | 34.4%), **desecration** (90 | 16.8%), vandalism of public symbols (67 | 12.5%) **arson-related attacks** (78 | 14.6%) and **threats** and **disruption** of worship (46 | 8.6%). OIDAC Europe also recorded cases of **physical violence** (35 | 6.5%) and of **homicide,** attempted homicide and **terrorism** (6 | 1.10%).

These figures do **not include monetary theft** and break-ins at religious sites, which amounted to **966** additional recorded cases.



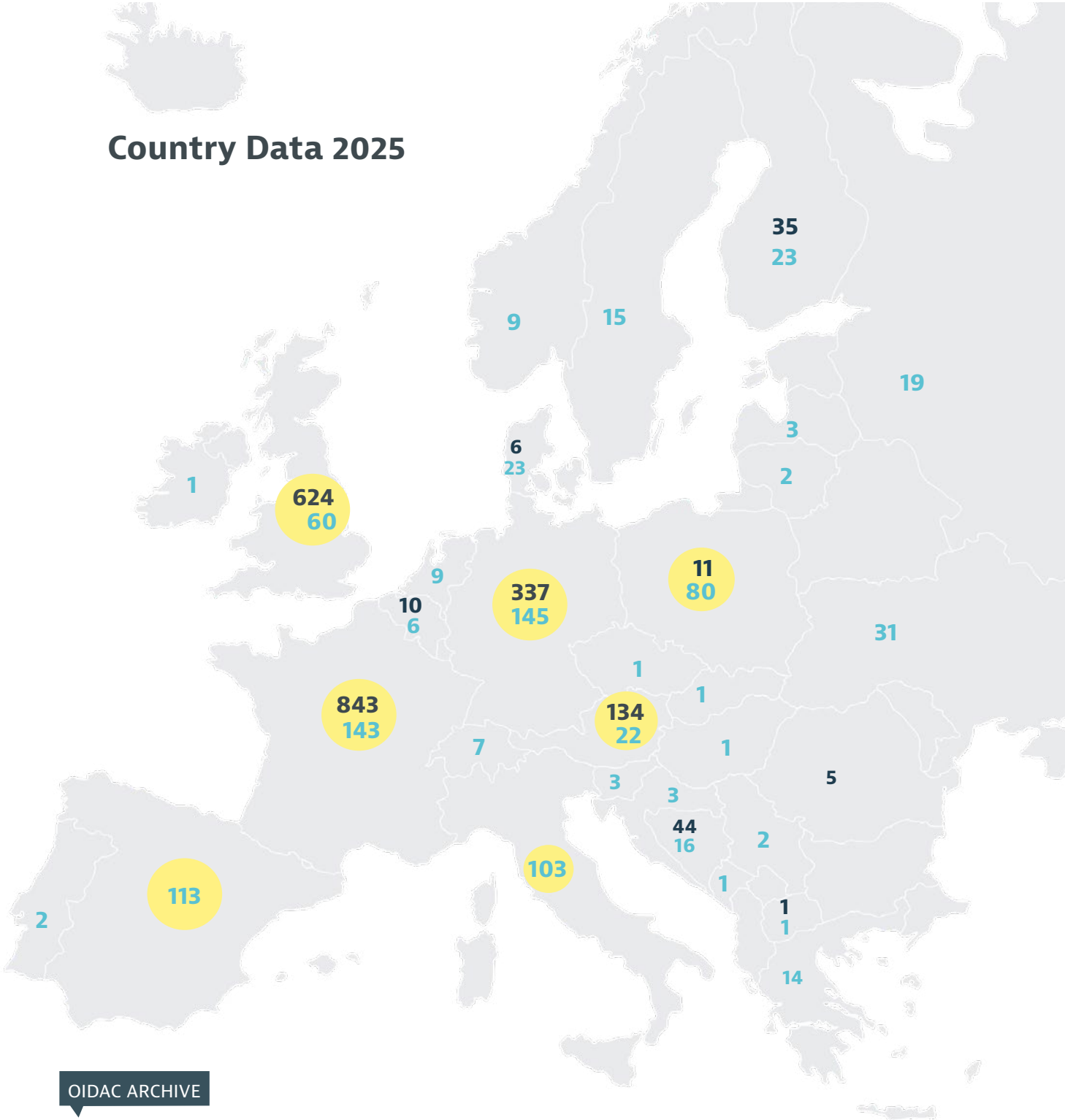
Country Data on Anti-Christian Hate Crimes in 2025

Country	Police Data Total	of which Attacks on Individuals**	Civil Society Data*** Total[11]	of which Attacks on Individuals**
France	843[12]	109	143	67
United Kingdom *	624[13]	—	60	18
Germany	337[14]	57	145	26
Spain	—	—	113	25
Italy	—	—	103	6
Austria	134[15]	46	22	5
Poland	11[16]	1	80	17
Bosnia and Herzegovina	44[17]	29	16	3
Finland	35[18]	24	23	2

* Police statistics cover only England and Wales; reporting period from April 2025 to March 2026.
** Including threats, harassment, physical violence, criminal insults/defamation, coercion, sexual offences and homicide.
*** OSCE/ODIHR civil society figures may be subject to minor revisions as additional incidents are accepted.

Differences in government recording methodologies or the omission of anti-Christian hate crimes from official statistics **limit comparisons between countries.** Austria, for example, uses OSCE/ODIHR methodology, whereas Germany records anti-Christian offences within its politically motivated crime framework, which may leave attacks on churches unrecorded as anti-Christian hate crimes. Civil society data therefore provide an important reference point and can reveal gaps in government recording or classification.

Country Data 2025



OIDAC ARCHIVE

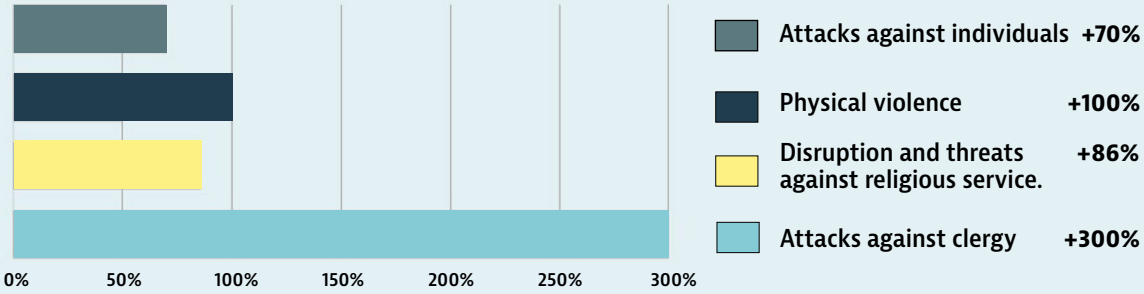
- Most Affected Countries
- Hate Crimes Documented by Police
- Hate Crimes Documented by Civil Society

France: Attacks on Clergy rise by 300% in 2025

According to the **French Ministry of Interior's** report on anti-religious offences,[19] France recorded 843 anti-Christian incidents in 2025, a 9% increase from the previous year. Property offences represented 87% of all anti-Christian incidents (734 cases), primarily targeting churches. However, the sharpest increase concerned **attacks against individuals,** which **increased by 70%,** with 109 offences recorded in 2025.

According to the report, ***"physical violence*** targeting members of the Christian community ***doubled"*** compared to the previous year, with **attacks against clergy** and other church officials increasing **fourfold.** Disruptions of religious services and threats against worshippers also rose by 86%.

French Ministry of Interior: Anti-Christian offences 2024-2025



In September 2025, **Ashur Sarnaya**, a 45-year-old disabled Assyrian Christian, was stabbed to death outside his Lyon apartment while livestreaming Christian messages in Arabic. Having fled Islamist persecution in Iraq in 2014, he was killed in an attack French authorities have since confirmed as jihadist.



Alongside 843 anti-Christian incidents, the Ministry recorded 326 anti-Muslim and 1,320 antisemitic incidents in 2025. The report also highlighted the high risk faced by Jews relative to their population size and a significantly greater risk for regularly practising Catholics compared with nominal Catholics.

Spain: Gaps in Recording and Hostility Towards Clergy

Spain's government statistics distinguish antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other religion-related hate crimes but provide no separate anti-Christian category—a gap repeatedly criticised by civil society organisations. OSCE/ODIHR recorded **113 anti-Christian incidents** reported by civil society, including **25 cases of violence and threats against individuals.** A 2025 survey[20] of **117 Catholic priests** by Spain's Observatory for Religious Freedom and Conscience found that:

- **67%** had experienced insults, mockery or offensive remarks;
- **48%** reported vandalism of church property;
- **12%** had been denied services or faced direct discrimination;
- **90%** perceived consistent media bias against Catholic priests and bishops.

Among the countries covered by OIDAC Europe's monitoring, Spain also stood out for particularly widespread **restrictions on religious freedom** and ideologically motivated bias against Christians in public life.

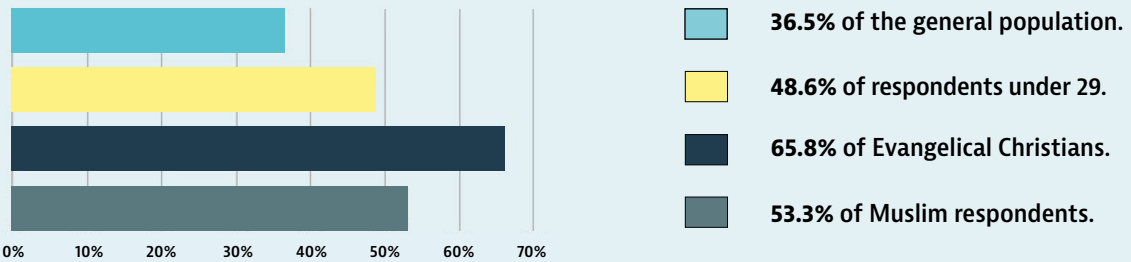
Germany: Perceptions of Hostility Against Christians on the Rise

Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) recorded **337 anti-Christian offences** with a political motive in 2025, including 14 physical assaults, 34 offences involving coercion or threats and one **attempted homicide.** Attacks on churches, including arson and the burning of Bibles, are not automatically classified as anti-Christian hate crimes. ODIHR recorded **145 anti-Christian incidents** reported by civil society in Germany, the **highest country total.**

Beyond recorded offences, a representative survey[21] from 2025 found that the following respondents considered hostility towards Christians in Germany widespread:

Survey: Are hostile attitudes towards Christians widespread in Germany?

Percentage of respondents answering "yes" (April 2025)



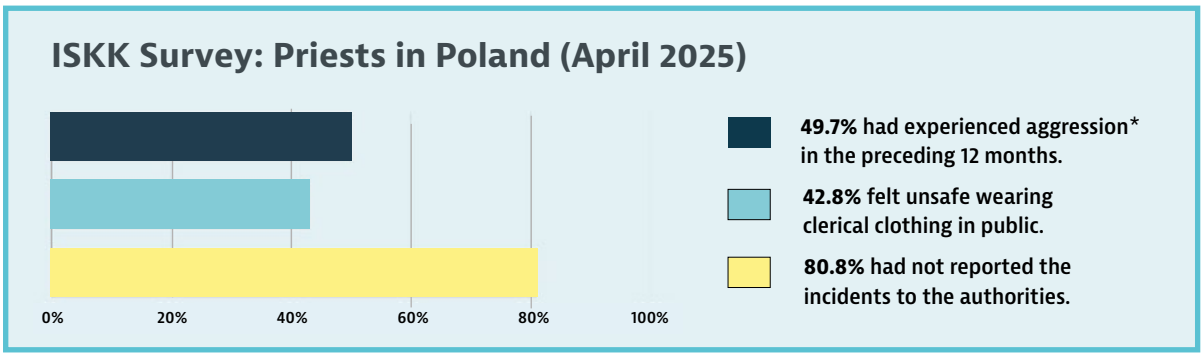
UK: Rising Hate Crime and Limits on Christian Expression

Police in England and Wales recorded **624 anti-Christian hate crimes in 2025/26, a 24% increase** from 502 in 2024/25. Ecclesiastical Insurance has been reporting well over a hundred arson incidents affecting British churches each year.[22] Within OIDAC Europe's monitoring, the United Kingdom accounted for the highest number and some of the most severe cases of employment-related discrimination and restrictions on public prayer, including dismissals for expressing Christian beliefs and prosecutions for silent prayer.

Poland: Widespread Aggression Against Clergy

While the Polish government reported only 11 anti-Christian hate crimes to OSCE/ODIHR, ODIHR documented **80 incidents** reported by civil society, including the **killing of a priest.**

A 2025 survey[23] of 996 Catholic priests by the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics (ISKK) found **widespread aggression against clergy.** Most perceived an increase **(85.9%)**, citing negative media portrayals **(96.4%)** and political and societal tensions **(91.1%)** as key drivers.



*Including verbal abuse, online harassment, and physical or property-related attacks.

Motives and Perpetrator Groups

Identifying motives behind anti-Christian hate crimes is difficult: **low clearance rates** for vandalism and arson leave many offenders unidentified and motives unknown.

Of the 528 cases individually recorded by OIDAC Europe, **123 showed indications of political or ideological motives.** The most frequent were radical left (26), radical right (22), radical Islamist (22) and anti-religious (22). In another 22 cases, satanic symbols were used or an occult connection was suspected. Experts and affected communities identify anti-clericalism, religious intolerance,[24] religious extremism,[25] negative media portrayals, and political or social tensions[26] as key drivers.

Netherlands: In July 2025, a Christian foundation warned of sharply increased discrimination against Syrian Christians in Dutch asylum centres. A Syrian Christian mother received death threats from Muslim residents, who told her, "we know where your family lives". Fear of such attacks has led some Christian asylum seekers to conceal their faith.

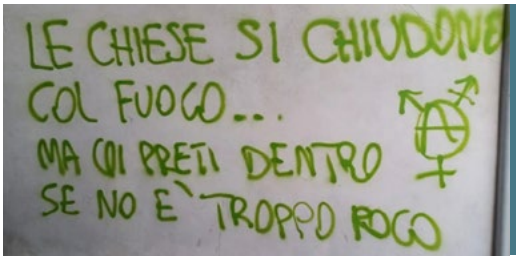




Austria: In October 2025, two fake bombs prompted an evacuation during Mass at Vienna's Karlskirche alongside a pro-life event. Authorities confirmed the devices were intended to cause panic. Before the event, pro-abortion groups had circulated images depicting violence against Christians and the church in flames.

Germany: A Christian-run café in Leipzig suffered repeated attacks, including vandalism, graffiti and a butyric acid attack around Christmas 2025. Its church operators attributed the attacks to left-wing extremists and announced its closure in 2026 after 26 incidents over two and a half years.





Italy: In July 2025, graffiti beside Perugia's Basilica of San Domenico read: "Churches should be burned down, but with the priests inside; otherwise it's not enough". Anarchist and transgender symbols accompanied the threat.

Poland: In October 2025, a roadside chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Wólka Wybraniecka was defaced with satanic graffiti and swastikas, and its statue destroyed.



Biased Reporting and Delegitimisation of Christian Views in Public Discourse

At an OSCE/ODIHR workshop in Rome in May 2026, Christian representatives and civil society organisations raised concerns about **negative stereotyping of Christians in political and media discourse.** ODIHR's Guide on Anti-Christian Hate Crimes warns that narratives portraying Christian communities as dangerous, extremist or socially suspect can reinforce prejudice and increase vulnerability to hostility.[27] Surveys reflect these concerns: **96.4% of Polish Catholic priests** surveyed identified one-sided **negative media portrayals as a driver of growing aggression,** while **90% of Catholic priests surveyed in Spain** perceived **consistent media bias** against Catholic priests and bishops.[28]

Biased and Imbalanced Media Reporting

During the reporting period, several public broadcasters drew criticism for casting expressions of faith in a negative light while **disregarding journalistic objectivity** and balance.

In Germany, concerns involved the presentation of **Christian beliefs and practices as inherently suspect.** A May 2025 report by ARD's Tagesschau, for example, was criticised for portraying a Christian footballer's public prayer as dangerous and **warning against missionary activities,** taken offline after a public outcry.[29] ZDF's children's programme *logo!* similarly prompted complaints about biased treatment of religions in a March 2026 edition, which presented Islam in exclusively positive terms in a segment on Ramadan, followed by a wholly negative account of Christian history.[30]

At the same time, WDR's *Radical Christians in Germany: Crusade from the Right* was criticised for portraying Christian networks as **"threats to democracy"** without adequately distinguishing extremist activity from legitimate religious advocacy. The documentary Pious *and Radical: Enemies of the Constitution in God's Name* also drew **criticism for conflating extremist**, potentially criminal positions with traditional **Christian sexual ethics** and biblically grounded social criticism, casting the latter as constitutionally suspect.[31]

Other programmes have been criticised for discrediting entire denominations and practices. In Spain, the public RTVE apologised after describing evangelical church growth as "worrying" and "dangerous".[32] On privately owned Cadena SER, a presenter described Mass as "Sunday witchcraft" and the Church as a "sect", alongside derogatory generalisations about believers and clergy.[33]

In the UK, former BBC journalists have likewise criticised **religious illiteracy**, including a "general feeling of disdain" for the Church of England and "mild hostility towards the idea of religion" among staff.[34]

Political Discourse and the Labelling of Christian Organisations

In July 2026, **Amnesty International UK apologised** after publishing a briefing collectively labelling numerous Christian and other organisations "anti-rights". Although the organisation withdrew the publication, acknowledging significant failures in research and editorial standards,[35] similar classifications persist.

Neil Datta's *The Next Wave*, presented at the European Parliament in June 2025, was criticised for **conflating legitimate Christian advocacy** on life, family and education with **religious extremism** and using labels such as **"anti-rights" to discredit** Christian pro-life and family organisations. Despite these criticisms, France's Economic, Social and Environmental Council drew on the report's framing in its March 2026 resolution against "anti-gender" strategies, adopting its terminology and presenting the movements concerned as "threats to democratic foundations".[36]

Forbidden Colours' September 2026 *The Hate Review* went further: it used terminology related to **pathology, including "contamination"** and **"viral load"**, to describe **Christian counselling** and pro-life organisations and incited hatred against them by calling for the **"decontamination of Europe".**[37]

Similar concerns have emerged in national party politics. In Germany, Die Linke's 2026 Saxony-Anhalt election programme placed what it termed **"Christian-Evangelical fundamentalism" alongside jihadism**, pledging to combat "religious fundamentalism, whether Christian-Evangelical or jihadist in character".[38] A Spanish-based NGO documented left-wing politicians calling Catholic organisations "sects" and parliamentary opponents "Taliban", while a Podemos official advocated **dynamiting the Valle de los Caídos cross.** [39]

Ridicule of Christian Beliefs and Symbols

Christian organisations have also expressed concerns about programmes and exhibitions ridiculing sacred figures and symbols. **The use of public money to finance such content is a particular concern,** especially where public broadcasters are involved.

In June 2026, ZDFheute's morning newsletter used "Happy Kadaver" in a Corpus Christi headline, which it later amended following complaints.[40] In October 2026, Jan Böhmermann's *ZDF Magazin Royale* described the crucified Christ as a "gender-fluid, bi-curious, half-naked POC otter".[41]

A January 2026 video showed presenters from Studio Brussel, VRT's radio station, **smashing statues of Jesus and Mary.** During a March interview, they explained that they would not similarly treat Islamic or Jewish symbols. VRT subsequently apologised.[42]

Vienna's publicly funded Künstlerhaus exhibition *Du sollst dir ein Bild machen* was criticised by Christian organisations for blasphemous works, including a **sexually explicit Pietà** and an **eroticised crucifix.** Organisers described them as a "dialogue" with Christian imagery.[43]

Continued Oppression in Occupied Ukraine

OIDAC Europe's 2025 report documented clergy detentions, church seizures and restrictions on worship in Russian-occupied Ukraine. These violations continued in 2025–2026.

Mission Eurasia's findings, published in January 2026, document pressure on clergy and believers to obtain Russian passports, **accept state-approved leaders** and **abandon Ukrainian-language worship** and prayers for Ukraine. Confiscated churches were not returned even to congregations complying with registration demands.[44] Closures and restrictions have largely eliminated Sunday schools, while parents face pressure to enrol children in militarised "patriotic" programmes. These measures undermine religious autonomy and families' ability to transmit their faith.[45]

In January 2026, armed officers raided **Pastor Vladimir Rytikov's** Baptist church in Sorokyne, occupied Luhansk Region, threatening to stop services unless it registered. The congregation refuses registration to avoid state interference. Occupation authorities annulled the pastor's residence permit and ordered him to leave, while the Federal Security Service (FSB) labelled him a **"security threat".** His lawyer planned a further appeal after the Russian-controlled Luhansk Supreme Court rejected his challenge in October 2026.[46]

Ukrainian Orthodox Church priest Kostiantyn Maksimov, from Tokmak in occupied Zaporizhzhia Region, remained imprisoned following a closed "espionage" trial and a 14-year sentence in 2024. Transferred to a Russian labour camp in 2025, he appealed to his Church's leadership for support in a letter published in January 2026.[47]

In April 2026, Moscow Patriarchate clergy seized the **Greek Catholic Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Tokmak,** barring parishioners from praying there, according to the Donetsk Exarchate. Occupation officials also announced plans to transfer **Orthodox Church of Ukraine buildings** to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Beyond the occupied territories, **Russia's war on Ukraine has devastated religious communities across the country:** in October 2026, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russian forces had killed around **120 clergy** and damaged or destroyed approximately **800 religious sites** since February 2022, describing attacks on clergy and religious institutions as deliberate.[48]

Belarus: Churches Lose Clergy and Legal Recognition

Compulsory re-registration and restrictions on foreign clergy continued to affect Christian communities. In 2026, officials refused permission for at least a dozen **Polish Catholic priests** to continue serving. **Father Marian Szerszeń** left in July after 36 years of ministry.[49]

In March 2026, masked officers arrested **Father Anatol Parakhnevich,** searched his church and home, and took the church keys, preventing Sunday Mass.[50] A September 2026 review identified at least **35 religious communities, mostly Christian, ordered dissolved** in Brest and Mahilyow Regions following compulsory re-registration. Unregistered religious activity can carry **up to two years' imprisonment.**[51]

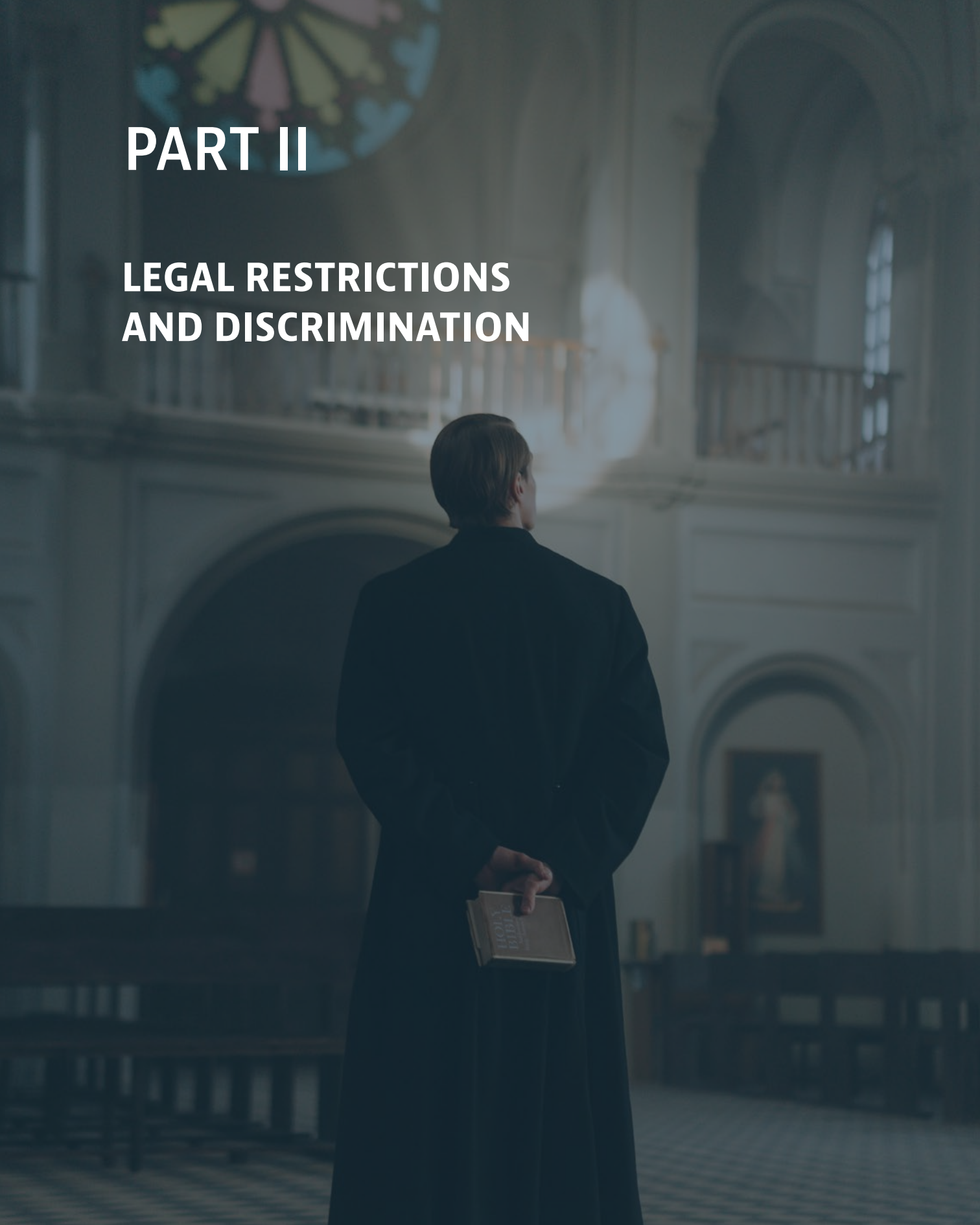
Authorities opened criminal cases against exiled Protestant preacher **Sergiy Melyanets** in January 2026 and Orthodox theologian **Natallia Vasilevich** in April. Melyanets had prayed for defendants and challenged restrictions on churches; Vasilevich helps lead Christian Vision, which documents religious freedom violations. Both were added to Russia's wanted list at Belarus's request, risking arrest and extradition.[52]

In August 2026, authorities designated Catholic weekly ***Gość Niedzielny's*** online platforms "extremist materials". Catholic family-run publisher **Tekhnalohiya** was declared an "extremist organisation" in June 2026, banning its activities.[53]

Russia: Restrictions on Religious Life and Anti-War Preaching

Although a comprehensive assessment of Russia falls beyond this report's scope, **Mission Eurasia's** documentation of **systematic pressure, censorship and criminal prosecution** affecting Christian communities and clergy opposing the war deserves particular attention.[54]

In September 2025, Pentecostal pastor **Nikolai Romanyuk received four years' imprisonment** over a sermon opposing participation in the war.[55] In 2026, courts also fined a Baptist pastor, a seminary rector and a Christian university for possessing Mission Eurasia publications following its designation as "undesirable". A Moscow Region court ordered **178 New Testaments and 74 Gospel of John booklets destroyed,** a decision upheld in August 2026.[56]



PART II

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS AND DISCRIMINATION

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Introduction: Legal Restrictions and Discrimination

While freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in international human rights law, Christians in Europe have faced **increasing restrictions on its exercise** and, in some cases, even criminal prosecution for peacefully expressing their beliefs.

Religious freedom protects both private and public, individual and communal expressions of faith. Although **limitations on the manifestation of religion** are permissible, international human rights law requires them to be **prescribed by law,** pursue a legitimate aim, and be **necessary** and **proportionate.** Yet these safeguards are not always respected, including in legislation that does not explicitly address religion. The following section examines **proposed and adopted legislation and judicial decisions** that have restricted or raised concerns about the free exercise of religion or belief in Europe.

1. Discrimination in Employment, Services and Benefits

As in previous years, Christians have faced **unequal treatment** because of their religious beliefs. The following cases concern exclusion from **employment** and **political participation,** denial of **services and funding.** Some involve explicit objections to Christian convictions; others arise from policies that place religious individuals or organisations at a disadvantage. Several legal challenges have secured recognition of discrimination or the reversal of restrictions, while others continue, often at considerable personal and financial cost.

UK: Christian Artist Secures Settlement after Exclusion over Her Beliefs

Christian artist Victoria Culf secured a settlement with Watford Borough Council in June 2026, three years after **expressing her faith-based concerns** about children's gender "transition" in a **private conversation** with a colleague. She was subsequently required to give 24 hours' notice before entering her own exhibition and lost a community arts contract.[57]

Culf said the council claimed police were investigating a "hate crime", although police records showed that no criminal investigation had been opened and that her comments were regarded as protected speech. In the settlement, the council welcomed her return and said it will consider her for future work.[58]

"Although I was cleared by the police within 48 hours, the incident had a significant and lasting negative impact on my business and professional reputation."

— Victoria Culf



Image: Victoria Culf in an interview. © Christian Concern

UK: Social Worker Challenges Job Refusal over His Beliefs

Touchstone Leeds withdrew Christian social worker **Felix Ngole's** job offer after discovering his publicly expressed beliefs on marriage and sexuality. Despite his assurances that he would treat everyone fairly, the charity refused to restore the offer after a second interview.

A tribunal found the initial withdrawal discriminatory. An **appeal ruling** clarified that treating someone unfavourably merely because others might object to their protected religious beliefs **cannot be justified.** In September 2026, the Court of Appeal heard Ngole's further challenge concerning the second interview and final refusal.[59]

> ***"[Discrimination based on concerns] that service users might have reacted badly merely to the fact that the claimant held the religious beliefs in question [...] [is] not capable of justification."***
>
> *— Employment Appeal Tribunal, Ngole v Touchstone Leeds*

UK: Teachers and Chaplain Challenge Dismissals over Expression

- In Scotland, **Sarah Morse** was dismissed from Arbroath High School after expressing her Catholic opposition to abortion in response to pupils' questions. She said pupils were free to disagree and that she had not tried to persuade them. She accepted a financial settlement in August 2026.[60]
- In Sunderland, **Anita Meston** lost her position at Biddick Academy after answering a pupil's question, saying she held Christian pro-life beliefs. She acknowledged another pupil's disagreement and resumed the lesson, but her contract was terminated the next day. In October 2026, she announced a religious discrimination claim.[61]
- As reported in December 2025, a **London primary school teacher** was dismissed after telling a Muslim pupil that "Britain is still a Christian state", referring to the King's role as head of the Church of England. He faced police and safeguarding investigations and a ban on working with children. Police dropped their investigation, and he successfully appealed the ban.[62]
- Chaplain **Fr. Bernard Randall** was dismissed from Trent College, Nottingham, and referred to the Prevent counter-terrorism programme after telling pupils in a sermon that they could disagree with contemporary views on sexuality and gender. He secured a confidential employment settlement in July 2026.[63]

UK: Lib Dems Admit Discrimination against Former Candidate

The Liberal Democrats admitted religious discrimination against **David Campanale,** deselected as their parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam in 2023. Local activists had challenged his suitability because of his Christian convictions on abortion and assisted suicide. Campanale described being questioned by approximately 30 members and **"mocked and abused in relation to his beliefs".** Some party members had refused to support his campaign. The party removed him, citing a loss of members' confidence.

He sued the party for religious discrimination. In April 2026, **the Liberal Democrats admitted discrimination,** leaving compensation and costs to be determined. Party figures and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum called for an independent investigation to prevent similar discrimination.[64]

> ***"The freedom to hold and express religious beliefs is a fundamental right in a democratic society, including within politics."***
>
> *—Tom Ellis, Campanale's solicitor*

Spain: Parliamentary Forum on Catholic Faith Abruptly Cancelled

In October 2025, a forum on the Catholic faith's contribution to Spain and Europe was **barred from the Congress** of Deputies **despite prior permission.** Organisers, the Enraizados Foundation, learned through media reports that the left-wing parties *PSOE* and *Sumar* had supported its cancellation over purportedly "fascist" content and religious messages. Despite removing disputed imagery of the Valley of the Fallen as requested, the foundation received no formal notification or written legal explanation. Participants were denied access and had to move to a nearby hotel.[65]

EU: FAFCE and WYA Challenge Funding Restrictions over Their Values

The **Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE)** and **World Youth Alliance (WYA)** challenged EU funding decisions excluding their projects from funding. FAFCE reported six rejected proposals, including child protection and digital education projects.[66] **WYA** faced payment suspensions on three Erasmus+ grants over alleged breaches of "EU values", including criticism that its reproductive health materials omitted or opposed abortion. In September 2026, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency **lifted the payment suspensions,** after finding that the suspected breaches did not justify continued suspension.[67]

> ***"No organisation should ever be penalised for defending a legitimate position in the public square."***
>
> *— Vincenzo Bassi, FAFCE president*

Croatia: Zagreb Faces Discrimination Complaint over Red Wednesday

In July 2026, the Croatian Protestant Conference (HPK) reported Zagreb to the Ombudswoman after the city failed to decide on its request to illuminate fountains for **Red Wednesday, commemorating persecuted Christians.** Despite submitting the required documentation in 2025, HPK received neither permission nor a written refusal, preventing the illumination. In January 2026, the responsible ministry ordered the city to issue a decision within 15 days, but it still **failed to respond.**[68] By September, HPK had also initiated administrative court proceedings.[69]

A separate municipal parking decision in August 2026 compounded HPK's concerns: a parking space newly marked outside its office and congregation entrance **obstructed access,** particularly for wheelchair users, while neighbouring entrances had no-parking markings.



Image: The Colosseum in red, symbolizing the persecution against Christians around the world, from February 2018. © OSV News photo/Remo Casilli, Reuters.

Türkiye: ECtHR Condemns Removal of Priests from Foundation Boards

In May 2026, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled against Türkiye for removing two Greek Orthodox priests, **Niko Mavrakis** and **Corc Kasapoğlu,** from the governing boards of three community foundations in Istanbul solely because they were priests.

The ECtHR found **no legal provision prohibiting priests from serving on these boards,** nor evidence that the Directorate had authority to remove them on that basis. It ruled that Türkiye had **violated their freedom of association,** interpreted in light of religious freedom, and awarded compensation to Kasapoğlu and Mavrakis's heirs.[70]

Germany: Au Pair Platform Admits Religious Discrimination against Christian Father

An international **au pair platform** based in Germany **blocked an Italian father's profile** after he requested an au pair who would support his son's Christian upbringing and not endorse homosexual practice. The platform considered his position discriminatory and blocked his profile. The father filed his legal claim in November 2021.

In September 2026, the dispute concluded through a settlement before the Kassel Regional Court. The platform **acknowledged that the exclusion constituted religious discrimination** and violated his religious freedom. It also expressly recognised parents' right to educate their children according to their religious convictions.[71]

UK: Freshers' Fair Ban on Church Successfully Challenged

Grace Church Greenwich was **refused a stall at Goldsmiths University's Freshers' Fair** under contractor Native's policy excluding religious content from the fair. The church challenged the policy as discriminatory. In January 2026, Native **suspended the ban,** allowing the church and Good News for Everyone to book stalls again.[72]

UK: National Trust Faces Bias Claims over Catholic Film Refusal

In December 2025, the Catholic **filmmaker Christian Holden** was **refused permission to film** a pilgrimage documentary at St Cuthbert's Cave, reportedly because of its "religious affiliation". Following discrimination complaints, the National Trust denied having a policy against religious filming and promised to review the request's handling. Holden completed the documentary using public footpaths instead.[73]

France: Marseille Court Suspends Christian Film Ban

In October 2025, Marseille authorities **cancelled screenings of *Sacré-Cœur*** (Sacred Heart) at a municipal cinema, citing secularism rules. **The Marseille Administrative Court** suspended the ban, ruling that screening a religious film did not constitute religious endorsement. It found an unlawful restriction on freedom of expression and artistic creation and **ordered the mayor to allow** the remaining scheduled **screenings.**[74]

UK: Christian Car Stickers Put Insurance at Risk

In August 2026, **Simeon Chandra**, a Christian from Birmingham, was told to **remove "Jesus Loves You" stickers** or lose his car insurance, despite having disclosed them to his insurer beforehand.



Image: © Christian Legal Centre

> ***"We see all kinds of messages, flags and slogans in public life. But when a Christian puts a peaceful message on his own car, suddenly it appears to become a problem."***
>
> *— Simeon Chandra*

He complied to remain insured but reportedly received no explanation for the reversal. He is considering legal action.[75]

France: Military School Accused of Anti-Catholic Admissions Bias

In July 2026, families challenged admissions rejections by the ***Prytanée National Militaire de La Flèche***, whose admissions report listed attendance at a school outside the state contract system, including **Christian schools, as an exclusion criterion.** Several affected Catholic schools reportedly had no graduates admitted for two years.

Families sought urgent relief from the Administrative Court of Nantes, arguing that applicants should be assessed on merit rather than previous schooling. The Armed Forces Minister called the criterion "totally erroneous", ordered its removal and **launched an investigation.**[76]

Spain: Catholic School Targeted for Being "Too Catholic"

In May 2025, the Catalan Parliament approved a motion targeting what it called "reactionary ultra-Catholic groups" in schools and urging funding withdrawal. The debate cited ***Mare de Déu del Carme*,** whose religious teaching and prayer had drawn complaints. The school rejected allegations of "indoctrination" and reaffirmed its Catholic identity. Authorities subsequently imposed supervision of its curriculum, teaching materials and practices during 2025/26 and 2026/27.[77]

2. Public Worship and Evangelism

Religious freedom protects **public prayer, preaching** and **sharing one's faith,** individually or with others. Under Article 9 ECHR and Article 18 ICCPR, restrictions must be prescribed by law, necessary and proportionate to a permitted aim, such as public safety or protecting others' rights. **Radical secularist approaches** seeking to **confine religion to private life** disregard this protected public dimension. The following cases illustrate restrictions on peaceful worship and evangelism and legal challenges defending these freedoms.

Bulgaria: ECtHR Rejects Evangelism Ban

In June 2026, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Shumen's **blanket ban on door-to-door religious outreach violated religious freedom.** The prohibition failed to distinguish peaceful evangelisation from coercion, and authorities had not sufficiently justified it. By its ruling the ECtHR reinforced the protection of sharing religious beliefs under Article 9 ECHR.[78]

Germany: Police Challenge Public Prayer and Bible Reading

Video footage published in May 2026 showed police challenging Christians quietly praying and reading the Bible at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, without amplification or approaching passers-by. **Officers** said the location was **"not a place for praying"** and "not a church". They treated the activity as a demonstration because one of the men **visibly held a Bible,** raising concerns about restrictions on peaceful public prayer.[79]

Monaco: Swiss Evangelist Barred over Public Cross

In November 2025, police detained Swiss evangelist Stephan Maag while he walked through Monaco carrying a cross and speaking about his faith. According to his account, officers said religious expression was "only allowed inside buildings, but not on public property". They ordered him to dismantle the cross and leave Monaco, providing no written explanation.[80]



Image: Stephan Maag carrying a cross. © zVg

UK: Churches Challenge Restrictions on Street Preaching

- Police threatened Kingsborough Centre members with **fines for preaching, displaying Bible verses** and distributing literature under Hillingdon Council's public-space rules. Officers reportedly told them to turn their biblical signs away from passers-by. Following a legal challenge, the council changed the rules in May 2025, **removing the restrictions** and expressly allowing religious leaflets.[81]
- In **Colchester,** Bread of Life Community Church challenged a Community Protection Notice **covering the entire church**, banning them from street preaching amplification and **citing certain religious messages,** including references to hell, as causing "harassment, alarm and distress". The church denies threatening behaviour and criticises that **biblical teaching is being treated as intimidation.** The appeal hearing scheduled for October 2026 was postponed until further notice because no judge was available.[82]

> ***"We are seeing a slippery slope from managing noise to policing theology. If a church can be criminalised simply for proclaiming the gospel, then freedom of religion and speech in the UK are in serious jeopardy."***
>
> *— Pastor Stephen Clayden*

UK: Street Preachers Face Repeated Arrests and Prosecution

- In November 2025, preacher **Shaun O'Sullivan** announced plans to challenge repeated police action against him. OIDAC reported **16 arrests without resulting convictions,** including proceedings arising from remarks about religion and expressions of support for Jewish people. He argues that police have repeatedly mischaracterised his words and targeted his Gospel preaching.[83]
- In April 2026, police confirmed that Pastor **Dia Moodley** would face no further action following his arrest in Bristol in November 2025 for preaching about biological sex and differences between Christianity and Islam. He spent **several hours in custody** after complaints about his remarks. His lawyer raised concerns about repeated arrests and investigations over his religious expression.[84]
- In September 2026, a London court acquitted Richard Johnson, prosecuted for **distributing Gospel leaflets in Soho.** Prosecutors stressed the location after a complainant described it as an LGBT "safe space". The court found no threatening conduct and distinguished causing upset from committing a public-order offence.[85]

3. Prayer and Expression Near Abortion Facilities

As documented in OIDAC Europe's previous report, Christians have faced arrest and prosecution for silent prayer, religious gatherings and offers of voluntary conversation near abortion facilities. These activities engage **freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.** Restrictions intended to prevent harassment must therefore distinguish intimidation or obstruction from peaceful conduct.

Yet in 2026, Christians continued to face prosecution under "buffer zone" laws for **Sunday worship and silent prayer,** while Northern Ireland police guidance raised concerns about **carrying Bibles** and providing requested pastoral care. Although courts dismissed some charges or overturned restrictions, other cases resulted in convictions and prolonged proceedings, highlighting how broadly worded **prohibitions on "influencing"** risk criminalising peaceful religious expression in public.



Image: Isabel Vaughan-Spruce
© Alliance Defending Freedom

UK: Carrying a Bible May Breach "Buffer Zone" Law

In July 2026, **the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** published guidance stating that **carrying a Bible,** reading Scripture or **praying** with a patient could constitute an offence within an abortion "safe access zone" if capable of "influencing" or "distressing" someone accessing abortion services. The guidance also states that recklessness regarding these effects can suffice; an **intention** to influence or distress someone is **not required.** Clergy have no exemption, and visible religious practice may be unlawful ***"even where no direct approach or communication takes place".*** [86] Patient consent does not establish lawfulness, because the **effect on others nearby** must also be considered.

Although PSNI says most hospital ministry remains unaffected, the guidance brings ordinary pastoral activities, including requested end-of-life prayer, within potential criminal enforcement. The guidance advises clergy to seek independent legal advice.

UK: Army Veteran Appeals Conviction for Silent Prayer

Army veteran **Adam Smith-Connor** is appealing his conviction for **silent prayer** near a Bournemouth abortion facility under a local order prohibiting expressions of approval or disapproval of abortion, including prayer.[87]

In October 2024, Bournemouth Magistrates' Court treated his **bowed head and clasped hands** as expressing disapproval of abortion, although he neither approached anyone nor obstructed access. He received a conditional discharge and was ordered to pay £9,000 in prosecution costs. His appeal challenges the restriction's application to silent prayer.[88]

> ***"It isn't for the authorities to determine the contents of my thoughts on this matter [abortion], on a public street."***
>
> *— Adam Smith-Connor*

UK: Christian Woman Again Prosecuted for Silent Prayer

Christian volunteer **Isabel Vaughan-Spruce** faces **prosecution** for **standing and praying silently** near a Birmingham abortion facility. Charged in December 2025 under the national "buffer zone" law, she pleaded not guilty in January 2026. Prosecutors treated her presence as potentially unlawful "influence" on people accessing abortion services.[89]

In October 2026, Birmingham Magistrates' Court permitted five replacement charges, covering **separate occasions when she stood and prayed silently,** after finding the original charges improperly drafted. She pleaded not guilty to all five, with **trial scheduled for January 2027.**

Her ADF UK lawyers argue that her known Christian pro-life beliefs caused otherwise ordinary presence on a public street to be treated as criminal. The prosecution follows an earlier acquittal and a £13,000 police settlement over previous arrests.[90]

> ***"Standing silently and holding certain beliefs in a public space should never be a crime."***
>
> *— Isabel Vaughan-Spruce*

Northern Ireland: Pastor Appeals Conviction for Open-Air Sermon near Hospital

In May 2026, retired Baptist pastor **Clive Johnston** was convicted and **fined £450 for holding an open-air Sunday service** near Causeway Hospital in Coleraine, Northern Ireland. Although he preached on John 3:16 without mentioning abortion, the court treated the service as unlawful "influence" within the "buffer zone". In October 2026, Belfast's Court of Appeal heard his appeal.[91]

In May 2026, Coleraine Magistrates' Court dismissed a further prosecution against **Claire Brennan** for praying and offering conversation and support near Causeway Hospital. Key witnesses failed to attend, leaving insufficient evidence to proceed. Brennan maintained that her conduct was peaceful and compassionate.[92]

Scotland: Court Dismisses Charges over Offer of Conversation

In April 2026, Glasgow Sheriff Court dismissed charges against Catholic grandmother **Rose Docherty**, arrested for holding a sign reading: ***"Coercion is a crime, here to talk, only if you want."*** She neither approached anyone nor obstructed access. The court found that the prosecution had not specified conduct amounting to an offence under the legislation, and the Crown Office declined to appeal.[93]



Image: Rose Docherty © Alliance Defending Freedom

Netherlands: Pro-Life Volunteers Repeatedly Arrested

Reports published in June 2026 documented repeated **arrests of Christian Kies Leven volunteers** offering information and practical support outside abortion clinics. In Utrecht, authorities required volunteers to remain 200 metres away, citing access and public-order concerns. Kies Leven maintained that its outreach was peaceful and said several cases were discontinued before trial. A **government response** in January 2026 clarified that one-person activities fall under freedom of expression rather than demonstration law: municipalities may regulate them, **but cannot restrict them because of their message.**[94]

Germany: Court Rules Ban on Pro-Life Prayer Unlawful

In March 2026, Aachen Administrative Court ruled unlawful a police ban on a pro-life association gathering within 100 metres of an abortion facility. Participants had prayed the Rosary monthly after Mass since 2005. The court held that **protection against harassment did not create a blanket ban on nearby religious or moral expression.** Police had not established that the vigil would impose opinions on patients or place them under significant pressure.[95]

Austria: Court Upholds Prayer Vigil outside Abortion Facility

In January 2026, Vienna Administrative Court overturned two police decisions rejecting notifications for a '40 Days for Life' prayer vigil. One denied its status as an assembly because of its religious character; the other concerned the specificity of its proposed location following counter-demonstrations. The court confirmed that the **vigil qualified as a constitutionally protected assembly.** A revised notification had already enabled it to proceed.[96]

Spain: Appeal Court Upholds Acquittal of 21 for Prayer

In September 2026, Álava Provincial Court upheld the acquittal of **21 pro-life volunteers prosecuted for praying** near the Askabide abortion clinic in Vitoria-Gasteiz. Initially acquitted in December 2025, they faced charges under legislation criminalising harassment intended to obstruct abortion access.[97]

Rejecting the clinic's appeal, supported by prosecutors, the court found[98] that prayer in small groups without shouting, insults or obstruction did not meet the criminal threshold:

> ***"The proven conduct carried out by the defendants cannot be considered 'harassment'."***
>
> *— Álava Provincial Court, Judgment 158/2026*

4. Religious Symbols in the Public Sphere

Christian crosses and other religious symbols express personal faith, identify places of worship and preserve a community's heritage. Religious neutrality and historical-memory policies can affect both individuals wearing such symbols and monuments on public land. While restrictions are possible within applicable human-rights standards, radical secularist approaches risk treating religious visibility itself as incompatible with public life.

Switzerland: Religious Symbol Ban for Elected Representatives Challenged

In July 2026, evangelical leaders Markus Hofer, Joseph Kabongo and Michael Mutzner challenged **Geneva's constitutional ban on visible religious symbols for elected representatives.** Approved by 51.37% of voters in June 2026, it covers cantonal and municipal legislators during plenary sessions and official appearances, including Christians wearing crosses.[99]

The applicants argue that elected representatives reflect the **population's religious diversity,** rather than embodying the State's neutrality. Hofer described his Salvation Army uniform as part of his Christian identity, while Kabongo had openly expressed his Christian convictions when standing for election.

France: Bill Would Restrict Religious Symbols for Elected Representatives

In April 2026, senators introduced a bill to **ban conspicuous religious symbols worn by local elected representatives** while exercising their mandates or official functions. Breaches could reduce their allowances; repeated non-compliance after a formal warning could lead to court-ordered removal from office.[100]

Although its sponsors refer to Islamic headscarves, the proposal covers all religions, including conspicuous Christian crosses. Still awaiting parliamentary examination, it would make concealing such symbols a condition of exercising elected office, backed by **financial penalties and possible loss of office.**[101]

Greece: Christian Icons in Courtrooms Challenged before the ECtHR

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) is examining *Union of Atheists v. Greece*, concerning **Christian icons displayed in Greek courtrooms.** The applicants requested their removal during proceedings involving religious matters, arguing that the images compromised judicial impartiality, discriminated against non-Orthodox litigants and infringed freedom of conscience. Greek courts refused, and the European Court communicated the case to the Government in July 2025.[102]



Image: © Alliance Defending Freedom

In a January 2026 third-party submission, ADF International argued that a **symbol reflecting national history** cannot, by itself, demonstrate a violation of freedom of belief or undermine the fairness of proceedings.[103]

> ***"Public spaces should not be stripped of crosses, icons or other symbols with religious, cultural, and historical significance in the name of pluralism."***
>
> *— Adina Portaru, Senior Counsel at ADF International*

In *Lautsi and Others v. Italy* (2011), the Court's Grand Chamber upheld classroom crucifixes as **"essentially passive" symbols.** It found that greater visibility for Christianity did not, by itself, establish indoctrination, and recognised national discretion over such displays.[104]

It remains to be seen whether the Court will preserve that distinction when examining Christian icons in a judicial setting. It is argued that requiring removal solely because an image is religious would treat Christian heritage as incompatible with public institutions, without establishing how the image interfered with the proceedings.

France: Cross Removals under Secularism Law

Three cases in 2026 concerned the application of **Article 28 of France's 1905 Law on the Separation of Churches and State.** The provision prohibits erecting new religious symbols on public monuments or land, subject to specified exceptions. Current disputes center around renovations and whether replacements count as preserving a historic monument or erecting a new religious symbol prohibited by the 1905 law.[105]

- In **Saint-Divy, Brittany**, Rennes Administrative Court ordered the removal of a replica Calvary cross in June 2026. The original had stood for approximately three centuries before its relocation to a cemetery in 1967. Although its base remained, the court treated the replica installed in 2022 as a new monument.[106]



Image: © Fondation du Patrimoine

- In **Quasquara, Corsica,** Marseille Administrative Court of Appeal upheld a removal order in June 2026. The municipality argued that its 2022 cross replaced a pre-1905 monument, but the court held that local heritage, Corsican identity and public support did not create an exception.[107]

- In **Robion,** Nîmes Administrative Court ordered a hilltop cross relocated to private property in February 2026, treating it as a post-1905 installation. The mayor defended its historical and commemorative significance, including its restoration after a local woman's murder in 2017, and announced an appeal. A petition opposing removal attracted over 11,000 signatures.[108]

These disputes highlight tensions between statutory installation dates and communities' efforts to preserve or reconstruct Christian landmarks with continuing religious and commemorative significance.

Spain: Removals under "Democratic Memory" Legislation

Measures under Spain's "democratic memory" legislation have targeted Christian monuments for removal because authorities associate them with the Franco dictatorship. Churches and municipalities have contested these classifications, citing the monuments' religious significance, subsequent alterations and heritage protection.

- In December 2025, the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* (BNG) sought to add a public cross in **Vigo** to the national catalogue of symbols contrary to "democratic memory". A 2015 High Court ruling had overturned an earlier removal order, recognising the cross, previously stripped of political inscriptions and emblems, as a religious symbol "which transcends political ideas".[109]

- In **Cáceres,** the Government ordered the removal of the Plaza de América cross following its inclusion in the catalogue.[110] The municipality challenged the order in June 2026, arguing that the inscription had already been changed.[111]

- In **Gijón, Asturias** ordered the Jesuits to remove *Colegio La Inmaculada's* cross-and-angels monument in May 2026, giving them four months to comply or face removal at their expense.[112] In July 2026, Asturias' High Court suspended the order to protect the artwork's integrity. [113] A national decision nevertheless required removal within six months.[114]



Image: ©Mister Prepa

- At the **Valley of the Fallen,** Madrid's High Court suspended drilling and geological surveys in June 2026 over authorisation and conservation concerns. In July 2026, it lifted the suspension, accepting that the preparatory works were reversible and necessary for the Government's "reinterpretation" project.[115]

5. Freedom of Expression

Freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression are **closely interrelated:** the right to manifest religion includes **publicly teaching,** explaining and **discussing religious convictions.** Articles 9 and 10 ECHR protect these activities, subject to restrictions prescribed by law, pursuing a permitted aim, and necessary and proportionate in a democratic society. The following cases examine restrictions on Christian speech, including cancelled lectures, police warnings and criminal proceedings. Even without a conviction, prolonged investigations can have a **chilling effect** on the broader society and discourage lawful religious expression.

Christian Academics Face Pressure and Self-Censorship

OIDAC Europe's research identifies universities as environments where Christians face particular pressure to conceal convictions that conflict with prevailing secular views. Christian students are **especially prone to self-censorship,** fearing exclusion or academic and professional consequences. Reports of hostility towards Christian scholars and campaigns to cancel lectures also raise concerns that the expression of traditional Christian perspectives can jeopardise academic careers.

In Germany, the Munich School of Philosophy cancelled a lecture by **Catholic philosopher Sebastian Ostritsch** in November 2025. His subject was rational arguments for God's existence, comparing Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant. Objections, however, concerned his publicly expressed positions, including **Catholic teaching** on abortion and sexuality, and his philosophical defence of a politician's remarks on the **Christian "order of charity".**[116]

Following **student protests** in which Ostritsch was framed as a "right-extreme fundamentalist" with a "dangerous political agenda", the university withdrew his invitation.[117] It affirmed its commitment to academic freedom but said the controversy would overshadow the lecture and jeopardise a safe event. It also promised an internal review and new formats for handling disagreement.[118]



UK: Pastor Receives Police Warning over Bible Verse

In October 2025, Burnley pastor **Mick Fleming,** known for supporting homeless people and individuals struggling with addictions, said a police officer questioned the display of John 3:16, a verse on God's love and salvation in Christ, on his campervan. According to Fleming, the officer said it ***"could be seen as hate speech in the wrong context"*** and that a complaint could trigger an investigation. Fleming said he would not remove the verse and Lancashire Police said it had no record of the encounter and would not consider the verse hate speech.[119]

Spain: Parties File Complaints over Catholic Campaigns

In March 2025, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) and *Hacemos Córdoba* filed **"hate crime" complaints** against the Catholic lay association ACdP over campaigns about **womanhood** and protecting **unborn children with Down syndrome,** seeking the posters' removal. The complaints were transferred from Córdoba to Madrid. In October 2025, prosecutors reportedly dismissed the complaint concerning the campaign about women.[120]



"Today you congratulate me. Would you abort me tomorrow? Doesn't that seem a little hypocritical?"[121]



"Is a woman born or made?"[122]

Spain: Ministry Refers Bishop's Homily to Prosecutors

In May 2025, Spain's Ministry of Social Rights referred **Bishop Emeritus Juan Antonio Reig Pla** to prosecutors over a homily describing disability as a consequence of original sin while affirming every person's dignity and God's love. He apologised for the misunderstanding and clarified his remarks by reference to **Catholic teaching on original sin** and human suffering. The Ministry nevertheless **requested criminal inquiries,** initiated an administrative inquiry, sought explanations from the Spanish Bishops' Conference and complained to the Ombudsman.[123]

Malta: Matthew Grech's Acquittal Appealed by AG

In March 2026, a Maltese **court acquitted Matthew Grech and two journalists** of "advertising conversion practices" over a 2022 broadcast discussing his Christian conversion and decision to leave a homosexual lifestyle. The court found that the programme was intended to ***"provide a platform for discussion"*** and merely discussed the issue and Grech's personal experience. It also stressed that ***"the law does not condemn the free decisions that each person may take for their own best development".***

The court further cautioned against interpreting the law to protect only ***"one section of our society,*** *namely all persons identifying as LGBTIQ",* while silencing others. Noting that the law did not distinguish between sexual orientations, it asked: *"Would persons identifying as heterosexual seek prosecutions against every presenter who invites persons identifying as LGBTIQ to speak about their personal experiences (...)?"*[124]

However, **Malta's Attorney General appealed the acquittal,** with an appeal hearing reported in October 2026. Grech therefore continues to face criminal proceedings after a three-year trial involving 17 court appearances and the risk of up to five months' imprisonment.[125]

"Over these past three years, the process itself became the punishment."

— Matthew Grech



Image: © Christian Concern

Iceland: Police Scrutinise Priest's Statements

In March 2026, Reykjavík police examined statements by **Father Jakob Rolland,** chancellor of the Catholic Church in Iceland, after he explained Catholic teaching on homosexuality in a radio interview and described the Church's spiritual guidance for people with same-sex attraction who request it. LGBT advocacy group Samtökin '78 and political figures called for legal action under Iceland's "conversion practices" ban, while Rolland maintained that the Church offered only voluntarily requested prayer.[126]

Spain: Investigation into Bishop's Comments Closed

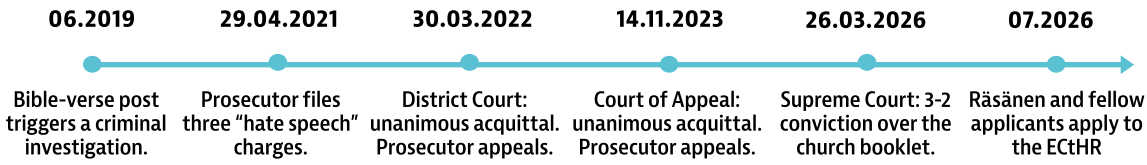
In January 2026, Madrid prosecutors closed an investigation into **Bishop José Ignacio Munilla** following a complaint about his public criticism of Spain's "conversion therapy" ban and his defence of pastoral assistance for people freely seeking to live in accordance with Catholic teaching on sexuality.[127] After the investigation was closed, he reaffirmed the Church's responsibility to provide spiritual support and said the complaint had sought to ***"intimidate the Church".***[128]

Finland: Acquitted over Post, but not over Pamphlet

In March 2026, Finland's Supreme Court **unanimously acquitted Päivi Räsänen** over a 2019 social media post questioning her church's support for Pride and **citing a Bible verse.** However, a **3–2 ruling convicted** her and Lutheran Bishop Juhana Pohjola over a church pamphlet written in 2004 and kept online.

The Court found that passages insulted people on grounds of sexual orientation, despite containing no incitement to violence or comparable threats. **The pamphlet predated the legislation applied,** raising concerns about criminal liability for retaining older religious material online.[129]

The Prosecutor General ordered the investigation despite police initially finding no grounds to proceed, and challenged two unanimous acquittals. In July 2026, Räsänen and Pohjola applied to the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).**[130]



Germany: Investigation into Christian YouTubers

In February 2025, Hamburg prosecutors opened an investigation into statements by Christian YouTubers **Niko and Tino** for a video criticising **Islam and Islamist-related antisemitism.** Prosecutors acted on their own initiative under legislation on insults to religious beliefs capable of disturbing public peace. In October 2026, the **investigation** was reported to have been **closed** because no prosecutable offence had been identified.[131]

6. Religious Autonomy and Church Property

Religious freedom protects communities' **autonomy in their internal affairs,** including choosing leaders and members, teaching their beliefs and providing pastoral care. Its effective exercise also requires access to legal recognition and places of worship. State interference must comply with applicable human-rights safeguards.[132]

Spain: Concerns Over "Conversion Therapy" Bill

In June 2026, the Congress of Deputies approved a bill proposing **six months to two years' imprisonment for "conversion therapies",** including practices freely consented to or requested. [133] It would have added criminal sanctions to the administrative penalties under Law 4/2023.[134] **Concerns about unclear definitions and the inclusion of consensual practices** centred on the risk of penalising voluntary pastoral care for people with same-sex attractions. The bill lapsed following Parliament's dissolution in October 2026.

UK: Draft "Conversion Therapy" Bill Threatens Pastoral Care

In June 2026, the Government published a draft bill for England and Wales proposing **up to five years' imprisonment** for abusive "conversion practices" causing "serious harm" or "substantial distress". Although the Government says ordinary parenting and religious expression are not targeted, the draft contains **no express exemption** for them. Its **inclusion of psychological** or **emotional pressure** has raised concerns about criminalising lawful pastoral care or parental intervention.[135]

Netherlands: Police Enter Church to Stop Service

In January 2026, police entered Praise Church in Tilburg and stopped a worship service led by evangelist **Tom de Wal.** The mayor had classified it as an "event" requiring a permit. De Wal, therefore, continued praying outside and was subsequently arrested.[136]

Prosecutors later concluded that **the outdoor gathering was not an event**, and he would face neither prosecution nor a fine. The municipality maintained that its intervention inside the church was justified.[137]

Spain: Religious Brotherhoods Defend Autonomy

In March 2026, Sagunto's Brotherhood of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ voted to retain its **male-only membership rules.** The Government announced proceedings to withdraw Holy Week's national tourism recognition, and the Ministry of Equality referred the matter to prosecutors. According to reports from May 2026, an **investigation** into alleged sex-based discrimination had been opened.[138]

In a similar case, in November 2025, the Brotherhood of the Holy Christ of La Laguna and the Diocese of Tenerife announced that the **European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)** would examine their challenge to a 2024 Constitutional Court ruling **requiring admission of a woman** to the male-only brotherhood.[139]

Estonia: Restrictions on Orthodox Christian Church

UN experts warned that restrictions on the **Estonian Orthodox Christian Church,** including funding withdrawal and measures affecting clergy and property, threatened religious freedom.[140] In June 2026, the Supreme Court upheld legislation allowing authorities to require churches to sever organisational ties with foreign religious authorities deemed a "threat" to Estonia.[141]

Ukraine: Churches Struggle with Legal Recognition

Ukrainian authorities continued proceedings to dissolve the **Ukrainian Orthodox Church's (UOC) Kyiv Metropolia.**[142] Separate cases seeking dissolution opened against an UOC monastery in July[143] and its Synodal Department for Family Affairs in September 2026.[144]

Romanian Orthodox Christians also faced registration delays after authorities failed to decide on their association's August 2024 application within the legal deadline. According to a priest interviewed by Forum 18, the lack of recognition prevents communities from inviting Romanian priests to serve permanently.[145]

Armenia: Government Targets Church Leadership

The **Armenian Government's** confrontation with the **Armenian Apostolic Church** intensified through clergy arrests, prosecutions and an official programme seeking to replace its leadership. In August 2026, the National Assembly approved the Government Programme for 2026–2031. Its "Spiritual Security" chapter **commits the Government** to securing the **removal** or retirement of the Church's head, **Catholicos Karekin II,** the adoption of **new church statutes** and the election of a successor.[146]

In August, the **Supreme Spiritual Council,** a church governing body chaired by the Catholicos, rejected government authority to impose church reforms or leadership changes, citing **constitutional protection of church autonomy.** It also condemned military and prison chaplaincy restrictions, the removal of church history from schools and additional tax penalties as wider state pressure.

Alongside these attempts to reshape church leadership, law enforcement authorities began **arresting senior clergy** in June 2025, including **Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan,** accused of **plotting to overthrow the Government** after he had led protests demanding the Prime Minister's resignation over territorial concessions to Azerbaijan. Bishop Mkrtich Proshyan and other priests were detained in October 2025 over alleged interference with political participation. In December 2025, a court placed Archbishop Arshak Khachatryan in pretrial detention on drug-related charges. The church condemned the pressure as interference with its religious life.[147]



Image: Catholicos Karekin II © David Chahramanyane

Amid this dispute over church leadership, Karekin II and six bishops also face **prosecution** for allegedly obstructing an interim **court order requiring the reinstatement of a dismissed bishop,** Gevorg Saroyan. The defendants faced up to two years' imprisonment; Karekin II has also been prohibited from leaving Armenia. [148] In October 2026, according to defence lawyer Ara Zohrabyan, the civil court terminated Saroyan's lawsuit and **lifted the interim order,** recognising that **appointing and dismissing diocesan leaders** fall exclusively within the Catholicos's authority and are governed by church law. This decision did not itself dismiss the separate criminal charges against Karekin II and the six bishops.[149]

Türkiye: ECtHR Takes Up Entry Bans on Christians

In January 2026, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) communicated 20 applications concerning **entry bans on foreign Christians in Türkiye.**[150] Authorities had used security codes N-82 and G-87 to prevent re-entry or continued residence, disrupting families and depriving congregations of pastors and other church workers.[151] The Association of Protestant Churches recorded **46 additional foreign Protestants** receiving entry-ban codes in 2025, often long-term residents without criminal records.[152] The **European Parliament** condemned the expulsions and called for their return.

> ***"Peaceful worship and participation in church life are not threats to national security."***
>
> *— Dr Lidia Rieder, ADF International*

Georgia: Land Sale Obstructs Church Access

In 2026, the Evangelical Protestant Church of Georgia reported **losing safe access to its Rustavi prayer house** after the municipality sold its shared courtyard and access road in December 2024 without consulting the congregation. The developer's fencing blocked vehicle access, while construction metres from the church raised safety concerns. In June 2026, the congregation appealed for a safe entrance. Services, youth events and international meetings were cancelled, and substantial activities suspended.[153]

Norway and Czechia: JW Challenge Deregistration

In April 2026, Norway's Supreme Court **overturned the withdrawal of Jehovah's Witnesses' registration and funding.** All five judges found insufficient evidence that the community's practices violated minors' rights; three also rejected claims that community practices unlawfully prevented members from leaving. The judgment affirmed religious autonomy, with implications for other communities' membership rules. [154]

In September 2025, Czechia's Ministry of Culture declined to initiate deregistration proceedings over disputed allegations concerning social exclusion, minors' healthcare and undisclosed teachings. It recognised that deregistration, liquidation and the transfer of remaining assets to other religious communities could **disproportionately interfere with religious freedom.**[155]

7. Freedom of Conscience

Freedom of conscience protects deeply held religious and moral convictions, including beliefs that **conflict with military service or certain medical procedures,** provided access to lawful services is safeguarded. The following cases concern access to alternative civilian service and failures to provide reasonable accommodation for individual and institutional objections to medical procedures that end human life.

Imprisonment and Forced Mobilisation amid Russia's War on Ukraine

In **Russia's Udmurt Republic,** three Pentecostals were denied alternative civilian service despite evidence of their religious convictions. Courts rejected their challenges; two were conscripted in June 2026, while the third received a medical exemption. In January 2026, Baptist **Andrey Topchy** was reported to be performing military service without taking the oath, after his application for alternative civilian service was **refused and his court challenge** was rejected on procedural grounds.[156]

By the end of 2025, Jehovah's Witnesses had reported **four criminal cases** in Russia for alleged evasion of military service, at least one resulting in conviction. Reported penalties in recent cases included **fines and compulsory labour.**[157]

In **Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories,** UN monitors reported in March 2026 that fear of conscription and deployment against their own country's armed forces compelled many Ukrainian men and boys to flee occupied territory.[158] Available sources do not establish how many Christian conscientious objectors were affected.

In **Ukraine,** where alternative civilian service remained unavailable during wartime, courts sentenced Seventh-day Adventists **Andrii Skliar** and **Ihor Kiktev** to **five years and one month's imprisonment** each in June 2026 for refusing military orders on conscience grounds. In July, about 300 Adventists were reportedly being held against their will in military units or training centres.[159]

Two Christian conscientious objectors died after forced mobilisation: Pentecostal **Yevhen Nabraklo** in January 2026 and **Baptist Dmytro Koval** in March 2026. Police were investigating Nabraklo's death; Koval's body reportedly showed signs of severe ill-treatment.[160]

Christian Care Institutions Face Assisted-Suicide Requirements

In September 2026, voters in **Switzerland's Zurich canton** approved legislation requiring hospitals and care homes, including Christian institutions, to **permit and help facilitate assisted suicide on their premises** despite their conscientious objections. Implementation is expected in spring 2027, affecting nearly 30 private homes, including Christian institutions, that currently refuse the practice. These institutions will **no longer be able to exclude assisted suicide,** even where residents chose them for their Christian approach to end-of-life care.[161]

In **France,** the 2026 assisted suicide and euthanasia law also limits institutional conscientious objection, although some protection remains. In August 2026, the Constitutional Council ruled that private institutions may refuse procedures manifestly contrary to their statutory mission or institutional project, **provided other establishments can meet local needs.** Christian hospitals' and care homes' ability to refuse these procedures therefore depends on the local availability of alternative providers.[162]

Spain: Government Requires Registers of Objecting Doctors

In October 2025, the Spanish Government demanded that regional authorities establish **registers of healthcare professionals who conscientiously object to performing abortions,** threatening legal action for non-compliance. The requirement had been introduced through legislation in 2023.[163]

In March 2026, Madrid's High Court of Justice ordered the regional government to begin creating its register. [164] The National Association for the Defence of the Right to Conscientious Objection (ANDOC) warned that the registers could become **'blacklists' used to exclude objecting doctors professionally.**[165]

Netherlands: Pharmacist Pressured over Conscientious Refusals

In October 2026, a complaint was filed with the Dutch Health and Youth Care Inspectorate against Christian **pharmacist Florus Krijgsman** over his refusal to dispense certain medicines on grounds of conscience. Despite **arranging referrals** to another local pharmacy, he faced parliamentary criticism and calls to **restrict conscientious objection** concerning contraception and hormone treatments for gender "transition".[166]

8. Parental Rights and Religious Education

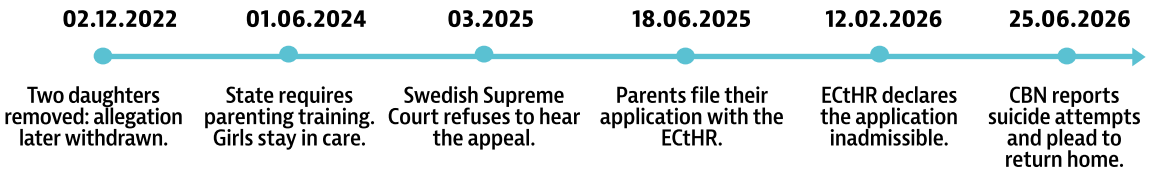
International human rights law protects parents' right to **ensure education consistent with their religious and moral convictions** and to guide their children's religious upbringing. The following cases concern how decisions on schooling, religious practice and child custody can affect Christian families' ability to transmit their faith.

Sweden: ECtHR Rejects Family's Challenge over Child Removal

Daniel and Bianca Samson have been separated from their two daughters since state authorities removed them in 2022 following abuse allegations that were shortly afterwards retracted.[167] The girls **remain in foster care** despite the retraction, prosecutors' finding of no evidence of abuse and the daughters' requests to return home.

In February 2026, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) declared the family's application **inadmissible,** finding that domestic legal remedies had not been exhausted.[168]

The family's representatives said authorities cited church attendance three times a week as evidence of **"religious extremism".** A video call reported in June 2026 showed one daughter describing repeated suicide attempts and asking to return home.[169]



Spain: Court Preference for Secular Schooling

In November 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) communicated *D.H. and E.H. v. Spain,* an application by a Catholic father and his daughter challenging Spain's Constitutional Court decision **favouring secular schooling** after the parents disagreed over their daughter's education. Lower courts had approved a Catholic school while exempting the girl from religion classes. In February 2024, the Constitutional Court annulled those decisions, treating non-confessional schooling as "neutral"—an approach criticised for privileging one parent's worldview and disadvantaging the other on religious grounds.

Spain: ECtHR Examines Ban on Father Sharing Faith

In June 2026, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) communicated *M.J.B.D. v. Spain,* concerning an Evangelical father **barred from taking his son to church or sharing biblical passages.** The mother received exclusive authority over religious upbringing until the child turns twelve. Spain's Constitutional Court upheld the restrictions in May 2025.[171]

The ECtHR asked Spain whether state neutrality can justify requiring parents to remain religiously neutral in their own homes, and if Spanish courts had assessed whether any physical or psychological harm might have been caused by Sunday worship and Bible reading.[172]

Portugal: Court Rejects Religious Objection to Classes

In April 2026, Braga's Administrative and Tax Court rejected the Mesquita Guimarães family's challenge to **compulsory "Citizenship and Development" classes** and ordered the parents to pay court costs. The family objected to teaching on sexuality and gender that conflicted with their religious convictions.[173]

Their sons were required to **repeat school years** after refusing to attend the classes. Class councils initially allowed the boys to progress because of their excellent results, but the school director overturned those decisions. The parents argued that compulsory participation **disregarded their responsibility for their children's moral education.**

Latvia: Home Education Limited

Amendments adopted in February 2026 make **home education in school years 1–6 conditional on municipal approval** from September 2027. Renewable authorisation covers one academic year and requires special circumstances concerning health, social needs, educational access or other significant factors.[174] Religious convictions are not expressly listed as a separate ground, leaving their acceptance dependent on municipal assessment.[175]

Norway: Schools Challenge Restrictions on Christian Teaching

In June 2025, Norway's Directorate for Education and Training (Udir) ordered Samfundets skole Sentrum, an independent Christian school, to change parts of its teaching and learning materials concerning marriage, relationships and sexuality following inspections of five Christian schools. Authorities concluded that, **even in religious education,** schools **could not present** particular forms of **relationship as "right" or "wrong"** for individual pupils, amid parliamentary calls for sanctions against faith-based schools adhering to traditional religious teaching on these subjects.[176]

The schools challenged these restrictions on teaching Christian beliefs about marriage and sexuality, with appeals reported in August 2025. In January 2026, the Norwegian Catholic Council of Bishops supported the challenge, arguing that the orders interfered with the schools' religious foundations and that **Udir** had **no authority to determine Christian doctrine** on marriage, sexuality, the human person or moral responsibility.[177] Christian organisations and school owners also formed a committee seeking ministerial talks, defending Christian education and **parents' freedom to choose schooling consistent with their faith.**[178]

> ***"The Directorate has no theological jurisdiction and no mandate to define Christian doctrine."***
>
> *— Norwegian Catholic Council of Bishops*

France: Catholic Schools Face "Humiliating" State Scrutiny

In December 2025, Catholic education authorities reported **intrusive and humiliating inspections** following the Bétharram abuse scandal. Allegations included questioning children about family religious practices, examining personal material and demands to remove Christian symbols. While accepting legitimate state supervision, they condemned methods undermining staff dignity and schools' religious identity. ***"We could not continue letting our teachers be humiliated,"*** said Guillaume Prévost, secretary-general for Catholic education. The **Education Minister** undertook to **remind inspectors** of their legal duties of **neutrality and objectivity.**[179]

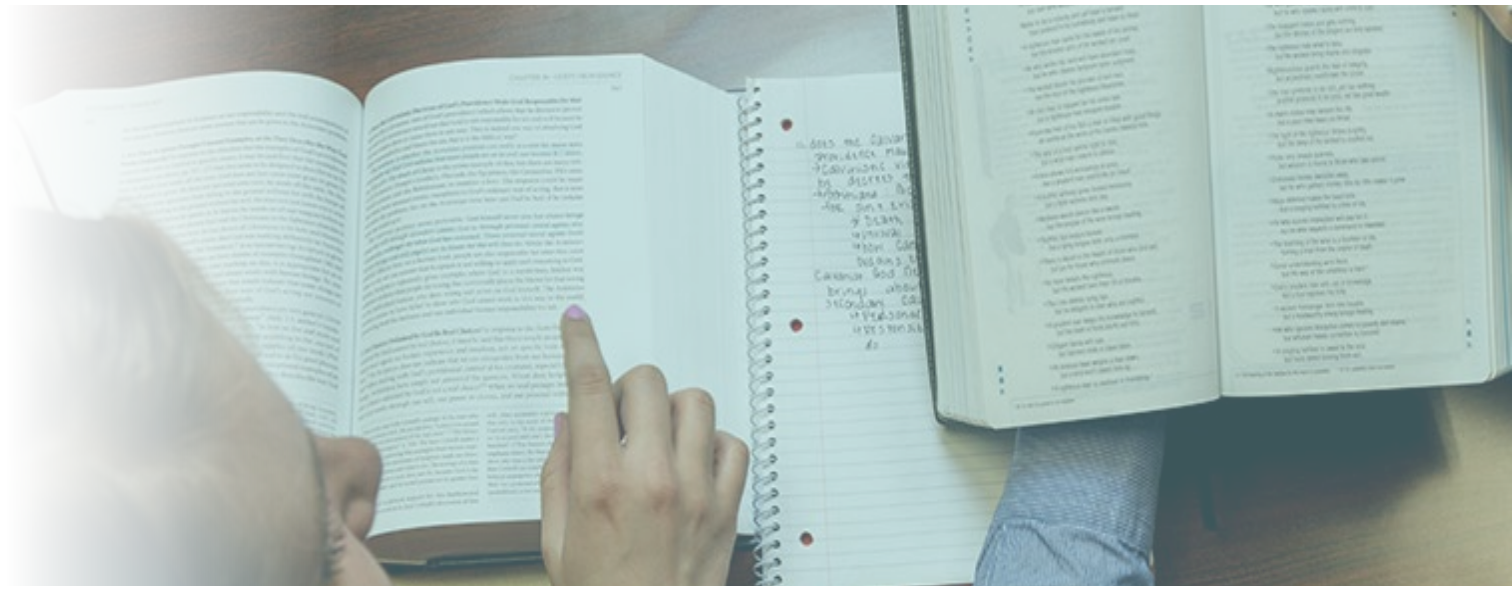
Spain: Evangelical Pupils without Religious Education

In its 2025 report, the **Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain (FEREDE)** recorded nearly **10,000 unmet requests for Evangelical religious education,** citing insufficient teacher recruitment, particularly in Andalusia, Valencia, Castilla-La Mancha and the Canary Islands.[180] The federation stressed that no new teaching contracts had been signed in 2025 in areas where the Ministry of Education directly manages teacher recruitment, despite growing demand. It lodged a formal complaint over the lack of progress in fulfilling ministerial commitments. In July 2026, FEREDE and the Ministry agreed to **review teacher recruitment** and provision arrangements.[181]

Slovakia: Christian Schools Face Restricted Funding Conditions

In January 2026, legislation came into force in Slovakia, making full funding for eligible church-run and private nursery and primary schools conditional on public-provider status or a public-service agreement. Christian schools outside these arrangements face a phased 20% **reduction in standard funding** from September 2028.[182]

Christian school and church representatives have warned that the conditions could **undermine religious schools' financial stability** and **parents' freedom to choose** religious education, particularly for families seeking schools outside their local district.[183]



Conclusions

This report examines intolerance and discrimination affecting Christians across Europe, from violent attacks and social hostility to restrictions on religious expression, employment, education and church autonomy. Its findings demonstrate the importance of protecting religious freedom in its public, private, individual and communal dimensions.

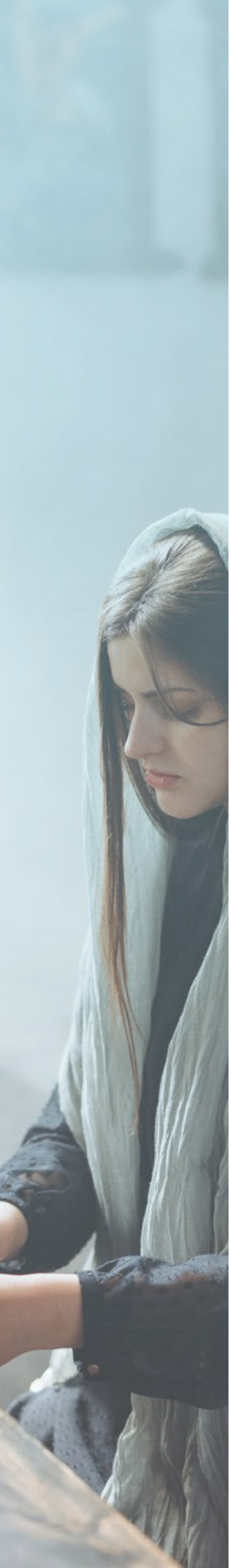
In 2025, OIDAC Europe identified **2,465 anti-Christian hate crimes and incidents, compared with 2,211 in 2024 and 2,444 in 2023.** The highest numbers were recorded in France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Recorded totals remained broadly comparable, although differences in recording practices and data coverage limit comparisons between years.

Within these totals, however, **recorded attacks on individuals,** including threats, **rose from 274 in 2024 to 395 in 2025,** an increase of approximately 44%. France recorded a 70% increase in offences against individuals, with recorded **physical attacks on clergy** and other church officials increasing **fourfold.** These findings underline the need for effective prevention, protection and investigation, alongside more consistent recording of anti-Christian bias.

Beyond hate crime, the report documents a **broad range of restrictions** affecting Christians' **religious freedom** in 2025–2026. Cases concerned employment and professional life, public worship and evangelism, religious symbols, freedom of expression, church autonomy and property, conscientious objection, parental rights and religious education. They illustrate how legislation, administrative decisions and institutional practices can restrict religious freedom even when they do not explicitly concern religion.

Within these findings, a recurring concern is **discrimination against Christians because of their religious convictions,** particularly on marriage, sexuality and the protection of human life. Several cases concerned individuals excluded from employment or public participation because they held or peacefully expressed traditional Christian beliefs, without evidence that they had discriminated against others. While several courts dismissed charges or overturned restrictions, **prolonged proceedings** themselves can impose substantial personal and financial burdens and discourage lawful religious expression.





Christians also continued to face **criminal proceedings for peaceful prayer and religious expression,** including silent prayer, Sunday worship and voluntary conversation near abortion facilities. Northern Ireland police guidance indicated that **carrying a Bible or praying with a patient at their request** could constitute an offence within hospital "buffer zones" if considered capable of "influencing" or "distressing" someone accessing abortion services.

Biased reporting and negative stereotyping in media and political discourse presents a further concern. Surveys among Catholic priests in Poland and Spain indicated widespread concern about media bias against clergy as one of the key drivers of experienced aggression. Some programmes drew criticism for conflating extremist, potentially criminal positions with traditional Christian sexual ethics and biblically grounded social criticism, casting the latter as constitutionally suspect. European advocacy groups have also been criticised for labelling Christian organisations "anti-rights" because of their pro-life convictions. Such portrayals risk reinforcing prejudice and **delegitimising Christian participation in civil society.**

In Russia, Belarus and Russian-occupied Ukraine, **security and extremism labels** have accompanied prosecutions, restrictions on religious literature and the suppression of independent religious communities.

Protecting religious freedom requires authorities to distinguish **belief from conduct, disagreement from discrimination, and peaceful religious expression from coercion or threats,** including when religious convictions challenge prevailing secular views. Laws and their enforcement should meet international human rights standards and public institutions should respect religious diversity rather than make conformity with those views a condition of participation.

Through its documentation and analysis, OIDAC Europe seeks to strengthen the **protection of religious freedom** for all religious or belief communities. Safeguarding these freedoms supports societies in which people can openly practise their faith, express their convictions and contribute to public life without intimidation or unjustified exclusion.

Recommendations

Based on this report's findings, OIDAC Europe puts forward the following recommendations to public authorities, international institutions and other relevant actors.

Recommendations to Governments of European Countries

→ **Protect peaceful religious expression, worship and assembly.** Review vague or overly broad legislation and enforcement practices that risk criminalising these activities, including voluntary pastoral care, in line with international human rights obligations and PACE Resolution 2036 (2015), §§6.3–6.4.

→ **Prevent discrimination because of religious convictions,** including in employment, education and access to services. Promote reasonable accommodation of religious beliefs and practices, following PACE Resolution 2036 (2015), §6.2.

→ **Respect religious autonomy, access to legal personality and places of worship,** including communities' freedom to choose their leaders and organise their internal affairs, as protected by Articles 9 and 11 ECHR.

→ **Respect parents' religious and moral convictions** in education and religious upbringing, consistent with Article 18(4) ICCPR and Article 2, Protocol No. 1 ECHR.

→ **Improve hate crime recording, investigation and victim support.** Collect disaggregated anti-Christian hate crime data, address under-reporting and implement recommendations of ODIHR's practical guide *Understanding Anti-Christian Hate Crimes and Addressing the Security Needs of Christian Communities (2025).*

Recommendations to International Human Rights Institutions

→ **Monitor** intolerance, discrimination and religious freedom restrictions, including against Christians, and follow up on identified violations.

→ **Use established international standards and relevant civil society evidence** when assessing national legislation and practices, including the recommendations of PACE Resolution 2036 (2015) and ODIHR's practical guide.

→ **Scrutinise the misuse of security and extremism classifications** against peaceful religious communities, and address arbitrary detention, suppression of worship and interference in religious autonomy.

Recommendations to the European Union

→ Establish an **EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred,** with a mandate, institutional standing and resources comparable to those of the Coordinators addressing antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, thereby **closing a gap** in the EU's response to religious intolerance and discrimination.

→ **Assess proposed and existing EU legislation** for unjustified restrictions on freedom of religion, expression, association and conscience, and address direct or indirect religious discrimination.

→ **Ensure fair and transparent funding decisions.** Do not exclude organisations merely because they hold lawful Christian convictions; assess compliance against clear legal requirements and provide effective review procedures.

Recommendations to Media Organisations and Journalists

→ **Report accurately and responsibly** on anti-Christian hate crimes and religious freedom restrictions, respecting victims' dignity and avoiding unsupported claims about motives or perpetrators.

→ **Avoid negative stereotyping,** including conflating traditional Christian convictions with extremist conduct. Apply consistent editorial standards across religious communities and correct misleading coverage.

→ **Strengthen religious literacy and engagement with religious communities,** including Christians, to represent their beliefs and practices accurately.

Recommendations to Church Leaders and Christian Organisations

→ **Equip communities to understand and exercise their rights,** recognise discrimination and obtain appropriate support when religious freedom is restricted.

→ **Encourage reporting and support those affected.** Establish accessible reporting channels, document incidents and cooperate with authorities and civil society on security and victim assistance.

→ **Address self-censorship and encourage confident participation in public life,** while strengthening constructive dialogue with other religious and belief communities.

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