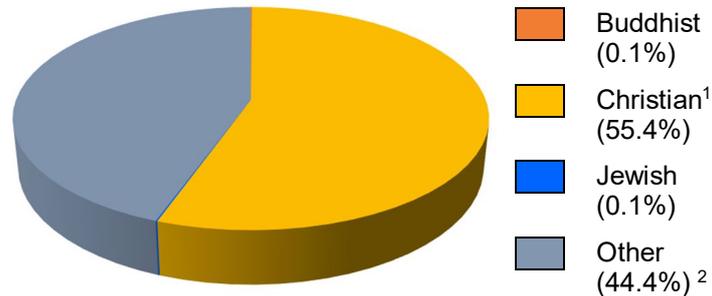


# CZECH REPUBLIC

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<b>Area:</b> 78,866 km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Population:</b> 10.6 million	<b>Political system:</b> Democracy	<b>Major Language(s):</b> Czech
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## Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

There is no explicit mention of religious freedom in the Czech Republic's constitution, but it does protect the "rights and freedoms of man and citizen." The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, a supplementary constitutional document, guarantees the freedom of religious conviction. Religious societies are protected in their independence from the state.<sup>3</sup>

The law states that the Department of Churches in the Ministry of Culture is responsible for religious affairs. While there is no obligation by law for religious groups to be registered with the government and while they are free to perform religious activities without doing so, there are several benefits of official recognition. The law establishes a two-tiered system of registration for religious groups. First-tier registration allows a religious organisation to become a legal entity. Unregistered religious groups are free to assemble and worship, but may not legally own community property. The law provides the option of forming civic associations to manage their property until they can meet the registration qualifications. With second-tier registration, religious groups are entitled to government subsidies as well as gaining the right to perform state recognised marriage ceremonies or serving as chaplains in the military and at prisons. Furthermore, the law permits second-tier registered religious groups to teach religion in state schools. Although religious instruction in public schools is optional, school directors must introduce religious education choices if seven or more students of the same religious group in a class request such instruction.

## Incidents

There have been some efforts at a local level to ban Muslim women from wearing headscarves. Government officials termed those attempts discriminatory. The city of Teplice considered an ordinance banning Muslim women from covering their faces, but the idea was abandoned after checking with the Ministry of Interior, which stated that such an ordinance violated the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

A group called "NO to Islam in the Czech Republic" submitted a petition of 25,000 signatures to Parliament asking the government not to grant the Muslim community second-tier registration, for which the community had not applied.<sup>4</sup> In September 2014 the wall of a mosque in Prague was vandalised with pig's blood and graffiti. While media reported on the incident and an investigation

was started by the police, the Muslim community denied the incident had occurred. Since the Muslim community did not file a claim, the police investigation of the case was suspended. In January 2016 a Syrian man was stabbed by masked individuals, the first attempt of a racially motivated murder against a Muslim in the wake of the refugee crisis. The victim received death threats prior to the assassination attempt. He was known for helping refugees and for his Muslim activism. The perpetrators insulted his religion while attacking him. According to the Prague Monitor, there was no public outcry about the case.<sup>5</sup>

In 2014 the Czech Federation for Jewish Communities (FZO) counted 234 incidents of antisemitism that year and in 2015 the number was almost as high with 221 incidents. These occurred mostly on the internet, with over 80 percent of the displays of anti-Jewish hatred carried out online. The report by the FZO noted, however, that the level of antisemitism was very low compared to other European countries. It warned of anti-Semitic literature becoming more popular though, as well as conspiracy theories about Jewish involvement in the European refugee crisis.<sup>6</sup>

### **Prospects for Freedom of Religion**

According to the newest Freedom House report, freedom of religion is mostly upheld in the Czech Republic.<sup>7</sup> It mentions, however, the anti-Muslim rhetoric of President Zeman, which seems to be in line with a growing anti-Muslim sentiment in the wake of the refugee crisis.<sup>8</sup> As in other Central-Eastern European countries, anti-immigrant moods surged after EU, and especially German demands, for a refugee quota. While the Catholic Church remains mostly undisturbed in the predominantly non-religious Czech society, the Muslim community is increasingly perceived as a foreign threat.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2011 census, some 11% of the total population are Roman Catholic

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country\\_65\\_1.asp](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_65_1.asp)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dlid=238372#wrapper>

<sup>4</sup> <http://10news.dk/?p=371>

<sup>5</sup> <http://praguemonitor.com/2016/02/09/t%C3%BDden-czech-anti-islam-moods-lead-murder-attack-muslim>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.praguemonitor.com/2016/05/18/number-displays-anti-semitism-high-czechrep>

<sup>7</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/czech-republic>

<sup>8</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/czech-republic>