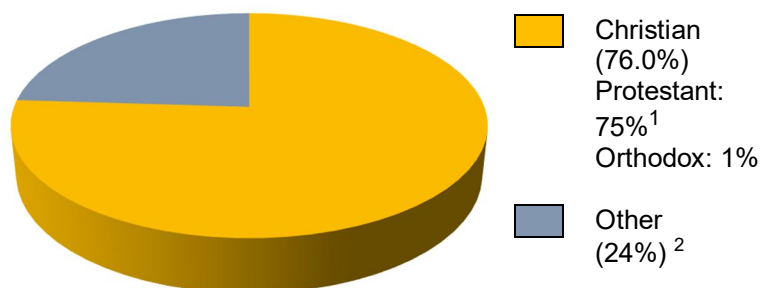


# FINLAND



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<b>Area:</b> 338,145 km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Population<sup>3</sup>:</b> 5.4 million	<b>Political system:</b> Democracy <sup>4</sup>	<b>Major Language(s):</b> Finnish, Swedish <sup>5</sup>
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## Legal Framework of Religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and conscience, which includes the right to profess and practise a religion, to express one's beliefs and to belong to or not belong to a religious community. It prohibits discrimination based on religion.<sup>6</sup> "Breach of the sanctity of religion" is against the law.<sup>7</sup>

The Freedom of Religion Act governs the recognition of religious communities and recognised communities are eligible for the receipt of public funds. Registered religious communities include the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELC), the Orthodox Church of Finland, and other communities such as the Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Evangelical Free Church, and the Seventh-Day Adventists.<sup>8</sup>

The ELC has a special status as an institution under public law and has the exclusive right to take initiative for amendments to the Freedom of Religion Act.<sup>9</sup> Members of the ELC or Orthodox Church must pay a church tax or formally terminate their memberships. The ELC and Orthodox Church must maintain cemeteries and may register births, marriages, and deaths for the state.<sup>10</sup>

Students belonging to a recognised religious community are given religious education in accordance with their families' convictions, while others are taught ethics. The singing of traditional hymns at school celebrations and at Christmas is not considered the practise of religion and is therefore permitted, to preserve Finnish culture. There are a small number of private religious schools.<sup>11</sup>

There are legal restrictions on animal slaughter, but the law allows some religious slaughter, provided that the animals are killed and stunned simultaneously. Leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities have opposed restrictions.<sup>12</sup>

Conscientious objection to military service for religious reasons is permitted, provided that objectors complete alternative civilian service. Failure to serve can result in imprisonment. Only Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from both military and civilian service.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, there are no restrictions on wearing religious clothing or symbols. There are no bans against wearing headscarves.<sup>14</sup> In February 2014, national unions of bus drivers and bus companies agreed that a Sikh turban could be worn by drivers at work.<sup>15</sup>

## Incidents

With respect to reports of incidents relating to religious minorities, it should be noted that because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it might be difficult to determine whether an incident is motivated by racism, xenophobia, or by religious intolerance.

Official figures reported to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) for its 2014 hate crimes report include 71 “anti-religious hate crimes,” including 31 physical assaults, eight cases of damage to property or vandalism, 18 cases of threats, three cases of disturbance of domestic peace, four thefts, and seven other crimes. The data provided does not classify the incidents by faith. Law enforcement forces reported no religiously motivated incidents.<sup>16</sup>

## Related to Christianity

According to the Finnish Immigration Service, half of the asylum applications in 2014 submitted by Iranians were based on their conversion to Christianity and argued that converts faced apostasy charges in Iran.<sup>17</sup> Some Finnish politicians have called for preference to be given to persecuted Christians in the selection of refugees according to the European Union quota.<sup>18</sup>

## Related to Islam

The Ankara-based Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research's (SETA) 2015 European Islamophobia Report says, “That Islamophobia is rising in an alarming way throughout public discourse, including media, politics and especially in the realm of cyberspace and social media. Other academic research cited in this report has shown that Islamophobia is one of the reasons of Muslim radicalisation and why some Muslims decide to leave Finland and move to Syria.”<sup>19</sup>

The construction of a large central mosque in Helsinki was endorsed by the deputy mayor and the Network for Muslim Affairs in 2015.<sup>20</sup> Concerns have been raised, however, as to potential funding by the government of Bahrain and whether it would be run by Finnish Muslims or by imams from outside of Finland.<sup>21</sup> According to the SETA report, there was at least one demonstration against the mosque project organised by the non-governmental organisation the Finnish Defence League (Against radical Islam for freedom and democracy), and the youth branch of the party True Finns published a statement against the mosque.

## Prospects for Freedom of Religion

It appears that there were no significant new or increased governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period under review.

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<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church

<sup>2</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238378>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17288360>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fi.html>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fi.html>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/uskonnonvapaus/?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238378>

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/uskonolliset\\_yhdyskunnat/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/uskonolliset_yhdyskunnat/?lang=en)

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/uskonolliset\\_yhdyskunnat/?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/uskonolliset_yhdyskunnat/?lang=en)

<sup>10</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=238378>

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- <sup>11</sup><http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Kirkollisasiat/opetus/?lang=en>
- <sup>12</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dclid=238378>
- <sup>13</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dclid=238378>
- <sup>14</sup>[http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR\\_2015\\_FINLAND.pdf](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_FINLAND.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup><http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dclid=238378>
- <sup>16</sup><http://hatecrime.osce.org/finland?year=2014>
- <sup>17</sup>[http://www.migri.fi/for\\_the\\_media/bulletins/press\\_releases/press\\_releases/1/0/iranian\\_christian\\_converters\\_frequently\\_arrested\\_and\\_questioned\\_61876](http://www.migri.fi/for_the_media/bulletins/press_releases/press_releases/1/0/iranian_christian_converters_frequently_arrested_and_questioned_61876)
- <sup>18</sup>[http://yle.fi/uutiset/rasanen\\_more\\_selective\\_choices\\_possible\\_for\\_quota\\_refugees/7232600](http://yle.fi/uutiset/rasanen_more_selective_choices_possible_for_quota_refugees/7232600)
- <sup>19</sup>[http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR\\_2015\\_FINLAND.pdf](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_FINLAND.pdf)
- <sup>20</sup>[http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR\\_2015\\_FINLAND.pdf](http://www.islamophobiaeurope.com/reports/2015/en/EIR_2015_FINLAND.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup>[http://yle.fi/uutiset/finnish\\_muslims\\_broadly\\_back\\_helsinki\\_mosque\\_\\_but\\_question\\_funding\\_sources/8415109](http://yle.fi/uutiset/finnish_muslims_broadly_back_helsinki_mosque__but_question_funding_sources/8415109)