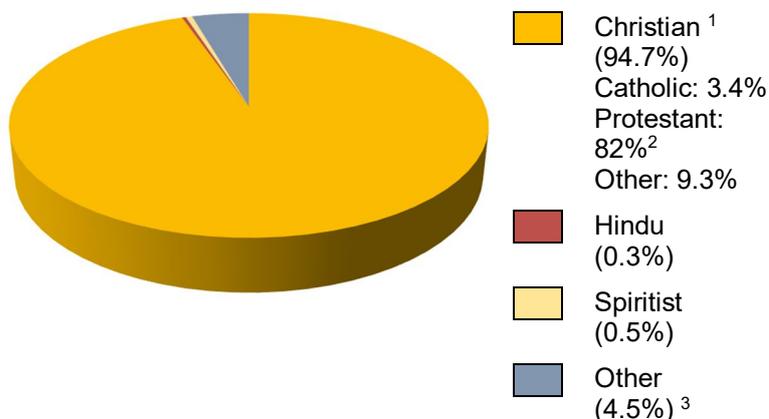
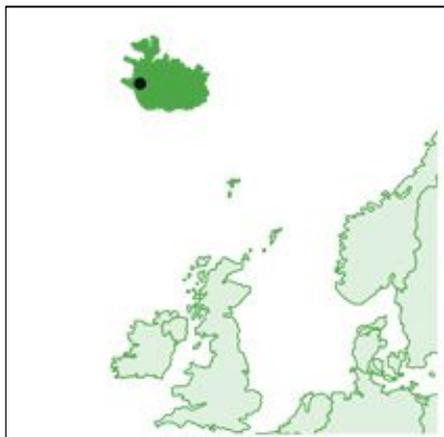


ICELAND



Area: 103,000 km ²	Population⁴: 331,918	Political system: Democracy ⁵	Major Language(s): Icelandic, English, Nordic languages, German
---	---	--	---

Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

While a referendum in 2012 approved a draft new constitution, the final bill was stalled in parliament and its future was uncertain.⁶

The current constitution establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) as the national church, and grants it state support and protection.⁷ It guarantees people the right to form religious associations and to practise their religion in accordance with their beliefs. However, nothing may “be preached or practised which is prejudicial to good morals or public order.”⁸

Religious groups and secular humanist organizations apply to the Ministry of the Interior for recognition and registration and a four-member panel reviews the applications. Registered religious groups and secular humanist organizations receive state subsidies based on membership numbers. The state provides subsidies to registered religious groups and secular humanist organizations and every individual 16 years of age and older must pay a “church tax” to the individual’s respective organization. If there is no official affiliation, the tax is paid to the University of Iceland.⁹

The constitution also provides that everyone is equal before the law, irrespective of religion, and no person “may lose his civil or national rights on account of his religion, nor may anyone refuse to perform any generally applicable civil duty on religious grounds.”¹⁰

Religious minorities

In 2014 the Market and Media Research firm conducted an opinion poll asking people to what extent they supported or opposed various religious organisations building places of worship in Iceland. Of those responding, 64.4 percent supported and 9.5 percent were against the Church of Iceland building new churches. 49.2 percent were in favour of the Ásatrú pagan association while 11.1 percent opposed it. 36.5 percent supported a Buddhist temple. 33.1 percent were against building a second Russian Orthodox Church. 42.4 percent of respondents were against, and 29.7 percent were in favour of a mosque being built in Iceland.¹¹

Incidents

In January 2015, following the Paris terrorist attacks, an MP recommended that background checks on all Muslims in Iceland should be carried out. The Minister of the Interior responded by emphasising the need to respect all citizens.¹²

The Reykjavik city council agreed to give the Icelandic Muslim Association land to build a mosque in September 2013. In November 2015, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson expressed shock and concern that the government of Saudi Arabia intended to fund the construction of a mosque in Iceland by donating one million US Dollars. He expressed concern that such financing would fuel radical Islam in Iceland.¹³ A few days after the President's speech, the Islamic Cultural Center of Iceland was vandalised.¹⁴ At around the same time, a Muslim woman in Reykjavik reported being refused as a tenant on account of her religion.¹⁵

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

In the period analysed, there have been no other reported incidents or negative developments with regard to religious freedom in Iceland, but based on opinion polls and the above incidents, it appears that there may be increasing societal intolerance toward some religious minorities.

¹ http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_107_1.asp

² Evangelical Lutheran: 76.2%, Lutheran Free Churches: 5.8%.

³ <http://www.indexmundi.com/iceland/religions.html>

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

⁵ Political System: Iceland is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary government.

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/icelands-pots-and-pans-revolution-lessons-from-a-nation-that-people-power-helped-to-emerge-from-its-10351095.html>

⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, Article 62

⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, Article 63

⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, Article 64; <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

¹⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Iceland, Articles 64, 65

¹¹ <http://grapevine.is/news/2014/10/08/about-42-against-mosque-in-iceland/>

¹² <http://icelandreview.com/news/2015/01/15/interior-minister-muslims-must-be-left-peace>

¹³ <http://icelandmag.visir.is/article/president-iceland-fears-saudi-arabian-funding-reykjavik-mosque-will-fuel-muslim-extremism>

¹⁴ <http://icelandreview.com/news/2015/11/23/islamic-center-iceland-vandalized>

¹⁵ <http://www.dv.is/frettir/2015/11/22/rasismi-islandi-marwa-fekk-ekki-ad-leigja-ibud-thvi-hun-er-muslimi/>