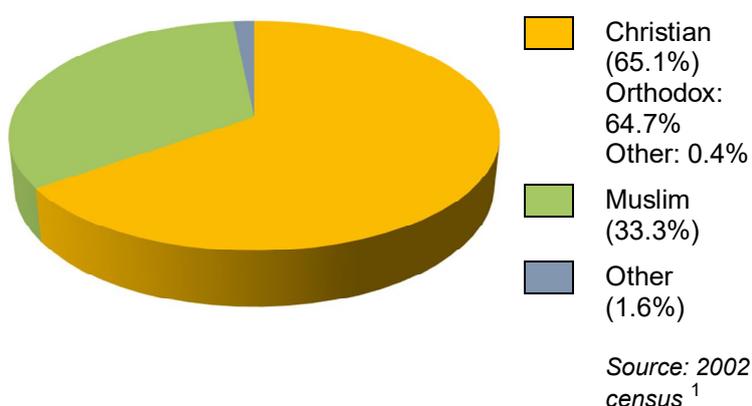


MACEDONIA



Area: 25,713 km ²	Population: 2.1 million	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Macedonian
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The Republic of Macedonia is located in South-east Europe at the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. It is bordered by Serbia and Kosovo to the north, Albania to the west, Bulgaria to the east, and Greece to the south. Macedonia is among the least developed countries in Europe. Also it is a place where two large civilizations clash: Orthodox culture and Byzantium civilization on the one hand, and Muslim culture and Islamic civilization on the other. The republic gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Greek objection to Macedonia's name, insisting it implies territorial pretensions to the northern Greek province of the same name, have stalled the country's movement towards joining the EU.

The country's two major religions are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Other groups include Roman Catholics, members of various Protestant denominations and Judaism.

There is a general correlation between ethnicity and religious affiliation – the majority of Orthodox believers are ethnic Macedonians, and the majority of Muslim believers are ethnic Albanians and Turks.

Most Muslims live in the northern and western parts of the country, while the majority of Orthodox Christians live in the central and south-eastern regions.

The largest Roma concentration is in the Skopje and Eastern regions. The Roma are the poorest of all the ethnic groups.

The constitution defines Macedonia as a secular state. The state also guarantees the freedom of religion, allowing its citizens to freely practise their religion either alone or in community with others. The state allows specific religions to form religious schools, foundations, and charitable organizations.

Articles 9, 20, 48, 54 and 110 of the Macedonian constitution² regulate religious freedom. Article 19 stresses the separation of religion from the state and the establishment of religious educational facilities, concentrating on the collective rights of the religious communities.

The state requires religious communities to be registered through the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups. The Commission categorizes the religious organizations into churches, religious communities and religious groups. The law does not make any distinction in the legal status between them. All three entities are treated alike.³

The first category of churches comprises 15 Christian religious groups, the most prominent being the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church. The others are very small Christian churches, both traditional and newly founded. The second category includes: the Muslim Community, the Jewish Community, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Islamic Community of the Holy See and the Crown, Sathya Sai Center, Vaishnavska Religious Community Iskon, Community Universal Life. The third category comprises eight associations – six Christian and two Muslim. The Bektashi Community, an Islamic Sufi order, is also registered in this category.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is not mentioned in the register.

The law does not permit private religious primary schools, but allows private religious schools at the secondary level and above. The Ministry of Education requires fifth-grade students to take one of three elective courses: Introduction to Religions, Ethics in Religion, or Classical Culture in European Civilization.

The largest organized religious community in Macedonia is the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Ohrid Archbishopric (MPC-OA). By the end of the Second World War, a decision by the People's Liberation Front of Macedonia introduced the foundation of the Macedonian Orthodox Church in order to end the dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BPC) and to grant Macedonian Slavic people a source of their own national identity.⁴

In 1967, the Macedonian Church proclaimed its autocephaly. The Serbian Church bishops denounced the decision and condemned the clergy as schismatic. The autocephaly of the Macedonian Church is not recognized by other canonical Orthodox churches in defense of Serbian opposition. Three neighboring churches, Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek, denied its autonomy, and even more its national prefix (Macedonian).

The Macedonian Orthodox Church celebrates its feasts according to the Julian calendar and services are held in the Macedonian language.

The Macedonian Orthodox Church has about 1200 churches organized under 10 eparchies, whose bishops make up the Holy Synod of Bishops, headed by the Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia. The Church numbers has about 500 active priests in about 500 parishes. The Church claims jurisdiction of about 20 monasteries, with more than 100 monks.

Islam was introduced into the area with the Ottoman conquest and the influx of Turkish settlers in the 14th century. The great majority of Muslims in Macedonia follow Sunni Islam (Hanafi School), with a minority of Bektashi, a traditional dervish order. The Sunni group consists of Albanians, Turks, Roma, Muslim Macedonians and Bosnians. Since Albanians comprise the biggest Muslim group in Macedonia, they felt they should be the front-runners in the battle with the state for an equal status of Islam within the state. The Macedonian state has made attempts to control the Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia through the appointment of a Slavic Macedonian as its head.⁵

International Muslim influence has come to Macedonia from neighbouring Kosovo. Several Saudi-funded mosques have been built in the Albanian villages. As a result, a power struggle seems to have begun within the Islamic Religious Community between the moderate mainstream and the radical (Wahhabi) wing. The leaders of the Islamic Religious Community in Macedonia do not deny the presence of the Wahhabis in the country. The Wahhabi sect controls five mosques in Skopje.⁶

The number of Turkey-based organisations increased their presence in Macedonia in the field of religion, culture and education.

Due to their marginal status in education and politics, Roma have little influence on major Islamic institutions within the country. There have been complaints from local Muslim Roma groups that the Albanian dominated Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia has attempted to expend its control over their communities.

There are 580 mosques throughout Macedonia. In the last 10 years, 350 new mosques were built in Macedonia, of which as many as 88 are in the Skopje-Tetovo-Gostivar area and in villages located under the Shar Mountain.⁷ Some are in completely uninhabited locations in Suva Gora and on the western slopes of Mt Vodno.

The small yet active Catholic community of Macedonia bears the legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius and of Mother Teresa, born and raised in Skopje.

The Catholic Church first appeared in Macedonia in 350. The Macedonian Byzantine Catholic Church was established in 1918.

Currently, there are about 20,000 members of the Catholic Church in Macedonia.⁸

The Catholics in Macedonia belong to the Latin (Roman) and to the Eastern (Byzantine) Rites. Around 5,000 Macedonians are Roman Catholics and around 15,000 are Uniats (Eastern Rites Catholics). The Catholics in Macedonia are not homogeneous in ethnic terms. The Uniats are almost exclusively Macedonians, while the majority of the Roman Catholics are Croats, Albanians, Poles, Slovenes and Hungarians.

Both rites are united in Macedonia under the jurisdiction of Monsignor Kiro Stoyanov who has a bi-ritual function in his capacity as Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Skopje, and of Apostolic Exarch with full jurisdiction over the Uniats in Macedonia.

Uniats acknowledge the Pope in Rome as their highest spiritual leader. The opposition between Uniats and Orthodox Christians is only in terms of administrative subordination to different centres and not in terms of religious rituals.

There are around 30 missionaries from male and female congregations from the Latin and the Eastern rites in Macedonia. The male orders are represented by a Lazarist brothers from the order of St Vincent of Paul of the Latin rites. There are around 10 Eucharistine sisters of the Eastern Rites. The rest of the Sisters belong to the Latin Rite orders of St Vincent de Paul, the Holy Cross and the Missionaries of Charity of Calcutta.

There are 11 Catholic churches in Macedonia and 20 priests of both rites.

The Catholic Church in Macedonia enjoys good relations with the representatives of the two other main religions in the country. According to Mons Stojanov, the Catholic Church tries to help the Orthodox Christians and the Muslims in Macedonia reconcile their positions.

The only Jewish community in Macedonia is based in Skopje and has 250 members, most of them Sephardic Jews.⁹

The constant construction of new churches, chapels, high crosses, minarets and mosques has been changing the Macedonian landscape for the past decade. The Macedonian Orthodox Church sees the construction of churches as a way of repelling the "invading tendencies of the Muslims", who are beginning to settle in traditionally Christian areas.¹⁰ For the Islamic Religious Community the erection of a series of historical monuments and new churches is a state project to prove the Orthodox character of the country.

In 2001 the country experienced an armed conflict between the central government and ethnic Albanian guerrilla fighters. The conflict ended in August of that year with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. However, internal relations between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians have remained the most sensitive issue affecting the country's security, with potential impact regarding entry into the European Union.¹¹

Incidents

No incidents have been noted.

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

The Islamic and Ottoman heritage in Macedonia remains a source of disagreement between Albanians and Macedonians.

There are centres where radical Islam is preached in Macedonia. This does not necessarily mean that Wahhabism is becoming a trend. Macedonia is oriented towards EU membership and it is not in the state's interest to see its Muslim populations radicalized.

However, this does not mean that various international Islamist fundamentalists will not make any further attempt to spread their influence and eventually change the face of Islam in the country.¹²

Other challenges that Macedonia needs to gradually overcome include: internal friction and conflict within the Orthodox community and increasing religious diversity caused by immigration.

Today in Macedonia, extreme secularism often clashes with the established, conservative cultural values rooted in religion. The teaching of religion in public schools, the ways that religious minorities publicly manifest their cultural values, the definition of abortion, the nature of homosexuality, and the lack of interest towards religion among young people are all new subjects to which the modern Republic of Macedonia has to pay attention.

¹ The last attempt to hold a census in October 2011 was scrapped after it began due to ethnic disputes.

² The Macedonian constitution was adopted on November 17, 1991 and reformed in 2001 and again in 2005

³ Republic of Macedonia Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups, (kovz.org.mk), October 2015

⁴ The Role of Religion in Eastern Europe Today Julia Gerlach, Jochen Töpfer

⁵ Krasniqi, G 2010, 'The 'Forbidden Fruit': Islam and Politics of Identity among Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia

⁶ Konstantin Testorides, "Radical Islam on rise in Balkans," Associated Press, 19 Sept 2010

⁷ BIRN 01 Oct 14

⁸ Mons Kiro Stojanov interview in Katolicki tjednik

⁹ The Jewish Community of the Republic of Macedonia

¹⁰ Fr Boban Mitevski, professor at the Theological Faculty and chief of staff to the head of the Ohrid Archbishopric, observed in BIRN01 Oct 14

¹¹ RSCAS 2015/28 The Revival of Islam in the Post-Communist Balkans: Coercive Nationalisms and New Pathways to God

¹² Krasniqi, G 2010, 'The 'Forbidden Fruit': Islam and Politics of Identity among Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia