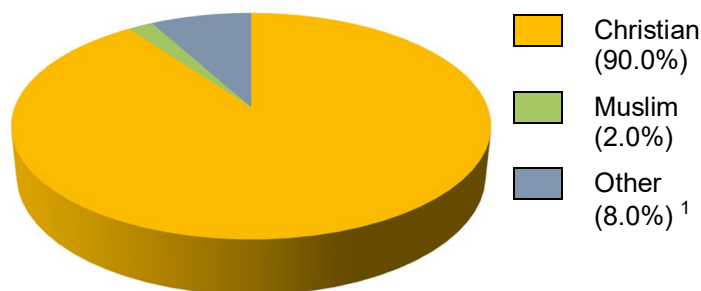
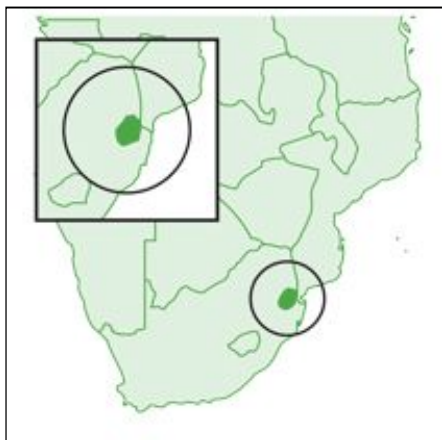


SWAZILAND



Area: 17,364 km ²	Population²: 1,435,613	Political system: Monarchy	Major Language(s): English, siSwati ³
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Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

In recent years, the small, landlocked Southern African country of Swaziland has increasingly become a haven for refugees from the crisis-torn regions of Africa. According to the UNHCR, the number of refugees increased year-on-year by 25 percent in 2013.⁴ Most displaced people come from war-torn areas in Central and East Africa to Swaziland,⁵ which has become a temporary, or even permanent, home for people from the crisis-stricken countries of Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Swaziland is a particularly attractive haven for refugees because its neighbours the large and economically strong South Africa. On the other hand, the outlook for immigrants in Swaziland has worsened significantly in the wake of the major drought in 2015/2016. Practically all of the countries of Southern Africa have been affected by the drought, which in some places has decimated harvests, or even wiped them out.

While the religious life of Swaziland is diverse, the vast majority are Christian. Independent African churches are represented, in addition to Protestants, Anglicans and Catholics. Churches are involved in the Council of Swaziland Churches (CSC).⁶ It is believed that some 40 percent of the population practice a blend of Christian and traditional African rites locally referred to as 'Zionism'.⁷

The 2005 constitution of Swaziland recognises and protects freedom of religion. Section 20 (sub-section 2) states: "...a person shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, or social or economic standing, political opinion, age or disability".⁸ Sub-section 3 states "For the purposes of this section, "discriminate" means to give different treatment to different persons". Section 23 (subsection 1) reads: "A person has a right to freedom of thought, conscience or religion." The constitution also protects people's "freedom of worship either alone or in community with others."

At the same time, the traditional laws and customs that are interpreted by the traditional courts, and the 360 village chiefs, also protect the right to engage in worship, including non-Christian religions. However, village chiefs are entitled to apply pressure on their communities to promote a particular form of worship, saying it is connected with local traditions.⁹

Religious groups must obtain government approval to build new places of worship in cities, and the approval of the village chiefs to build houses of worship in rural areas.¹⁰ The country's laws require registration by religious groups and churches. Communities that define themselves as Christian must apply for registration with one of the three national, inter-denominational associations – the League of Churches, the Swaziland Conference of Churches or the Council of Swaziland Churches. This is necessary in order for them gain a recommendation for government registration.¹¹

Upon receipt of this recommendation, the Ministry of Justice registers the organisation. For native non-Christian religious groups, registration requirements are met if a leader, a congregation and a place of worship exist. Churches and organised groups are exempt from income tax.

The Council of Swaziland Churches encompasses Anglicans, Catholics (as an observer), Mennonites, Episcopalians and Methodists.¹² The League of Churches represents the Zionist community and the other independent, African Churches.¹³ The Swaziland Conference of Churches represents the Evangelicals.¹⁴ The three organisations work together in rural development projects, and in general mission matters. They issue statements about current events, including contentious issues. They have jointly called for religious freedom to be included in a new draft constitution.

Religious education is a compulsory subject in primary schools but choice exists for secondary schools.¹⁵ In the curriculum, religious education includes all faiths. However, in practice the religion taught in schools is from a Christian perspective. The only religious youth groups permitted in schools are Christian. In many state-run schools, volunteers conduct public prayers and liturgical celebrations. Good Friday, Easter Monday, the Ascension and Christmas Day (25th December) are national holidays.¹⁶

Many of the organised Christian religious activities are supported by the government and the country's royal family (Swaziland is a conservative monarchy). In principle, the authorities cover the costs of transport of pilgrims and visits to shrines. State radio and television broadcast Christian religious programming, which always leads to protest on the part of non-Christian groups, who are not granted any airtime on public radio or television.¹⁷

Incidents

There are occasional reports of cases of discrimination for religious reasons, particularly in rural communities and directed towards non-Christian groups.¹⁸ Both major newspapers in Swaziland, the Swazi Observer (organ of the government) and the independent Times of Swaziland, have repeatedly published opinion pieces calling for companies run by Muslims to be expelled from the rural areas, to make room for local entrepreneurs who are members of the Swazi people.¹⁹ This example shows once more that cooperation between religious communities strengthening society can begin to falter in times of economic distress, particularly in societies with a wide range of faiths.

The role of the royal family in Swaziland is not free from controversy. Despite great poverty and high unemployment, King Mswati III wants to go ahead with the planned construction of a church in the former capital city of Lobamba. According to the newsweekly 'African Independent', the cathedral is expected to cost US\$157 million and offer space for around 30,000 faithful. Activists are critical of the call to support this project through donations by the population. At the moment, the majority of the people in Swaziland are unable to survive without external donations, according to Sibusiso Nhlabatsi, the spokesman for the organisation 'Swaziland Lawyers for Human Rights'. The King is criticised for his reportedly extravagant lifestyle while 63 percent of the population of Swaziland live in poverty. According to the World Bank, this Southern African country is one of the world's poorest. To date, Swaziland's large-scale celebrations of Mass have been held in stadiums.²⁰

Prospects for freedom of religion

Generally peaceful religious co-existence in Swaziland is unlikely to come under strain in the near future. There is cause for concern, however, as a result of the government's increasingly repressive policy towards the opposition, as well as the country's lingering economic problems. Whether these two developments will have a lasting impact on religious co-existence in the country remains to be seen.

¹ U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report 2014

² CIA 2016: The World Factbook, estimate July 2015

³ CIA 2016: The World Factbook 2016

⁴ UNHCR 2016

⁵ <https://www.laenderdaten.info/Afrika/Swasiland/fluechtlinge.php>

⁶ U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report 2014

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=217889

⁹ U.S. State Department 2016: International Religious Freedom Report 2014

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <http://councilofswazilandchurches.org>

¹³ https://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_African_Churches

¹⁴ <http://swazilandcc.org/aboutus/>

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State 2016: International Religious Freedom Report 2014

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_Swaziland

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State 2016: International Religious Freedom Report 2014

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ http://de.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/03/05/swasiland-k%C3%B6nig_plant_trotz_armut_volkfinanzierte_kirche/1212999