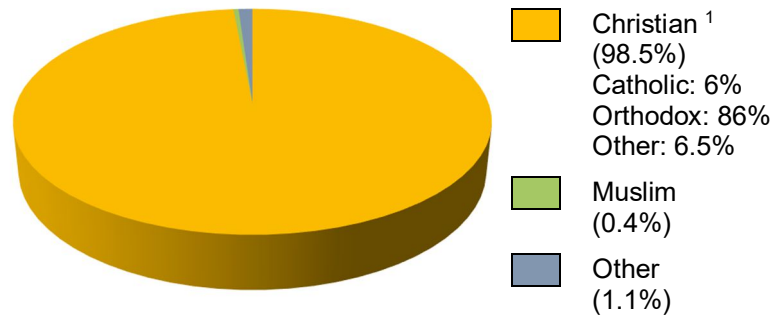


ROMANIA



Area:	Population:	Political system:	Major Language(s):
238,391 km ²	19,511,000	Democracy	Romanian

Legal framework on Freedom of Religion and actual application

The constitution guarantees the freedom of religious beliefs. It states that all religions are independent from the state and have the freedom to organise “in accordance with their own statutes”. The law imposes restrictions on minority religious groups in terms of registration requirements and the granting of official religious status. The law establishes a three-tier system of recognition: “religious groups”, religious associations, and religions. “Religious groups”, as defined by the law, are groups of individuals who share the same beliefs. “Religious groups” are not legal entities and do not receive tax exemptions or support from the state. Religious associations are defined as groups of individuals who share and practise the same faith, but are also legal entities and must be registered as such in a religious association registry. To register, religious associations must have 300 citizen members and must submit members’ personal data. The membership requirement for registration of all other types of associations is three members. Religious associations do not receive government funding but receive limited tax exemptions. Groups recognised as religions under the law are eligible for state support based on their proportional representation in the census. They have the right to establish schools, teach religion classes in public schools, receive government funds to build places of worship, pay part of their clergy’s salaries with state funds, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licences for denominational channels, own cemeteries, and receive tax-exempt status.

Incidents

Many hearings of restitution lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church Courts were delayed by the courts. Furthermore, the Greek Catholic Church was asked to pay judicial fees, a requirement not consistent with the law. The Orthodox Church often filed appeals or change of venue requests that delayed resolution of some lawsuits. In a number of cases, courts ruled against the restitution of Greek Catholic churches, although the Greek Catholic Church had produced ownership deeds, on the grounds that the Greek Catholic Church had a smaller number of adherents than did the Orthodox Church. One such example occurred in October 2014 in Salonta. The Greek Catholic Church reported that Orthodox religion teachers harassed Greek Catholic children, who had to stay in the classroom during the Orthodox religion class because religious instruction in their faith was not available. The government continued to refuse to return to the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church a building housing the Batthyaneum Library and an astronomical institute, despite a 2012

ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ordering the government to remedy the situation.

There were reports of a range of anti-Semitic incidents, including desecrations of synagogues by vandals, anti-Semitic sermons by Orthodox priests, Holocaust denials, and commemorations of former pro-Nazi Legionnaire leaders. In one well-publicised case, an individual advertised on the internet a lampshade he said had been made from the skin of a Jewish victim of the Holocaust.² Orthodox clergy reportedly harassed Greek Catholic clergy and church members and denied minority religious groups' access to cemeteries. Minority religious groups said that the media favoured the Orthodox Church and disseminated negative reports about minority religious denominations.³

There is very strong opposition against building a second mosque in the capital, Bucharest. Even though the international treaties have been signed, on a local level anti-Muslim activists are trying to prevent construction.⁴ Their fears of a rising tide of Islamism in Romania are echoed by the MCA Romania, the Centre for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism. The director of the centre warned that the building of the mosque could lead to a rise in fundamentalism and anti-Semitism.⁵

In May 2016 the U.S. embassy in Bucharest strongly criticised the country's central bank for releasing a coin commemorating Mihail Manoilescu, a former governor of the National Bank of Romania during the World War II era. Manoilescu was a promoter and contributor to the fascist and anti-Semitic ideology of the Romanian state at that time.⁶

The recent emergence of a pro-life movement in Romania has brought about some ecumenical co-operation between Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Christians.⁷

In a recent move, the Romanian government approved a Holocaust restitution bill, easing the process of recovering property seized from Jews during the World War II era. This is seen as an acknowledgement of Jewish suffering during that time, important in improving relations between Romania's religious communities.⁸

Prospects for Freedom of Religion

On a general level, freedom of religion is respected in Romania and the national government tries to promote inter-religious tolerance. There are, however, many cases of hostility against various religions or denominations on a local level. Many local authorities and Romanian Orthodox priests act to preserve the image of a purely Orthodox, Romanian nation. The hostility is directed against all other religions and denominations, both historically Romanian (including the Roman Catholic Church) and those relatively new to the country. Anti-Muslim sentiments continue to rise in society in the wake of the refugee crisis, and of an increased fear of Islamist terrorism. While the efforts of many higher government officials and clergymen of the Romanian Orthodox Church must be noted, there is still a strong culture of discrimination against religious minorities in Romania.

¹ According to the 2011 national census some 86% of the population adheres to the Romanian Orthodox Church and about 4-6% to the Roman Catholic Church.

² <http://www.jta.org/2014/08/05/news-opinion/world/romanian-watchdog-outraged-by-ad-for-lampshade-made-of-human-skin>

³ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2014&dclid=238424#wrapper>

⁴ http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/rumaenien-mit-der-moschee-ziehen-wir-terroristen-und-bomben.795.de.html?dram:article_id=351732

⁵ <http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/311600/will-planned-romania-mosque-stoke-anti-semitism/>

⁶ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-criticizes-romania-central-bank-for-anti-semitic-coin/>

⁷ <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2014/05/16/an-inspiring-story-of-romania-s-fledgling-pro-life-movement/>

⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/world/europe/romania-holocaust-survivors-jews-restitution-claims.html?_r=0