

ROMANIA 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits restricting freedom of conscience and belief, as well as forcing an individual to espouse a religious belief contrary to the individual's convictions. It stipulates all religions are independent from the state, and religious groups have the freedom to organize "in accordance with their own statutes." According to the law on religious freedom and religious denominations, the state recognizes the "important role" of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the history of the country, but it also recognizes the role of "other churches and denominations." The law specifies a three-tiered classification of religious organizations: religious denominations, religious associations, and religious groups.

During the year, the government approved two applications for registrations of religious associations. Reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties continued, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. In January, Calin Georgescu, honorary chair of the political party Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, praised Ion Antonescu, the country's dictator during the Holocaust, and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder and leader of the Legionnaire Movement, an organization that adopted antisemitic legislation and carried out various antisemitic attacks, including a pogrom in Bucharest in 1941. In March, a Bucharest court revoked the deferred prison sentence against former intelligence officer Vasile Zarnescu, previously found guilty of Holocaust denial, and instead issued him a warning. In February, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciuca established an interministerial committee for monitoring the implementation of the two-year national strategy to combat antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech, which the government adopted in 2021.

Some minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholic Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, continued to report Romanian Orthodox priests

and adherents at times blocked their access to cemeteries. Material promoting antisemitic views, glorifying the Legionnaire Movement, an antisemitic group founded in 1927 and also known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and promoting Holocaust denial and relativism, continued to appear on the internet. Media outlets reported that during a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest in January, two persons attempted to lay a wreath with a message denying the Holocaust, and officials opened an investigation. According to a study released by the Wiesel Institute in July, articles published online continued to state that Jews or Israel were responsible for manufacturing harmful COVID-19 vaccines and were profiting from the health crisis. Its survey results issued in 2021 found 22 percent of respondents agreed with a statement that Jews act to destabilize society while 64 percent of respondents disagreed.

U.S. embassy officials continued to advocate with the government for restitution of religious property to the original owner, and religious tolerance. The embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom and paid tribute to Holocaust victims through Facebook postings. Embassy officials met with ROC leaders and with representatives of the Jewish and Islamic communities to discuss ways to promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 18.5 million (midyear 2022). According to a 2011 government census, ROC adherents constitute 86.5 percent of the population and Roman Catholics almost 5 percent. According to the census, there are approximately 151,000 Greek Catholics; however, Greek Catholics estimate their numbers at 488,000. According to the Greek Catholic Church, since the time of the census, a significant number of persons whose Greek Catholic families were forced to covert during the Communist regime rediscovered their roots and joined the Greek Catholic Church. Other religious groups include Old Rite Russian Christians; Protestants, including Reformed Protestants, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Lutherans, and Evangelical Augustans; Jews; Muslims; Jehovah's Witnesses;

Baha'is; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Zen Buddhists; the Family (God's Children); the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church); the Church of Scientology; and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. Atheists and nonbelievers represent less than 1 percent of the population.

According to the 2011 census, Old Rite Russian Christians are mainly located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Of the 64,337 Muslims counted in the 2011 census, 43,279 live in the southeast, near Constanta. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania. Protestants of various denominations and Roman Catholics reside primarily in Transylvania. Orthodox and ethnic Ukrainian Greek Catholics live mostly in the north. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Members of the Armenian Apostolic Church are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Virtually all members of the Protestant Reformed and Unitarian Churches of Transylvania are ethnic Hungarians. More than half of the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Transylvania are composed of ethnic Hungarians. Approximately 40 percent of the country's Jewish population of 3,400 resides in Bucharest.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution prohibits restricting freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, or religious beliefs, as well as forcing individuals to espouse a religious belief contrary to their convictions. It stipulates all religions are independent from the state and have the freedom to organize "in accordance with their own statutes" under terms defined by the law. The law on religious freedom and religious denominations specifies the state's recognition of the "important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church" as well as the role of "other churches and denominations as recognized by the national history" of the country.

The constitution states religious denominations shall be autonomous and enjoy state support, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, hospitals, penitentiaries, retirement homes, and orphanages. Only clergy members of recognized religious denominations may be hired by the government as military or prison chaplains. Regulations state that clergy members of religious associations may be granted access to prisons on a case-by-case basis in certain conditions. There are no similar regulations for religious groups. The law forbids public authorities or private legal entities from asking individuals to specify their religion, except for the census.

The provisions of the law devoted to religion stipulate a three-tier system of religious classification, with “religious denominations” at the highest level, followed by “religious associations” and “religious groups” at the most basic level. Organizations in the top two tiers are legal entities, while religious groups are not. Civil society associations established under separate provisions of the law governing associations and foundations may also engage in religious activities and have the status of legal entities.

By law, there are 18 religious organizations recognized as “religious denominations,” all of which were in existence at the time the law on religion was enacted in 2006: the ROC, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustan Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Federation of Jewish Communities, Muslim Denomination (Islam), and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Additional organizations seeking recognition as religious denominations must demonstrate 12 years of continuous activity after 2006, the effective date of the law. A religious association is then eligible to apply for the status of religious denomination if it has a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population as counted in the most recent census (approximately 20,120 persons).

The law defines a religious association as an organization of at least 300 citizens who share and practice the same faith and has attained legal status through registration with the Registry of Religious Associations in the office of the clerk of the court where the main branch of the association is located. To register, religious associations must submit to the government their members' personal data (e.g., names, addresses, personal identification numbers, and signatures), which the law says the government may not share with other public institutions or use in any other way. To operate as religious associations, organizations also require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations, which is under the authority of the Office of the Prime Minister.

The law defines a religious group as a group of individuals sharing the same beliefs. Religious groups do not have to register to practice their religion and do not need approval from the national secretariat to operate.

Civil society associations engaged in religious activities function like secular associations and foundations; however, they do not receive the same benefits as religious denominations or religious associations. These associations do not require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations to operate. Their registration falls under the provisions of law governing the establishment of foundations, associations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which require a minimum membership of three individuals. Such civil society associations are not required to submit members' personal data.

Under the constitution, each of the country's 18 recognized ethnic minorities, including Jews, who in some laws are categorized as an ethnic group and in others as a religious group, is entitled to a representative in the Chamber of Deputies. An organization is required, however, to receive votes equal to 5 percent of the national average number of votes cast by district for a deputy to be elected, and any citizen, regardless of religious affiliation, may vote for them. The list of organizations that benefit from these provisions is limited to those belonging to the National Council of Minorities, which consists of organizations already in parliament.

Religious denominations are eligible for state financial and other support. They have the right to teach religion classes in public schools, receive government funds to build places of worship, partially pay clergy salaries with state funds, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, and apply for broadcasting licenses for their own stations. Under the law, the amount of state funding a denomination receives is determined by the number of adherents reported in the most recent census, as well as by “the religious denomination’s actual needs,” which the law does not define.

Religious associations do not receive government funding and do not have the right to teach religion in public schools, but both they and religious denominations receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups do not receive either government funding or tax exemptions.

Both religious denominations and religious associations may own or rent property, publish or import religious literature, proselytize, establish and operate schools or hospitals, own cemeteries, and receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups have no legal status to engage in such activities; however, they may practice their religious beliefs, including in public.

Civil society associations engaged in religious activities may engage in religious worship and own cemeteries. While they do not receive the same tax exemptions or other benefits granted to religious denominations and religious associations, they may receive the tax advantages and other benefits accruing to civil society associations and foundations.

Legal provisions allow local authorities to fund places of worship and theological schools belonging to religious denominations, including providing funding for staff salaries and building maintenance, renovation, and conservation or construction of places of worship. The government funds theological schools through the same mechanism available for other preuniversity schools. No similar provisions

exist for religious associations or other associations engaged in religious activities; however, these associations may receive funding through legal provisions for civil society associations and foundations.

The law allows all types of religious organizations to bury their dead in cemeteries belonging to other religious organizations, except for cemeteries belonging to local Jewish and Muslim communities. By law, non-Muslims and non-Jews are not entitled to be buried in Jewish or Islamic cemeteries. Public cemeteries must have separate sections for each religious denomination if requested by the denominations operating in the locality.

The law allows clergy from recognized religious denominations to minister to military personnel. This includes the possibility of clergy to function within the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service, Protection and Guard Service, Special Telecommunications Service, and General Directorate for Penitentiaries. Under various other arrangements, clergy of recognized religious denominations, and in some cases religious associations, may enter hospitals, orphanages, and retirement homes to undertake religious activities. Religious denominations and religious associations may undertake activities in penitentiaries, subject to approval by the institution's director.

The law provides for the restitution of religious properties confiscated between 1940 and 1989, during World War II and the ensuing Communist regime, if the properties are in the possession of the state.

Under the law, if a confiscated property is used "in the public interest," such as for a school, hospital, or museum, and is returned to its previous owner, the current occupants are allowed to remain in it for 10 years after the restitution decision and pay a capped rent. The law does not address the general return of properties currently used as places of worship by another religious group.

A separate statute on the reinstatement of the Greek Catholic Church regulates the restitution of properties to the church from the ROC. Restitution decisions

are made by a joint commission representing the two churches and based on “the will of the believers from the communities that possess these properties.” The Greek Catholic Church may pursue court action if attempts to obtain restitution of its properties through dialogue are unsuccessful.

The law establishes a points system of compensation in cases where in-kind restitution is not possible. Religious groups may use the points only to bid on other properties in auctions organized by the National Commission for Real Estate Compensation (NCREC). The NCREC also validates compensation decisions of other local or central authorities, including those of the SRC, which decides on restitution claims filed by religious denominations and national minorities. The law establishes a 240-day deadline by which claimants must submit additional evidence in their cases at the specific request of the entity in charge of resolving their restitution claim. If a claimant does not meet the deadline, the administrative authority may reject the case. The authority may extend the deadline by an additional 120 days if the claimants prove they made a concerted effort to obtain evidence, usually held by other state authorities, but were unable to do so.

The law nullifies forced “donations” of Jewish property during World War II and the Communist era and lowers the burden of proof for the previous owners or their heirs to obtain restitution. The law designates the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania as the legitimate inheritor of forfeited communal Jewish property and accords priority to private claims by Holocaust survivors. The law does not address heirless or unclaimed property left by Holocaust victims. According to the country’s various civil codes adopted from 1939 on, heirless property and unclaimed property devolves to the government.

The law prioritizes compensation to Holocaust survivors for immovable properties confiscated during the Communist regime. Under the law, the National Authority for Property Restitution (NAPR) must make a one-time compensation payment to successful claimants who are Holocaust survivors, as opposed to other claimants who receive compensation in several tranches over a period of five years. The

law expands access to prioritized processing of claims by persons residing outside the European Union who can prove their status as Holocaust survivors with documents issued by an entity designated by the government of their country of residence.

Romanian and foreign citizens persecuted based on ethnic criteria between 1940 and 1945, defined in the law to include Jews, are entitled to a monthly pension. The amount of the pension varies, depending on the type and length of persecution endured. The pension is available to survivors and their families who are no longer citizens, thus entitling foreign citizen Holocaust survivors and foreign citizen family members of Holocaust victims to the same benefits as Romanian citizens. Applicants are required to submit official documents issued by Romanian or foreign government authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross to prove Holocaust survivor status. The government does not accept certification from the U.S.-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany as proof of Holocaust survivor status, despite requests made by the World Jewish Restitution Organization, and as recommended by the U.S. government.

The law allows Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries and who are eligible for compensation in Romania to prove they were victims of racial and ethnic persecution based on official documents released by institutions of the country of residence. The law exempts Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries from having to physically submit their applications for compensation at the pension offices in Romania and allows them to use other means of communication, such as electronic mail or express mail, to apply.

By law, children of Holocaust victims and survivors are eligible for monthly compensation. The law also applies to persons who do not have Romanian citizenship or do not reside in the country.

By law, religious education is optional in both public and private schools. Each of the 18 legally recognized religious denominations is entitled to offer religion

classes, based on its own religious teachings, in all schools. The Ministry of Education drafts the religious education curriculum for religious education in cooperation with all religious denominations to ensure the accuracy of the teachings. A denomination may offer classes regardless of the number of students adhering to the denomination in a school. The law allows for exceptions where the right of students to attend religion classes cannot be implemented “for objective reasons,” without specifying what these reasons may be.

Under the law, participation in religion classes is not required. Parents of students younger than 18 must request their children’s enrollment in religion classes, while students 18 and older may make this request themselves. Students normally take a religious course in their school that is based on the religious teachings of the denomination to which the student belongs. Alternatively, students may opt to take a religion course offered by their denomination outside the school system and submit a certificate to receive academic credit.

Religion teachers in public schools are government employees, but each religious denomination approves the appointment and retention of the teachers of its religion classes.

The law forbids proselytizing in public and private schools. If teachers proselytize, the school management determines the appropriate discipline, based on the conclusions of an internal committee.

The religion of a child who has turned 14 may not be changed without the child’s consent; after age 14, individuals have the right to choose their religion.

The law bans discrimination on religious grounds in all areas of public life. It also bans religious defamation and generating conflict on religious grounds, as well as public offenses against religious symbols. Penalties may include fines varying from 1,000 to 100,000 lei (\$220-\$22,000), depending on whether the victim is an individual or a community.

The law exempts deceased adherents of Judaism from autopsy upon the request of their families or the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania provided law enforcement bodies determine there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding their death.

By law, antisemitism is defined as a perception of Jews expressed in the form of anti-Jewish hatred, as well as speech and physical acts motivated by hatred that target Jews or their belongings, Jewish community institutions, or Jewish places of worship. Penalties for publicly promoting antisemitic ideas and doctrines or manufacturing and disseminating antisemitic symbols range from three months to three years' imprisonment and the loss of certain rights such as the right to vote and run for election. Penalties for establishing an antisemitic organization range from three to 10 years in prison and the loss of certain rights.

The law prohibits the establishment of fascist, Legionnaire Movement (the country's fascist organization established between the two world wars), racist, or xenophobic organizations, which it defines in part as groups that promote violence, religiously motivated hatred, or extremist nationalism, the latter term undefined. Penalties for establishing such organizations range from three to 10 years' imprisonment and the loss of certain rights. Criminal liability is waived if the person involved in establishing such an organization informs authorities of the organization before it begins its activity; penalties are halved if the individual assists authorities with the criminal investigation. The law also makes manufacturing, selling, distributing, owning with intent to distribute, and using racist, fascist, xenophobic, and Legionnaire symbols illegal. Penalties range from three months to three years' imprisonment.

Publicly denying the Holocaust or contesting, approving, justifying, or minimizing it in an "obvious manner" as determined by a judge is punishable by six months' to three years' imprisonment or by a fine, depending on the circumstances, of up to 200,000 lei (\$43,200). Publicly promoting persons convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes are subject to prison terms ranging from three months to three years (and from six months to five years if the offense was

committed online). The same penalties apply to publicly promoting antisemitic, fascist, Legionnaire, racist, or xenophobic ideas, worldviews, or doctrines.

The criminal code cites religious motivation, including in acts of murder, assault, and vandalism, as an aggravating factor in a crime. In such cases, courts may impose a more severe penalty upon conviction of that crime. Based on the seriousness of the offense, and the aggravating factor of religious motivation, courts have discretion to impose up to two more years of imprisonment, but not more than an additional one-third of the maximum prison sentence for that crime under the code. Courts may impose a fine as an alternative to a prison term (but may not impose both), and in such cases may impose up to an additional one-third of the maximum fine provided under the code for that crime, due to the aggravating factor of religious motivation.

The law allows religious workers from legally recognized religious organizations to enter and remain in the country under an extended-stay visa. Visa applicants must receive approval by the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs and submit evidence they represent religious organizations legally established in the country. The secretariat may extend such visas for up to five years. There is no quota or other limit on the total number of visas for foreign religious workers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

As of November, the government had approved two applications for religious association status, compared with two religious associations in 2021. The approved applications were for the “Burning Pyre” Apostolical Religious Association and the “Erdélyi Hit Gyülekezete” Association. As of year’s end, 44 entities were registered as religious associations.

Some small religious groups continued to state they viewed the 300-person membership requirement and the need to submit their members’ personal data for registration as a religious association as discriminatory because other types of

associations required only three members and did not have to submit members' personal data. They again criticized the three-tier classification system for religious organizations.

Greek Catholics reported that throughout the year, during the commemoration of soldiers or cultural figures who had been followers of the Greek Catholic Church, local authorities invited ROC representatives to perform religious ceremonies. In March, local authorities in the Budesti-Fanate Village in the county of Bistrita-Nasaud inaugurated a monument dedicated to local soldiers who died in World Wars I and II. The Ministers of Finance and Agriculture, Adrian Caiu and Adrian Chesnoiu, respectively, and local officials attended the event, which included the consecration of the monument by a Romanian Orthodox bishop. Greek Catholics reported that the commemorated soldiers had been followers of the Greek Catholic Church and therefore, a Greek Catholic priest should have presided over the monument's consecration. Representatives of the Greek Catholic civic group ACUM stated that such practices were attempts to "distort" and "confiscate" the religious identity of the commemorated persons.

In October 2021, Bishop Ambrose of Giurgiu told worshippers not to "rush to get vaccinated." Following the bishop's statement, police opened a criminal investigation for spreading "dangerous disinformation." According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, authorities did not file charges against the bishop and the investigation concluded.

In October 2021, the mayor of Sacel, Maramures County, sent an official letter to a Greek Catholic individual accusing him of establishing a "clandestine" Greek Catholic place of worship in his home and trying to recruit adherents. The mayor also threatened to sue the person for damages and compensation related to a court decision ordering the town to return two previously confiscated properties to the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Maramures. Following the incident, the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Maramures issued a press release stating that the place of worship in Sacel was a legally established Greek Catholic parish and that the town had a historical Greek Catholic presence. The press release also noted that

despite a court final decision ordering the town to return the confiscated properties, the local government of Sacel refused for years to enforce the ruling. The bishopric also expressed concerns regarding pressure, harassment, and threats against Greek Catholics who wanted to practice their faith freely. The properties were not returned by year's end.

In February, the Bacau Tribunal revoked a building permit issued by the town of Darmanesti in 2018 for the construction of a monument and Orthodox-style crosses in a World War I cemetery in which predominantly Hungarian Catholic World War I soldiers were believed to be buried. The ruling had also ordered the removal of the Orthodox-style crosses and the monument dedicated to the country's soldiers. The cemetery was the site of 2019 protests and tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians over the construction of a monument and placement of Orthodox-style crosses on the graves of Hungarian Catholic soldiers.

There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. NAPR SRC had approved 48 requests for the restitution of "immovable properties" (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 105 cases, and rejected 365 other claims during the year, compared with 23 approved requests for restitution, 42 approved compensations cases, and 471 rejected claims in 2021. All the claims were submitted before the 2006 deadline. In 12 cases, the filers withdrew their claims. According to data provided by NAPR, the number of cases the SRC reviewed decreased from 665 in 2021 to 530.

According to NAPR, religious denominations appealed in courts 154 decisions the SRC issued during the year, compared with 76 in 2021. The Roman Catholic Church made five appeals (seven in 2021); the ROC made 54 (24 in 2021); the Greek Catholics made 62 (16 in 2021); the Evangelical Augustinian Church made eight (17 in 2021); and the Jewish community made 12 (two in 2021). Information concerning court decisions on these cases was unavailable. The

Romanian Orthodox Church reported that the government had returned an estimated 7 percent of the properties confiscated during the Communist regime.

During the year, NAPR reviewed 399 claims submitted by the Greek Catholic Church, compared with 305 claims in 2021. NAPR approved three requests for restitution to the Greek Catholic Church and approved compensation in 15 other cases. Greek Catholic Church officials report that NAPR continued to reject most of their claims because the properties now belonged to the ROC and were subject to a different law, making restitution possible only through a joint commission representing the two Churches and based on “the will of the believers from the communities that possess these properties.” During the Communist regime, all places of worship and parish houses were transferred to the ROC, and most other properties (land and buildings) to the state. According to Greek Catholic officials, there was again no progress on forming a joint commission by year’s end, a request the Greek Catholic Church made 22 years ago.

The Greek Catholic Church continued to report delays on restitution lawsuits. Church representatives stated there were no court decisions on Greek Catholic restitution cases again during the year and that in several cases, local government committees in charge of transferring the ownership of certain lands to the Greek Catholic Church following a restitution decision failed to do so. The Greek Catholic civic group ACUM reported that the local government in Targu Lapus refused to enforce a 2015 court decision that returned to the Greek Catholic Church a land lot that had belonged to a Greek Catholic religious school and five hectares (approximately 12 acres) of forest and pasture that had belonged to the local Greek Catholic parish.

Restitution of a property in Bixad that was previously restored to the Greek Catholic Church by the government and confirmed by earlier court decisions continued to be delayed because of an appeal of the decisions and claim for the property by the Satu Mare County Council filed in 2016. According to members of the Greek Catholic Church the council continued to block restitution because it

believed the property should remain in ROC hands. At year's end, the case remained pending.

Although implementing regulations to officially prioritize property restitution cases for Holocaust survivors remained pending, NAPR approved priority status for 164 such applications. Since the passage of the legislation, NAPR had awarded compensation to Holocaust survivors in 127 cases, rejected the claims in 14 cases, and not issued a decision in 23 cases at year's end.

The SRC approved 27 pending claims from previous years by the Jewish community – 26 through compensation and one through restitution – and rejected 17 others, compared with 38 during the same period in 2021. In seven other cases, the claimants withdrew their requests. Religious groups continued to state that it was difficult to obtain required documentation from the National Archives demonstrating proof of ownership in time to meet the 120-day deadline to submit an appeal. The Caritatea Foundation continued to state the claims procedure was overly bureaucratic because the SRC often requested submission of numerous additional supporting documents, which sometimes were located in government-managed archives, giving Jewish claimants insufficient time to meet the deadline for document submission. Caritatea stated access to government-managed archives holding the required documents for the restitution process remained difficult.

According to the Caritatea Foundation, as of November, the NCREC issued 37 final approvals on decisions during the year. Caritatea stated it challenged five of these decisions because the compensation amounts awarded were significantly lower than the value of confiscated property. As of November, 110 decisions were pending final approval, of which 18 had been issued before 2013, according to Caritatea.

According to the Diocese of Transylvania of the Reformed Church, delays continued in addressing its property restitution lawsuits. According to data provided by NAPR, since 2002, the SRC had reviewed 955 of the 1,191 claims

submitted by the Reformed Church and had approved 539 requests for compensation or restitution in kind.

The Diocese of Transylvania of the Reformed Church continued to state that the government rejected its restitution claims on the grounds the entities registered as the former property owners were educational institutions of the Reformed Church and not the contemporary churches. According to church leaders, the Communist regime had dissolved the former educational institutions while confiscating their property, meaning the former property owners no longer existed as such, but the contemporary churches, as the successors to the dissolved educational institutions, were in effect the same entities whose property the Communist regime had seized. At the end of 2021, the NCREC invalidated a previous decision the SRC issued in 2007 according to which the diocese should receive compensation for a confiscated building and plot of land in Odorheiu Secuiesc. The NCREC invalidated the SRC's decision on the grounds that the building and land lot belonged to the former College of Helvetic Faith in the city of Odorheiu Secuiesc and not to the diocese. According to the diocese, however, the SRC's decision was incorrect and unjustified because the documents attesting the ownership of the building identified the Reformed Church as the owner and the church's college as the building's function.

According to the Transylvania Reformed Diocese, the Cluj-Napoca municipality continued to refuse to enforce a court decision returning several previously confiscated buildings to the diocese.

According to the Piatra Craiului Diocese of the Reformed Church of Romania, a criminal investigation against Bishops Istvan Csurly and Bela Kato for bribery and use of forged documents was pending through year's end. In September 2021, Zoltan Balog, the president of the General Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church, which represents Reformed Churches in several countries, including Romania, issued a statement condemning the criminal investigation of the two bishops. According to the statement, the prosecutors started an investigation against the two bishops on charges of document forgery in a case concerning the

restitution of a Wesseleny College building in Zalau that had belonged to the Reformed Church in Transylvania. According to Balog, the investigation aimed to block church property restitution.

The Hungarian Unitarian Church reported delays on compensation and restitution decisions. According to church representatives, throughout the year, the SRC issued several decisions granting compensation for confiscated property, but the NCREC did not review most of those decisions, causing delays, with decisions still pending at year's end.

Sixteen claims submitted by the Roman Catholic Church were resolved as of year's end, compared with 21 in 2021. The government granted compensation or restitution in kind in 14 cases and denied two claims, compared with six and 13 claims, respectively, in 2021. The government approved 18 claims submitted by the Reformed Church and denied 18 others, compared with nine and 13 claims, respectively, in 2021.

During the year, nearly 90 percent of schoolchildren continued to take religion classes taught by government employees appointed by the ROC and in accordance with the Romanian Orthodox faith. According to some NGOs and parents' associations, this enrollment continued to be the result of pressure by the ROC, as well as the failure of school directors to offer parents alternatives to religion classes.

ACUM reported that in some cases teachers discriminated against Greek Catholic students and pressured them to take religion classes taught according to the ROC faith. Some schools reportedly did not offer Greek Catholic students alternatives to religion classes taught according to the Romanian Orthodox faith. Greek Catholics reported that the teachers' practice of providing Romanian Orthodox textbooks to all first-grade children on the first school day represented a form of pressure. According to ACUM, a teacher from the Petru Rares High School in Targu Lapus admonished a Greek Catholic mother because her child did not attend the religion class taught according to the Romanian Orthodox faith.

Historians and Holocaust experts said the general history curricula provided few mandatory classes on the country's Holocaust history. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, the mandatory curricula for primary, middle, and high schools included explicit references to the Holocaust or other more general topics that allowed teachers to use the content in their instruction. A high school course, "History of the Jews – The Holocaust," remained an elective class. During the 2021-22 school year, 2,119 students took the course, compared with 1,650 during the 2020-21 school year. According to the National Institute of Statistics, there were approximately 622,000 students enrolled in high schools during the 2020-21 school year. In November 2021, parliament passed a bill sponsored by Silviu Vexler, the member of parliament serving as the designated official representative of the Jewish community, making "The History of Jews – The Holocaust" a compulsory course for all high school students beginning in 2023. The President signed the bill into law on November 25. In January, the political party Alliance for the Unity of Romanians issued a press release describing the Holocaust and sex education as "minor issues" that were elevated to the rank of compulsory courses, and it qualified the initiative as a "systematic act of undermining the quality of Romanian education." The Special Representative for Combating Antisemitism and Xenophobia and Promoting the Memory of the Holocaust and Communism Alexandru Muraru condemned the statement, characterizing it as an attempt to "deny and trivialize the Holocaust". During the year, a working group under the Ministry of Education completed the draft curricula for the compulsory Holocaust course. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the document was pending approval by the Ministry of Education at year's end.

The government reported that military chaplains continued to be Romanian Orthodox priests, with the exceptions of one Roman Catholic priest and one pastor from the Evangelical Alliance.

According to the NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania (MCA), prosecution of antisemitic speech and Holocaust denial continued to be infrequent. The MCA continued to state that throughout the

years, authorities did not hold individuals who engaged in antisemitic acts legally accountable, and that law enforcement bodies failed to prosecute those who committed various acts of vandalism directed against cemeteries, synagogues, and memorials. On March 31, the Bucharest Court of Appeals revoked a prison sentence against convicted former intelligence officer Vasile Zarnescu and instead issued him a warning prior to his serving any portion of his sentence. In February 2021, in a nonfinal ruling, the Bucharest Sector Three Court found Zarnescu guilty of Holocaust denial and sentenced him to a deferred prison sentence of 13 months and two years' probation. Zarnescu authored several books and articles between 2013 and 2017 that negated facts about the Holocaust, including the use of gas chambers. In March, MCA director Marco Maximilian Katz publicly stated the decision to revoke Zarnescu's prison sentence was unacceptable and incomprehensible.

According to the Wiesel Institute, throughout the year some local authorities renamed streets named after persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity. In December, the local council in the town of Mangalia changed the name of a street named after Vintila Horia, an antisemitic writer convicted of war crimes. Nevertheless, media outlets again reported some local authorities continued to allow old names of streets, organizations, schools, and libraries honoring persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity and to allow the display of public statues and busts depicting persons convicted of war crimes. Several cities and towns continued to allow streets to remain named after Ion Antonescu, the country's dictator during World War II, or Mircea Vulcanescu, a member of the Antonescu-led cabinet, and some local governments continued to refuse to change the names despite requests from the Wiesel Institute.

On December 28, the Bucharest Sector 2 City Council voted against a proposal by council member Silviu Feroiu to remove a bust of Mircea Vulcanescu located in a public park. The MCA issued a press release stating that the council's decision showed "lack of consideration and minimum respect for the memory of the Jews who were persecuted, harassed, tortured, and murdered by the government in

which Mircea Vulcanescu was a leading participant.” Alexandru Muraru, the Special Representative for Combating Antisemitism and Xenophobia and Promoting the Memory of the Holocaust and Communism, published a statement criticizing the council’s decision and stating that members of the party Alliance for the Unity of Romanians had pressured local council members to vote against the proposal. Local council member Silviu Feroiu told media outlets that after proposing the removal of the bust, he received several death threats on his phone.

Media outlets reported that in September, the local government in the town of Sighet declared Petru Codrea a honorary citizen while the mayor described him as a “model of Christianity and of social dignity and morality.” According to the Wiesel Institute, Codrea was a member of the Legionnaire Movement. The Wiesel Institute also reported that Codrea was declared an honorary citizen one day before the reopening of Elie Wiesel’s childhood home in Sighet, and the institute requested the local government to withdraw Codrea’s honorary title. By year’s end, the Sighet City Hall refused to withdraw the honorary title.

The Wiesel Institute continued to organize several online and in-person educational activities for teachers, students, and police officers; inform the public about the Holocaust; and post teaching materials on the history of the Holocaust in the country on its web page. Throughout the year, the institute posted several graphic novels about local Holocaust history on its webpage and displayed them in exhibitions throughout the country.

In February, Prime Minister Ciuca established an inter-ministerial committee for monitoring the implementation of the two-year national strategy to combat antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech that was adopted in 2021. The plan’s expressed goals were to seek to improve data collection on antisemitic incidents, revamp training programs for law enforcement and magistrates, update the school curriculum on the Holocaust, and develop relevant cultural programs. The committee includes representatives of the Jewish Community, the B’nai B’rith Forum, and MCA Romania. A report released by the

committee in May noted some progress on the establishment of several working groups and methodologies, while highlighting delays with regards to specialized training and educational measures.

ACUM representatives continued to state that history textbooks and academic publications distorted or minimized the history of the Greek Catholic Church. ACUM also reported that official websites of central and local government institutions published biased and false information about the Greek Catholic Church. According to ACUM, in most cases local governments did not invite Greek Catholic Church representatives to public events but did invite ROC representatives. The group also reported that government officials deliberately overlooked the religious affiliation of historically important Greek Catholic leaders when commemorating them.

Marking a change from previous years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that the Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medical Science and Pharmacy in Cluj and the Grigore T. Popa University of Medical Science and Pharmacy in Iasi provided the option to Seventh-day Adventist candidates to take the exams on another day than Saturday following requests by representatives of their church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also reported that several public hospitals rejected requests by Seventh-day Adventists to take a day off on Saturday.

In August, the Public Health Directorate issued a permit allowing members of the Islamic community to build a new cemetery near Bucharest. According to Muslim representatives, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations provided half of the funding required for the construction of a funeral chapel.

In February, the head of the Jewish Community, the government's representative for combatting antisemitism, the Elie Wiesel Institute, and the NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism condemned statements made by the honorary chair of the political party Alliance for the Unity of Romanians, Calin Georgescu. During a January 31 television interview, Georgescu praised Ion

Antonescu, the country's dictator during the Holocaust, and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder and leader of the Legionnaire Movement.

On March 27, before a performance at the "I. L. Caragiale" National Theater, unknown persons distributed several copies of a newspaper that included antisemitic content. The Ministry of Culture announced it had started an internal investigation and notified police about the incident. The National Theater notified law enforcement and as of December, an investigation for incitement to hatred or discrimination was pending before the Prosecutor's Office attached to Bucharest's Sector 1 Court.

On January 25, during a ceremony dedicated to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day organized by the Jewish community in Bucharest, President Iohannis delivered remarks paying tribute to Holocaust victims and emphasizing the duty to counter antisemitism and preserve Holocaust memory. Pursuant to its pledge to implement the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission report, the government again commemorated the annual National Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 7, marking the day when Romanian authorities began deporting the country's Jews to Transnistria, in current-day Moldova. To mark the day, presidential advisor Catalina Galer delivered remarks on behalf of President Iohannis emphasizing the importance of providing Holocaust-related education and condemning Holocaust distortion. The Wiesel Institute held a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest that several government officials attended.

During an October 5 ceremony hosted by the government, the Elie Wiesel Institute and the Ministry of European Investments signed a €15 million (\$16 million) EU-funding agreement for the development and construction of the Bucharest Holocaust and Jewish History Museum. Prime Minister Ciuca attended the ceremony and highlighted the country's commitment to promoting Holocaust remembrance.

The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations continued to provide funding for the publication of several books on the history and heritage of religious groups in the country. Throughout the year, Baptists, Evangelical Augustans, and Unitarians received such funding.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to non-Orthodox religious groups, Romanian Orthodox priests again prevented them from conducting burials in Romanian Orthodox or public cemeteries, including refusing access to the Romanian Orthodox cemetery in Sapanta that previously belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, or otherwise continued to restrict such burials by requiring they take place in isolated sections of a cemetery or follow Orthodox rituals. Greek Catholics reported that Romanian Orthodox priests refused to collect taxes from Greek Catholic relatives of persons buried in cemeteries previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church, which could result in the seizure of the gravesites for tax delinquency. As a result, Greek Catholics said they had to lie about their religion or rely on acquaintances who belonged to the Romanian Orthodox faith in order to keep the gravesites. ACUM reported that the priest of the ROC parish “Lord’s Ascension” in Targu Mures did not allow a Greek Catholic woman to pay taxes for the grave of her deceased relatives buried in a cemetery previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church because she was not a ROC adherent. In several counties located in the historical region of Moldavia. Local governments did not respond to requests by the Seventh-day Adventist Church for permission to conduct burials in the cemeteries.

ACUM stated that Romanian Orthodox priests often pressured the families of deceased Greek Catholics to bury their dead according to ROC rituals or tried to prevent Greek Catholic priests from performing the rite of Holy Unction for dying persons. Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that in some cases, in counties of Iasi, Suceava, and Botosani located in the northeastern

part of the country, Romanian Orthodox priests disrupted Seventh-day Adventist funerals and local Romanian Orthodox priests incited hatred against religious minorities during church services.

According to Greek Catholics, some ROC archdioceses continued to distort the history of the Greek Catholic Church in their public messaging. They said that on websites of several Romanian Orthodox deaneries and parishes, the ROC presented historical details about several formerly Greek Catholic churches that the Communist regime had transferred to the ROC without mentioning the churches and some of their previous priests or that their founders were Greek Catholic. Greek Catholics also reported that textbooks, local government websites and social media pages, as well as some outlets deliberately omitted the previous Greek Catholic affiliation of churches or the adherence of important historical figures to the Greek Catholic Church.

ROC officials continued to reconsecrate places of worship previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church and transferred to the ROC in 1948. Greek Catholics reported that in such cases, ROC representatives removed Greek Catholic relics from the altar without any explanation, with the disposition of the relics undisclosed.

Media outlets reported that on January 27, during a wreath laying ceremony commemorating International Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest, two persons known for their antisemitic behavior attempted to lay a wreath while streaming the event on social media. The wreath carried the message “Do not forget: one half of the truth is a lie. Romania saved 400,000 Jews during the Holocaust” which, according to the Wiesel Institute, is a statement used widely by Holocaust deniers.

Material promoting antisemitic views and glorifying Legionnaires as well as messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism, continued to appear on the internet. According to a study released by the Wiesel Institute in July, several articles published online claimed that Jews or the state of Israel were profiting

from the COVID-19 health crisis and were manufacturing harmful vaccines. According to the same study, most antisemitic hate speech on social media included Jewish conspiracy theories, including alleging plans to create a worldwide state controlled by Jews and led by the anti-Christ. The study also noted that following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, several postings on websites stated that Jews were behind the war or were trying to use the war for selfish interests.

According to government officials, during the year, law enforcement authorities closed their investigation of a vandalism incident against a Romanian Orthodox Church located in Bucharest because the damage did not cause the church to be unusable. In March 2021, media outlets reported that unknown persons vandalized and painted messages on the walls of the church.

As of year's end, a criminal investigation of antisemitic messages painted in 2020 on a fence of a relative of a mayoral candidate in Suceava County (northeastern part of the country) remained pending with the prosecutor attached to the Radauti court. The messages included the candidate's name, a swastika, and an antisemitic slur. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, law enforcement bodies took measures to identify several eyewitnesses and reviewed closed-circuit television footage but could not identify any perpetrator because of the low quality of the images.

At year's end, a criminal investigation concerning the 2020 vandalism of a monument dedicated to the approximately 7,500 Jews transported to concentration camps from Targu Mures, in the north central part of the country, was still pending before the prosecutor's office attached to the Targu Mures court. According to government officials, the fingerprints collected from the crime scene did not show up in the police database.

At year's end, a criminal case involving three suspects charged in 2019 with the desecration of a grave in a Jewish cemetery in Husi remained pending before the

Husi court. In 2020, the Prosecutor's Office of the Vaslui tribunal indicted three suspects for destroying dozens of headstones in the cemetery.

According to media reports, in June, several teenagers smashed multiple windows of the 19th century synagogue in Orastie, located in the western part of the country. Orastie municipal authorities condemned the incident and notified law enforcement. Police identified the suspects and started a criminal investigation for destruction of property.

According to the MCA, online shops continued to sell antisemitic items and books, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other publications promoting antisemitic messages.

In December 2021, the Wiesel institute issued the results of a survey on attitudes towards Jews carried out on a nationally representative sample of 1,064 respondents. According to the survey, the percentage of those who responded "totally agree" or "somewhat agree" with the following statements were as follows: Jews are only pursuing their own interests (54 percent); it would be better for Jews to live in their own country (37 percent); Jews should be restricted from certain professions or occupations (30 percent); Jews act to destabilize the society (22 percent). While 65 percent of the respondents believed that the Holocaust happened in Germany, 52 percent responded that the Holocaust happened in other countries, while 32 percent responded that the Holocaust happened in Romania. A report issued in May by the Interministerial Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization, and Hate Speech noted that the survey indicated "a potential hostility towards Jews in the Romanian society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials continued to advocate for improved property restitution processes and the importance of respect for religious diversity with government officials.

Embassy officials discussed with the Wiesel Institute ways to improve Holocaust-related education and to support the establishment of the Jewish History and Holocaust Museum. Embassy officials continued to discuss with Muslim and Jewish leaders ways of promoting respect for religious diversity and curbing religious discrimination. Embassy officers also met with ROC representatives to discuss issues of religious freedom, tolerance, and interreligious relations.

Throughout the year, embassy officials met with several members of the Interministerial Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization, and Hate Speech to discuss measures to counter antisemitism and enhance Holocaust education.

Using social media, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom, stressed the importance of combating antisemitism, and paid tribute to Holocaust victims. In January, the embassy posted a Facebook message on National Religious Freedom Day emphasizing the right to choose and practice religion without government retaliation or constraint.

In January, the embassy also posted Facebook messages regarding the anniversary of the 1941 Bucharest pogrom, in which fascist Iron Guards killed at least 125 Jews and desecrated the synagogue. The embassy also helped organize and sponsored the annual Elie Wiesel Study Tour in July, which provided students the opportunity to travel to historic sites and to understand the political, social, and cultural forces that created the Holocaust. The embassy helped organize an exchange program for several members of the committee in charge of drafting the curricula for the compulsory high school course on the Holocaust. The embassy also used the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation to finance the renovation of the Elie Wiesel memorial house in Sighet.