

2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Spain

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion. It states that while no religion shall have a “state character,” the government shall form cooperative relations with the Roman Catholic Church and other religious faiths. The government has a bilateral agreement with the Holy See that grants the Catholic Church additional benefits not available to the three other groups with which the government has agreements: Muslims, Protestants, and Jews. Groups without agreements may register with the government and receive some benefits. Throughout the year, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) called for the government to reform the part of the penal code that criminalizes offending “religious sentiments,” which, it stated, unduly restricted freedom of expression. Some organizations said laws criminalizing public statements disparaging religious beliefs or nonbelief, or perpetrating “profane acts” that “offend the feelings” of persons equated to criminalizing blasphemy. Religious groups that in prior years participated in the government’s Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom reported that the committee, an important venue for coordination with the government, had not met since 2019. Some religious groups and NGOs voiced concerns about government restrictions on places of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were instances of members of parliament and local government officials using derogatory language against Jews and Muslims. The governmental Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation continued outreach to various religious groups and organized events promoting religious freedom. Several religious groups cited continuing obstacles to providing religious education and the integration of teachers of religion in schools, given the legal requirement for a minimum of 10 interested students to initiate non-Catholic religious education classes in public schools. The Ministry of the Interior’s Office on Hate Crimes offered assistance to victims of religiously motivated hate crimes and provided training to law enforcement.

The NGO Observatory for Religious Freedom and Conscience (OLRC) reported 148 religiously motivated incidents – including two assaults – in the first 10 months of the year, 33 fewer than in approximately the same period of 2020. Of the 148 cases, 110 (74 percent) were against Christians, nine were against Muslims, three against Jews, and 26 were classified as being against all faiths. Separately, the Ministry of the Interior documented 45 hate crimes with religious motivations in 2020, compared with 66 in 2019. The General Prosecutor’s 2020 annual report identified one new prosecution during 2020 for hate crimes involving religion, compared with seven such cases in 2019. Several individuals were sentenced to fines and imprisonment for antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate speech. Some Christians, Muslims, and Jews reported they continued to experience both elevated hostilities directed against them on social media and frequent instances of vandalism. In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 10 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Spain said they had negative feelings towards Jews.

U.S. embassy and consulate representatives met with the Ministry of the Presidency’s Office of Religious Affairs, as well as with regional governments’ offices for religious affairs officials to discuss antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities. Issues discussed included access to permits for places of worship, religious education, cemeteries and burial, religiously motivated hate crimes, and hate speech. Embassy officers also raised these issues with religious leaders who participated in Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation meetings. Embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, Jewish, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhist, and other religious groups, and civil society groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 47.3 million (midyear 2021). According to a survey conducted in July by the governmental Center for Sociological Research, 58.6 percent of respondents identified as Catholics and 2.4 percent as followers of other religious groups. In

addition, 10.4 percent described themselves as “nonbelievers” 11.5 percent as agnostics, and 15 percent as atheists; the remaining 1.9 percent did not answer the question.

The Catholic organization Episcopal Conference of Spain estimated in 2017 that there are 32.6 million Catholics. The Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE) estimates there are 2.2 million Muslims; the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) estimates there are 1.5 million Protestants; the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE) estimates there are between 40,000 and 45,000 Jews; the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal, an umbrella organization for the various Orthodox churches, stated in 2014 there were 1.5 million Orthodox Christians; the Jehovah’s Witnesses reports approximately 120,000 members; the Buddhist Union of Spain-Federation of Buddhist Entities (UBE-FEBE) estimates there are 100,000 Buddhists; and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) reports nearly 57,000 members. Other religious groups include Christian Scientists, other Christian groups, Baha’is (12,000 members), Church of Scientology (11,000 members), and Hindus (40,000). The autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa contain the highest percentages of non-Christians; nearly 50 percent of the population in both cities is Muslim.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion and provides for freedom of religion and worship for individuals and communities. The constitution states no one may be compelled to testify about his or her religion or beliefs. It also states, “No religion shall have a state character,” but “public authorities shall take into account the religious beliefs of Spanish society and consequently maintain appropriate cooperative relations with the Catholic Church and other denominations.” The Catholic Church is the only religious group explicitly mentioned in the constitution. Under the penal code, it is a crime to prevent or disrupt religious services or to offend or scorn religious beliefs, ceremonies, or practitioners. The constitution allows limits on expression if “necessary to maintain public order.”

The law imposes a sentence of between eight to 12 months against an individual who offends the feelings of members of a religious group, publicly disparages the dogmas, beliefs, rights, or ceremonies of that religious group or who publicly insults members of the religious group. The law imposes the same penalties against an individual who publicly disparages those who do not profess any religion or belief. The law also imposes a six-month to one-year prison sentence or a fine against anyone who perpetrates “profane acts” that “offend the feelings” of persons belonging to legally protected religious confessions in a place of worship or at religious ceremonies.

The penal code’s definition of hate crimes includes acts of “humiliation or disrespect” against victims because of their religion, with penalties of one to four years in prison. Antisemitism is specifically defined in the penal code as a hate crime. By law, authorities may investigate and prosecute criminal offenses committed by neo-Nazi groups as terrorist crimes. Genocide denial is a crime if it incites violent attitudes, such as aggressive, threatening behavior or language. The law also provides for a “Declaration of Reparation and Personal Recognition” for those who experienced violence or persecution for political, ideological, or religious beliefs during the 1936-39 Spanish Civil War or the subsequent dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

The government does not require religious groups to register, but registration confers on religious groups certain legal benefits. Groups registered in the Registry of Religious Entities maintained by the Office of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with Parliament, and Democratic Memory (Ministry of the Presidency) may buy, rent, and sell property, and may act as a legal entity in civil proceedings. Registration entails completing forms available on the ministry’s website and providing notarized documentation of the foundational and operational statutes of the religious group, its legal representatives, territorial scope, religious purposes, and address. All persons or groups have the right to practice their religion whether or not registered as a religious entity. New religious communities may register directly with the Ministry of the Presidency, or religious associations may register on their behalf.

Registered groups that wish to sign cooperation agreements with the state must acquire *notorio arraigo* (“deeply rooted” or permanent) status through the Ministry of the Presidency’s Office of Religious Affairs. To achieve this status, groups must have an unspecified “relevant” number of followers, a presence in the country for at least 30 years, and a “level of diffusion” in the general population that the government considers demonstrates a “social presence,” which is not further defined. Groups must also submit documentation demonstrating the group is religious in nature to the Office of Religious Affairs, which maintains the Register of Religious Entities. Jehovah’s Witnesses, UBE-FEBE, the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Episcopal Orthodox Assembly of Spain and Portugal are registered religions with *notorio arraigo* status.

The government maintains a bilateral agreement with the Holy See, executed in part by the Episcopal Conference of Spain. The Episcopal Conference interacts with the government on behalf of the entire Catholic community. Per a 1979 agreement with the Holy See, individual Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register with the government. The Catholic Church is the only religious entity to which persons may voluntarily allocate 0.7 percent of their taxes. The government also has cooperation agreements with CIE, FEREDÉ, and FCJE. These agreements with the country's four predominant religions – Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Judaism – are legally binding and provide the religious groups with certain tax exemptions and the ability to buy and sell property, open a house of worship, and conduct other legal business. The agreements also grant civil validity to weddings performed by clergy and permit the placement of teachers in schools and chaplains in hospitals, the military, and prisons. Groups with cooperation agreements are also eligible for independently administered government grants. The agreements cover legal, educational, cultural, and economic affairs; religious observance by members of the armed forces; and the military service of clergy and members of religious orders.

If the Office of Religious Affairs deems an applicant for registration a nonreligious group, the applicant may instead be included in the Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of the Interior. Inclusion in this register grants legal status but confers no other benefits. Registration itself simply lists the association and its history in the government's database. Registration as an association is a precursor to requesting that the government deem the association to be of public benefit, which affords the same tax benefits as charities, including exemption from income tax and taxes on contributions. For such a classification, the association must be registered for two years and maintain a net positive fiscal balance.

The Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation is a governmental entity attached to the Ministry of the Presidency that promotes religious freedom and diversity. It provides funding to non-Catholic religious denominations that have a cooperation agreement with the government in support of activities that promote cultural, educational, and social integration. It provides nonfinancial assistance to other religious groups registered with the government to increase public awareness. The foundation also promotes dialogue and rapprochement among religious groups and the integration of religion in society. It works closely with the Office of Religious Affairs.

The government funds religious services within the prison system for Catholic and Muslim groups, including Sunday Catholic Mass, Catholic confession, and Friday Islamic prayer. The cooperation agreements of FCJE and FEREDÉ with the government do not include provisions for publicly funded services. These groups provide religious services in prisons at their own expense.

The government guarantees access to centers for asylum seekers and refugees for religious workers of groups with cooperation agreements with the state so that these groups may provide direct assistance, at their expense, to their followers in the centers. Religious workers from groups without a cooperation agreement with the government may enter internment centers upon request to the Ministry of the Presidency.

Military rules and cooperation agreements with the government allow religious military funerals and chaplain services for Catholics, Muslims, Protestants, and Jews, should the family of the deceased request it. Other religious groups may conduct religious funerals upon request.

The government recognizes marriages performed by all religious communities with notorio arraigo status. Members of religious groups without this status must be married in a civil ceremony.

The regions of Madrid and Catalonia maintain agreements with several religious groups that have accords with the national government. These regional agreements permit activities such as providing religious assistance in hospitals and prisons under regional jurisdiction. The central government funds these services for prisons and the military, and the regional governments fund hospital services. According to the central government, these subnational agreements may not contradict the principles of the federal agreements, which take precedence.

Religious groups must apply to local governments for a license to open a place of worship, along with other establishments intended for public use. Requirements for licenses vary from municipality to municipality. Documentation required is usually the same as for other business establishments seeking to open a venue for public use and includes information such as architectural plans and maximum capacity. Religious groups must also inform the Office of Religious Affairs after opening new places of worship.

Local governments are obligated to consider requests for use of public land to open a place of worship. If a municipality decides to deny such a request after weighing factors such as availability and value added to the community, the city council must explain its decision to the requesting party.

The law requires a minimum of 10 interested students to initiate new religious education classes in public schools for religions other than Catholicism. As outlined in the cooperation agreements with religious groups, the government provides funding for salaries of teachers of Catholic religious education classes in public schools and, when at least 10 students request it, funding for Islamic and Protestant teachers. The Jewish community is also eligible for government funding for Jewish instructors but has declined it. The courses are not mandatory. Those students who elect not to take religious education courses are required to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes. Regional governments are responsible for developing curricula and financing teachers for religious education, with the exception of Andalusia, Aragon, the Canary Islands, Cantabria, and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, which leave the curricula and financing of education to the national government in accordance with their respective regional statutes.

Autonomous regions generally have the authority to develop the requirements for religious education instructors and certify their credentials, although some defer to the national government. Prospective instructors must provide personal data, proof that the educational authority of the region where they are applying to work has never dismissed them, a degree as required by the region, and any other requirement as stipulated by the religious association to which they correspond. The religious associations must provide a list of approved instructors to the government. Ministry of Education-approved CIE guidelines stress instruction in “moderate Islam” in worship practices, with emphasis on pluralism, understanding, religious tolerance, conflict resolution, and coexistence. CIE also requires instructors to have a certificate of training in Islamic education. Private religiously based schools, whether or not they receive public funds, must comply with governmental education regulations. Private religious schools that do not receive public funds must additionally obtain authorization to function from regional educational authorities.

Catholic and Jewish clergy may include time spent on missions abroad in calculations for social security and may claim retirement pension credit for a maximum of 38.5 years of service. Protestant clergy are eligible to receive social security benefits, including health insurance and a government-provided retirement pension with a maximum credit of 15 years of service, but pension eligibility requirements for these clergy are stricter than for Catholic clergy. Muslim, Orthodox, and Jehovah’s Witnesses clergy are also eligible for social security benefits under the terms of separate social security agreements each of these groups negotiated with the state.

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

Throughout the year, Amnesty International and other NGOs reiterated calls for the government to reform the part of the penal code that criminalizes offending “religious sentiments,” which, they stated, unduly restricted freedom of expression. Some organizations said the laws criminalizing public statements disparaging religious beliefs or nonbelief, or perpetrating “profane acts” that “offend the feelings” of persons equated to criminalizing blasphemy. In May, a Malaga appeals court reaffirmed the conviction of a woman for “offending religious sentiments,” confirming the 2,700-euro (\$3,100) fine levied against her as punishment. The Spanish Association of Christian Lawyers had originally filed a complaint against the woman for her participation in a 2013 public women’s rights procession in which she carried a large plastic vagina fashioned to look like the Virgin Mary. The appeals court determined the woman’s actions were not “guided by public or collective interest in criticism, but rather with the intention of vilifying or offending” Catholics.

In January, the government implemented a new education law, under which Holocaust education remained mandatory.

Several religious organizations with notorio arraigo status reported the government’s Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom had not held a meeting since late 2019. Members of these organizations said the committee – composed of government officials, religious representatives, and experts on religious issues – previously met several times per year. Organizations expressed concern regarding the loss of a primary venue for interfaith cooperation and government dialogue. Officials from the Ministry of the Presidency identified the cessation of committee activity as an unintended consequence of the 2019 transfer of responsibility for religious freedom issues from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of the Presidency. Parliament must modify the decree to allow the Ministry of the Presidency to convene the committee.

In September, the Madrid regional parliament approved for presentation to the national congress a draft bill prohibiting state assistance to entities that engage in antisemitism or otherwise discriminate on the basis of birth, race, sex, religion, or other personal characteristics. The FCJE applauded the move. In the same month, the Madrid regional parliament adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism.

On May 7, the Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation and Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces announced a new joint project to promote religious diversity and increase local governments' capacity to protect religious freedom. Through the project, local and provincial government officials committed to adhere to principles of coexistence, share best practices, and access expert consultants. The cities of Bilbao, Burgos, Cartagena, Castellon, Fuenlabrada, Guadalajara, Malaga, Olivenza, and Valladolid joined the initiative.

In the fall, the public Madrid Autonomous University unveiled a new academic course in religious leadership and administration. Religious officials collaborated with faculty to develop the course, which focuses on the legal principles affecting the relationship between religious entities and the Spanish government. Buddhist and Catholic representatives praised the course as the product of interfaith collaboration.

In April, the city of Madrid signed an agreement with the Sefarad-Israel Center to jointly promote Jewish culture in Madrid society. The agreement included the creation of a dedicated Jewish literature space in Madrid's public library and a commitment to cohost community events on Sephardic culture and history. In December, the city and center cohosted a public Hanukkah candle-lighting ceremony.

In May, the city of Leon unveiled a new exhibit depicting the country's Jewish history. Called "Discover Sefarad," the exhibit included images furnished by the Network of Jewish Quarters and the Cervantes Institute.

In February, the Supreme Court suspended regional COVID-19 restrictions on religious services in Castile and Leon that had limited attendance to 25 persons. The court's ruling called for proportionality, and it stipulated that blanket restrictions had failed to reasonably consider building characteristics that might safely permit larger, or necessitate smaller, gatherings. The regional government of Castile and Leon had lifted the restrictions several days before the court's ruling.

In August, reports stated that the OLRC reiterated concerns regarding the suspension or interruption of religious services during a conversation with Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska. The OLRC said the continued restrictions on religious gatherings impeded acts of worship fundamental to religious practice. In December 2020, the Supreme Court had dismissed a complaint filed by the Spanish Association of Christian Lawyers against Grande-Marlaska in his official capacity. That complaint accused the ministry's security forces of unlawfully interrupting religious gatherings throughout the country while enforcing COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The court determined the interruptions fell within the government's authority under its first pandemic state of emergency (March through June 2020) and were therefore justified as "extraordinary measures to preserve collective safety."

In January, FEREDE expressed concerns regarding capacity and other restrictions on churches due to the COVID-19 pandemic. FEREDE and other religious organizations reacted positively when the government lifted or reduced restrictions in later months, although they urged caution among their congregations.

CIE representatives stated that COVID-19 restrictions continued to complicate the pre-pandemic practice of repatriating the remains of deceased Muslims to their countries of origin for burial. As a result, CIE reported that more Muslims chose to bury their deceased in sections of local cemeteries with dedicated plots for burial, in accordance with Islamic rites. According to CIE, 12 of the country's 17 autonomous communities have cemeteries with dedicated plots for Muslim burials. In May, CIE representatives met with a member of parliament to advocate for agreements in communities lacking dedicated space. In October, members of the Islamic community in Cordoba, Andalusia, expressed concerns about the lack of protocols for the burial in accordance with religious rites of Muslims who die while experiencing homelessness. Throughout the year, media reported on the ongoing efforts of the Muslim community to establish such an agreement in Badajoz, Extremadura, where city officials voiced opposition to ceding control of a portion of the municipal cemetery to that community.

In March, media reported the European Court of Human Rights in November 2020 had declined to hear a complaint brought by the grandchildren of former dictator Francisco Franco related to the government's October 2019 exhumation and reburial of Franco's remains. The OLRC had previously said it did not consider removing Franco's remains from the Valley of the Fallen as an attack on religious freedom.

On July 15, King Felipe VI hosted a second secular memorial service, one year after the first, to honor Spaniards who had lost their lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several religious groups, including Protestants and Jews, expressed appreciation for the ceremonies' secular tone that contrasted with the Catholic rituals previously common at similar ceremonies.

In September, the regional governments of the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves in north Africa announced that for the first time Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr would be paid holidays for public and private sector employees.

Several religious groups cited continuing obstacles to providing religious education and integrating teachers of religion in schools, given the legal requirement for a minimum of 10 interested students to initiate non-Catholic religious education classes in public schools. CIE reported the number of teachers and schools offering Islamic studies courses continued to increase annually. Islamic studies courses in seven Balearic Islands schools began during the 2021-22 academic year. In 2021, there were only four autonomous communities without Islamic studies courses in public schools: Asturias, Cantabria, Galicia, and Murcia. CIE said some regions lacked Islamic studies courses due to decisions by local authorities or a lack of demand. Where viable, CIE professors taught at more than one school.

FCJE reported there were no Jewish religious education classes in public schools. FCJE officials said they did not consider the lack of Jewish education classes to be problematic because of the availability of, and preference for, private religious instruction in the Jewish community. FCJE reported schools were usually unaware of Jewish holidays as provided for in the accord between FCJE and the state but were often amenable to modifying school schedules to accommodate students when informed of these holidays. Occasionally, mandatory public examinations for university students conflicted with Jewish religious occasions, such as the Sabbath. In these cases, FCJE reported it worked with affected students and academic institutions to make individual accommodations.

Jehovah's Witnesses representatives said they declined to seek their own religious instruction in schools, since they believed that religious training was the responsibility of the individual and not the responsibility of the state.

In January, the FCJE advocated for autonomous community governments to incorporate "robust" Holocaust and Jewish history as mandatory topics in the secondary school curricula at the regional in addition to the national level, where it has been mandatory since 2013. Also in January, the central government implemented a new education law, under which Holocaust education remained mandatory. The Sefarad-Israel Center continued to train teachers on the Holocaust, Judaism, and anti-Semitism through a 2017 agreement between the FCJE and the Ministry of Education.

In May, CIE criticized a history textbook used in some high schools in Catalonia as offensive to Muslims and inappropriate for students. Observers said what they called the textbook's overly simplistic description of Islam and its tenets presented the religion in a negative light. The publishing company Vicens Vives said it would correct this in future editions of the textbooks.

Non-Catholic religious groups described what they said was unequal legal treatment by the government as an ongoing concern. The Catholic Church remained the only religious entity to which persons could voluntarily allocate 0.7 percent of their taxes. According to media, one in three Spaniards chose to allocate some of their taxes to the Catholic Church in 2020, yielding 301 million euros (\$341.27 million), a 5.85 percent increase in donations compared with 2019. Other religious groups were not listed on the tax form as potential recipients of funds. Several religious groups, including Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, and the Church of Jesus Christ, continued to express their desire to have their groups included on the tax form, while some groups described the system as discriminatory. They said they would rather receive voluntary contributions from taxpayers without preconditions than rely on funding from the FPC, which has specific conditions for use of its funds.

CIE, FEREDE, and FCJE stated they relied on government funds provided through the Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation to cover their administrative and infrastructure costs. The Ministry of the Presidency stated it continued to allocate funding to different groups according to the number of registered entities and the approximate number of adherents. Foundation officials reported the pandemic delayed disbursement of funds during the year. In 2020, it provided FEREDE with 462,800 euros (\$525,000), CIE with 330,000 euros (\$374,000), and FCJE with 169,405 euros (\$192,000). In addition to infrastructure and administrative funding, foundation funds also covered small publicity and research projects. Several religious groups reported financial challenges due to COVID-19, with many of their members unable to make the same levels of charitable donations as in previous years.

In February, three Catalonia-based Muslim community organizations – the Union of Islamic Community in Catalonia, the Islamic Federation Council of Catalonia, and the Islamic Federation of Catalonia – filed a complaint against the Vox political party for its "Stop Islamization" social media campaign leading up to Catalanian regional elections. As part of this campaign, Vox's regional candidate had posted videos to Twitter juxtaposing images of area mosques and Islamic studies courses with footage of 2017 terrorist attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils. The Barcelona hate crimes prosecutor opened a hate crimes investigation into Vox's messaging during the campaign. The case

was subsequently transferred to Madrid. In October, the Madrid prosecutor's office closed the investigation, finding that Vox's campaign was protected by laws guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression.

The Ministry of Justice continued processing applications under the 2015 law that provided descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country more than 500 years ago the right of return as full Spanish citizens, as long as the applications were submitted before the law's expiration in September 2019. The government allowed petitioners to modify their applications, if necessary, until September 2021. It had twice extended this deadline. As of June, the government had received more than 150,000 petitions and had granted citizenship to approximately 60,000 descendants of Sephardic Jews. The government rejected approximately 3,000 petitions for various reasons and continued to address outstanding cases. FCJE reported the organization remained involved in the law's adjudication process and that it devoted considerable resources to supporting the ministry's efforts. In July, overseas Jewish associations stated the Ministry of Justice deviated from the criteria and evaluation procedures outlined in law to dismiss petitioners with valid cases. FCJE officials said the ministry continued to adjudicate cases fairly and in accordance with the law.

On October 13, Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares spoke at the Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, reaffirming the country's commitment to the 2000 Stockholm Declaration, the founding document of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Albares referenced the nearly 10,000 exiled Spanish Republicans sent to Nazi concentration camps at Mauthausen and Buchenwald, saying, "To remember is also to prevent.... We remember [the past] so we do not repeat [it.]"

The FCJE estimated there were very few survivors of the Holocaust residing in the country and said, for this reason, the government only considered property restitution on a case-by-case basis.

In May, the FCJE's Observatory of Antisemitism denounced the use of public billboards in Oleiros, Galicia, to criticize the actions of Israel with the phrase "Zionist Terrorism." City mayor Angel Garcia Seoane took responsibility for the signage, which he said displayed his personal views.

Courts continued to rule against municipal and provincial government resolutions supporting the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, although sources stated that new resolutions were increasingly uncommon. Such resolutions usually entailed a nonbinding declaration calling on the central government to "support any initiative promoted by the international BDS campaign" and to "suspend relations with Israel until that country stops its criminal and repressive policies against the Palestinian population." Some pro-BDS-movement legislation also contained language in support of a "space free of Israeli apartheid." In May, a Valencia pro-BDS organization led a demonstration advocating boycotts to protest "Zionist attacks and crimes in Gaza, Jerusalem, and all of Palestine."

The Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation conducted several outreach campaigns, including hosting virtual events, aimed at promoting a better understanding of different religions and respect for religious freedom. It continued working with religious groups on the opening and operation of places of worship, the impact of religious education, and the effects of discrimination and limits to religious freedom in the workplace. The Office of Religious Affairs maintained an online portal for information to aid new immigrants or citizens moving into a community to find his or her locally registered religious community and place of worship. The Ministry of the Interior's Office on Hate Crimes continued to provide assistance to victims of religiously motivated hate crimes and training for law enforcement.

Several regional and municipal government offices continued to conduct outreach with the stated goal of promoting religious diversity. In March, the Catalan regional government published the 2020 Barometer on Religiosity and on the Management of its Diversity, an opinion poll showing the population's religious affiliation, knowledge of other faiths, and opinions on religious freedom. The report reflected that 70 percent of the population supported incorporating instruction about the world's major religions into school curricula. The Department of Religious Affairs and the regional ministry of interior published a guide for law enforcement agencies that provided police with tools to respect religious diversity in their operations. The Barcelona city council's Office for Religious Affairs and Office for Non-Discrimination facilitated and promoted religious celebrations and provided grants for projects of various religious groups. The municipal government organized roundtables to discuss the status of religious freedom in the city, emphasizing the role of women in religious communities.

In September, the Catalan regional government's Department of Religious Affairs partnered with the Ramon Llull University to launch a Chair of Religious Freedom and Conscience as a forum for studying and promoting religious freedom in the region.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the OLRC, there were 148 incidents it described as violating religious freedom in the first 10 months of the year, 33 fewer incidents than occurred in approximately the same period of 2020. Of the incidents, 110 (74 percent) targeted Christians, nine were against Muslims, three against Jews, and 26 were classified as being against all faiths. There were two incidents of violence (one assault on Catholics and one against Muslims), 21 attacks on places of worship, 49 cases of harassment, and 76 cases of “public marginalization of religion.” According to the OLRC’s 2020 annual report, published in September, Catalonia was the region with the most attacks on religious freedom in 2020, followed by Madrid and Andalusia.

According to the Ministry of the Interior’s 2020 annual report on hate crimes, the most recent available, there were 45 hate crimes based on religious beliefs or practices – and, separately, three motivated by antisemitism – in 2020, compared with 66 and five such crimes, respectively, in 2019. Only crimes involving antisemitism were disaggregated, as the penal code treats these as distinct offenses. Most of the religiously motivated crimes occurred in Catalonia (12 hate crimes based on religious beliefs, and two specifically of antisemitism), followed by Madrid (eight and zero crimes), Valencia (five and zero crimes), and Murcia (four and zero crimes).

The ministry’s report did not cite specific examples or provide a breakdown of religiously motivated incidents by type of crime. According to a ministry official, the figures in the annual report only included officially filed complaints and not incidents gathered from press reports.

The General Prosecutor’s 2020 annual report reported one new prosecution in that year for a hate crime involving religion, compared with seven such cases in 2019.

In October, a Valencia regional court convicted a man of physically and verbally assaulting seven Jehovah’s Witnesses in Torrent, Valencia in 2018. Although prosecutors originally requested two years’ imprisonment, after he pleaded guilty, the courts sentenced the defendant to six months’ imprisonment (served as a two-year suspended sentence) and a mandatory course in tolerance.

In April, the Barcelona hate crimes prosecutor asked for between three and 10 years’ imprisonment for 15 members of groups generally considered to be far right that promoted anti-Muslim sentiments through weekly protests outside a local Barcelona mosque in 2017 and 2018.

Also in April, a court in Tocaronte in the Canary Islands sentenced a man to two years’ imprisonment for xenophobic and anti-Muslim social media posts, including references to “taking out” a mosque, in 2017 and 2018. Although the messages were posted to the man’s personal account and had limited reach, the court ruled they qualified as hate speech under the law because they were publicly accessible.

In May, the former leader of the Islamic Federation of the Canary Islands faced hate crimes charges for antisemitic social media posts from 2014-2017. In July, a Tenerife regional court dismissed the charges, ruling that the messages fell within the bounds of freedom of expression. The Canary Islands General Prosecutor’s Office said it planned to appeal the decision.

In May, the Cantabria public prosecutor’s office announced it would pursue a nine-month prison sentence and a 2,400-euro (\$2,700) fine in the trial of a woman accused of shouting slurs at a Muslim woman in 2019. Authorities accused the woman of denigrating wearing a hijab. Afterwards, she made similar comments to three bystanders. In August, courts convicted the defendant of a hate crime and sentenced her to six months’ imprisonment and a fine of 1,080 euros (\$1,200); the court suspended the woman’s sentence and imposed a two-year probation period.

In May, the Interreligious Council of Catalonia and the Working Group of Religions, an entity composed of the representatives of the various religious faiths in the region, released a statement titled “Anti-Religious Phobias: Rights and Limits of Freedom of Expression.” The statement warned of an increase in antisemitism, anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiment, and discrimination against other faiths present in Catalonia.

In June, a Madrid court sentenced a man to a six-month suspended sentence and three years’ probation under a plea agreement with the prosecutor’s office for physically and verbally assaulting a Muslim woman on the metro. Reports of the 2017 incident suggested the individual had lifted his arm in a Nazi salute and referenced gas chambers while disparaging the woman’s use of a hijab.

Media reported that in February, 300 people attended an event paying tribute to the Blue Division, a Spanish volunteer military unit that fought on the side of Nazi Germany in World War II. During the event, a woman gave a speech calling Jews “the same enemy hiding behind different masks,” praising the Blue Division’s contributions, and identifying communism as “a Jewish invention to oppose

workers.” The FCJE filed a hate speech complaint with the General Prosecutor’s office, which opened an investigation. In May, a judge ruled that the statements did not constitute a crime, and the prosecutor’s office appealed the ruling. Media reported in October that the case had been closed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Israeli embassy, and national and local government officials condemned the gathering. In April, the National Police announced it would not levy charges against other attendees, citing the constitutional right to gather peacefully without prior authorization.

In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey based on data from December 2019-January 2020. According to the survey, 10 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Spain said they had negative feelings towards Jews. Thirteen percent said they would be “totally uncomfortable” or “uncomfortable” with having Jewish neighbors. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they agreed or disagreed. The proportion who responded “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” with the following statements were – “the interests of Jews in this country are very different from the interests of the rest of the population” (21 percent); “there is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world” (17 percent); “Jews have too much influence in this country” (9 percent); “Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society” (8 percent); “Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals” (11 percent); “many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later” (10 percent); “Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them” (10 percent); “Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes” (11 percent).

Muslim leaders in Valencia expressed concern that some Muslim youth might be susceptible to more extreme ideologies in the absence of public Muslim education classes or religious services.

Media reported several incidents of religiously motivated vandalism during the year, many of which prosecutors referred to the courts. In January, an unknown individual threw a large rock through the door of a mosque in Fuerteventura, Canary Islands, destroying a wood panel. In February, unknown individuals partially burned a mosque in San Javier, Murcia, which had previously been defaced with anti-Muslim graffiti. City officials called the incident intentional and released a statement condemning the vandalism. Also in February, city officials in Burgos in Castile and Leon region reported 26 vandalism incidents in 2020 involved antisemitic symbols or language. In April, local political figures denounced the defacement with a swastika of a statue honoring famed middle ages Muslim physician Ibn al-Baytar. In May, the local government of Hoyo de Manzanares, in Madrid Region, denounced antisemitic and anti-Muslim graffiti that appeared on the gates of the town’s Jewish cemetery. Also in May, an unknown person defaced a mural in a Madrid-area neighborhood named for Polish Jewish activist Rosa Luxemburg, killed in Berlin in 1919, with the words “killer Jew.” In July, the mayor of Cabezo de Torres, Murcia, condemned an act in which an individual left a severed pig’s head at the door and wrote the words, “Stop the invasion” and “No to Islam” on the walls of a local mosque.

In September, the UNESCO Association for Interreligious Dialogue (AUDIR), a Catalan NGO, organized its sixth “Night of Religions” in Barcelona, in which 40 places of worship representing 15 different religious groups opened their doors to local residents. More than 2,500 persons took part in in-person and online activities, double the number of the previous year, which were conducted in-person and online. AUDIR established interreligious dialogue groups in 10 cities in the region bringing together religious leaders from different faiths to discuss religious diversity and create neighborhood joint projects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy and consulate representatives met with the Ministry of the Presidency’s Office of Religious Affairs, as well as with regional governments’ offices for religious affairs officials to discuss antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, and concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities. Issues discussed included access to permits for places of worship, religious education, cemeteries and burial, religiously motivated hate crimes, and hate speech. Embassy officers also raised these issues with religious leaders who participated in Pluralism and Coexistence Foundation meetings.

Embassy and consulate officials met with leaders of Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, Jewish, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhist, and other religious groups, and civil society groups. Embassy and consulate officials discussed the concerns of community members regarding discrimination and the free exercise of their religious rights.

In October, embassy officials traveled to Cordoba, a city with historic Islamic sites and communities, to engage with Muslim community organizations. Muslim community representatives in Cordoba discussed funereal challenges, such as the lack of religiously appropriate protocols to bury Muslims who died while experiencing homelessness.

In November, embassy officials met with Muslim leaders in the city of Valencia to discuss the community's assimilation into the local population.

In January, the embassy participated in a Holocaust Remembrance Month event hosted by the Spanish Senate. In February, the consulate general in Barcelona invited the Director of the European Association for the Promotion of Jewish Heritage and Culture and founder of Catalonia's first Jewish cultural center to participate in a virtual embassy-sponsored exchange program on interfaith dialogue and religious freedom.

In April, the Charge d'Affaires posted a series of messages on social media marking the beginning of Ramadan and highlighting the importance of religious freedom as well as the inclusion of and respect for religious minority communities. The messages underscored the U.S. commitment to tolerance and coexistence around the world. In lieu of hosting an annual iftar celebration, the Charge sent personal letters to leaders of religious groups, government offices, diplomatic missions, and NGOs commemorating Ramadan and promoting religious diversity and tolerance. The consulate general in Barcelona also promoted religious freedom and diversity on social media on occasions such as the International Religious Freedom Day and Ramadan.

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