



Federal Ministry  
for Economic Cooperation  
and Development



Federal Foreign Office

# **The Federal Government's Second Report on the Global Status of Freedom of Religion**

**Reporting period 2018 – 2019**

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## Summary

Recent years have seen a trend towards increased restrictions on the human right to freedom of religion or belief in all parts of the world. Christians – who form what is numerically the world’s largest faith community – are particularly affected by the violation of religious freedom, but followers of other religions and world views also suffer discrimination and persecution on account of their faith or because they do not subscribe to any belief.

In its coalition agreement of 12 March 2018, the German government created the post of Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion to underpin its commitment to freedom of religion or belief worldwide. In a cabinet decision of 11 April 2018 it appointed Member of the Bundestag Markus Grübel to the position. The role emphasises the Federal Government’s solidarity with minorities and with all who are persecuted or discriminated against as a result of their religion or belief.

Freedom of religion or belief is inextricably linked to other human rights. The right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Human rights require states to guarantee liberties and the right to protection. Human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible. However, the human right to freedom of religion or belief can sometimes be at odds with other rights – such as the right to freedom of opinion and expression. There are synergies, too. For example, the combined effect of human rights can prove mutually reinforcing for the relevant liberties.

The Federal Government's Second Report on the Global Status of Freedom of Religion consists of a country section and a thematic part.

The country section of the report describes the implementation of the human right to freedom of religion or belief in 30 countries in which developments on this front were regarded by the Federal Government as being of particular interest in the reporting period 2018 to 2019. The report outlines the situation in countries in different parts of the world in which freedom of religion or belief was violated during the reporting period or in which there were notable developments in this area.

The sections on individual countries provide information on the demographic and legal situation in the particular country and on restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, whether imposed by the state or by society. Where the appropriate information is available, there is also an analysis of inter-faith cooperation structures and their potential for promoting freedom of religion or belief in the country in question. In all the countries covered in this report, the Federal Government is working to improve the human rights situation by supporting projects or engaging in political dialogue with governments and civil society.

In the thematic expositions, special attention is paid to areas in which freedom of religion or belief is currently particularly restricted. In combination with the country-specific analyses, these expositions are intended to facilitate systematic identification of political linkages on a scale larger than that of individual countries.

The present report highlights three such current challenges in relation to the guaranteeing of freedom of religion or belief:

1. blasphemy laws and anti-conversion laws,
2. digital communication,
3. state education schemes.

This selection was made on the basis of the following considerations:

Under the pretext of protecting freedom of religion or belief, blasphemy laws and anti-conversion laws often turn out to open the way to restrictions on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. The number of national blasphemy and anti-conversion laws is growing worldwide. The violation of freedom of religion or belief by blasphemy and anti-conversion laws is profiled systematically in this report from a legal perspective and illustrated by case studies.

Digital communication and the impact of online hate speech on freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, especially freedom of opinion and expression, are becoming increasingly significant. The report describes various forms of online hate speech related to religious affiliation or group membership while also highlighting ways in which digital communication can promote freedom of religion or belief.

Issues of freedom of religion or belief have not tended to feature on international education agendas. Yet specific restrictions on what should be the guaranteed human right to freedom of religion or belief do occur in the education sector. The chapter describes the opportunities and restrictions encountered by religious and other social groups in connection with state education programmes and analyses the quality of these programmes and their teaching content. It explores how an understanding of freedom of religion or belief is imparted through curricula and textbooks and it examines how freedom of religion or belief can develop more fully in state education systems.

The report ends with an overview of the Federal Government's efforts to strengthen freedom of religion or belief.

Freedom of religion or belief is essential if religious communities and followers of particular beliefs are to be able to unlock their potential for contributing to social cohesion and peaceful and sustainable development. The Federal Government supports the worldwide realisation of freedom of religion or belief as part of its human-rights-based foreign and development policy.

## A. Introduction

### Freedom of religion or belief under growing pressure in many countries

Freedom of religion or belief is restricted all over the world.<sup>1</sup> Christians, who form the world's largest faith community, are particularly affected by the violation of religious freedom, but followers of other religions and world views also suffer discrimination and persecution on account of their faith or because they do not subscribe to any belief.

Protection of freedom of religion or belief is an important issue in Germany. In 2019 our country marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Basic Law (Grundgesetz, GG)<sup>2</sup> and the centenary of the Weimar Constitution. A key concept underpinning both documents is the separation of church and state because too close a relationship damages both. For freedom to exist, church and state can only cooperate if there is no state religion. This very point was made in the Weimar Constitution. The first paragraph of Article 137 stipulated that "there is no state church" and the article went on to state that "the freedom to form religious associations is guaranteed". The relevant articles<sup>3</sup> were carried over into Article 140 of the Basic Law. Article 4 of the Basic Law safeguards freedom of faith and of conscience and freedom to profess a religious or philosophical creed, and guarantees the undisturbed practice of religion.

The German parliament and the Federal Government have responded to the global rise in restriction of the human right to freedom of religion or belief that has been seen in recent years. In a resolution of 1 July 2015 the Bundestag required the Federal Government to produce a report describing the status of freedom of religion or belief in countries worldwide.<sup>4</sup> The first such report produced by the Federal Foreign Office was submitted by the Federal Government on 9 June 2016<sup>5</sup> and debated in the Bundestag on 23 September of that year.<sup>6</sup>

To promote freedom of religion or belief worldwide, the German government's coalition agreement of 12 March 2018 created the post of Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion. In a cabinet decision of 11 April 2018, Member of the Bundestag Markus Grübel was appointed to the position. The role emphasises the Federal Government's solidarity with minorities and with all who are persecuted or discriminated against as a result of their religion or belief. According to the 2018 cabinet decision, the tasks of the Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion fall into three main areas:

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<sup>1</sup> See Pew Research Center (2019). A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World. <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world>

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations used in this report are explained in a list of abbreviations at the end of the document.

<sup>3</sup> Articles 136, 137, 138, 139 and 141 Weimar Constitution

<sup>4</sup> German Bundestag (2018). Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht des Ausschusses für Menschenrechte und humanitäre Hilfe (Resolution recommendation and report of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid). Printed Paper 19/1894. <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/018/1901894.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> German Bundestag (2016). Unterrichtung durch die Bundesregierung. Bericht der Bundesregierung zur weltweiten Lage der Religions- und Weltanschauungsfreiheit (Information from the Federal Government. Report by the Federal Government on the status of freedom of religion or belief worldwide). <https://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/087/1808740.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> German Bundestag (2016). Stenographic report of the 191<sup>st</sup> session. <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btp/18/18191.pdf#P.19025>

1. *monitoring freedom of religion worldwide using a systematic country-by-country approach,*
2. *engaging in international dialogue on issues of religious freedom and*
3. *presenting the Federal Government’s biennial report on the global status of freedom of religion, in collaboration with the Federal Foreign Office.*<sup>7</sup>

The present report was produced through collaboration between the Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion, who is based in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Federal Foreign Office and the relevant German missions abroad. It also reflects the findings of many discussions between the Commissioner and affected people, experts and politicians worldwide.

### **Freedom of religion or belief in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Under applicable international law and Germany’s Basic Law, the human right to freedom of religion or belief is not entirely unrestricted. Article 18(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) permits limitations prescribed by law that “are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others”. Such restrictions must be proportionate and necessary in order to protect the legal interests cited in the Article. They must not be discriminatory, they can only be imposed for a limited period and they must be subject to regular scrutiny in the light of the current situation.

The lockdowns and restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic affected followers of all religions worldwide. Many governments have urged churches and religious communities to take steps to curb the spread of the virus, including by cancelling services and restricting prayer times. However, discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation has been reported from various countries in connection with the restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic. For example, blasphemy laws have sometimes been used during the pandemic to restrict freedom of speech<sup>8</sup> and antisemitic hate speech has increased significantly since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous people are in a particularly vulnerable position, not only because healthcare is often inadequate. The infection risk is often heightened and the livelihoods of many indigenous people jeopardised by the lack of information on dealing with the pandemic and by illegal farming and mining in indigenous territories.

### **Legal principles and challenges**

The right to freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Article 18 of the ICCPR. Freedom of religion or belief is inextricably linked to other human rights. Human rights require states to guarantee liberties and the right to protection. Human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible. However, the human right to freedom of religion or belief can sometimes be at odds with other rights – such as the right to freedom of opinion and

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<sup>7</sup> The parts in italics indicate the tasks assigned to the Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion by cabinet decision.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch (2020). Myanmar: 3 Charged for COVID-19 Street Art – Repeal ‘Insulting Religion’ Law, Support Freedom of Expression. 8 April 2020; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/08/myanmar-3-charged-covid-19-street-art>

<sup>9</sup> Shaheed, Ahmed (2020). Rise in Antisemitic Hatred during COVID-19 must be countered with tougher measures, says UN expert. 19 April 2020; <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25800&LangID=E>



expression. There are synergies, too. For example, the combined effect of human rights can prove mutually reinforcing for the relevant liberties. This is illustrated by the fact that in countries in which human rights are not or only to a very limited extent restricted, the human right to freedom of religion or belief is often fundamentally guaranteed.

Recent years have seen a trend towards increased restrictions on the human right to freedom of religion or belief all over the world. According to a report published by the Pew Research Center in 2019, the number of governments imposing “high” or “very high” restrictions on one or more religious groups stood at 52 in 2017 (the latest available figure). Between 2007 and 2017, the number of countries in which people experienced “the highest levels of social hostilities” in connection with religion rose from 39 to 56.<sup>10</sup> The report also notes that in 2017 there were 23 countries in which atheists and members of other groups who identify with no religion experienced discrimination and persecution as a result of their non-religious world view. In the previous year this was the case in only 14 countries. This is the largest rise within a group affected by restrictions on freedom of religion or belief.<sup>11</sup>

### **Updating of the first report**

The present second report builds on the Federal Government’s first report on the status of freedom of religion or belief worldwide published in 2016 and updates it. The reporting period comprises the years 2018 and 2019. Using numerous examples, the first report identified a typology of abuses of the right to freedom of religion or belief. This provided a basis for the present report. Selected topics that are of particular relevance to freedom of religion or belief and that are addressed in reports of international organisations, supranational or national political stakeholders and research institutions, foundations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)<sup>12</sup> are analysed in more detail and the political efforts of the Federal Government in these areas are highlighted.

The second report also heeds the view of many members of the German Bundestag that a systematic typology can usefully be supplemented by a country-specific analysis of the situation with regard to freedom of religion or belief that would enable the shapers of foreign and development policy to take targeted action to counter unfavourable trends. In this context, neither the selection of countries and topics nor the description of political endeavours makes any claim to be complete.

### **The country sections**

The present report outlines the situation in countries in different parts of the world in which freedom of religion or belief was restricted during the reporting period or in which there were notable developments in this area. In the selected countries, the status of the right to freedom of religion or belief appeared of particular interest in this context. At the same time, some countries with severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief are not covered in this report. Such countries include Syria,

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<sup>10</sup> Pew Research Center (2019). A Closer Look at How Religious Restrictions Have Risen Around the World. 15 July 2019. p. 5. [https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/07/Restrictions\\_X\\_WEB\\_7-15\\_FULL-VERSION-1.pdf](https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/07/Restrictions_X_WEB_7-15_FULL-VERSION-1.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> Reference and Research Services of the German Bundestag (2018). Dokumentation Berichte zur Religionsfreiheit und zu religionspolitischen Debatten. Auswahl. (Documentation reports on freedom of religion and on debates on religious policy) <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/575582/23337317a4efea37c475e4e506fc0a33/WD-1-023-18-pdf-data.pdf>

Yemen and Libya: as a result of ongoing war and conflict, it is currently impossible to collect sound and reliable data on these states.

The information and assessments in the country sections have been gathered by the German missions abroad in whose remit the various countries fall. Using this data, the country sections were compiled by the Federal Foreign Office in collaboration with the BMZ. Insights and experience from visits and meetings in which the Federal Government Commissioner for Global Freedom of Religion has participated and from the work of the BMZ have also been incorporated into the country sections. The section on each country provides information on the demographic and legal situation and on restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, whether imposed by the state or by society. Where the appropriate information is available, there is also an analysis of inter-faith cooperation structures and their potential for promoting freedom of religion or belief in the country in question.

### **The sectoral topics**

In the thematic expositions, special attention is paid to areas in which freedom of religion or belief is currently particularly restricted. These sections were compiled by the BMZ in the light of recent research findings. In combination with the country-specific analyses, these expositions are intended to facilitate systematic identification of political linkages on a scale larger than that of individual countries. Here, too, the aim is to highlight examples of options for action.

The present report highlights three key current challenges: blasphemy laws and anti-conversion laws, the challenges and opportunities of digital communication, and state education sectors. The challenges were selected on the basis of the following considerations:

An exploration of blasphemy laws and anti-conversion laws was considered necessary because such laws are often used, under the pretext of protecting freedom of religion or belief, as a starting point for restrictions on human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief. The number of national blasphemy and anti-conversion laws is growing worldwide. The violation of freedom of religion or belief by blasphemy and anti-conversion laws is profiled systematically in this report from a legal perspective and illustrated by case studies.

Digital communication and the impact of online hate speech on freedom of religion or belief and other human rights, especially freedom of opinion and expression, are becoming increasingly significant. The report describes various forms of online hate speech related to religious affiliation or group membership while also highlighting ways in which digital communication can promote freedom of religion or belief.

Issues of freedom of religion or belief have not tended to feature on international education agendas. Yet specific restrictions on what should be the guaranteed human right to freedom of religion or belief do occur in the education sector. The chapter describes the opportunities and restrictions encountered by religious and other social groups in connection with state education programmes and analyses the quality of these programmes and their teaching content. It explores how an understanding of freedom of religion or belief is imparted through curricula and textbooks and it examines how freedom of religion or belief can develop more fully in state education systems.

### **The social potential of the religions**

The Federal Government supports the promotion of freedom of religion or belief worldwide not only on account of its human-rights-based approach to foreign and development policy but also because it recognises that religious actors and religious communities all over the world have significant potential that is vital to the cohesion and development of societies. Schemes involving cooperation with

religious actors are often widely trusted, enabling those concerned to act as credible intermediaries in conflict situations. People of faith frequently engage with those on the margins of society. On the other hand, religious commitment can also serve to fan the flames in social and political conflicts. The human right to freedom of religion or belief is an important basis of the Federal Government's involvement in the areas of both religion and foreign policy and religion and development.<sup>13</sup> The constructive collaboration with religious actors on the basis of human rights is something that we want to expand further in the coming years. Religious communities can be drivers of change and make an active contribution to the process of sustainable development. They can help to improve the living conditions of people in their area in many different ways and they are often in touch with vulnerable individuals and groups. As a complement to church-based development cooperation, the Federal Government also seeks collaboration with, among others, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and multi-faith partners through its "Religion and Development" and "Religion and Foreign Policy" programmes. At individual, social and institutional level, this enhances the potential of religious actors in relation to the social, environmental, political and economic dimensions of sustainable development and uses it to help achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Freedom of religion or belief in Germany**

A credible account of the global status of freedom of religion or belief cannot ignore consideration of the situation at home. At national level, the right to freedom of religion or belief in Germany is enshrined in and guaranteed by the Basic Law and by the constitutions of the individual states (Länder) that make up the Federal Republic of Germany. However, there are challenges in connection with the actual practice of religion – i.e. at societal level – and freedom of religion or belief is repeatedly the subject of debate within society and of court decisions.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 necessitated sweeping bans on contact and assembly in order to curb the virus. The measures impinged on the liberties of all and also affected the gatherings of faith communities. Services, religious assemblies and celebrations with families and friends had to be abandoned by Christians at Easter, by Jews at Passover and by Muslims in Ramadan. Out of a sense of solidarity, responsibility and common purpose, the religious communities in our country have voluntarily accepted these restrictions in order to protect lives. The Federal Constitutional Court has ruled that restrictions on the freedom of religion or belief were justified but must be regularly reviewed.<sup>14</sup> In the light of a positive trend in tackling the pandemic and the particular protection afforded to the freedom to practice religion in the Basic Law, it was important in connection with the further easing of restrictions to work with the religious communities to adopt a course that accords religious life renewed freedom. Working with representatives of the minister-presidents of the Länder, the churches and major religious communities, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community has discussed their strategies for holding services and organising religious gatherings and activities while taking steps to protect against infection. On the basis of these strategies and discussions, a set of measures and recommendations was drawn up to enable the restrictions on

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<sup>13</sup> BMZ (2016). Religious communities as partners for development cooperation [https://www.bmz.de/en/publications/type\\_of\\_publication/information\\_flyer/information\\_brochures/Materialie252\\_religionen\\_als\\_partner.pdf](https://www.bmz.de/en/publications/type_of_publication/information_flyer/information_brochures/Materialie252_religionen_als_partner.pdf); AA (2019). Religion and foreign policy (Flyer) <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2239078/4b8e0fe02be63a269c59f1aefa38b21a/religion-und-aussenpolitik-data.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Federal Constitutional Court (2020). Resolution of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chamber of the First Senate of 10 April 2020 - 1 BvQ 28/20 -, marginal notes 1-16, [https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2020/04/qk20200410\\_1bvq002820.html](https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2020/04/qk20200410_1bvq002820.html)

religious practices to be progressively eased.<sup>15</sup> The fact that it was possible to arrive cooperatively at a careful balance between the measures to protect the physical integrity of every individual and the free practice of religion – that is, between Article 2(2) and Article 4(2) of the Basic Law – while also needing to prevent the health system being overwhelmed, is a good sign of the freedom of religion or belief in Germany.

There is regular public debate in Germany about issues relating to the religiously motivated wearing of headscarves. In 2019, for example, there was discussion of whether a ban on headscarves for very young girls in schools and nurseries is compatible with the Basic Law.<sup>16</sup> There are also debates about the religious slaughter of animals, which centre on the compatibility of animal welfare and the freedom of religion or belief.<sup>17</sup> In addition there is frequent discussion about the rite of circumcision of boys, about bell-ringing and about the building of places of worship.

To address the challenges within society associated with the freedom of religion or belief in practice, the Federal Government – against the backdrop of the religious neutrality of the state – promotes inter-faith dialogue since this contributes to peaceful life in a multi-religious society. The Federal Government actively exchanges ideas with representatives of religious communities and regularly holds talks with them. The meetings both encourage networking between representatives of the religious communities and promote dialogue.

External observers<sup>18</sup> sometimes report critically on the societal dimension of the freedom of religion or belief in Germany – for instance, in connection with religiously motivated violence or violence against religious minorities. The figures for religiously motivated offences in Germany recorded by the police are published annually by the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA).<sup>19</sup> According to the BKA's statistics, the number of Islamophobic offences rose last year by 4.4 percent, and antisemitic incidents increased by 13 percent. The majority are attributable to right-wing politically motivated criminality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Conference call of the Federal Chancellor with the heads of government of the Länder on 30 April 2020. Resolution; agenda item 2: Measures to curb the COVID-19 pandemic; <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/973812/1749804/353e4b4c77a4d9a724347ccb688d3558/2020-04-30-beschluss-bund-laender-data.pdf?download=1> ; Seiten 3 f. und 6 ff.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g.: Gerbig, S. (2019). Die Religionsfreiheit von Kindern im schulischen Raum: zur Diskussion über Kopftuchverbote für Schülerinnen (The freedom of religion of children in the school setting: on the discussion about bans on headscarves for schoolgirls). German Institute for Human Rights; Jacobs, A. (2019). Kinder ohne Kopftuch? Argumente für und gegen das Verbot von Kopftüchern für junge Mädchen an öffentlichen Schulen in Deutschland (Children without headscarves? Arguments for and against the ban on headscarves for young girls in public schools in Germany). *Analysen & Argumente*, No. 371, October 2019, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Administrative Court (2006). BVerwG 3 C 30.05; VGH 11 UE 317/03; 23 November 2006; <https://www.bverwg.de/entscheidungen/pdf/231106U3C30.05.0.pdf>; Reference and Research Services of the German Bundestag (2007). Schächten. Das verfassungsrechtliche Spannungsfeld zwischen Religionsfreiheit und Tierschutz (Slaughter. The tension in constitutional law between freedom of religion and animal welfare); <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/423608/e5fa07a579bbff97254aa3276922c626/wd-3-202-07-pdf-data.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of State (2019). 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Germany. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/germany/>

<sup>19</sup> Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community / Federal Criminal Police Office (2020). Politisch motivierte Kriminalität im Jahr 2019. Bundesweite Fallzahlen. (Politically motivated criminality in 2019. National case figures) 12 May 2020; [https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2020/pmk-2019.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=8](https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2020/pmk-2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=8); S. 5-6; S. 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> 1898 antisemitic offences and 856 offences with an Islamophobic background were attributed to right-wing politically motivated criminality, accounting for 93.4 percent and, respectively, 90.1 percent of these

The post of Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism was created by a resolution of the German Bundestag of 18 January 2018.<sup>21</sup> To ensure that relevant antisemitic incidents are recorded even if they fall below the threshold of punishability, the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, in a capacity of both patron and funder, promotes the nationwide expansion of a reporting network overseen by the Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism (RIAS e.V.).

There are similar commissioners in almost all Länder and in many other institutions – for example, in public prosecutors’ offices, in the police force and in the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Protestant Church in Germany, EKD). 2019 saw the signing of an agreement between the German government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany – a public body – to regulate provision for the spiritual needs of Jews in the military, sending an important signal for Jewish life in Germany.<sup>22</sup>

“Hate, right-wing extremism, antisemitism and other forms of group-focused enmity have no place in Germany. The Federal Government is determined to protect our liberal democracy against such things.”<sup>23</sup> One of the worst antisemitic incidents of recent decades occurred in the city of Halle in 2019. On Yom Kippur, the most important Jewish holiday, an armed man motivated by far-right thinking perpetrated a fatal attack. Alongside such publicly discussed incidents, the everyday forms of discrimination experienced by Jewish people are an important indicator of the continuing existence of antisemitism in Germany. The Federal Government vigorously opposes antisemitism, as it does all forms of extremism and hate crimes. In October 2019 it adopted a package of measures to tackle right-wing extremism and hate crimes. The Act to Combat Right-Wing Extremism and Hate Crime that was passed in the summer of 2020 serves to implement this package of measures. It gives the authorities more powers to prosecute hate crimes and right-wing extremism and creates additional posts for the purposes.<sup>24</sup>

Another issue discussed in Germany is the conversion of asylum-seekers, mostly Muslims, to Christianity. As part of the asylum process, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees examines whether the newly adopted faith would be lived out in a way that would trigger persecution if the asylum-seeker were to return to their country of origin. The decision is always taken after consideration of all available information about the country of origin and the asylum-seeker. Particular weight is attached to the importance of freedom of religion or belief. While religious communities make their own decision about membership of their religious community in this context, state bodies involved in the asylum process must determine whether adhering to a particular faith-based practice is a core element of the asylum-seeker’s religious identity and hence indispensable for him or her.

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offences. Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community / Federal Criminal Police Office (2020). Politisch motivierte Kriminalität im Jahr 2019. Bundesweite Fallzahlen. (Politically motivated criminality in 2019. National case figures) 12 May 2020; [https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2020/pmk-2019.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=8](https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2020/pmk-2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=8); S. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> German Bundestag (2018). Stenographic report of the 7<sup>th</sup> session. <https://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btp/19/19007.pdf#P.522>

<sup>22</sup> German Bundestag (2020). Beschlussempfehlung und Bericht des Verteidigungsausschusses (12. Ausschuss) zu dem Gesetzentwurf der Bundesregierung – Drucksache 19/18074(neu) (Resolution recommendation and report of the Defence Committee (12<sup>th</sup> Committee) on the Federal Government’s draft law – Printed Paper 19/18074 (new)) – Printed Paper 19/19534 27.05.2020. <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/195/1919534.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Federal Government (2019). German government takes action against right-wing extremism and hate crimes, 30 October 2019; <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/gegen-extremismus-und-hass-1687190>

<sup>24</sup> See Sections B 2.2. and D “Measures by the Federal Government” of this report.

There is no scrutiny of belief. No reference is made to the possibility of practising the Christian faith in the country of origin purely in private. This would contradict the freedom of religion or belief under the Basic Law. Freedom of religion or belief includes the right to publicly declare one's religion or belief. In countries such as Iran and Afghanistan, Christians and non-believers may in principle be at risk.

### **Outlook**

This report is guided by a positive view of the social and political potential of religion. In issues of societal orientation, in crisis prevention and in the transition to sustainable development, policy-makers should cooperate with civil society, including religious actors and religious communities, and neither ignore nor idealise them. Promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief worldwide calls for multilateral and bilateral dialogue and cooperation, the advancement of research, greater international debate on relevant civil-society reports and stepping up of the European dialogue and the common commitment to all human rights.



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