

Croatia



Stable / Unchanged ▬

Religion

Population

Area

- Christians : **93.9%**
- Agnostics : **2.7%**
- Muslims : **2.0%**
- Atheists : **1.4%**

4.225.000

56.594 Km²

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

The country's constitution guarantees freedom of religion.^[1] All religious communities are equal under the law. There is no official state religion. Religious communities are free to conduct public religious services as well as run schools and charitable organisations. A faith group needs at least 500 members and five years of registered operation to be recognised as a religious community.

The Croatian state has entered into separate legal agreements with different religious communities.^[2] These agreements regulate issues such how much state subsidy employees of the various communities should receive, their eligibility for state pensions, state support for the upkeep and renovation of religious buildings, chaplains' access to prisons, military and state institutions,^[3] special food requirements for Adventists and Muslims and provision for paid leave for Muslims for religious festivals which are not state holidays. There is official recognition of marriages conducted by religious communities which have agreements with the state; this dispenses with the need to register the marriages at the civil registry office. Public schools allow religious teaching in cooperation with religious communities which have agreements with the state, but attendance is optional. In primary schools, about 90 percent of all children receive religious education classes about the Catholic faith. In high schools, about 65 percent of students receive Catholic education classes (the alternative is courses on Ethics). Non-registered religious communities are not allowed to provide religious education in schools or have access to state funds for religious activities.

There were 54 registered religious communities by the end of 2017 including the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Christian Adventist Church, the Church of God, the Church of Christ, the Pentecostal Church, the Evangelical Church, the Coordination of Jewish Communities in Croatia, the Croatian Old Catholic Church, the Islamic Community of Croatia, the Reformed Christian Church, the Union of Baptist

Churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, the Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, the Church of the Full Gospel, the Word of Life Alliance of Churches, the Protestant Reformed Christian Church and Bet Israel.

Public holidays in Croatia include a number of the Catholic religious holidays; it is legal for non-Catholics to celebrate other major religious holidays.

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious community. The government recognised the Church's historical and cultural role and its social position by signing four agreements of mutual interest with the Holy See in the period from 1996 to 1998.^[4] These concordats mandate government funding for pensions and salaries of certain religious personnel through government pensions and health budgets.

The agreements also regulate public school religious education and military chaplains. The other 16 religious groups, which have agreements with the state, may offer religious education in schools, provided that at any one school there are at least seven followers of the faith in question.

There are 17 ecclesiastical circumscriptions and 1,598 parishes in Croatia. There are currently 25 bishops, 2,343 priests and 3,711 religious.^[5] There is one Catholic TV channel, Laudato TV. There are two Catholic radio stations and many weekly and monthly magazines. There are also several Catholic internet news portals popular with Catholics. There are many Catholic professional associations, but membership is generally drawn from the lower tiers of the workforce. Vocations to the priesthood and male religious life are relatively stable but female vocations are decreasing. The role of lay people increased almost immediately after the introduction of religious instruction in schools. The clergy and laity are united against secularism.

There is public space for demonstrations by faith groups on issues of social importance. For example, Croatia's "March for Life" was held on 20th May 2017. According to the police and local media, the event attracted 20,000 people in the capital, Zagreb, and up to 5,000 in the country's second largest city, Split.^[6]

A sign of the good relations between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches is the high level of cooperation involving investigations into a cause for sainthood; the joint Orthodox-Catholic commission into the life of Blessed Aloysius Stepinac held its sixth and final meeting at Domus Sanctae Marthae, Rome, on 12th and 13th July 2017. At the conclusion of the commission's meetings, the Secretariat of the Holy See prepared a joint statement which was adopted by both sides. The document considers that the opinion of both Orthodox and Catholic Churches remains unchanged but acknowledges that ultimately the Pope must make the final decision about the cardinal's cause.^[7] Commission members had come to the conclusion that various events in the Cardinal's life, his speeches, writings, silences, and views are still open to interpretation.

Incidents

In March 2017, the Serbian Orthodox Church released a statement that unknown persons had desecrated Orthodox churches and broken into the Church of Saint Georgije in Križke and Saint Jovan Krstitelj in Miošić, near Drniš.^[8] The vandals did not rob the Orthodox shrines or desecrate the icons or other religious objects. The statement declared that the motive for the attack was unclear. The statement added that on 19th March 2017, a church in Medvidja was broken into. The local priest immediately informed the police, who quickly came and investigated. The south door to the church was broken.

Anti-Serbian graffiti including Croatian Second World War Nationalistic emblems were painted on a Serbian Orthodox church in the Croatian town of Sinj.^[9]

The Archdiocese of Split Makarska objected to the inclusion of the play 'Our Violence and Your Violence' as part of the 'Marulićevi Dani' theatre festival in Split.^[10] The archdiocese claimed that the play, directed by Croatian theatre director

Oliver Frlji?, is offensive to citizens and faithful, and called on the festival organisers to reconsider including it. The play features a hijab-clad woman being raped by Jesus after pulling a national flag from her genitals. The archdiocese stated that it had acted after receiving many complaints from faithful who were distressed and disgusted by the play.

Prospects for freedom of religion

Relations between the state and church in Croatia depend on which political Party is in power. Catholic believers generally support the non-confessionalism of the country's political structures. Although there is a high percentage of Catholics, Croatia is still an ideologically pluralistic society.

There is huge tension concerning the preferred conception of the state, on the one hand, the secular model, as proposed by the European Union, and on the other, a model where religion has an important role. Compounding the problem is that ethnicity continues to be an significant issue in society, with Croats representing 90 percent and Serbs only 4.4 percent with the rest made up of Bosniacs, Italians, Albanians and Hungarians.

Certain liberal civil society organisations have had a great impact on politics and on the promotion of secularism in Croatia. A radically secular worldview has been expounded, in which athiestic or agnostic views of religion have been proposed in an effort to achieve political neutrality. Advocates of this worldview declare that, in the name of democracy, faith-based communities should be excluded from public debates on social and ethical issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and euthanasia.

The secular ideology, which portrays faith as a force for ill, is a challenge for the Catholic Church, which has had a significant influence on the national, cultural and religious identity of modern Croatia. This challenge motivates Christians to engage in dialogue about political issues at all levels. It remains to be seen whether Croatia will become an increasingly secular state or whether it will be a place of encounter between religious groups cooperating with political structures for the common good.

Endnotes / Sources

[1] Articles 14, 17, 39, and 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia

[2] Religious Communities Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, Narodne novine 83, 2002, Registry of Religious Communities, Ministry of Public Administration

[3] The Treaty Between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on Spiritual Instruction of Catholic Believers Who Are Members of the Armed Forces and Police Services of the Republic of Croatia and The Treaty between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on Co-Operation in Education and Culture. Narodne novine (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia – International Contracts),2, 1997.

[4] The Treaty between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on Legal Issues. Narodne novine (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, International Contracts) 3, 1997 and The Treaty between the Holy See and the Republic of Croatia on Economic Issues. Narodne novine (Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia, International Contracts) 18, 1998.

[5] Central Statistical Office of the Church

[6] The greater number of people gathered in Zagreb. Anti protestors blocked the stood on their way and the Police arrested them, Jutarnji List, 20th May 2017, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/foto-video-hod-za-zivot-u-zagrebu-se-okupio-veci-broj-ljudi-protuprosvjednici-blokirali-prolaz-povorci-policija-ih-potrpara-u-maricu/6097488/>

[7] The Pope will decide about the sanctity of Alojzije Stepinac, Ve?ernji List, 15th July 2017,

<https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/papa-alozije-stepinac-kardinal-1182433>

[8] Orthodox Churches broken into, Novosti, 15th March 2017, <https://www.portalnovosti.com/provale-u-dalmatinske-hramove>

[9] Pro-Ustasha emblems has been painted on a Serbian Orthodox church in Sinj, Tportal, 7th March 2017, <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/na-pravoslavnoj-crkvi-u-sinju-osvanuli-ustaski-simboli-20170307>

[10] How not to be offended when somebody use the cultural insitutions to vilify and disrespect the others, Vecernji List, 22. April 2017, <https://www.vecernji.hr/kultura/nadbiskupija-protiv-frljica-kako-ne-bitu-zgrozen-kada-se-u-hramu-kulture-na-najvulgarniji-nacin-druga-omalovazava-i-blati-1164918>