

Serbia

Serbia generally respects human rights and the freedom of religion following the implementation of its new constitution in 2006. The vast majority of the population, 85%, is Christian Orthodox, and 94% of people belong to one of the seven ‘traditional’ religions recognised by the government. It is estimated only 1.1% of people are atheists.

Constitution and government	Education and children’s rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
<u>There is systematic religious privilege</u> <u>Preferential treatment is given to a religion or religion in general</u> <u>State-funding of religious institutions or salaries, or discriminatory tax exemptions</u>			
<u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u>	<u>State-funded schools offer religious or ideological instruction with no secular or humanist alternative, but it is optional</u>		<u>Some concerns about political or media freedoms, not specific to the non-religious</u> <u>Concerns that secular or religious authorities interfere in specifically religious freedoms</u>
		<u>No religious tribunals of concern, secular groups operate freely, individuals are not persecuted by the state</u>	

Legend

Constitution and government

Officially, Serbia has no state religion. The constitution specifically invokes the principle of the separation of church and state; however it also recognises seven “traditional” religions, which appear automatically in its Register of Churches and Religious Communities. These are the: Serbian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic Community, and the Jewish community.

Although it is not mandatory for groups outside these seven to register, unregistered groups can experience considerable difficulty when trying to open bank accounts, purchase or sell property, or publish literature. To register, groups need to provide members’ names, identity numbers and signatures, proof the group has over 100 members, a summary of its teachings, ceremonies, goals, basic activities and sources of funding. Throughout 2013, the government rejected a number of

“non-traditional” groups that attempted to register - including the League of Baptists, Hare Krishna Movement, Pentecostal Church, and Protestant Evangelical Church of Subotica. At the end of the year, according to Supreme Court data, there were cases filed by three religious communities - the Union of Baptist Churches, Church of Christian Oath, and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church - pending before the Supreme Court appealing the ministry’s decision to deny them registration.

Preferential treatment

The government gives some preferential treatment to the Serbian Orthodox Church, through funding and subsidies for clergy working outside the country. All registered groups’ clergy receive healthcare and a pension, replacing a system in which the government would sporadically allow these benefits to certain religions based on individual agreements with the clergy and Ministers.

In 2012, the Serbian Constitutional Court ruled the law maintaining the privileged status of the ‘traditional seven’ was constitutional and not discriminatory.

Education and children’s rights

Primary and Secondary students are required to attend classes on at least one of the seven traditional religions, or opt for ‘civil education’ instead in which students learn about modern day values, including democracy, tolerance and human rights. The number of children opting for the religious education vary: 50% of primary school children pick it, and between 20% and 40% of those at secondary schools. If the number of students picking a class falls below the national minimum, 10%, then the class is not run at all. Students which are not members of one of the seven traditional religions tend to pick civic education.

<policy.hu/aleksov/book_doc03.pdf>

Family, community and society

Police responses to religiously-motivated vandalism are often sluggish and inconclusive, and rarely lead to arrests, and members of minority groups occasionally experienced social aggression - including things like spray-painted graffiti, rocks and bricks being thrown at churches and cemeteries, general hate speech and a negative portrayal in the media.

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

While freedom of the press is technically protected under the Serbian constitution, journalists are often verbally and physically attacked and the media as a whole is subject to widespread corruption. The lack of resources available to the media often leads to self-censorship.