

RELIGION, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN SWEDEN

 Sveriges
interreligiösa råd

sst

Nämnden för
Statligt Stöd till Trossamfund

About this pamphlet

This pamphlet is for those who want to learn more about religious freedom. The pamphlet does not tell you what to think or believe; it only addresses the provisions laid out by Swedish law. We have also collected some general information about religion in Sweden. At the back of the brochure you will find contact information for various religious communities in Sweden.

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PHOTO: JOEL STOCKMAN



Religious Freedom

In Sweden, the right to religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution. Religious freedom means that all individuals, regardless of age or gender, are free to follow and practice their religion in the way that they see fit - for example through worship, education, social mores, and religious rituals.

Religious freedom is a human right, and as such it encompasses not only the protection of your right to follow a faith, but also your right to choose not to do so. This right is unconditional. However, the freedom to practice a religion is conditional. This means that you may not practice a religion if its practice runs contrary to Swedish law. The Swedish state may only restrict religious practices in cases where limitations are necessary to protect public order, health, or morals, or for the protection of other peoples' rights and freedoms.

To whom does religious freedom apply?

- People of every religious faith.
- People with non-religious beliefs, such as atheism.
- Men, women, and children.
- People with and without disabilities.
- People of different sexual orientations.



What is meant by religious freedom?

- The freedom to choose, change, or leave one's faith.
- The freedom to practice one's religion.
- The freedom from being compelled to practice a religion.
- Freedom from being forced to refrain from practicing a religion.
- Freedom from being forced to abandon one's faith.
- Protection from being discriminated against because of one's religious beliefs.
- Freedom from being made to disclose one's religious beliefs to others.
- The right of parents to give their children a religious upbringing, as well as a child's right to make his or her own decisions when it comes to his/her beliefs.
- The right to refuse to bear arms when serving in the military.
- Employers must demonstrate reasonable flexibility when it comes to their employees' religious practices and beliefs, within the context of the workplace.



What is not meant by religious freedom?

- That religions have a right to freedom from criticism.
- That one may say whatever one pleases in the name of religion.
- That one has a right to not have to witness the religious practices of others.
- That religions have an inherent right to their followers.
- That any person has a right to control the religious practices of another individual.
- That parents have the right to impose religious practices upon their children, with no regard for a child's increasing capacity to form beliefs of his/her own.
- That one may violate other human rights on the grounds of religious freedom.





Religion in Sweden

The role that religion plays in a society varies widely throughout the world. In some countries, there is a single dominant religion, whilst in others many religions may coexist, side by side. In some countries, a person's religious identity determines everything: work life, social standing, and where you live. In others, religion and religious communities play a minor role in peoples' lives.

For many hundreds of years, Sweden was a country completely dominated by a single religion - Lutheran Christianity - and a single religious denomination, the Church of Sweden. In those days, anyone living in Sweden was designated by law as a member of the Church of Sweden. Furthermore, the Church of Sweden was also part of the Swedish state. There were minority groups of Jews, Roma, Sami and Catholics who followed another faith - but they were the exceptions to the rule. An increased presence of these minorities, ideas developed during the Enlightenment, and the Free Church movement (which started in the mid-1800s) drove the quest for religious freedom. Yet it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that religious freedom really found a place in Swedish society. Since 1952, the right to belong to any religious denomination one chooses, or to not to belong to any denomination at all, has been specifically protected under Swedish law.

During the 20th century, two major trends developed with regard to Swedish religious life: On the one hand, Sweden became an increasingly secular society. This meant that the Swedish state took over many of the duties that had previously been the responsibility of the church, such as healthcare, child care, and education. Since 2000, the Swedish Church is no longer a part of the Swedish state; instead, it operates on the same terms as all the other religious communities in the country. The Swedish state cannot be said to ascribe to any particular religion. The other development is that groups of people from many different religious traditions have continued to move to Sweden. These include, amongst others, Catholics, Jews, Orthodox Christians, Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus. Sweden is becoming an increasingly multi-religious society.

In international comparative studies, Sweden is now mentioned as an example of a society where for many people religion does not play a large role in daily life. This is partly true. However, it is also important to remember that many people are very engaged in religious life, and there are lots of active religious communities in Sweden. The majority of Sweden's population of over 7 million inhabitants are members or registered participants of a religious community.

What percentage of people in Sweden answer “yes” to the question “Is there a god?”?

23%



What percentage takes part in religious services?

What percentage of people in Sweden agree with the statement “There is some sort of higher power or life-force”?

53%



550,000

people in Sweden participate in religious services on a weekly basis

The number of churches or other houses of worship in Sweden:



3,700

Members or registered participants in the activities of religious communities:

OVER A 7 MILLION

Religious Communities in Sweden

Today there are many major religious communities in Sweden, and thousands of local congregations. All the major religions are represented here, as well as many lesser-known religions from all over the world.

■ **The Church of Sweden** is Sweden's largest religious denomination, and is composed of 13 dioceses and over 6.3 million members. The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical-Lutheran community and acts as an open national church; it is controlled jointly by a democratic organisation and the Church's priests, deacons and bishops. The Church of Sweden's local congregations can be found throughout Sweden, and perform religious services, do educational and missionary work, and also are very socially active.



PHOTO: HOLGER ELLGAARD

■ **The history of Free Church Christian communities** dates back to the 19th century, when Revivalist influences reached Sweden from Europe and the USA. This influx inspired the Baptist and Methodist movements and various waves of neo-Evangelicalism. The term "Free Church" stems from the fact that membership in these organisations is voluntary, and that these communities were not connected to or controlled by the state, unlike the Church of Sweden, which was at that time a national institution. There are currently a dozen national religious communities that belong to this group, and local congregations can be found in most places in Sweden. Between 250 – 350,000 people are members or active participants in the Free Church community.



■ **The Orthodox and Eastern Churches** are Christian denominations with roots in Eastern and Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. In Sweden, these denominations began establishing themselves in the 1960s. Today there are about twenty different churches of this denominational group represented in Sweden, with many congregations. This group includes denominations of the Byzantine Orthodox Church on one hand (for example, Greek Orthodox Christianity), and on the other hand denominations of the Oriental Orthodox Churches (for example, Syrian Orthodox Christianity). There are between 100 – 150,000 members of these religious communities in Sweden.



■ **The Catholic Church** has over 100,000 members in Sweden. Religious services are held in about 130 places in the country, and there are over 40 congregations. Oriental Catholics comprise a distinct group within the Catholic Church; they are in turn divided into twenty different sects that primarily have their roots in the Middle East. Seven of these Oriental Catholic denominations are currently represented in Sweden. Formally speaking, they are led by the Roman Catholic bishop, but they also have their own episcopal vicar and their own national pastors.

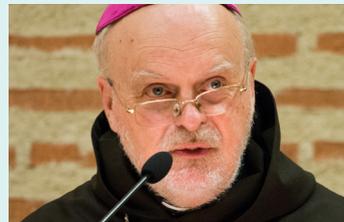


PHOTO: FRANKIE FOUGANATHIN

■ **The Buddhist Cooperation Council of Sweden (SBS)**

was founded in 1993 and is a national organisation of over 20 Sweden-based Buddhist associations. SBS is committed to promoting the knowledge of Buddhism and to supporting the development of the Buddhist community in Sweden. SBS estimates that there are 50,000 Buddhists in Sweden, of whom 5,000 are registered followers of the faith.



■ **The Jewish Central Council** was founded in 1953 by the Jewish congregations of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Norrköping. The Jewish Central Council works on a local level to promote the acceptance of Jews within Swedish society. On a national level, the organisation strives to promote awareness of Judaism and to monitor and address issues of importance to the Jewish religious minority and the Jewish ethnic community in Sweden. The Jewish Central Council estimates that there are currently 20,000 Jews living in Sweden, of whom roughly 6,000 are registered followers of the faith.



PHOTO: 199PEMA

■ **The Islamic national associations** are national organisations that represent local congregations and mosques. There are currently over 150 local Islamic associations in Sweden that offer houses of prayer, educational opportunities, and social services. The Islamic national associations and their local congregations have been established presences in Sweden since the 1970s. Today it is estimated that between 150 – 200,000 people are active members of an Islamic congregation in Sweden. The Islamic national associations and their local congregations have been established presences in Sweden since the 1970s and represent both the Sunni and the Shi'ite sects of Islam.



■ **Other Organisations** The Mandaic Sabian Society comprises over 6000 Mandaean living in Sweden, making it the largest Mandaean community outside the Middle East. The National Association of Alevis has organisations in many places in Sweden and unites people from Turkey and Kurdistan who have their religious roots in Alevism. Temples and organisations for Hindus, Sikhs, and Jain can also be found in many parts of Sweden, especially in metropolitan areas. In addition to these religious communities, there are also members of many other denominations to be found in the country, including followers of the Baha'i, Jehovah's Witness, Word of Faith Movement, Yezidi, and Mormon faiths.





PHOTO: MAGNUS ARONSON

Cooperation Between Religious Communities

These days there are lots of examples of collaboration between religious communities in Sweden. The aim of these collaborations is to provide religious communities with a stronger and more unified voice when it comes to public debate, but the hope is that they can also promote dialogue and understanding between people of different religions.

The National Interfaith Council of Sweden (SIR) is composed of national representatives from every religion. The goal of this council is to encourage goodwill and peace within the Swedish society. SIR also aims to deepen, develop and disseminate knowledge about different religions in Sweden, and to discourage anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other threats to religious freedom. There are also many different local and regional initiatives currently working throughout Sweden to increase acceptance and peaceful coexistence between different religious groups. Furthermore, there are also organisations that bring together different social groups within Sweden. These include the Christian Council of Sweden, the Swedish Muslim Council, and many others.

Governmental Support for Communities

The Swedish government has long supported the existence of religious communities in Sweden, arguing that they are fundamental to any healthy society. This support takes the form of financial contributions that help these communities to offer religious services, counselling, social care and education.

Spiritual Care in Public Institutions

Sweden has a long tradition of offering spiritual care to people for whom public institutions are responsible. One example of this is that spiritual support and guidance is available in virtually all Swedish hospitals. Through these services, those who feel the need can seek support from chaplains from different religious faiths. People in prison also have access to spiritual care.

Statement from the National Interfaith Council of Sweden on the "Refuse to Hate" campaign

All over the world, violent acts are carried out in the name of religion. In Sweden, Jewish institutions, churches and mosques are subjected to vandalism and criminal damage, and people suffer harassment and physical attacks for wearing their religious symbols. This is unacceptable in a society that defends each person's right to their beliefs and to express and practice their religion.

As representatives of various religions and faith communities in Sweden, we strongly reject aggression, hatred and violence with religious overtones, both when we are the targets and when it stems from our own communities. We would instead like to highlight the opportunities created by religions to contribute towards social and democratic development in Sweden and around the world. Our religions are based on principles that emphasise honesty, justice, the importance of caring for others and the pursuit of the common good. People of different faiths may have contrasting beliefs, but they are united in their endeavour to achieve good in society. We want to show our support for religious freedom and **Refuse to Hate!**

Everyone, believers and non-believers, has a duty to defend democratic society's freedom of religion and belief. Members of different communities want to support one another's right to practice their faith. We also want to encourage political representatives, government agencies, organisations in civil society and everyone who is a defender of justice and peace to stand up and show their support for **Refuse to Hate!**

Representatives from the various religions in Sweden are united in their position on religious hostility, hatred towards Muslims and anti-Semitism. This text has been adopted by the National Interfaith Council of Sweden, which functions as a national forum for religious leaders. We, the undersigned, want to use this appeal as a call to action to encourage demonstrations of solidarity: **Refuse to Hate!**

Let's pass on the baton!

For the National Interfaith Council of Sweden on 22 December 2014

Elvir Gigovic

Muslim Council of Sweden

Helena Hummasten

Muslim Council of Sweden

Mustafa Setkic

Imam, Bosnian Islamic

Haider Ibrahim

Community Islamic Shia Society

Trudy Fredriksson

Swedish Buddhist Cooperation

Bhante Dhammaratana

Council Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council

Örjan Widegren

Swedish Bahá'í

Sudhagar Ragupathy

Assembly Hindu Society

Genzabra Salwan Alkhammas

Mandaean-Sabian Society

Jaspal Singh

Swedish Sikh Community

Maynard Gerber

Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities

Karin Wiborn

Secretary-General, Christian Council of Sweden

Antje Jackélen

Archbishop of the Church of Sweden

Benjamin Atas

Archbishop of the Syrian Orthodox Church

Anders Arborelius

Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Stockholm

Pelle Hörnmark

Director Swedish Pentecostal Fellowship

Contact Information for National Religious Communities and Other National Organisations

Do you want to contact a religious community or organisation? The following is a list of many of the national organisations in Sweden that are engaged in religious activities.

■ Lutheran Churches

Svenska kyrkan (The Church of Sweden)

018-16 96 00
info@svenskakyrkan.se
www.svenskakyrkan.se

Evangelisk-luthersk mission – Bibeltrogna vänner (The Evangelical-Lutheran Mission)

08-559 23 104
expeditionen@elmbv.se
www.elmbv.se

Evangeliska fosterlandstiftelsen (The Evangelical Mission)

018-430 25 00
efs@efs.nu
www.efs.nu

■ The Free Church Community

Equmeniakyrkan (The Uniting Church in Sweden)

08-580 031 00
info@equmeniakyrkan.se
www.equmeniakyrkan.se

Frälsningsarmén (The Salvation Army)

08-562 282 00
info@fralsningsarmen.se
www.fralsningsarmen.se

Pingströrelsen (The Pentecostal Church)

08-608 96 00
info@pingst.se
www.pingst.se

Evangeliska frikyrkan (The Evangelical Free Church)

019-16 76 00
info@efk.se
www.efk.se

Sjundedags adventistsamfundet (The Association of Seventh Day Adventists)

08-545 297 70
info@adventist.se
www.adventist.se

Svenska alliansmissionen (The Swedish Alliance Mission)

036-30 61 50
info@alliansmissionen.se
www.alliansmissionen.se

Vineyard Norden

info@vineyard.se
www.vineyard.se

Trosrörelsen/Livets ord (Word of Faith Movement/ Word of Life)

www.livetsord.se
info@livetsord.se

■ Islamic National Associations

Bosniakiska islamiska samfundet (The Bosnian Islamic Association)

0520-49 90 64
kontakt@izb.se
www.izb.se

Förenade islamiska föreningar i Sverige (The United Islamic Associations of Sweden)

08-509 109 24
info@fifs.se
www.fifs.se

Islamiska kulturcenterunionen (The Union of Islamic Cultural Centers)

08-15 98 88
info@ikus.nu
www.ikus.nu

Islamiska shia samfunden i Sverige (The Islamic Shi'ite Association of Sweden)

08-580 123 14
info@shiasamfund.se
www.shiasamfund.se

Svenska islamiska församlingarna (The Islamic Congregations of Sweden)

tunawi@gmail.com

Sveriges muslimska förbund (The Swedish Muslim Federation)

08-420 640 58
www.smf-islam.se
smfsverige@hotmail.com

■ Orthodox and Eastern Churches

Antiokiska ortodoxa kyrkan (The Antioch Orthodox Church)

pbmansour@hotmail.com
www.antiokchsweden.se

Armeniska apostoliska kyrkan (The Armenian Apostolic Church)

info@armeniskakyrkan.org
www.armeniskakyrkan.se

Eritreanska ortodoxa tewahedo kyrkan i Skandinavien - Koptiska patriarkatet (The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Scandinavia - Coptic Patriarchate)

www.eotcs.se

Eritreanska ortodoxa tewahdo kyrkan i Sverige (The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church of Sweden)

lidetamariyam@outlook.com
www.kidstmariameotc.se

Etiopiska Ortodoxa Tewahedo Kyrka Årkestitfödet (The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Archdiocese)

debereselammedhanealem@gmail.com
www.medhanealem.se

Grekisk ortodoxa Metropolitdömet (The Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden)

08-612 34 81
metropolisofsweden@gmail.com

Koptisk-ortodoxa kyrkan (The Coptic-Orthodox Church)

08-550 344 13
www.copt.se
coptse@facebook.com

Ryska ortodoxa kyrkan - Patriarkatet i Konstantinopel (The Russian Orthodox Church - Patriarchate of Constantinople)

08-15 63 16
angel.velitchkov@yahoo.se

Ryska ortodoxa kyrkan - Moskvpatriarkatet (The Russian Orthodox Church - Patriarchate of Moscow)

rusortswed@hotmail.com
www.sweden.orthodoxy.ru

Serbisk-ortodoxa kyrkan (The Serbian-Orthodox Church)

www.crkva.se
dusan@svetisava.se

Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan patriarkatets ställföreträdarskap (The Syrian-Orthodox Church; deputy of the patriarchate)

08-550 84 140
kansli@syriskortodoxakyrkan.se
www.syriskortodoxakyrkan.se

Syrisk-ortodoxa kyrkan (The Syrian-Orthodox Church)

Syrisk ortodoxa ärkestiftet (The Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese)
08-550 656 44
info@soa-s.se
www.soa-s.se

Österns assyriska kyrka i Sverige (The Eastern Assyrian Church of Sweden)

www.assyrianchurch-europe.org
youel_yacoub@hotmail.com

■ Other Organisations

Alevitiska riksförbundet (The National Association of Alevis)

www.alevi.se

Svenska bahá'í-samfundet (The Swedish Bahá'í Association)

kontakt@bahai.se
www.bahai.se

Hindu Forum Sweden

hinduforums sweden@gmail.com
www.hinduforums sweden.se

Hindu Cultural Maintainance Center

www.swedenganeshatemple.com

Hindu Mandir Society

www.mandirstockholm.se

Ezidiska riksförbundet i Sverige (The National Association of Yezidi in Sweden)

ezidiska.riksforbundet@hotmail.se

Jesu Kristi Kyrka av Sista Dagars Heliga (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)

08-544 709 30
www.jesukristikyrka.se

Jehovas Vittnen (Jehovah's Witnesses)

www.jw.org/sv

Judiska centralrådet (The Jewish Central Council)

08-587 858 00
www.jfst.se
info@jfst.se

Mandeiska sabeiska samfundet (The Mandaic Sabian Society)

www.mandaeen.se
mss@mandaeen.se

Sikhiska församlingen (The Congregation of Sikhs)

www.sikh.se
unga@sikh.se

Romersk-katolska kyrkan i Sverige (The Roman Catholic Church of Sweden)

08-462 66 00
info@katolskakyrkan.se
www.katolskakyrkan.se

Sveriges buddhistiska samarbetsråd (The Buddhist Cooperation Council of Sweden)

www.buddhism-sbs.se
trudy@buddhism-sbs.se

Universell kyrkan av Jesus Kristus (The Universal Church of Jesus Christ)

ukjk@eujc.org
www.eujc.org

■ National Collaborative Organisations

Sveriges interreligiösa råd (The National Interfaith Council of Sweden)

08-586 24 080
info@interreligiosaradet.se
www.interreligiosaradet.se

Sveriges kristna råd (The Christian Council of Sweden)

08-453 68 00
info@skr.org
www.skr.org

Sveriges muslimska råd (The Muslim Council of Sweden)

08-559 257 99
info@sverigemuslimskarad.org
www.sverigemuslimskarad.org

Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund (The Commission for Government Support for Religious Communities)

08-453 68 70
info@sst.a.se
www.sst.a.se

■ Spiritual Care in Hospitals and Prisons

Sjukhuskyrkan (The Hospital Church)

www.sjukhuskyrkan.se

Muslim Spiritual Care in the Hospital

www.muslimskasjukhuskoordinatorer.se

Buddhist Spiritual Care in the Hospital

www.buddhism-sbs.se

Spiritual Care in Prison

www.kriminalvarden.se



**Sveriges interreligiösa råd (The National
Interfaith Council of Sweden)**
08-586 24 080
info@interreligiosaradet.se
interreligiosaradet.se



Governmental Support for Communities
08-453 68 70
info@sst.a.se
www.sst.a.se