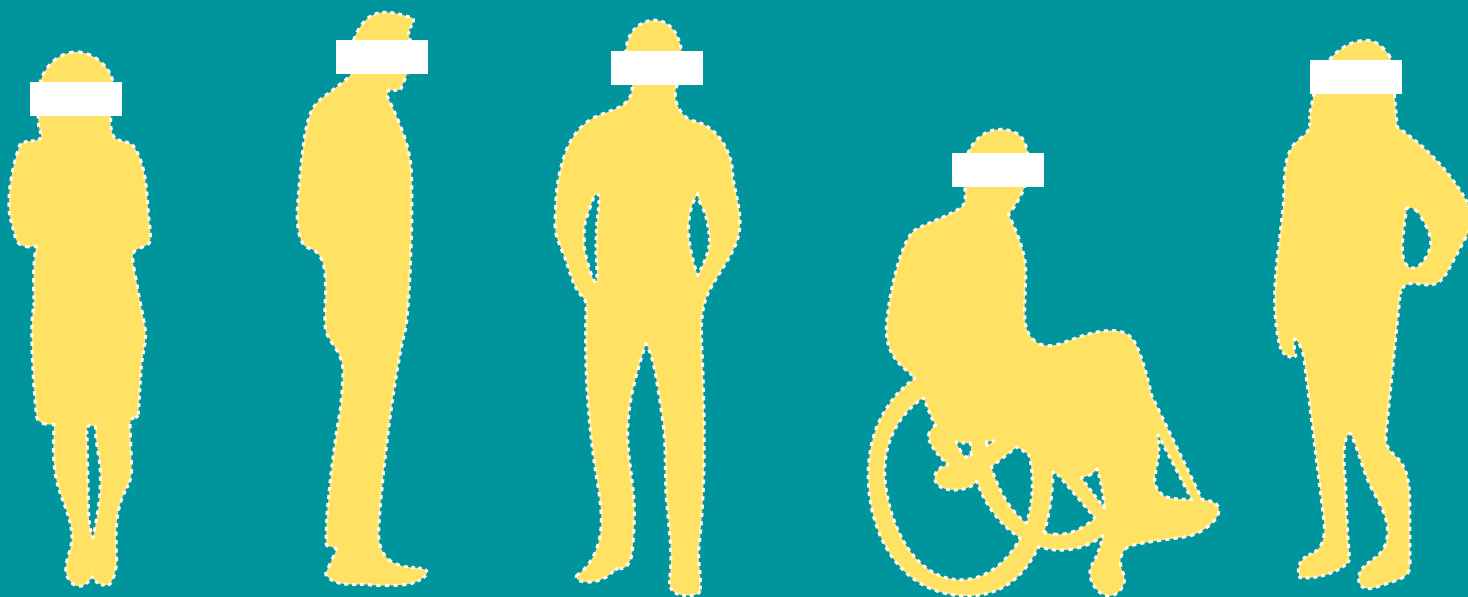


# Anti-Christian Hate Crime



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Christians are the target of hate crimes across the OSCE region. The nature of these crimes ranges from graffiti to vandalism and physical assaults against Christians distributing religious materials. Anti-Christian hate crimes send a message of exclusion to victims and their communities, and to society as a whole. Its existence also underscores wider trends of intolerance towards other groups, and everyone has a role to play in countering this and all forms of intolerance. This factsheet highlights the impact of such crimes and provides guidance on identifying anti-Christian hate crimes.

## What Is Hate Crime?

**Criminal Offence  
+ Bias Motivation  
= Hate Crime**

- Hate crimes comprise two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation.
- First, hate crimes require a base offence to have occurred. In other words, the act committed must constitute an offence under criminal law. If there is no underlying crime, there is no hate crime.
- The second element of a hate crime is that the perpetrator must commit the criminal act with a particular bias motive or motives (such as a bias against a victim's disability, religion, ethnicity, colour and/or their gender). The presence of a bias motive is what differentiates hate crimes from other crimes.
- A hate crime has taken place when a perpetrator has intentionally targeted an individual or property

because of one or more protected characteristics, or expressed hostility towards the protected characteristic(s) during the crime.

## What Are Anti-Christian Hate Crimes?

Attacks or threats against people because of their actual or perceived Christian identity, or targeting persons or property associated with Christian people or communities, constitute anti-Christian hate crimes. Such crimes can target both majority and minority Christian denominations. ODIHR's hate crime reporting suggests that minority Christian groups may be more often subjected to physical violence, while property may be the prime target where Christians are a majority group.

Given the numerous religious denominations and movements that comprise Christianity, crimes motivated by a bias against Christians can take many different forms. Victims



Jehovah's Witnesses hand out religious materials in Kyiv, 4 August 2019. (Shutterstock)



The aftermath of an arson attack at a church in France, 4 July 2020. (OIDAC)

might be targeted because of their Christian faith, or because their faith is associated with a different Christian denomination than that of the perpetrator, or because their denomination of Christianity identifies with a specific ethnic group.

Since 2002, OSCE participating States have committed themselves to combat racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance, including intolerance against Christians, and to prevent and respond to hate crimes.

## How to Recognize Anti-Christian Hate Crimes

There are a number of indicators that can help to identify bias against Christians in a potential hate crime. Such indicators, known as “bias indicators”, can prompt the authorities to investigate a crime as an anti-Christian hate crime, enabling a tailored response.

The following questions can help identify anti-Christian hate crimes:

- Do the victims or witnesses perceive that the incident was motivated by bias against Christians?
- Were there comments, written statements, gestures or graffiti that indicate bias? This can include anti-Christian, anti-religious (such as Satanist or anarchist) symbols, or messages attacking church structures or doctrine. For example, graffiti stating that burning down a church is the only way to ensure freedom.
- Was the target a place with a religious or cultural significance, such as a church, Christian cemetery or school? Was the property attacked in a previous anti-Christian incident? Types

of attacks against property include damaging or destroying religious statues and objects, the theft of liturgical equipment and arson attacks.

- Was the victim visibly identifiable as a Christian, such as a person wearing a necklace with a cross, or wearing clerical attire?
- Was the target a member of the clergy, such as a priest or a nun? Were the victims targeted while evangelizing, propagating their faith or distributing religious materials? Was the victim a convert to Christianity?
- What was the nature of the attack? For example, did the attacker set religious items on fire or defecate inside the church? Anti-Christian hate crimes can also target symbolic objects, such as consecrated hosts that represent the body of Christ in the theologies of some Christian denominations.
- Does the suspect belong to a hate group that targets Christians? These could include different far-right groups or groups advocating intolerance against Christians. Does the suspect’s background or criminal record show that they have committed similar acts in the past, including against other groups?
- Is the suspect a member of a different religious group to that of the victim?
- Did the incident occur on a significant date, whether for religious (such as Christmas or Easter), historical or political reasons?
- Is there any other clear motive? The lack of other motives is also a reason to consider bias motivation.

Anti-Christian hate crimes should be monitored and recorded as a separate category of crimes. Where a crime is committed with multiple bias motives, each of these biases must be recorded and addressed during investigation and prosecution. Data on anti-Christian hate crimes should be disaggregated by gender, to better understand the extent to which women and men are affected by such crimes, and to identify appropriate measures to counter anti-Christian hate crimes. When investigating and addressing anti-Christian hate crimes, it is important to consider the possible multiple identities of the victim (such as religion and ethnicity or gender), as this can have significant ramifications for individual victims.

## Reporting Anti-Christian Hate Crimes

Anti-Christian hate crimes, like all hate crimes, are under-reported. There are a host of challenges to reporting this type of hate crime, notably a lack of trust in the authorities, who may be perceived as downplaying anti-Christian hate crimes.

Effective access to justice remains a critical challenge for victims, and one that participating States need to address. Governments have a central role to play in ensuring access to justice, from the initial assessment of victims’ needs by police officers to developing support mechanisms for victims.

Many Christian civil society groups have recognized the importance of hate crime monitoring, including as an advocacy tool, and are developing their monitoring capacities through outreach and online reporting.

To be effective, police responses and government policies to counter anti-Christian hate crimes must be evidence-based and draw on official hate crime data, as well as on reports from civil society and international organizations. Increased public awareness of hate crime, hate crime recording by states, measures to encourage reporting by victims, and civil society monitoring and reporting will all help reveal the scope of the problem in more detail, enabling policymakers to identify appropriate responses.

## Examples of Anti-Christian Hate Crimes

- An Orthodox church was attacked by a group, who blocked entry to the building and threatened the priest.
- A Baptist pastor was shot at several times with a rifle a few days after being subjected to anti-Christian hate speech.
- A Catholic church was vandalized, a religious statue was decapitated and graffiti was painted on the walls.
- A woman Jehovah’s Witness was insulted, hit in the back and threatened with a knife after being invited into a home with her colleague while they were distributing religious materials.
- A Christian cemetery was vandalized, 18 tombstones were damaged and crosses were destroyed.
- Several refugees housed in refugee centres were threatened after converting to Christianity.

## What Can You Do?

There are a number of organizations that can assist victims of hate crime. Equality bodies, ombuds institutions addressing discrimination, civil society organizations and local Christian associations play a central role in countering hate crimes. They serve as vital links between victims, communities and local authorities. You can contact these organizations, your local support association or ombuds institution to find out more about anti-Christian hate crimes:

- Equinet – the European Network of Equality Bodies:  
<http://www.equineteurope.org/>
- The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI): [www.theioi.org](http://www.theioi.org)
- The European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI): <http://ennhri.org/>

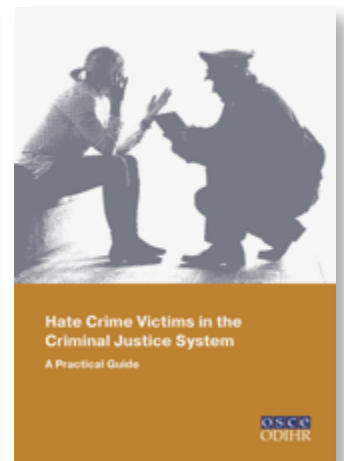
## ODIHR Guides on Hate Crime

ODIHR has compiled good practices from OSCE participating States on addressing hate crime and has shared those through a number of publications, available on our website at:

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/guides-related-to-hate-crime>

ODIHR has been collecting and publishing data on anti-Christian hate crimes since 2006. Find out more about anti-Christian hate crimes and how civil society organizations can report incidents to ODIHR by visiting our dedicated hate crime reporting website at:

[www.hatecrime.osce.org](http://www.hatecrime.osce.org)



### More information:

For detailed information about ODIHR's hate crime initiatives and to view its full range of resources and publications, please visit:

[www.osce.org/odihr/tolerance](http://www.osce.org/odihr/tolerance)

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