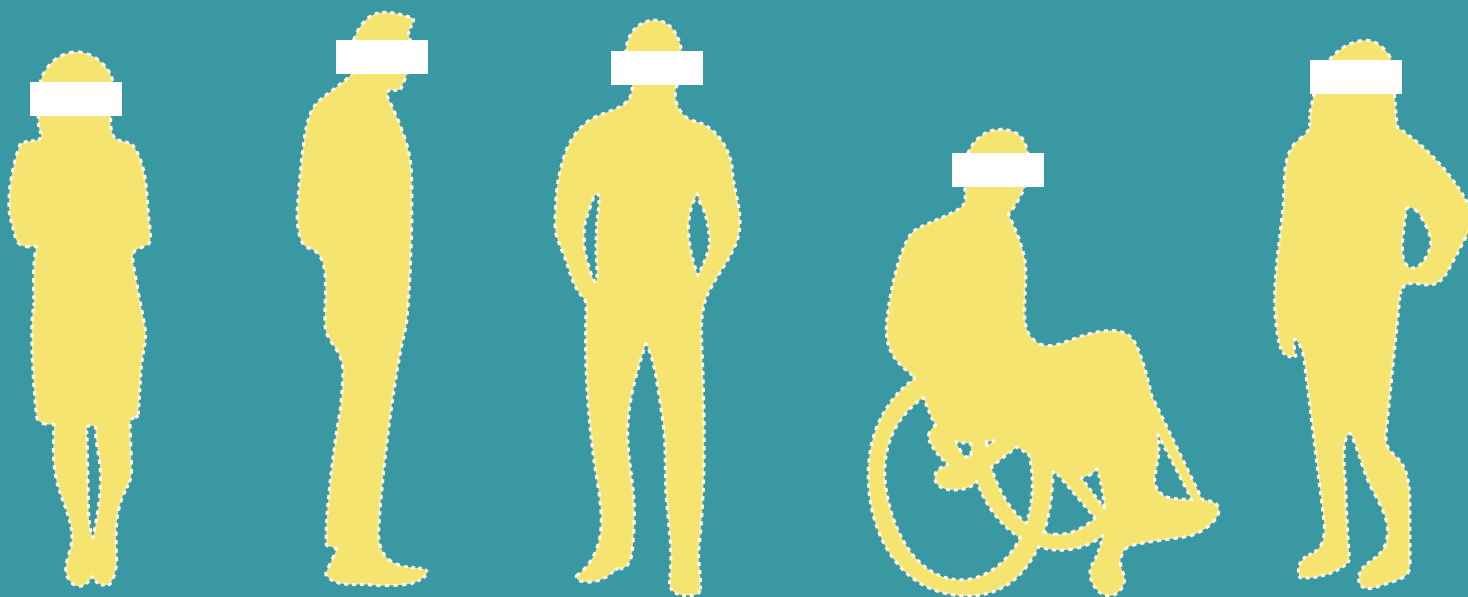


# Hate crime against Christians



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Christians of various denominations are targets of hate crime across the OSCE region. The nature of hate crimes against Christians ranges from attacks on property, including graffiti and vandalism, to physical assaults. This factsheet highlights how hate crimes affect Christians, and helps readers to effectively identify anti-Christian hate crimes. Only a strong response from all actors in societies can effectively challenge discrimination, intolerance and hate crimes against Christians.

## What is hate crime?

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

- Hate crimes comprise two elements: a criminal offence and a bias motivation. Hate crimes require a base offence to have occurred. In other words, the act committed must constitute a criminal offence under national 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 motivation, based on a "bias". The presence of a bias motive is what differentiates hate crimes from ordinary crimes.
- A hate crime has taken place when a perpetrator has intentionally targeted an individual or property because of a protected characteristic, or expressed hostility towards the victim's protected characteristic during the crime.

Hate crimes send messages of exclusion to victims and their communities. As they can potentially lead to wider social unrest, these crimes require strong responses to prevent retaliatory violence, and escalation into cycles of conflict.

## What are anti-Christian hate crimes?

Given the numerous branches and denominations of Christianity, bias motivated crimes against anyone who identifies as or is perceived to be a Christian can take many different forms. Victims may be targeted simply for being Christians, because they subscribe to a particular denomination, or because their denomination of Christianity is associated with a specific ethnic group.

Hate crime against Christians can target both majority and minority Christian denominations in a given country. ODIHR's hate crime reporting suggests that minority Christian groups are more often the victims of physical violence, while property is the prime target for



hate crimes targeting majority Christian denominations.

Since 2002, OSCE participating States have committed themselves to combatting racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, discrimination and intolerance, including intolerance against Christians, and to preventing and responding to hate crimes.

## How to recognize hate crimes against Christians?

A perpetrator's bias against Christians or Christianity is what defines an incident as an anti-Christian hate crime. There may be multiple biases involved in one incident, for example where a Christian group is also an ethnic minority. It can be difficult to distinguish anti-Christian bias from political disagreements in countries where Christians are the majority group and play an important role in community life. It is important to record all individual bias motivations involved in a crime because they can help authorities decide whether a case should be investigated as a possible hate crime.

There are a number of indicators that can be used to identify bias against Christians. Examples of questions to help identify anti-Christian hate crimes are:

- Do the victims or witnesses perceive the incident to have been motivated by bias towards Christians or Christianity?
- Did the perpetrator make comments, written statements, gestures or draw graffiti that indicate bias? This may include anti-Christian, anti-religious (such as satanist or anarchist) symbols, or messages attacking church structures or doctrine.
- Was the target a place with religious or cultural significance, such as a church, Christian school or a cemetery? Was the property attacked in a previous anti-Christian incident? Attacks on property can involve damage to religious statues, objects, stained glass and nativity scenes.
- Was the victim visibly identifiable as a Christian? For instance a person wearing a cross or 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 a church? Anti-Christian hate crimes may also target symbolic objects, such as consecrated hosts that represent the body of Christ for some denominations of Christianity.

- 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.

## Reporting hate crimes against Christians

Hate crimes against Christians, like all hate crimes, are under-reported. There are a host of challenges to reporting such hate incidents, notably a victim's potential isolation or lack of trust in the authorities, who can be perceived by victims to downplay anti-Christian hate crimes.

Governments have a central role to play in ensuring access to justice for victims of anti-Christian hate crimes. This includes identification and recording of hate crimes as such; assessment of a victim's needs; or robust support mechanisms for victims, through governmental or non-governmental institutions.

In order to develop effective responses to these crimes, reliable data need to be collected. As states, civil society groups and individuals recognize the existence and impact of hate crimes against Christians there will be increased awareness, reporting by victims, recording by governments and monitoring by civil society. This will help to reveal the full magnitude of the problem and enable policy-makers to identify appropriate responses.

ODIHR has collected and published data on hate crimes against Christians since 2006. However, there is no consistent reporting methodology on hate crimes against Christians among OSCE participating States. Some states report all hate crimes committed with an anti-religious bias under one category (including anti-Semitic or anti-Muslim crimes, for example), while other states report hate crimes against Christians separately. Data on anti-Christian hate crimes should be recorded in a manner that allows for disaggregation by gender, to show how hate crimes affect Christian men and women differently.

## Examples of Hate Crime against Christians

- A group of people attacked an Orthodox Christian church, blocking the entrance to the building and threatening the priest.
- A Baptist pastor, in a country where Christians are a minority, was shot at several times with a rifle a few days after being subjected to anti-Christian hate speech.
- A Roman Catholic church was vandalized: a religious statue was decapitated and graffiti was painted on the walls.
- A female Jehovah's Witness was insulted, physically assaulted and threatened with a knife after being invited into a home while 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 assist Christian victims of hate crimes. Equality bodies, ombuds institutions addressing discrimination, civil society organizations and local Christian associations play central roles in countering hate crimes. They serve as vital links between victims, communities and local authorities.

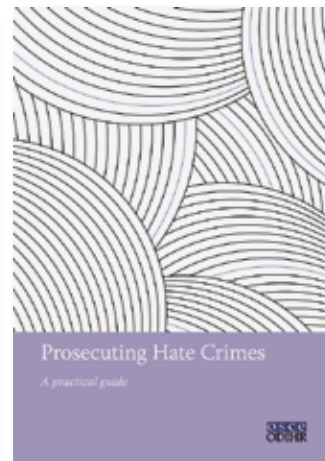
You can contact these organizations, your local support association or ombuds institution to find out more about anti-Christian hate crimes:

- Contact the equality body closest to you. You can find a non-exhaustive list here: <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 and has shared these through a number of publications. These publications are available on our website at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124602>

Find out more about anti-Christian hate crimes and how you 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)

### OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

ul. Miodowa 10  
00-251 Warsaw  
Poland

Tel.: +48 22 520 0600  
Fax: +48 22 520 0605  
E-mail: [tndinfo@odihr.pl](mailto:tndinfo@odihr.pl)

