

FRANCE COUNTRY VISIT

Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chair-in-Office Ambassador Evren Dağdelen Akgün, Rabbi Andrew Baker, and Professor Wolfgang Palaver

June 10-13, 2025

We are grateful to the French Mission to the OSCE in Vienna and to colleagues in Paris for facilitating our visit and for organizing an informative and productive schedule of meetings with all the key government agencies whose work is central to our mandates. We are also appreciative of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and its dedicated Tolerance and Non-discrimination staff who provided us with essential preparatory materials and logistical support throughout our visit.

The organization of our visit followed the long-standing practice of our mandates. We met separately with civil society representatives and representatives of religious communities, followed by joint meetings with government representatives and those from national bodies with relevant advisory roles. We acknowledge that France enshrines the concept of secularism (*laïcité*)¹ in its constitution, which may limit government actions that other states are free to take. Nevertheless, we feel compelled to note the concerns expressed to us by community leaders.

THE VIEWS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

¹ “*Laïcité* in France is based on three principles: freedom of conscience and the freedom to manifest one’s beliefs within the limits of respect for public order, the separation of public institutions and religious organizations, and the equality of all before the law regardless of their beliefs or convictions.

Laïcité guarantees believers and non-believers the same right to freedom of expression of their beliefs. It also ensures the right to have or not to have a religion, to change it or to no longer have it.

It guarantees the free exercise of religion and freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion: no one may be compelled by the right to respect religious dogmas or prescriptions.

Laïcité presupposes the separation of the state and religious organizations. The political order is based solely on the sovereignty of the people of the citizens, and the state—which does not recognize or pay tribute to any religion—does not govern the internal functioning of religious organizations.

From this separation is deduced the neutrality of the State, of local authorities and public services, not of its users. The *laïc* Republic thus ensures the equality of citizens in public service, regardless of their convictions or beliefs.

Laïcité is not one opinion among others but the freedom to have one. It is not a conviction but the principle that authorizes them all, subject to respect for public order.

Source : www.gouvernement.fr

CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jews of France are estimated to number over 500,000, making it the largest Jewish community in Europe. Its stability and security, its sense of well-being and resiliency in the face of significant and sustained antisemitic incidents may presage the future of Jewish life in Europe more generally. Indeed, the executive director of the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France (CRIF) has said he believes all Jewish families in the country have considered the possibility of emigrating. In the face of this, French authorities have repeatedly sought to reassure their Jewish citizens. As President Macron has said, “France without Jews would not be France.”

The French Union of Jewish Students includes 15,000 members from across the country with 35 local chapters. They are primarily university level students but also include some secondary school representatives. They speak today of an “atmosphere” of antisemitism on campuses and report 10-20 violent incidents occurring each year. Most antisemitic incidents are associated with pro-Palestinian activism. They have been frustrated by the inability of universities to address their concerns, noting that the existing mechanisms rely on internal commissions drawn from students and staff, many of whom, they believe, are already biased against them. [Subsequent to our visit on July 31, 2025, Act No. 2025-1017 on combating antisemitism in higher education was passed. It is hoped that this new legislation, which calls for the appointment at every institution of a racism and antisemitism focal point will provide for a more independent and impartial handling of these matters.]

In high schools antisemitism is more frequently a problem of bullying and harassment of Jewish students. Addressing antisemitism is almost exclusively contextualized through Holocaust education, and Jewish students would like to see a more direct focus on contemporary forms of the problem. One recent survey² described the school situation as follows:

“The exclusion of Jewish students from various forms of adolescent sociability is generally a minority among secondary school students – 16% of students would refuse to form friendly or romantic relationships with Jewish students – but it reaches worrying levels among students displaying certain origins (52% among students exclusively of non-European origin) or religions (45% among Muslim students).”

Because of these hostile environments, Jewish community representatives say sizeable numbers of Jewish students are transferring to (Jewish and non-Jewish) private schools. However, as French law prohibits collecting data based on religion, no exact number can be determined.

Despite or perhaps because of the problems they face, Jewish students are also quite active in programs that promote greater Jewish-non-Jewish understanding and cooperation. One such initiative, undertaken by the Union of Jewish Students and *SOS Racisme*, brings Jewish and non-Jewish facilitators into the schools to counter the prejudicial views of Jews and other minorities. This program, known as “Coexist,” (described in more detail below) trains sixty students each

² CRIF and IFOP March 2025 survey <https://www.ifop.com/article/enquete-aupres-des-collegiens-et-lyceens-sur-lantisemitisme-a-lecole/>

year to serve as facilitators, each one able to lead a school intervention. The entire program costs about 1 million Euro annually, half of which comes from public funding. Such is the popularity of the program that, if more money were available, still more facilitators could be trained. Conversely, students are nervous that if a far left or far right party were to gain political power even this modest program would be threatened.

Even as many French Jews face increased intolerance in public settings, there are those in the community who, rather than lower their profile, believe it is a time for Jewish pride and activism. Sadly, it has become common for Jews to change their names on ride-sharing apps, fearing exclusion or mistreatment if their identify is known. However, there are new, grassroots organizations that want to be present and seen as Jews in public demonstrations, such as those supporting women's rights (*Nous vivrons* "We will live"), even when they are told they are unwelcomed. They look to build and highlight alliances with other community groups on issues of shared concern, believing it will display Jews in a positive light.

These new organizations are also finding ways to empower individual Jews. An app developed by the Diaspora Defense Force allows students or their parents to report incidents of antisemitism in schools or on campus, with one hundred cases registered in the first year. The goal is not to press for legal action (most incidents do not meet the prosecutorial threshold), but rather as a tool to initiate dialogue with school directors and elected officials to implement change.

The French principle of *laïcité* (secularity) is a bedrock value of the country, but it also poses some challenges unique to France and of concern to the Jewish community. Collecting disaggregated data on religiously motivated hate crimes (discussed elsewhere in this report) is limited, as the religious identify of victims is not recorded. Community leaders say this also hindered recognition of antisemitism originating within segments of the Muslim population. Other developments which also might shed light on the problem of antisemitism—e.g., the withdrawal of Jewish students from public schools due to harassment—will not be officially identified. Jewish representatives also note that it would otherwise restrict education efforts to promote an understanding of modern day Jewish communal life and practices. Nevertheless, it is the overwhelming view of French Jews that the principle of *laïcité* is positive and protective, ensuring equality and protecting religion from state interference.

Community representatives speak positively of government actions to address antisemitism and believe that their specific concerns are heard. However, they do not believe that the justice system is doing what it should to prosecute incidents of antisemitism, which fosters an atmosphere of impunity for antisemitic acts. They note, too, that the statements of some political leaders can at times exacerbate the situation. As in so many places, they flag the proliferation of antisemitism on social media platforms, which polarizes public discourse and can lead to physical attacks and harassment.

There have also been some antisemitic incidents such as paint sprayed on memorials and synagogue buildings that both Jewish community and government officials believe were carried out on instructions from Russia or other foreign, malign sources and are under investigation.

The French Jewish community has faced physical and lethal violence for well over a decade, with the attacks on the Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012 and on the Jewish supermarket in Paris in 2015 being among the most violent. The community's security umbrella, Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ), has long been challenged with assessing and meeting the security needs of French Jews. Following the 2015 attacks, police and the military were mobilized to provide protection to Jewish schools and synagogues and other communal buildings. This was an unprecedented measure that lasted for a year. While there have been physical enhancements made to buildings, police protection is limited and episodic, and the SPCJ must pay for security guards itself. This is a significant and ongoing financial burden, with no signs of it lessening and nothing comparable facing other religious communities.

CURRENT CHALLENGES FACED BY MUSLIMS IN FRANCE

France is home to the largest Muslim community in the EU, with Islam the second most practiced religion in the country. French survey show that 10% of the population identifies as Muslim; the estimated number of Muslims in the country today is around 7 million.

The French system of *laïcité* is rooted in the French Constitution and in the 1905 law on the separation of Church and State. This principle guarantees freedom of conscience while imposing absolute neutrality on the State. It does not recognize any specific religion; nor does it privilege any religion or non-religion as superior. French officials stress that *laïcité* is intended not to prohibit religion, but to ensure that all citizens may follow their beliefs within the framework of law and order. Yet, according to Muslim community members represented by the Civil society organizations (CSO) we met, this principle has been increasingly applied by means of restrictive legislation.

In practice, restrictive laws have had a curtailing effect on the freedoms of Muslims for two decades. The 2004 law banning ostentatious religious symbols was preceded by a report explicitly focused on the "visibility of Islam," leaving little doubt in the minds of Muslims that Muslims were the primary target.

The 2021 law on "separatism," enforcing respect for the French Republic's core principles, reinforced controls on religious associations; this step was partially justified by counter-radicalization objectives, and it introduced stricter oversight of foreign funding. CSOs point out that under this law, imams have been expelled and organizations and schools have been dissolved under vague accusations. On the other hand, French authorities maintain that dissolutions of organizations and exclusion from the territory are evidence-based and thoroughly motivated measures under criminal law which can be brought to court." This law has also required associations to sign what CSOs describe as a "secular charter" about the values of the Republic in order to access public funds, a measure they describe as part of a broader trend of securitization. Some CSOs we met even characterize these developments as a form of "collective punishment" of entire communities. While the law applies broadly to all religions, Muslims feel especially targeted. This has led to a deepening of mistrust between these communities and the State.

Civil society representatives say that anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination in France continue to rise and continue to be under-recognized, reinforced through law, politics, media, and daily practices. In general, they report an escalation in anti-Muslim acts from hate speech to violent attacks. In the face of this, they point to discriminatory policies, weak legal remedies, and a climate that normalizes hostility against Muslims especially on the part of far-right politicians and certain media outlets.

Muslim women are disproportionately affected while distrust of institutions fuels widespread underreporting of hate crimes. Rights awareness and activism - increasingly led by women - are rising. However, fear and marginalization remain prevalent among women who wear hijab and who report being harassed in daily life.

Legally, France does not provide a definition of Islamophobia in its Criminal Code, even though religious discrimination is prohibited. French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) considers an agreed working definition to be useful. Furthermore, anti-Muslim hatred is still not recognized in the 2023-2026 National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination Linked to Origin.

French law recognizes 25 types of discrimination, 23 of which are embedded in the Criminal Code. Nevertheless, of the estimated 1.2 million people who perceive themselves as victims, only 600 to 1,300 cases of discrimination are recorded each year, and convictions are extremely rare - between zero and five annually (CNCDDH). This discrepancy is indicative of a structural problem - namely, underreporting and weak enforcement of legislation. The discrepancy between civil society statistics and those provided by official sources is striking. The Ministry of Interior recognizes the matter of discrepancy and hence has supported the launch of ADDAM (Association of Defense against Discrimination and Anti-Muslim Acts) , and its online platform to report anti-muslim acts.

There is also the widely held view that cases regarding anti-Muslim acts rarely receive legal results or meaningful penalties. However, government officials highlight that discrimination is one of the many categories under which anti-Muslim acts fall. They are also frequently treated as acts of racism (including assaults on persons, discrimination, damage to property, insults, defamation, incitement to hatred and other offenses): out of the 6,558 people charged with racism, 2,838 received a penal response (prosecution or alternative to prosecution), including 1,594 convictions.

Some CSOs argue that there have been cases where judges uphold discriminatory institutional decisions, such as suspending Muslim students for their clothing choices. A striking example involved two girls, one Muslim and one non-Muslim, who both wore identical long skirts to school; only the Muslim student was punished. Civil society holds that Muslim schools have also faced unjustified contract termination or closures. Examples given are about two private schools whose contracts linking them to the State were terminated: The Averroès school in Lille won its case in court, which however some politicians later described as a “political defeat.” In Lyon, the Al Kindi high school was seen by some Muslim community as widely targeted on the grounds that it would produce a Muslim “elite,” reflecting the impression that economically independent or politically active Muslims are viewed as threats to the Republic.

They stress that everyday discrimination is most evident in education and employment. Muslim student groups are sometimes denied official affiliation with universities, a prerequisite for accessing funding, rooms, and facilities. In several cities, police have summoned their leaders and questioned them about their views on hijab, or which strand of Islam they followed.

French authorities point out that religious clothing and symbols are permitted for students in higher education, that “they may only be restricted if accompanied by behaviour involving proselytism, coercion or disruption of the institutional order. The mere wearing of a garment, including a religious one, does not constitute an act of proselytism.”

However, Muslim students on an individual basis also fear that they may be increasingly denied university affiliations or internships because of their religion. In professional training programs Muslim women are barred from participating in sports or medical practice unless they remove their head coverings. Nursing schools have even been reported to forbid women from wearing medical caps, alleging they were disguising a religious covering; special working groups were later established to address this problem. The authorities underline that dress requirements that apply in certain fields of study or internship, particularly in sports or medical training, stem strictly from hygiene and safety regulations and apply equally to all students. The Ministry ensures that their application is not discriminatory.

CSOs maintain that employment discrimination is equally severe. They report that women in hijab are consistently denied internships, apprenticeships, and jobs. Recruitment practices at times also display bias³. A study, among others, revealed that CVs with Muslim names had lower rates of call-back, all other parameters being equal (DARES, Document d’Etudes, Avril 2023, No. 268).

Negative political and media discourse reinforces the problem. CSOs underline that narratives of “entryism” lead to Muslims organizing politically or socially to be seen as attempting to take power in politics with the intention of imposing religious laws.

Reports such as the 2025 Muslim Brotherhood dossier are seen as reinforcing the widespread perception of Muslims as a potential threat. For example, Muslim students report facing stricter checks. Many Muslims feel that the securitization of Islam is out of proportion with the level of security accorded to Muslims, and as a consequence they feel obliged to constantly demonstrate their loyalty and innocence.

Incidents of violence, such as the murder of Aboubakar Cissé in April 2025 in a mosque and the arson attack on a mosque in Morlaix in 2024, are seen as being misclassified by authorities or their importance minimized. Even though the brutal killing of Mr Cissé in a mosque gave every sign of anti-Muslim bias, CSOs highlight that it was not promptly recognized as an anti-Muslim hate crime. While later the suspected murderer of Aboubakar Cissé was charged with "murder based on race or religion," the chain of events served to perpetuate the prevalent perception

³ https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/2025-12/ddd_rapport_les-discriminations-fondees-sur-la-religion_20251204.pdf

among the Muslim community that country-wide indifference to their plight was institutional in nature. However, French authorities have communicated to us the visit of the said mosque by the Interior Minister.

In addition to the murder of Aboubakar Cissé, Hichem Miraoui, a Tunisian man was killed in Puget-sur-Argens in May. The newly established ADDAM documented an arson attack on a mosque in Morlaix with worshippers inside. While ADDAM informed us that it classified the attack as attempted murder (due to the fact that people were inside the mosque praying at the time of attack) upon further evidence and information, has agreed when the National Directorate of Territorial Intelligence classified it as property damage. Other incidents: a pig's head was left as graffiti on a mosque in Cherbourg; Islamophobic stickers appeared at the University of Orléans; pork was deposited at the home of the head of the Observatory on Islamophobia; and graffiti on the home of an Arab-origin citizen read "Muslims to the crematorium." These attacks illustrate how normalized hate speech escalates into violence, often preceded by coordinated cyber-harassment campaigns.

The media climate reinforces these dynamics. CNews is now the most-watched channel and broadcasts content that civil society members estimate to be 80% anti-Muslim. It frequently amplifies the "great replacement" theory.

Far-right student groups also play a role in reinforcing anti-Muslim sentiments. Muslim CSOs refer to the activities of L'UNI (Inter-University Union) which accuses Muslim student groups of *Islamogauchism*. L'UNI has a record of violence, and it was recently exposed in the press for Nazi salutes. Although criminal cases were launched, they targeted individuals rather than the organization itself. On the other hand, the GUD, another far-right student group was dismantled in 2024.

Many Muslims argue that in the interpretation and implementation of laws, Islam is disproportionately targeted in comparison with other religions. But officials emphasize that the measures are not anti-Islamic in nature; rather their purpose is to combat extremism. They argue, furthermore, that no religion is exempt from oversight. Even though French officials maintain that they are operating within a specific political context, based on a perception of domestic security risks, there is also a clear awareness among public institutions that anti-Muslim hatred and anti-Muslim discrimination are real and serious challenges. There is a recognition that such acts are underreported as well.

However, anti-Muslim incidents, even when acknowledged, are not properly recorded. Collection of data is fragmented and not disaggregated, and these incidents are typically listed under the broader heading of 'racist acts', or else relegated to qualitative commentary that focusses on attitudes.

Muslims' perception of discrimination is well-founded. A 2024 EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) report, *Being Muslim in the EU*, found that 32% of Muslim respondents in France had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months. Frequent random checks targeting Muslims in daily life were often mentioned. Searches of Muslims at the Paris Olympics described

as invasive were cited as further examples. Many Muslims are now afraid to identify publicly as Muslim or some even to frequent mosques, according to representatives of civil society.

In accordance with the 1905 law, France does not encourage any particular form of religious teaching. However, France does encourage Muslim actors to themselves build schools and create theological programs adapted to the reality of French society and its principles.

CSOs tell us that the issue of religious representation remains unsettled as there is still no legal framework for employing imams. For decades, France accepted imams sent by foreign states (*détachés*) paid by their home countries. However, since 1 April 2024, new *détachés* are no longer accepted, and existing ones must change their status (pay and contracts to be taken over by mosque associations) and meet language and *laïcité* criteria. While the state justifies this as a measure against foreign influence and separatism, Muslim leaders say it will lead to a shortage of imams, especially in smaller or rural mosques that cannot pay high salaries. The government is promoting the professionalization of imams via FORIF (dialogue forum), standardized job descriptions, and is encouraging French Muslim actors to provide more local training programs. Many Muslim leaders, however, say that France does not have enough institutes to train imams with deep religious knowledge which will exacerbate the shortage. France promotes non-religious training programs given by universities called "*Diplôme universitaire Laïcité, droit et religion*" which provide imams with historical, legal, and sociological knowledge about Islam and the French principle of *laïcité*.

Meanwhile, the CFCM told us it had acted as the official representative of Muslims since 2003, but lost this status in 2023. French officials inform us that the CFCM includes 3 federations among its members, and does not include any independent place of worship which is actually sizeable in the country. The Grand Mosque of Paris put the number of mosques in France at 3,000, emphasizing that it remains inadequate in providing for the needs of the Muslim community in the country. Muslim religious leaders also refer to problems in coming to a common understanding on the process of animal slaughtering for halal meat as well as inadequate allocation of burial grounds.

The political narrative surrounding Muslims is described by CSOs as being consistently hostile. Anti-Muslim rhetoric permeates mainstream politics, not only the far right. Politicians across the spectrum continue to instrumentalize anti-Muslim sentiments for electoral gain. Civil society members point out that some officials, while open to working on anti-Muslim issues, display a different public image than the more sympathetic engagement they see in bilateral meetings,

In the face of the many problems described above, CSOs play a crucial role but most suffer from financial under-resourcing or lack human resources. For example, the newly founded ADDAM, with only 12 volunteers who also hold full-time jobs, has stepped in to build a reporting platform financed by DILCRAH, though funding remains far below what is allocated to other forms of discrimination. At present, ADDAM receives reports by e-mail every day and follows up with victims to encourage official complaints. Still, widespread mistrust towards the authorities deters many Muslims from reporting cases at all. ADDAM is independent and collaborates with DILCRAH, the PHAROS platform (on illegal on-line content), and ARCOM (public body for regulation of audiovisual and digital communications). It was, however, not invited to DILCRAH's

mid-term evaluation of the PRADO as ADDAM was founded after the launch of the national plan and did not take part in its drafting.

The current anti-Muslim rhetoric and belief that the discrimination they face is systemic have even led some French Muslims to emigrate or to return to their country of origin.

Public institutions recognize anti-Muslim acts as forming part of the spectrum of hate phenomena. However, the monitoring architecture provides more transparency and analytical depth for antisemitism than it does for anti-Muslim hatred. Consequently, both the public narrative and the policy tools in use risk underestimating the scale and impact of the discrimination, hate speech, and violence that are faced by Muslims.

On the positive side, a multitude of practical steps are being taken by public institutions to improve the situation. These include the training of judges, prosecutors, police, and gendarmerie; addressing online hate speech; and collaborating with civil society reporting platforms. The Minister of Equality between Men and Women and the Fight Against Discrimination underscored her awareness of the difficulties confronting Muslims, particularly anti-Muslim hatred and the community's prevailing mistrust toward public institutions. She affirmed that the Ministry takes these concerns seriously.

CURRENT CHALLENGES REGARDING RACISM

The existence of national or ethnic minorities is not recognized in national legislation due to the universalist approach. As all types of discrimination are treated the same, it is difficult to give visibility to the challenges faced by these minorities.

Far-right ideology is spreading in the media and on social networks and is linked to the increase in racist hate crimes. In recent years there has been almost no limitations on the racist discourse of far-right actors, targeting especially migrant and Muslim communities, which has contributed to the normalization of such discourse. Far-right legislators strategically present bills they know are anti-Constitutional, e.g. prohibiting marriage between an irregular migrant and a French citizen (as it is grounds for regularizing the migratory status), in order to challenge human rights standards and portray them as a limitation to the "rights" and "safety" of the French population. Ahead of the 2027 elections, the parties of the right are adopting some elements of the far-right discourse. Certain statements by public officials fuel the negative far-right narrative about migrants and justify a violent response, such as the recent condemnation of attacks in central France as "barbarian" by the Minister of the Interior.

Racism and antisemitism are increasing in *schools*, including references to Nazism, the Holocaust, and the slave trade. France has established guidelines on the intervention of regional inspectors in school and training departments but lacks an established protocol for teachers to deal with this.

There is, according to civil society organizations working on racism and xenophobia, some evidence of systemic racist sentiment in law enforcement, police brutality, and discriminatory identity checks based on appearance, leading to mistrust in law enforcement especially among

youth from minority groups. Mistrust in addition to poor reception in police stations lead to underreporting of racist hate crime. When reported, police record two-thirds of cases inaccurately. There also seems to be a certain lack of training within the criminal justice system.

CHALLENGES FOR ROMA AND SINTI COMMUNITIES

The full diversity of Romani groups —Roma, Sinti (including Manouches), Kale, and Gitans — have all been present in France since the 15th century, and repressive measures targeting Roma date to the 17th century. In France, Travelers (*gens du voyage*) are recognized as a nomadic group, not as an ethnic minority. The first state registration of “nomadic populations” began with the 1912 law requiring them to carry specific ID papers (*carnet anthropométrique*), replaced in 1969 with the *livret de circulation* until this law was repealed in 2017.

Anti-Gypsyism is widespread and targets both Roma communities and perceived mobile populations (e.g., Yéniches). Recent anti-Roma hate incidents include the eviction of a Romanian Roma family living in self-built barracks near Paris which included racist chants and stone-throwing by residents and the 2024 killing of a pregnant Romani woman who was shot on her doorstep. There is anti-Gypsyism expressed through bureaucratic and legal barriers that deny access to basic human rights such as education, housing, and healthcare.

Those who maintain mobile ways of life are penalized as basic citizenship rights are conditioned upon a fixed address. Most municipalities (80%) fail to comply with the legal requirement to establish designated caravan sites (*aires d'accueil*). Even when such spaces are provided, they are often near landfills or industrial zones resulting in institutionalized segregation and unsanitary conditions. Those who park outside designated zones are criminalized using the AFD (*Amende Forfaitaire Délictuelle*); three AFDs can lead to three years in prison. Many members of the Roma community cannot afford lawyers. Moreover, caravans are not recognized as a permanent address, preventing Roma people from obtaining IDs, social security, education, medical cards, or even mobile phones. Religious communities, often Protestant, provide addresses through churches to help community members to access basic rights.

Barriers that prevent children from accessing education include the lack of a permanent address and requirements to provide proof of mobility (such as work contracts) to access distance learning. Mediators have been introduced to facilitate access to basic education, but the education system expects Roma children to assimilate and limits opportunities for them to learn their first languages. Only 1% of the Roma population reach higher education.

Roma migrants face intersectional discrimination. Although Romanian and Bulgarian Roma are legally permitted to stay in France for three months as EU citizens, in practice they may be deported if they lack documentation. Documentation such as a permanent address and work permit are also required to hold even low-paid jobs. Roma from Kosovo, Serbia, or Macedonia often apply for asylum, but face mass rejection.

France’s National Plan to Combat Racism includes eighteen references to anti-Gypsyism, reflecting a growing awareness of the issue. However, these are general references, without targeted measures or specific policies aimed at addressing the Roma communities. Moreover,

the strategy disproportionately focuses on Roma migrants living in informal settlements (*chantiers*), leaving issues facing the broader Roma population in France unaddressed.

CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS AND BELIEF COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

The original approach to *laïcité* of the 1905 law is based on a good, liberal framework of separation of the church and state. However, it has since drifted into an anti-religious approach to *laïcité* that tends to remove all religious expression from the public square and restrict the religious space. The 2004 law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools is narrow and primarily targets minorities, particularly Muslim communities, which runs counter to the true spirit of the word *laïcité*. Any criticism of the 2004 law is, according to representatives of religious and belief communities other than Christian, seen as a sign of radicalism.

Some representatives of faith communities addressed the activities of Miviludes (Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and Action Against Sectarian Aberrations). According to most Christian denominations, Miviludes fulfills the need to differentiate between religions and sects. Others, however, raised concerns about its practice and questioned its need, as the existing legal framework already provides enough protection against abuse. Most Christian denominations do not oppose Miviludes as they are not attacked in its annual report. However, the same activity – such as public canvassing or sexual abuse – is labeled by Miviludes as an aberration in the case of minority communities, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses or Scientologists. The methodology of Miviludes lacks clarity and a definition of “sectarian deviations.” Some actors have raised concerns regarding the lack of transparency and absence of a right to reply with the Ministry of the Interior.

The Sikh community faces challenges regarding the 2004 law and expresses the following concerns. Sikh students face pressure to cut their hair despite it being a religious obligation. Schools misapply the law. After terrorist attacks on teachers there is a more extreme approach to everything related to religion and culture. Public servants and military personnel are not allowed to wear religious symbols (e.g., turban). Sikhs are required to remove their turbans for official ID photos in France, unlike in Italy or Belgium. This violates the principle of equal treatment under EU law, and the case might again be brought to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

There is long-standing tension between the Scientologists and the French government, particularly Miviludes. The 2025 Miviludes report includes a page on Scientology that results in treating the group as a cult. This fuels discrimination and stigmatization against Scientologists. There is difficulty in building dialogue with the state officials. For instance, the Councilor for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has refused to meet with Scientology representatives based on the argument that they are a cult.

Since the 1905 law, Buddhists have been able to practice their faith in France, enjoy ordinary treatment as a religious organization and are part of the Conference of Religious Leaders of France (CRCF), alongside Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Unlike some

other communities, French Buddhists do not face problems with the authorities and have not experienced issues with the 2004 law as they only wear religious symbols during religious ceremonies.

In November 2023, French authorities conducted simultaneous raids on eight locations associated with the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), a yoga organization founded by Romanian spiritual leader Gregorian Bivolaru, due to alleged involvement in human trafficking and money laundering.

CHALLENGES FOR CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Significant concerns were raised about the nature and application of *laïcité*. While it was agreed that the Law of 1905 sought to protect religious freedoms, the Law of 2021 was seen to undermine this and use the values of *laïcité* for the purpose of control. In addition to restricting foreign funds, the law requires religious associations to re-register every five years. A growing ignorance of religious culture and religious intolerance among civil servants includes police and intelligence that were not trained well enough on how to enforce the 2021 law.

Some acts of discrimination were mentioned by the Christian denominations. The Catholic community registers on average two attacks or desecrations of churches per day, in addition to desecration of cemeteries. There have been high-profile incidents such as the 2016 assassination of Father Hamel by two young men who acted on behalf of the Islamic State (ISIS) and the 2022 murder of three people. Some of these acts are committed by mentally disturbed individuals and some by Satanic groups.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints raised concerns about the practice for young members of the church to serve religious missions abroad for a few years; leave requests from university are dealt with on a case-by-case basis but 75% of cases are rejected.

Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) consistently need to go to court for its rights to be guaranteed in France, including to achieve registration as a religious organization and the right to nominate penitentiary chaplains. In the mid-1990s, a predecessor to Miviludes created a list of sects including JW at the top of the list. Although the government retracted the list ten years later, at the local level some of JW's rights (such as the right to rent a city hall) are not respected due to this label as a sect. JW has a good relationship with the government, especially the Central Office for Religious Affairs (BCC) of the Ministry of the Interior. They engage in dialogue with the State and are involved in various collaborative activities. They participate in discussions on religious matters, contribute to chaplaincy services in institutions such as hospitals and the military. In June 2021, the Minister of the Interior organized a meeting between JW and the president of Miviludes. Miviludes offered a follow-up working meeting to explain its methodology, but this meeting was never held, and the President of Miviludes stated in an interview that he would never again meet with JW.

CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES

Among initiatives to promote interfaith understanding is the organization, *Coexister*, created through a partnership of the French Union of Jewish Students and *SOS Racisme*. It brings together young people from different religious backgrounds who have questions about current affairs with operations in 20 cities in France and a focus on youth ages 15-35. It operates with a professional staff of 15 based in Paris and a network of some 500 volunteers. A total of 10,000 youth participates in its events, following a set organizational path. This starts with a first meeting, followed by dialogue among participants, leading to joint programs. These are shared with other young people who will replicate the cycle. *Coexister* provides a “safe space” for them to share their religious views and gives them the confidence to do so with others. It operates with an annual budget of 1 million Euro, half of which comes from private donors. *Coexister* has faced significant problems since October 7, 2023, as Jewish young people are less likely to come.

The grouping of Christian churches and the Conference of Religious Leaders in France (CRCF) are important spaces for interfaith dialogue. The CRCF does not have a membership policy, with attendance mostly being a historical question. They convene representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Christian Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist communities, with an aim to share experiences and produce shared statements when relevant. The CRCF published a joint statement immediately after 7 October 2023 but has been unable to achieve consensus on a further statement since then, though it is still frequently discussed at meetings.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES

MIVILUDES (The Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and Action Against Sectarian Aberrations)

The Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and Action Against Sectarian Aberrations states that it does not monitor religious groups, per se, but only addresses illegal behaviors that manipulate or exploit individuals. They do not deal with doctrine and work with religious leaders, but not with cults to which they grant only the status of cultural association. In relation to JW, Miviludes stated that although they are recognized as a religious organization in France there might be people with aberrant behaviors among their followers. There is a pending dialogue needed with people who want to or have left the community to understand JW’s treatment of them, e.g., if they are completely cut off from their family and community.

In response to the widespread perception by Muslims in France that they are too often conflated with “Islamists” or “extremists,” Miviludes acknowledged that public officials have a responsibility to avoid such errors in narrative. Dialogue with Muslim communities must be conducted through local interlocutors to “better organize” the Muslim faith which is perceived by some Muslim communities as intervention in religion by the state. According to Miviludes, it is essential that the State as a whole improve its capacity to combat discrimination on the basis of religion.

DEFENDER OF RIGHTS

The Defender of Rights office addresses the problem of unequal treatment by public and private sector. It is not a prosecutorial body, but it can play an investigative and mediating role. Only a

small fraction of its cases concern discrimination on the basis of religion—about three percent of all cases received annually (165 cases of a total of 5,679 cases of discrimination). The office saw an increase in the number of antisemitic discrimination cases it received last year, but more cases concern (Muslim) women discriminated for wearing headscarves in the workplace. Many victims, particularly Muslims, refuse to pursue complaints for fear of reprisals. A significant problem flagged by this office concerns the 32 million identity checks that authorities carry out which falls on average twenty times more on black and Arab young people. Many of them have come to see this as just a “fact of life” and will not even report the incidents. French courts have said this is a problem. The Conseil d’État has recognized this disproportionality but fell short of calling it systemic discrimination, leaving policy unchanged.

Furthermore, it considers the French Football Federation’s ban on the veil as discriminatory as it prevents Muslim women and girls from pursuing careers in football and participating in high-level sporting events.

NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH) was established in 1947 and has had a mandate to report on public policy intended to combat racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism since 1990. The Secretary General informs us that the norms on addressing racism and intolerance are good and makes special reference to the national plan on combating racism and antisemitism. However, she believes the problem is implementation. This starts first with the police to ask the proper questions to determine if crimes are motivated by a hate bias and then with the prosecutors and judges in bringing charges and convicting wrongdoers. The law provides for 23 criteria defining discrimination, but 656 complaints ultimately resulted in only five convictions. This creates a sense of impunity that leads to more incidents and reluctance on the part of victims to report crimes. We are told that judges are not in the habit of examining the hate motivation of crimes, which in any case may warrant serious attention. And, as a judge herself, the Secretary General says that judges are the most reluctant group to accept outside training.

There were two notable discrepancies that emerged following this meeting. While CNCDH says that police are not equipped with or inclined to ask the necessary questions of victims to determine a hate motivation, police officials tell us this is not the case. We are even shown a special app that all police officers have on their phones, which will prompt them to ask all the proper questions. Additionally, CNCDH says they do not make use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism in their work. However, France has adopted the IHRA definition, and Minister for Equality Aurore Bergé tells us that the law will be changed to ensure that the definition is used even more broadly. (It is evident that the Secretary General takes issue with this.)

CNCDH also notes that Muslims are often stigmatized as “separatists,” implying they do not belong, or are called *entryists* seeking to take control. Such narratives, combined with mistrust of institutions, result in severe underreporting of anti-Muslim incidents. CNCDH included a definition of Islamophobia in its 2014 annual report, but not since. In their survey, the

Government Information Service and CNCDH use both “Islamophobia” and “anti-Muslim intolerance” and conclude that society at large understands them as equivalent, even if politicians do not. It identified the 2025 murder of Aboubakar Cissé as a clear anti-Muslim hate crime, and it noted that the killing of a Tunisian man was linked to a far-right group that sought to inspire copycat attacks. CNCDH warns that when terrorism is almost exclusively associated with Muslims, it obscures far-right violence.

The Commission also documents concrete consequences of bias. In the health sector, there have been cases where doctors have acted on stereotypes such as the so-called “Mediterranean syndrome,” which presumes North Africans exaggerate their symptoms. This has led to fatal medical negligence and higher maternal and infant mortality rates among these communities.

CENTRAL OFFICE FOR COMBATING CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

The Interior Ministry includes the Central Office for Combating Crimes Against Humanity and Hate Crimes (OCLCH), one of fourteen offices with specialized jurisdiction. This office was created in 2013, and in 2019 its mandate was expanded to include hate crimes. Over 16,000 hate crimes and misdemeanors have been recorded in the past year, and this office has taken responsibility for the 80 most serious crimes that were committed. Because French law prohibits identifying the specific religion of a victim even when recording a “religiously based” hate crime, it is not possible to know how many of these 16,000 incidents were antisemitic in nature. However, our interlocutors who know the exact nature of these most serious 80 crimes inform us that “two-thirds of them” were antisemitic in nature. In 2023, this office provided an app for all police and gendarme official duty phones to enable them to assess and respond to incidents of hate crime in real time. It also provides advice on how to best support hate crime victims and a step-by-step guide to interview them.

Anti-Muslim hate crimes are often harder to pursue because French law generally allows judges to recognize only two aggravating factors. Thus, prosecutors may privilege tangible aggravations (such as nighttime or multiple perpetrators) over religious bias, which is more difficult to prove. As a result, some anti-Muslim crimes are not formally recorded as such. On the positive side, new tools to improve police practice, such as the new duty phone apps, may improve the collection of this information.

The Ministry of the Interior prioritizes combating discrimination, racism, and online hate speech, as governmental priorities, and in 2024, they also recorded a high number of acts against Christians.

CENTRAL OFFICE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS (BCC) MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

The Central Office for Religious Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for providing security for places of worship. In 2024, the Ministry recorded a dramatic increase in antisemitic attacks with a total number of 1,570. (This compares to 770 anti-Christian incidents and 173 anti-Muslim incidents.) Overall, this meant a 60 percent increase over 2022. In the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks in 2015, police security supplemented by military personnel was fixed in place in front of most synagogues and Jewish schools in France. But funding and staff

limitations necessitated a change in this policy. Instead, authorities make do with moving police patrols which can be increased according to religious holidays and political events. This adds to the financial burden of the Jewish Community which must hire security personnel to fill the needs that the police cannot provide.

The Ministry highlighted that FORIF functions as a space for dialogue on Islam which includes addressing security for places of worship as well as working on the professionalization of imams, Muslim chaplancies, banking and insurance inclusion for Muslim associations, Muslim quarters in French cemeteries.

However, it also acknowledged Muslim frustration over the limited security measures, including for the Grand Mosque (which does receive increased security at times of heightened risk) made available to its community buildings and places of worship. As government funding cannot be used directly for religious buildings, only cameras in public spaces near mosques can be financed.

MINISTRY FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN AND THE FIGHT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

The Minister for Equality between Men and Women and the Fight against Discrimination, Aurore Bergé, explained that there were two priorities for addressing the rising antisemitism in France, namely, defining antisemitism and training prosecutors and judges to ensure that they can recognize and prosecute antisemitic hate crimes. Additionally, she stressed the importance of training educators about antisemitism so that they can explain it to their students. To this end, they are now looking to insert the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism into law. She noted that the IHRA definition has been adopted through a Parliamentary resolution, but the current legal codes address antisemitism only as part of a general provision on criminal offenses that address religious discrimination. The IHRA definition offers a much more detailed description of the various forms antisemitism can take. The Minister convened a national conference on antisemitism in the wake of the October 7th attacks which brought together government and civil society leaders. Working groups were created and met over several months resulting in a set of recommendations now under review.

This Ministry expressed concern about new backlashes for the fight against anti-Muslim hatred and racism, paying attention to social networks and online hatred. It highlighted that the murder of a Tunisian national in the south of France was categorized as racist because of the perpetrator's online racist content activity before and after committing the crime, though many see it as anti-Muslim.

The Ministry also recognized that the problem of Muslim mistrust in public institutions and the underreporting of anti-Muslim hatred cases were serious matters. In response, it is funding a new reporting platform for anti-Muslim incidents to be launched and run by ADDAM. The Ministry is also pursuing measures to counter employment discrimination, including ensuring objective assessment of CVs. It reported that more than half of the 2023-2026 National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism and Discrimination Linked to Origin has already been implemented.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION AND MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research are aware that since the 2023/2024 school year there has been a significant increase in discrimination cases, noting that racist incidents have doubled and antisemitic incidents have increased fourfold. Currently, the Ministries employ a somewhat narrow definition of antisemitism, relying on language from the criminal code and the IHRA definition's first paragraph, absent the specific examples. However, this may change when a new law, described to us at a previous meeting, is passed.

The Ministry of National Education acknowledged that anti-Muslim incidents are underreported, stating they are difficult to measure. In fact, the focus has so far been on antisemitism, they have not produced statistics on anti-Muslim incidents. This could be because the Ministry does not record 'anti-Muslim incidents', but racist, anti-Semitic acts, and all cases of discrimination without distinction.

However, they maintained that there is a willingness to address the problems of Muslim students. They are only now beginning to develop methods to address their needs. The Ministry of Higher Education has over 200 trained experts (by the Shoah Memorial) and is funding research on racism and hate speech to gain an understanding of the needs of Muslim and Roma students.

The Ministry of National Education stated that vocational school regulations - such as those requiring nurses' caps - apply to all students without exception. It maintained that no discriminatory enforcement against Muslim women should take place, though Muslim organizations contest this in practice.

MINISTRY FOR EUROPE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

A discussion in the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs highlighted the connection between international and domestic matters. For France to advocate for freedom of conscience and religion in the international arena it must demonstrate its commitment to these same values at home. About countering antisemitism, this means ensuring a better understanding by society in general of the phenomenon per the IHRA definition. The Ministry sponsored a French--American consultation of government officials and civil society representatives in Paris to exchange information and best practices in fighting antisemitism, followed by a second consultation with German counterparts in Berlin.

The case of Alfred Dreyfus was also highlighted, as there are currently efforts underway to posthumously increase his military rank to that of General. With that rank his remains could be transferred to the Pantheon. We are told that this would serve as a strong, symbolic gesture in the ongoing battle against antisemitism.

The Ministry stressed that its international advocacy is dependent on addressing challenges at home. It acknowledged that Muslim communities feel increasingly stigmatized, especially after an expert report, "The Muslim Brotherhood and Political Islamism in France", was presented to

the government in May 2025 which was seen as controversial by some civil society organizations. It also noted that its policy of *laïcité* is often mischaracterized abroad, with media focusing disproportionately on disputes such as burka bans while ignoring cases where bans have been reversed.

It had been suggested that French diplomats are sometimes reluctant to engage with Catholic representatives based on the 1905 law and history of tension between the French Republic and the Catholic Church. However, our interlocutors took issue with this assertion and maintained that engagement with Christians and other religious groups is a normal part of their activity. Additional concerns about the treatment of minority Christian groups turned on the decision of the Ministry of Interior to recognize them as religious associations (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, since 2014) following recommendations by the ECHR.

INTERMINISTERIAL DELEGATION FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM, ANTISEMITISM, AND ANTI-LGBT HATRED (DILCRAH)

Much of the focused efforts to combat antisemitism and racism is centered in the Interministerial Delegation for the Fight against Racism, Antisemitism, and anti-LGBT Hatred (DILCRAH). Established thirteen years ago with a more limited focus on protecting religious institutions in the wake of the lethal attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse and at the time housed in the Interior Ministry, it now operates with a staff of 14 and an annual budget of 14 million Euro. DILCRAH supports legislation and offers advice and coordinates across ministries and other public bodies to ensure there is a coherent and comprehensive approach to combating racism, antisemitism, and discrimination more generally. DILCRAH's action plan includes 80 specific measures, including the improvement of tools to measure racism and antisemitism, training for police, gendarmes, and judges, and the education of young people. Some 100,000 officials have taken part in its training programs.

Its 2023 Action Plan includes eighty measures, such as better monitoring of discrimination, training of law enforcement, and education of young people. DILCRAH works directly with civil society and has partnered with ADDAM to promote reporting of anti-Muslim incidents. As legal constraints prevent disaggregating data by ethnicity or religion, official statistics report 16,000 "racist and xenophobic" incidents in 2024.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Ministry of Justice data on religiously based hate crimes track the progress of cases initially identified by police. Of incidents reported by law enforcement, only fifty percent have sufficient evidence to be prosecuted. Only two-thirds of these will ultimately be taken to court. (Others may receive some administratively imposed sanction.) Fourteen percent of the court cases result in a not guilty verdict. It is also true that, if there is difficulty in proving bias-motivation, the case may be prosecuted without a finding of aggravated circumstance. The National School for the Judiciary has long prioritized anti-discrimination training for judges, and all courts have an anti-discrimination officer on staff. A meeting of all these contact persons was convened in

November 2025 to raise awareness in the aftermath of the October 7th Hamas attacks and the subsequent spike in antisemitic incidents in France.

The Ministry acknowledges that in cases where religious bias is difficult to prove, prosecutions often proceed without the aggravating circumstance. This reflects concerns raised by Muslim organizations. While the Ministry emphasizes the presence of anti-discrimination officers in all courts and specialized training for judges, other government officials with whom we met believe more training is necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The French Government and its leaders and ministers should take every opportunity to explain to the public that the fight against antisemitism and mounting an effective opposition to intolerance and discrimination against Muslims are not simply a matter of protecting minority communities but are essential to the preservation of democracy.
- Greater efforts should be taken and new methods identified to collect disaggregated data on hate crimes that will provide a more detailed picture of the bias directed at Jews, at Muslims, and at other threatened minorities. This could include empowering and cooperating with civil society monitors as well as campaigns to encourage hate crime victims to report.
- There are important programs carried out by or with civil society that demonstrated success in promoting tolerance and interfaith and interethnic understanding, but with additional resources they can do more. To this end, additional funding should be provided to *Coexist* and DILCRAH.
- More should be done to educate and encourage judges to understand the special nature of bias-motivated hate crimes and thus, wherever possible, to include it in their decisions. The successful prosecution of hate crimes is a significant deterrent to those who might follow.
- The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism is the most recognized and adopted guidance tool to understand antisemitism in its various forms, and France has endorsed it. While some government agencies make use of it, others do not. All departments and agencies that must deal with the problem should employ it.
- The security needs of the Jewish community are acute, and the government must provide more and sustained assistance to address them.
- Sustained and detailed attention should be accorded to the impact of current laws and regulations on the Muslim community, combined with the creation of targeted monitoring mechanisms designed to ensure the visibility of the discrimination and intolerance faced by Muslims.
- As anti-Muslim hatred remains relatively under-recognized in France (partly due to underreporting), concrete steps should be taken to rebuild the affected communities' trust in institutions and improve their access to effective legal remedies. Anti-Muslim hatred should be systematically quantified, analyzed and publicized, and a clear year-by-year statistical profile developed.

- The perception that attacks against Muslims are not taken as seriously as those against other groups needs to be addressed, and practical steps to guarantee equal protection should be taken. Additionally, more steps are needed to bring about improvements in judicial procedures, where possible, to prevent any misclassification of cases of hate crimes.
- Further areas that merit exploration are the drawing up of a clear working definition of anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination, together with a formal integration of this issue within the national anti-racism plan; the formation of disaggregated data systems for the recording of anti-Muslim actions; the allocation of adequate human resources and funding for CSO reporting platforms; strengthened dialogue with religious leaders with a view to finding acceptable and workable solutions to the needs of the Muslim community; and the taking of concrete measures to ensure accountability for hostile media narratives.
- Specific measures should be taken to prevent bias in workplaces and universities against Muslim women, and targeted plans to address discrimination in the field of education should be accelerated.
- Political discourse and a public climate that normalize hostility toward Muslims are incompatible with democratic values and social cohesion. Thus, steps should be taken to encourage a powerful nationwide affirmation that Muslims are an integral part of the community, and that they are therefore entitled to equal dignity, inclusion and protection.
- Concerns about the law of 2021 voiced by representatives of several different religious denominations should be taken seriously. As much as possible, freedom of religion should not be hindered by securitization and exaggeration of control.
- Although the Council of State rules that Miviludes is not required to forward the reports it receives to the movements concerned, even if they are anonymized (Conseil d'Etat, n°490743, 03-26-2025) we recommend that Miviludes should engage in dialogue with faith communities against which concerns via *saisines* (anonymous citizen reports) are raised. While it is important that the anonymity of these reports is maintained, the religious groups accused should have access to redacted or summary accounts in order to properly address them in their respective communities.
- Regarding Roma and Sinti, more concrete policies are necessary to implement the national plan on a local level, especially with municipalities.