

Croatia

The constitution and other laws and policies protect freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as freedom of opinion and expression. While officially there is no state religion, **the Catholic Church has a very prominent and privileged position in public life.**

The Catholic Church receives substantial state financial support, as well as other benefits established in at least four concordats between the government and the Vatican. According to the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, **the concordats with the Vatican grant the Catholic Church more than \$43 million dollars in annual government funding for religious education and other operational costs.**

The Catholic catechism is taught in all state schools. Non-Catholic children have some rights to opt out of catechism classes. Schools that have at least seven students from any one non-Catholic

religious are allowed separate religion classes for those students. However, **non-Catholic students at most schools are not provided with any alternative classes to the catechism classes, such as lessons about ethics or the religion of their choice.**

In April 2010 the Constitutional Court refused to rule on the constitutionality of the catechism classes in state schools. The court stated that it lacked jurisdiction in the matter since it was unable to rule on the merits of international treaties (ie. the concordat). The decision was in response to a suit filed in 2000 claiming that the agreement violated the equal rights of all citizens.

Croatian State Radio and Television, the state-run broadcaster, has a formal agreement with the Catholic Church to provide regular, extensive coverage of Catholic events (as many as 10 hours per month). Other religions and denominations receive approximately 10 minutes broadcast time per month or less.

In addition to the concordats and other agreements with the Catholic Church, the government has **agreements with fifteen other religious denominations** that together make up about 15 percent of the population. A registered religious community may enter into agreements with the government if it was historically present in Croatia in 1941, or if it has at least 6,000 members. According to the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities, **the government provided 20 million kuna (US\$3,440,000) during the year to these non-Catholic religious groups in amounts proportional to their size (that amounts to less than 8% of the funding Croatia gives the Catholic Church).**

The constitution guarantees freedoms of expression and the press, and these rights are generally respected. However, journalists covering corruption and organized crime report that they are subject to political pressure, intimidation and assaults. There is unlimited access to the Internet.

The rights to freedom of assembly and association are guaranteed in the constitution and respected in practice.

Systemic Discrimination

- SYSTEMATIC RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGE
- DISCRIMINATORY PROMINENCE GIVEN TO RELIGIOUS BODIES, TRADITIONS OR LEADERS
- STATE-FUNDING OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS OR SALARIES, OR DISCRIMINATORY TAX EXEMPTIONS
- RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IS MANDATORY IN AT LEAST SOME PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHOUT SECULAR ALTERNATIVES