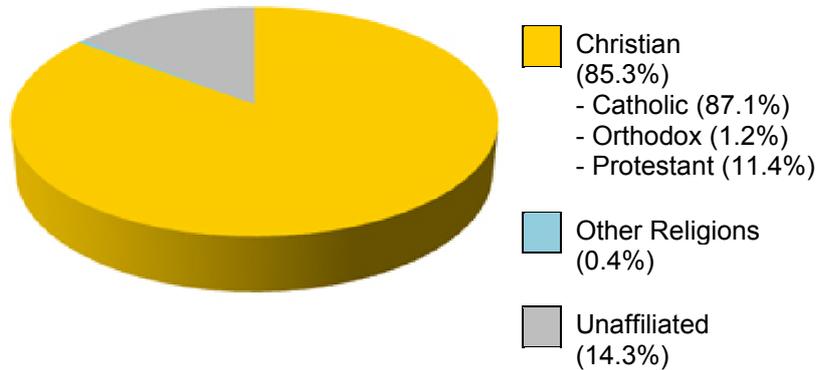


# SLOVAKIA



Population:	Area:	Refugees (internal)*:	Refugees (external)**:	Internally displaced:
5,408,000	49,000 km <sup>2</sup>	662	304	-

\* Foreign refugees living in this country.      \*\* Citizens of this country, now living abroad.

The constitution<sup>1</sup> of the Slovakian Republic refers in its preamble to the spiritual legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius. However the state abides by the principle of religious and ideological neutrality, in which no one religion is given preferential treatment. Article 24 guarantees freedom of religion and the independence of the religious communities. Each person is free to exercise his religion unhindered, to change it or to have no religious conviction.<sup>2</sup>

The religious communities are permitted to register as such in order to gain official recognition. However, the conditions for this are a minimum of 20,000 members, plus respect for the democratic rule of law and for the freedom and rights of all citizens. Given this high minimum number, many religious minorities are denied official recognition. This recognition is not however essential, though it does offer some advantages. Thus the 18 registered religious communities receive over €30 million in state subsidies, enjoy partial or even total tax relief, and have the right to conduct legal marriages. Non-registered religious communities are not permitted to make visits to prisons or hospitals and occasionally face difficulties with funerals. Although the law for the registration of civil associations actually excludes religious groups, a number of religious communities have in fact registered as such in order to acquire a legal status.

The restitution of church properties confiscated during the communist era has not yet been concluded. According to the Slovakian bishops' conference, the state has so far returned around 35% of the property that originally belonged to the Catholic Church or to Catholic institutions. The restitution law passed in 1993 makes no provision for compensation in regard to property returned in a poor state of repair. And yet some religious communities simply do not have the resources to restore the buildings that have been returned to them.

There is currently some controversy over the role of Slovakia between 1939 and 1945, when the country was a satellite of Nazi Germany. Spokesmen for the Jewish communities have criticised the tendency in some quarters for a glorification of the Slovakian state of the day. Among other things they accuse the state-run Institute for National Remembrance (UPN) of rehabilitating some of the political figures of the day.

<sup>1</sup> [www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Slovakia\\_2001](http://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Slovakia_2001)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

There were occasional instances of religious or racist discrimination noted during the reporting period. Anti-Semitic notions were voiced by around 500 right-wing radicals and several thousand sympathisers. There were isolated instances of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries, for example the desecration of 35 Jewish graves in April 2012 in the town of Kosice.<sup>3</sup>

In November 2012 the EU commission criticised Slovakia's plans for depicting the images of Saints Cyril and Methodius, complete with halos and the double cross, on their 2 Euro coins. France and Greece had both protested against this. However, the Slovakian central bank won the day in December 2012 and introduced the new coin without modifications in the summer of 2013.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208366#wrapper](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dliid=208366#wrapper)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thedaily.sk/saints-no-more-drop-the-halos-slovakia/> and <http://blog.radiovatican.de/der-schein-der-heiligen/>