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EUROPE: Anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe rose 70% between 2019 and 2020

Anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe rose 70% between 2019 and 2020, watchdog reports

By Anugrah Kumar

The Christian Post (11.12.2021) – <https://bit.ly/3IDUKN0> – A new study from a Vienna-based watchdog organization suggests

that anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe have increased by 70% between 2019 and 2020 amid rising concern about declining religious freedom across the continent.

A new report this month from the Observatory on Intolerance Against Christians in Europe (OIDAC) focuses on how declining religious freedom, freedom of conscience and parental rights have impacted the liberties of European Christians.

The document identifies “increasing intolerance and discrimination” against Christians from governments through legislation and political discourse. It also identifies intolerance from individuals through “social exclusion and criminal acts.”

OIDAC notes that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe published its annual hate crimes report in November, stating there were 981 anti-Christian hate crimes in Europe for 2020 compared to 578 in 2019.

“This meant an increase of 70% in anti-Christian hate crime since last year,” the OIDAC report states.

“Our numbers speak louder than our words. This is one of the reasons OIDAC was founded over ten years ago, because there was no other organisation reporting and raising awareness on this phenomenon in Europe.”

The study compiled over two years focuses on situations for Christians in five countries – France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – amid rising “secular intolerance” and “Islamic oppression.”

“These countries were selected because, according to our observations, Christians face the most difficulties in them,” the report explains. “The findings of the report are based on a variety of data we collected. The majority of our data is based on descriptive cases, an extensive questionnaire and in-depth interviews with experts and afflicted Christians.”

While hate crimes have a higher frequency in France and Germany, they tend to be more severe in Spain and France, the organization finds.

“The number of anti-Christian hate crimes in Germany is surprisingly high but not as severe as in other countries in this report,” the report reads.

“The observed cases of violence in Germany are mainly perpetrated against Protestant and Catholic churches and Christian buildings. These include vandalism, looting, graffiti, and damage of property with a high and slightly increasing frequency in the last years. There have also been more severe cases that show a clear bias like physical assaults on priests, arson attacks and decapitated statues. OIAC has documented 255 violent attacks against Christians or Christian sites between 2019 and 2020.”

In terms of legal prosecution for alleged “hate speech,” the U.K. has the highest number of cases. But the other countries have high rates of self-censorship, says the report.

The right to conscientious objection has been under threat in Sweden, France and Spain.

“The absence of the conscience clause in Sweden is already affecting Christian professionals, and intentions to alter this clause in France and Spain could lead to a complete exclusion of Christians in certain professions,” OIAC warns.

In the education sector, the organization warns that “Christian university students perceive that they cannot debate certain topics freely or express their opinions without judgment or negative consequences, which leads to the crippling effects of self-censorship.” The document also contends that various new sex and relationship education regulations are violating parental rights.

In France and Spain, most of the attacks were on Catholics. And in Germany and the U.K., both Catholic and non-Catholic Christians have been targeted.

OIAC recorded 175 incidents against religious freedom in Spain during 2019, and 140 (80%) were targeted at Catholics. In 2020, 51 violent incidents against Christians were recorded compared to 30 cases in 2019.

The watchdog says “secular intolerance” and “Islamic

oppression” are two of the primary threatening dynamics impacting the lives of Christians in Europe in four main areas of life: church, education, politics and the workplace.

“We found that the area of church life is the most visibly affected due to an increasing number of hate crimes in most countries, but education, the workplace and politics are following shortly after,” the report states.

“[W]hile secular intolerance is the driving dynamic in most of the cases and areas of life we observed, Islamic oppression mainly occurs in concentrated hotspot areas, in which Christian converts are the group that is mostly affected along with other residential Christians.”

The report argues that the opposition against conservative Christian moral views leads to secular intolerance.

“This polarization also appears to be promoted by sensationalist and religious-illiterate media that stigmatizes and marginalizes religious voices in the public debate,” the report adds.

Christian converts with a Muslim background are “very vulnerable,” the group says. “Our data indicates that many of them face intolerance and violence from their social environment, and the danger they face is often ignored by state authorities.”

The report also contends that churches had their religious freedom denied and faced discrimination in Europe due to gathering restrictions related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

“This happened either by the unjustified and disproportionate use of power by public officials (Spain) or through unproportionate blanket bans on public worship, downgrading it to a non-essential service,” OIAC details.

Last July, the watchdog found that there had been about a 285% increase in the number of “anti-Christian incidents” reported in France over the previous decade-plus.

“The French government reported 275, what they call, anti-Christian acts [in 2008],” the group’s Executive Director Ellen Fantini told The Christian Post at the time. “So that is anything from targeting a church in some way with vandalism or a public Christian statue, it could be a Christian cemetery or it could be actual assaults against French Christians with an anti-Christian bias.”

Photo : Catholic church bishops and faithful gather during a ceremony at the sanctuary of Lourdes, France, on Nov. 6, 2021. | AFP via Getty Images/Valentine Chapuis

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