



Proselytizing Abroad: Where is it legal and illegal?



Product of the Research & Information Support Center (RISC)

This document provides a list of countries with official and unofficial prohibitions or restrictions on proselytizing based on written law and local customs. Note that this list may not be exhaustive and country laws and customs are subject to change. Information is primarily gathered from the U.S. Department of State's 2016 [International Religious Freedom Report](#). This information is provided for reference purposes only, and is correct as of the date of this publication.

Country	Region	Legal to Proselytize?	Notes on Restrictions
Angola	Africa	Yes	
Benin	Africa	Yes	
Botswana	Africa	Yes, with limits	Missionaries are no longer granted long-term residency permits, and are permitted to stay 90 days.
Burkina Faso	Africa	Yes	
Burundi	Africa	Yes	
Cabo Verde	Africa	Yes	
Cameroon	Africa	Yes	
Central African Republic	Africa	Yes	
Chad	Africa	Yes, with limits	The president of High Council for Islamic Affairs has the authority to restrict Muslim groups from proselytizing.
Comoros	Africa	No	Proselytizing for any religion except Sunni Islam is illegal. Foreigners who proselytize may be deported.
Congo (Democratic Republic of)	Africa	Yes	
Congo (Republic of)	Africa	Yes	
Cote d'Ivoire	Africa	Yes	
Djibouti	Africa	Yes, with limits	In practice, groups proselytize on private property rather than in public. Societal norms discourage conversion from Islam.
Equatorial Guinea	Africa	Yes	
Eritrea	Africa	No	
Ethiopia	Africa	Yes	
Gabon	Africa	Yes	
Gambia	Africa	Yes	
Ghana	Africa	Yes	
Guinea	Africa	Yes	

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Guinea-Bissau	Africa	Yes	
Kenya	Africa	Yes	
Lesotho	Africa	Yes	
Liberia	Africa	Yes	
Madagascar	Africa	Yes	
Malawi	Africa	Yes	
Mali	Africa	Yes	
Mauritania	Africa	Yes, with limits	There is no specific legal prohibition against non-Muslims proselytizing. In practice, the government may prohibit such activity through a broad interpretation of the constitution stating that Islam shall be the religion of the people and of the state.
Mauritius	Africa	Yes, with limits	While there are no explicit restrictions in place, there are unofficial limits on the overall number of missionaries per religious group who are issued the requisite visas and work permits. The government continues to limit the number of foreign missionaries permitted in the country.
Mozambique	Africa	Yes	
Namibia	Africa	Yes	
Niger	Africa	Yes, with limits	The government prohibits public proselytization for all religious groups due to safety concerns. There is no restriction on private peaceful proselytizing.
Nigeria	Africa	Yes	
Rwanda	Africa	Yes	
Sao Tome and Principe	Africa	Yes	
Senegal	Africa	Yes	
Seychelles	Africa	Yes	
Sierra Leone	Africa	Yes	
Somalia	Africa	No	Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is prohibited.
South Africa	Africa	Yes	
South Sudan	Africa	Yes	

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Sudan	Africa	No	The government criminalizes proselytizing and conversion from Islam to another faith.
Swaziland	Africa	Yes	
Tanzania	Africa	Yes	
Togo	Africa	Yes	
Uganda	Africa	Yes	
Zambia	Africa	Yes	
Zimbabwe	Africa	Yes	
Australia	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Brunei	East Asia and Pacific	No	The government enforces restrictions on non-Muslim proselytization or individuals with no religious affiliation.
Burma	East Asia and Pacific	No	The government discourages proselytizing by non-Buddhist groups. The government has not allowed permanent foreign religious groups to operate in the country since the mid-1960s when it expelled nearly all foreign missionaries.
Cambodia	East Asia and Pacific	No	The law formally bans non-Buddhist groups from door-to-door proselytizing. However, some religious groups do proselytize without facing arrest.
China	East Asia and Pacific	No	New religious affairs regulations, amending the ones from 2005, come into effect in February 2018. Groups or individuals interested in proselytizing in China should carefully review these regulations before commencing their activities. There could be criminal penalties imposed upon foreigners for violations of these or other provisions designed to control or prohibit proselytization by

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			foreigners.
Fiji	East Asia and Pacific	Yes, with limits	Proselytizing on government premises or at government functions is prohibited.
Indonesia	East Asia and Pacific	No	The law specifically bans proselytizing by Ahmadiyya Muslims. Violations on proselytizing carry a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy.
Japan	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Kiribati	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)	East Asia and Pacific	No	Due to mounting concerns over the serious risk of arbitrary arrest and long-term detention in North Korea, the Secretary has authorized a Geographic Travel Restriction on the use of a U.S. passport to travel in, through, or to North Korea.
Korea (Republic of)	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Laos	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Malaysia	East Asia and Pacific	Yes, with limits	The law forbids non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. The law does support Muslims proselytizing others.
Marshall Islands	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Micronesia	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Mongolia	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Nauru	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
New Zealand	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Palau	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Papua New Guinea	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Philippines	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Samoa	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Singapore	East Asia and Pacific	Yes, with limits	Missionaries from the Jehovah's Witnesses and Unification Church are not permitted to work, publish, or distribute religious texts.
Solomon Islands	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Taiwan	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Thailand	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	

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Timor-Leste	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Tonga	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Tuvalu	East Asia and Pacific	Yes, with limits	Some islands such as Falekaupule have formal and informal bans on proselytizing.
Vanuatu	East Asia and Pacific	Yes	
Vietnam	East Asia and Pacific	No	Nearly all religious activities require registration and approval by the local government according to laws that are unevenly applies. Government treatment of foreigners seeking to worship or proselytize varies in practice from locality to locality.
Albania	Europe	Yes	
Andorra	Europe	Yes	
Armenia	Europe	No	The law prohibits, but does not define, "soul hunting," a term describing both proselytism and forced conversion. Some groups do proselytize there. Most Christian groups keep a low profile.
Austria	Europe	Yes	
Azerbaijan	Europe	Yes, with severe limits	The law states, "[c]arrying out religious propaganda by foreigners or persons without citizenship shall be prohibited." The law specifies the government may dissolve religious organizations if they proselytize in a way which "degrades human dignity"; hinder secular education; and other reasons. In June the law was amended to allow foreigners invited by registered religious groups to conduct religious services. The government uses registration

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			restrictions to control proselytization by nontraditional groups and foreign religious actors, and restricts or controls distribution of many religious materials used for proselytization.
Belarus	Europe	Yes, with limits	The law prohibits importing religious materials without a positive conclusion from the state's theological examination, and defines rules for registration of permitted religious organizations. Membership in an unregistered religious organization is penalized by a two-year term of imprisonment.
Belgium	Europe	Yes	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Europe	Yes	
Bulgaria	Europe	Yes, with limits	Some municipalities have adopted local regulations that restrict proselytizing.
Croatia	Europe	Yes	
Cyprus	Europe	Yes	
Czech Republic	Europe	Yes	
Denmark	Europe	Yes	
Estonia	Europe	Yes	
Finland	Europe	Yes	
France	Europe	Yes	
Georgia	Europe	Yes, with limits	The law states that public schools may not be used for purposes of religious indoctrination or proselytizing. The constitution prohibits "compelling anyone to express his or her opinion about religion" but the law provides for the "right to choose and change religious affiliation."
Germany	Europe	Yes	
Greece	Europe	No	The constitution prohibits proselytizing, as well as

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			blasphemy and religious insults. Violators are subject to criminal prosecution.
Hungary	Europe	Yes	
Iceland	Europe	Yes	
Ireland	Europe	Yes	
Italy	Europe	Yes	
Kosovo	Europe	Yes	
Latvia	Europe	Yes, with limits	The law stipulates that foreign missionaries may be issued a residency permit, hold meetings, and proselytize only if invited by a registered domestic religious group.
Liechtenstein	Europe	Yes	
Lithuania	Europe	Yes	
Luxembourg	Europe	Yes	
Macedonia	Europe	Yes	
Malta	Europe	Yes	
Moldova	Europe	Yes, with limits	Moldova's Law on Freedom of Conscience, Thought and Religion article 4.4 forbids excessive proselytizing, i.e., by coercion. In addition, the Code on Misdemeanors penalizes insulting the religious feelings of others. It also bans religious activities by foreign citizens in public areas without prior notice to local authorities.
Monaco	Europe	Yes	
Montenegro	Europe	Yes	
Netherlands	Europe	Yes	
Norway	Europe	Yes	
Poland	Europe	Yes	
Portugal	Europe	Yes	
Romania	Europe	Yes	
Russia	Europe	No	In 2016, a new anti-terrorism law specifically regulates missionary activities in Russia, the types of materials that can be used by missionaries, and the admission of

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			missionaries to the country.
San Marino	Europe	Yes	
Serbia	Europe	Yes	
Slovak Republic	Europe	Yes	
Slovenia	Europe	Yes	
Spain	Europe	Yes	
Sweden	Europe	Yes	
Switzerland	Europe	Yes	
Turkey	Europe	No	
Ukraine	Europe	Yes	
United Kingdom	Europe	Yes	
Algeria	Near East	No	Proselytizing of Muslims by non-Muslims is a crime.
Bahrain	Near East	No	
Egypt	Near East	No	The government generally permits foreign religious workers in the country on the condition that they do not proselytize to Muslims. Non-Muslim minorities and foreign religious workers generally refrain from proselytizing to Muslims to avoid risking legal penalties and extralegal repercussions from authorities and members of the local community.
Iran	Near East	No	The penal code specifies the death sentence for proselytizing and attempts by non-Muslims to convert Muslims, as well as for "moharabeh" (enmity against God) and saab al-nabi (insulting the prophet). The law prohibits Muslim citizens from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs.
Iraq	Near East	No	
Israel	Near East	Yes, with limits	Religious groups may proselytize on the condition that the individual is at least 18 years of age, and no

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			material benefits are offered.
Jordan	Near East	No	Individuals who proselytize Muslims may be prosecuted in the State Security Court under the penal code's provisions against "inciting sectarian conflict" or "harming the national unity." Both these offenses are punishable by imprisonment for up to one year, or a fine of up to 50 JD (US \$71).
Kuwait	Near East	No	
Lebanon	Near East	Yes, with limits	There is no law banning proselytizing; however such activities are discouraged by the local community.
Libya	Near East	No	There is no law prohibiting proselytizing, but regional governments have taken actions against individuals proselytizing to Muslims.
Morocco	Near East	No	The criminal code prohibits attempts by non-Muslims to "shake the faith" of citizens from Sunni Islam and punishes anyone who "employs enticements" to undermine the faith of a Muslim or to convert a Muslim to another religion with six months to three years' imprisonment and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams (US \$20 to \$51).
Oman	Near East	No	
Palestinian Territories	Near East	No	
Qatar	Near East	No	The law criminalizes proselytizing on behalf of any religion other than Islam with a punishment of up to 10 years in prison.
Saudi Arabia	Near East	No	
Syria	Near East	No	

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Tunisia	Near East	Yes, with limits	Although there is no law prohibiting proselytizing, it is discouraged by local communities.
United Arab Emirates	Near East	No	
Western Sahara	Near East	No	
Yemen	Near East	No	
Afghanistan	South and Central Asia	No	
Bangladesh	South and Central Asia	No	
Bhutan	South and Central Asia	No	
India	South and Central Asia	Yes, with limits	Laws on proselytizing vary state to state. There are laws restricting religious conversion in seven of the 29 states: Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Six of these states enforce the laws.
Kazakhstan	South and Central Asia	Yes, with limits	The law prohibits methods of proselytizing that take advantage of a potential convert's dependence on charity. The law also prohibits blackmail, violence or the threat of violence, or the use of material threats to coerce participation in religious activities. The law also bans religious or proselytizing activities in children's holiday, sport, creative or other leisure organizations, camps, or sanatoria.
Kyrgyz Republic	South and Central Asia	Yes, with limits	The law prohibits the involvement of minors in organized proselytizing religious groups, "insistent attempts to convert followers from one religion to another," and "illegal missionary activity," defined as missionary activity of

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			groups not registered with the State Commission on Religious Affairs.
Maldives	South and Central Asia	No	Proselytizing to change denominations within Islam is illegal and punishable by two to five years in jail or house arrest, depending on the gravity of the offense. If the offender is a foreigner, his or her license to preach in the country will be revoked, and he or she will be deported. Proselytizing to Muslims by adherents of other religions is illegal, and the penalty is the same as for intra-Islamic proselytizing.
Nepal	South and Central Asia	No	On August 8, 2017 the parliament passed a new criminal code, which reduces the punishment for converting – or encouraging the conversion of – the religion of another person or for engaging in any act, including the propagating of religion, that undermines the religion, faith, or belief of any caste, ethnic group, or community, from six years to five years' imprisonment. The law will take effect in August 2018. It also stipulates a fine of up to Nepali Rupees (NRs) 50,000 (US \$500) and subjects foreign nationals convicted of these crimes to deportation. The new criminal code also imposes punishments of up to two years'

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			imprisonment and a fine of up to NRs 20,000 (US \$200) for harming the religious sentiment of any caste, ethnic community, or class, either in speech or writing.
Pakistan	South and Central Asia	Yes, with limits	The government permits non-Muslim missionary activity and to allow missionaries to proselytize as long as they did not preach against Islam and they acknowledged they are not Muslim. The penal code bans Ahmadis from preaching or propagating their religious beliefs or proselytizing. The punishment for violation of these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.
Sri Lanka	South and Central Asia	Yes, with limits	While non-Buddhist religious groups maintain the right to incorporate through an act of parliament, the parliament has limited their ability to proselytize based on a 2003 Supreme Court ruling stating the right to propagate a religion through proselytization was not fundamental under the constitution.
Tajikistan	South and Central Asia	No	While the constitution and other laws do not expressly prohibit proselytizing, civil society members note that it is socially unacceptable for Muslims to convert to other religions and individuals or groups that proselytize to faiths other than Islam are harassed.
Turkmenistan	South and Central Asia	No	Proselytizing is punishable

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			as an administrative offense by fines ranging from 100-1,000 Manat (US \$28-286), with higher fines for religious leaders and lower fines for lay members.
Uzbekistan	South and Central Asia	No	The law punishes proselytism with up to three years in prison.
Argentina	North and South America	Yes	
Bahamas	North and South America	Yes	
Barbados	North and South America	Yes	
Belize	North and South America	Yes	
Bolivia	North and South America	Yes	
Brazil	North and South America	Yes	
Canada	North and South America	Yes	
Chile	North and South America	Yes	
Colombia	North and South America	Yes, with limits	The Government permits proselytizing among the indigenous population provided it is welcome and does not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands.
Costa Rica	North and South America	Yes	
Cuba	North and South America	Yes, with limits	The Cuban Constitution allows religious activities provided they don't act against the political regime or infringe the law. All travelers must still abide by OFAC regulations for travel to Cuba. See the Department of Treasury webpage.
Dominica	North and South America	Yes	
Dominican Republic	North and South America	Yes, with limits	Non-Catholic missionaries and religious leaders said they still could not obtain visas under the same immigration category as Catholic religious leaders, which non-Catholic groups said made it more expensive and difficult to

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			bring missionaries to the country.
Ecuador	North and South America	Yes, with limits	A private gated community near Guayaquil banned Jehovah's Witnesses from proselytizing within the community. Two courts upheld the community's right to do so. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed for protection before the constitutional court, which had not accepted the case as of the end of the year.
El Salvador	North and South America	Yes	Foreign religious groups must obtain special residence visas for religious activities and may not proselytize while on visitor or tourist visas.
Grenada	North and South America	Yes	
Guatemala	North and South America	Yes	
Guyana	North and South America	Yes	Foreign religious workers require a visa from the Ministry of Citizenship. Religious groups seeking to enter Amerindian villages for the purpose of proselytizing must apply for and obtain the permission from the village council.
Haiti	North and South America	Yes	
Honduras	North and South America	Yes	The government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits, and mandates a local institution or individual sponsor a missionary's application for residency and submit it to immigration authorities. Groups with whom the government does not have written agreements

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			are required to provide proof of employment and income for their missionaries.
Jamaica	North and South America	Yes	
Mexico	North and South America	Yes	There are reports that religious minority groups coming from outside the community to proselytize being discriminated by the local community.
Nicaragua	North and South America	Yes	Missionaries must obtain religious worker visas and provide information regarding the nature of their missionary work before the Ministry of Interior will authorize entry into the country. There have been reports of religious groups facing stricter scrutiny from Nicaraguan authorities. Nineteen foreigners have reportedly been expelled from Nicaragua since 2010, including environmental activists, journalists and academics. The Nicaraguan government said the visitors did not receive official permission to carry out their research or other activities while in-country. Advanced coordination is encouraged for religious groups. Multiple OSAC constituents have successfully coordinated travel via the Embassy of Nicaragua in Washington, DC.
Panama	North and South America	Yes	
Paraguay	North and South America	Yes	
Peru	North and South America	Yes	
Saint Kitts and Nevis	North and South America	Yes	
Saint Lucia	North and South America	Yes	
Saint Vincent and the	North and South America	Yes	

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Grenadines			
Suriname	North and South America	Yes	
Trinidad and Tobago	North and South America	Yes, with limits	The government's national security policy continued to limit the number of long-term foreign missionaries to 35 per registered religious group at any given time.
Uruguay	North and South America	Yes	
Venezuela	North and South America	Yes	

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