

Report shows rise in attacks on Christians in Israel, but a willingness to tackle issue

Second annual Rossing Center report documents 111 anti-Christian incidents in 2024. Accompanying survey finds almost half of Christians under 30 want to emigrate from Israel

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Christian worshippers at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old City on May 4, 2024. (Jamal Awad/Flash90)

On October 17, 2024, a Capuchin friar was walking through the park near the historic neighborhood of Yemin Moshe in Jerusalem when two Jewish teenagers spat at him without saying a word.

The unfortunately all-too-common episode is one of the 111 reported cases of attacks against Christians documented in a 2024 Annual Report by the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue, released on Thursday.

Last year's inaugural report documented 89 cases, including 32 attacks on church properties, 30 formally reported cases of spitting, and seven violent attacks, most of them against multiple victims. In the 2024 study, 111 episodes are reported, including 46 physical attacks, 35 attacks against church properties, and 13 cases of harassment.

According to the report, most perpetrators appear to belong to the ultra-Orthodox and national-religious communities. The majority of the victims are clergy or people wearing visible Christian symbols.

"The incidents we are able to track barely scratch the surface of what happens. We do not doubt that there are many more cases we do not know of," said Hana Bendcowsky, director of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations (JCJCR), one of the programs within the Rossing Center, an Israeli NGO that describes itself as an interreligious and peacebuilding organization.



Hana Bendcowsky, director of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations of the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue. (Courtesy)

In conjunction with the report, the group also surveyed attitudes of Christians on topics such as identity, freedom of religion, Israeli Jewish society, the Church's role, and emigration.

The survey results showed somewhat fraught relations between the Christian community and the rest of the country, with one in three Christians not feeling accepted by their fellow Jewish Israelis and contemplating leaving the country — a number that rises to 48% for people under 30.

Rossing was established two decades ago to promote dialogue and understanding between Christians and Jews in an unprecedented situation in which Jews are the majority and Christians are the minority.

“We have to remember that for centuries, Jews have experienced living as a minority within a Christian majority. The opposite situation is relatively new,” said Bendcowsky. “Being the majority and having our own state comes with responsibilities.”



An Armenian Christian priest walks along an alley near St. James Cathedral at the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, November 21, 2024. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

The idea of monitoring attacks against Christians emerged as a result of what she described as a “gut feeling” that something needed to be done after a group of pilgrims walking through the Cardo street in the Old City carrying crosses were violently attacked in the summer of 2022.

“The tension [with Christians] was always there and we were dealing with issues of spitting already 20 years ago,” she said. “But we see that in the last couple of years, the phenomenon has increased in numbers, and the seriousness of the incidents has increased. Our impression is that perpetrators do not feel the need to hide themselves but are very public about it.”

Almost half of Christians under age 30 want to leave Israel

During a briefing presenting the results of the report at The Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center on Thursday, Rev. David Neuhaus, a Catholic Jesuit based in Jerusalem, emphasized the need for broader initiatives to address the crisis at the level of public discourse.

“I think that uniquely focusing on religious Jews having problems with Christian religious symbols does not tackle the issue of also many secular Jews having a huge problem with Christians, not for religious reasons, but because of historical reasons,” said Neuhaus.

“I think that there needs to be a lot more focus, not only on the individual acts of violence, abuse and harassment, but also on some of the official attitudes towards Christians living in the State of Israel,” he said.

Some 180,300 Christians live in Israel, representing approximately 1.8% of the Israeli population, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Almost 80% of the Christians in Israel are Arab, constituting 6.9% of the country’s Arab population. In 2023, the Christian population grew by 0.6%.

The report’s accompanying survey on Christian identity polled 300 individuals (with a possible error rate of up to 5.6%). Of the respondents, 34% identified as Arab Christians, 23% as Israeli Christians, 13% as Palestinian Christians, 11% as Arabs, 9% as Palestinians and 7% as Christians.

Only one in 10 respondents reported having experienced harassment from Israeli Jews. Almost 60% said that they felt comfortable wearing Christian religious symbols, while 20% said they did not.

Asked about their relationship with Israeli Jews, 53% of respondents described daily interactions, while a quarter said they rarely or never interacted with Jews. However, the findings highlighted significant geographic and gender differences.

In central Israel, 87% of respondents reported daily interactions, whereas in East Jerusalem, 37% of them rarely or never interact. In addition, daily exchanges were registered among almost eight in 10 men but only four in 10 women.



Rev. David Neuhaus, a Catholic Jesuit based in Jerusalem, conducts a briefing on the Rossing Center 2024 Report on attacks against Christians at The Notre Dame of Jerusalem Center on March 27, 2025. (Rossella Tercatin/Times of Israel)



A visit for tour guides and other Jerusalemites to the compound of the Sisters on HaNeviim Street organized by the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue. (Courtesy of the Rossing Center)

The survey also asked respondents whether they considered emigrating from Israel and East Jerusalem. Some 36% said they were, including 48% of participants under 30. Also in this case, the results highlighted significant differences between local communities. In Haifa, 48% of the respondents said they were thinking of leaving the country, while in East Jerusalem, only 16% did.

The survey also showed a deep split over the perception of acceptance of Christians within the Jewish society. About 31% of the respondents said that they felt that Israeli Jews accept Palestinian/Arab Christians as part of Israeli society, while 34% disagreed.

In addition, 36% of respondents believe their identity as a Palestinian/Arab Christian impacted their access to job opportunities for advancement within state or state-affiliated institutions, while 41% disagreed.



Young seminarians of the Armenian Christian convent arrive for the daily afternoon prayer service at St. James Cathedral at the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, November 21, 2024. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

There are some silver linings to the Rossing Center’s findings: The 2024 report noted a positive trend in increased willingness of the victims to report what happened to the authorities.

“In the past, Christians were hesitant to report episodes because they were unsure how they would be treated,” Bendcowsky said. “We have been working on persuading them otherwise. Often the reporting is done not by the Christians themselves but rather by Israeli Jewish volunteers.”

Bendcowsky also said that recently, they witnessed a notable change in attitude among Israeli police.

“In the past few months, we have seen how the police have realized that [attacks against Christians] is an issue, and they started to track incidents, arrest people and make the arrests public. This has a huge impact on deterring future attackers because people do not want to get in trouble for spitting at someone. At the same time, it makes Christians feel seen,” she said.