

Protected Characteristics Profile: Religion

Purpose

This profile is one of nine, presenting quantitative (mainly through the Census) and qualitative (through locally run focus groups) data alongside desktop research. The purpose is to inform discussions about our local community.

Background

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination and unfair treatment in Britain; this is because of the Protected Characteristics they have. The Protected Characteristics are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

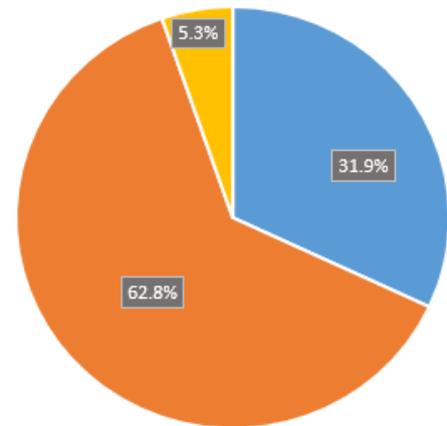
It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of a Protected Characteristic. Religion or belief discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of their religion or belief, or lack of religion or belief, in one of the situations covered by the Equality Act.¹

Key Points

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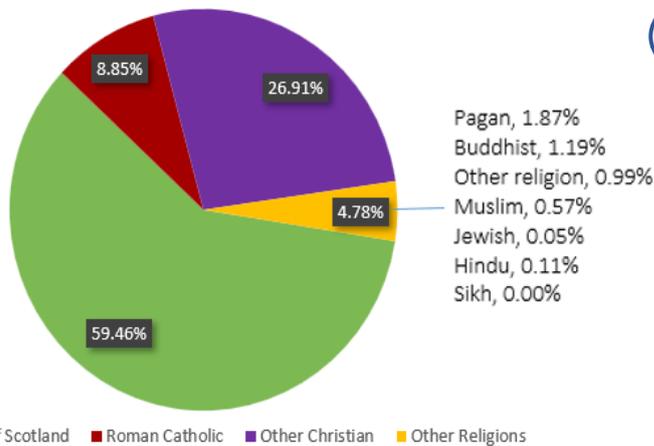
In 2022, 31.9% of those who responded to the Census stated they were religious, with 62.8% of respondents stating they were not religious. Shetland has the highest percentage of non-religious people, and the lowest percentage of religious people compared to other rural areas and Scotland overall.

Percentage of Shetland Population by Religion



■ Religion ■ No religion ■ Religion not stated

Percentage of People Practicing each Religion, by Religious Group, against Total Number of Religious People



■ Church of Scotland ■ Roman Catholic ■ Other Christian ■ Other Religions

Pagan, 1.87%
Buddhist, 1.19%
Other religion, 0.99%
Muslim, 0.57%
Jewish, 0.05%
Hindu, 0.11%
Sikh, 0.00%

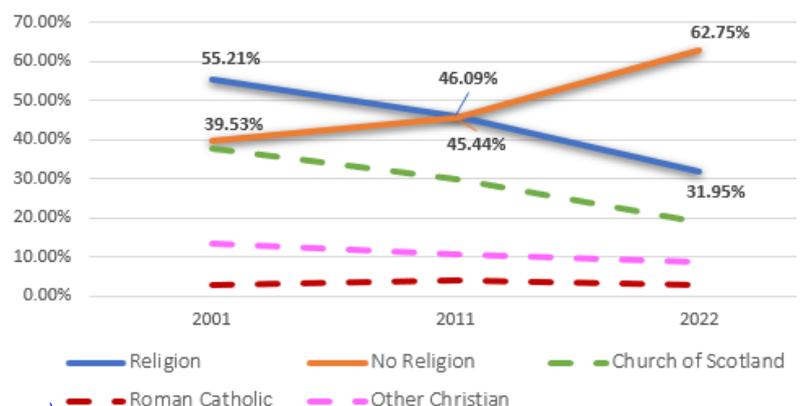
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Among Shetland's religious population, 59.46% responded they follow the Church of Scotland, 8.85% Roman Catholicism, 26.91% other Christian denominations, and 4.78% other religions. This pattern is similar in Orkney, the Western Isles, and the Highlands, though Scotland as a whole has a higher percentage of Roman Catholics (31%) and other religions (9%), but fewer other Christians (12%).

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Since 2001, the percentage of people who stated in the Census they were religious has decreased in Shetland. Religion as a whole has declined across Scotland, with the number of people identifying as non-religious increasing by over 20% from 2001 to 2022.

Percentage Practicing a Religion or no Religion in Shetland (by Census year)



¹ Religion or belief discrimination | EHRC (equalityhumanrights.com)

Data Sources: Scottish Census (2022, 2011 & 2001); Scottish Survey Core Questions.

Summary of Other Publications

Desk-top research of discrimination faced by individuals who have a religion or belief highlights several key findings:

Religion in the Workplace

Research from Religion at Work 2023 Survey reveals that 47% of 6,315 workers in the UK and US, feel uncomfortable discussing their religious festivals at work, 64% of respondents did not feel comfortable wearing religious dress or symbols at work, and 38% felt their organisation could do more to make employees feel comfortable wearing religious dress.

Lack of Understanding in Religious Education (R.E)

There are frequent instances where those of particular religions face discrimination due to a lack of understanding of their religious practices. Evidence shows that this is exacerbated by reduced provision of R.E in schools, which limits school leavers' abilities to have respect for and tolerance of people with different religious beliefs in their own communities. This was highlighted during a parliamentary debate on Religious Education in Modern Britain.

Religious Hate Crimes

Research from Stop Hate UK reveals in 2021/22, there were 8,730 religious or other faith Hate Crimes in the UK, an increase of 37% from the previous year. Religious or faith-based Hate Crimes have increased for the last 5 years and are one of the most common Hate Crimes according to Stop Hate UK.

Potential for Healthcare Discrimination

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities published Guidance in 2017 that recognises the differences in cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs alongside other factors can limit the success of healthcare provision. Other factors include language barriers, insecure immigration status and housing, discrimination, lack of trust between patients and healthcare professionals, and the time and cost of attending appointments.

Summary of Feedback from Local Focus Groups

People with different faiths highlight that they generally feel that Shetland is a peaceful and friendly place, and that the community is non-judgemental, with a healthy scepticism, respect and cultural understanding. However, pockets of prejudice remain.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- Provision of religious premises to worship and meet for prayer, particularly for smaller religious groups;
- More accessible women-only sessions and healthcare provision, including gender-specific leisure activities;
- More opportunities for alcohol-free events to reduce social pressures and misuse of alcohol in Shetland; and
- More conversations about faith, where honesty and openness are key, including in schools and communities, to improve understanding about religious groups and cultural differences.

