



PATH OF YAHRA INTERNATIONAL SPIRITUAL SOCIETY

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**The Path of YahRa (POYRA) Delegation
to the 2026 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference**

**Seeking Effective Protection:
Media Amplification, Employment Consequences, and the Status of an
Unregistered Belief Community in Czechia**

**Follow-up to POYRA's 2025 WHDC contribution
Warsaw Human Dimension Conference 2026, 5–15 October 2026
Plenary Session 3: Fundamental Freedoms I**

Request to the Czech delegation

POYRA respectfully asks the Czech delegation to identify the institution, or inter-institutional mechanism, currently competent to address cross-cutting cases involving freedom of religion or belief, alleged discrimination, professional consequences and media-related stigmatization, and with which representatives of affected communities can establish sustained dialogue.

Requests to ODIHR

In light of developments following POYRA's 2025 submission, we respectfully ask ODIHR to:

- 1. Examine whether the protection available to the POYRA members whose cases are described below is consistent with OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief and effective protection against discrimination,** particularly for members of unregistered or non-traditional belief communities.
- 2. Provide Czech authorities with guidance on the relationship between the unregistered status of a religious or belief community and protection against discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.** POYRA understands OSCE/ODIHR standards to mean that such protection should not depend on whether a religious or belief community is formally registered. We therefore ask whether unsuccessful registration may legitimately be treated as an indication that a community — or individuals affiliated with it — falls outside such protection.

3. **Facilitate structured dialogue** between Czech authorities, relevant independent institutions, and representatives of affected minority religious or belief communities. Despite repeated approaches before and after the 2025 Warsaw conference, no sustained follow-up mechanism has been established.
4. **Examine the consistency and accessibility of equality protection** in employment-related cases involving minority religious or belief communities, including the different treatment of the complaints submitted by teachers Martina Bártová and Pavel Hlavinka.
5. **In co-operation with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, encourage discussion on responsible reporting about minority religious and belief communities**, including meaningful opportunities for affected persons to respond to serious allegations, while fully respecting freedom of expression and editorial independence.

The final request is not a call to restrict critical or investigative journalism. POYRA recognizes the essential role of media freedom. The narrower concern is whether members of a stigmatized belief community can meaningfully respond when allegations about their religious affiliation are repeatedly amplified, reproduced through an uncritical anti-cult framing, presented in ways that foster hostility and social exclusion, and subsequently contribute to serious professional consequences.

Introduction

At the 2025 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference (WHDC), POYRA provided the Czech delegation and ODIHR with a briefing documenting social and professional exclusion reported by members of the community following an intensive media campaign in Czechia. The briefing requested structured dialogue, independent legal review, media-related guidance, and professional safeguards against faith-based discrimination.

The 2025 submission also presented an internal survey of 120 highly active POYRA members willing to share their experience. Among respondents, 85% reported fear of publicly identifying with their faith and 83% reported concealing their beliefs at work. These figures describe the experience of core active POYRA members and are not population-representative.

This follow-up does not repeat that material. It examines what happened when affected individuals and POYRA attempted to use existing media, regulatory, anti-discrimination and governmental mechanisms.

The central issue is whether a person associated with an unpopular or unregistered religious or belief community can obtain **predictable and effective protection against discrimination**, particularly when religious identification becomes associated with professional unfitness without evidence of individual professional misconduct.

I. Media amplification and absence of meaningful countervoice

During April and May 2025, CNN Prima NEWS broadcast a series of reports presented by the broadcaster as ‘exclusive’ reports about the community associated with Guru Jára / Path of YahRa (POYRA). **A significant part of the later reporting focused on the discovery that some members worked in education, with headlines and coverage presenting this as a matter of potential danger or public concern.** Several teachers and university lecturers associated with the community were identified or discussed in this context, although Martina Bártová and Pavel Hlavinka were among those most prominently exposed and subsequently became the two clearest documented cases of serious employment consequences. One CNN Prima NEWS report, for example, prominently emphasized that followers were active “in various positions — for example in education” and singled out a university lecturer.

The original reporting was subsequently amplified across the Czech media landscape. According to POYRA’s media monitoring, **the issue ultimately generated more than 100 television, online, print and radio items, including coverage distributed through the Czech News Agency.** The original allegations and framing were repeatedly reproduced, summarized and, in some cases, further adapted or reframed by other outlets. The investigative reporter was also repeatedly invited to discuss her findings on major media platforms. CNN Prima NEWS itself published additional interviews concerning the investigation, while Blesk and other outlets devoted further interviews and articles to the reporter’s experience and conclusions¹.

POYRA found that later coverage largely accepted, rather than critically re-examined, the anti-cult framing of the original investigation, with little attention to the ethical implications of the reporting itself. Instead, much of the later coverage reproduced or further amplified its central assumptions, often relying on the same or similar expert interpretations presented in the original reports. Some of those interpretations were associated with approaches commonly described in the literature as anti-cult or anti-sect. Scholarship on such movements has documented how minority religious communities may be framed through recurring narratives of manipulation, danger, victimization and social threat, which can in turn influence media and institutional responses². POYRA considers the Czech coverage relevant to this broader

¹ For further details, see *Bitter Winter*, “Sensational Revelations about Guru Jára: A TV ‘Investigation’ Leads to an Explosion of Hostile Media Reports and Calls for Renewed Judicial Action against His Movement,” 10 May 2025, <https://bitterwinter.org/czech-republic-sensational-revelations-about-guru-jara/>.

² See Régis Dericquebourg, “FECRIS: European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism,” in *Freedom of Religion or Belief: Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIS, Religion – Staat – Gesellschaft* 13, no. 2 (2012), pp. 183–196. See also the other country studies in the same volume concerning anti-sect movements and state neutrality. See also Stuart A. Wright and Susan J. Palmer, *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious*

pattern, while recognizing that this comparison does not by itself determine the accuracy or legitimacy of any individual report.

At the same time, POYRA attempted to present its own perspective. On 24 May 2025, it circulated a detailed communication to Czech television, radio and news organizations containing factual corrections, descriptions of professional consequences already experienced by exposed members, supporting materials, and an offer of further communication. The communication explicitly invited journalists to obtain and use additional information.

According to POYRA's outreach records, approximately 21 media organizations were contacted, with several approached through two or more separate contacts or communication channels. POYRA is not aware of any Czech national media outlet that subsequently provided comparable space for the community to explain its position or respond in depth.

The problem was therefore not simply negative coverage or criticism. It was the cumulative effect of extensive media amplification, anti-cult framing in which the presence of POYRA members in education was portrayed as potentially dangerous, and the absence of a meaningful countervoice from the affected community.

POYRA does not claim that every media organization had a legal obligation to publish its position. The pattern nevertheless raises a broader question about meaningful participation in public debate when serious allegations concerning a small and stigmatized religious minority are widely reproduced while attempts by the affected community to provide corrections receive little or no engagement³.

POYRA also submitted a formal complaint to the Czech Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV) on 28 May 2025. The Council considered it on 17 June, found no grounds to initiate offence proceedings, and referred to the statutory mechanism of a right of reply.

The broader outreach described above was not equivalent to a formal statutory request for reply. Taken together, however, the experiences raise a practical question: **what meaningful corrective mechanism exists once a stigmatizing media narrative has spread across numerous outlets and the affected minority cannot obtain comparable access to the public discussion?**

Communities (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), particularly their discussion of anti-cult framing and the construction of minority religious groups as social threats.

³ For a broader discussion of this pattern, see *FOREF Europe*, "Media Bias and Religious Liberty – When Headlines Hurt," 3 October 2025, <https://foref-europe.org/blog/2025/10/03/media-religious-liberty-when-headlines-hurt/>.

II. Two teachers, closely related events, different access to equality protection

Several POYRA members exposed in the 2025 reporting reported social ostracism, professional difficulties or loss of clients. The two clearest documented employment cases concern educators Martina Bártoová and Pavel Hlavinka. The wider professional impact is also reflected in POYRA's 2025 internal survey, in which 38% of respondents reported loss of clients or professional opportunities following hostile media coverage.

Martina Bártoová

Martina Bártoová taught at the Secondary Technical School and Higher Vocational School in Liberec under a fixed-term contract ending on 31 August 2025. According to the complaint submitted by her lawyer, the school had been satisfied with her professional performance; her yoga and spiritual activities were private and were not incorporated into her teaching.

After a journalist approached the school about Bártoová's association with Guru Jára, the director removed her from teaching and announced that her contract would not be renewed. Importantly, this was not only Bártoová's allegation: the director publicly confirmed to the media that he had removed her from teaching and would not renew her contract, stating that her private life could endanger the moral education of students.

At the same time, the school subsequently stated that her private activities had **not affected the quality, content or course of teaching**, that the educational process had not been disrupted, and that the safe and positive climate of the school had not been endangered⁴.

Bártoová's lawyer alleged that her association with the spiritual community was the decisive reason for the employment action and asked the Ombudsman to examine the matter as discrimination connected with personal belief.

On 8 July 2025, however, the Ombudsman did not examine the alleged discrimination on its merits. The complaint was set aside because it was characterized as a private-law dispute for which a general court was competent.

This is notable because the Czech Ombudsman is also the national equality body and publicly states that, in discrimination matters, its competence includes complaints concerning employers, recruitment, working conditions and termination of employment.

⁴ For further details on the Martina Bártoová case, see *Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)*, "A Teacher Fired for Practising Yoga in Her Private Life, a Guillotine Blow by the Media: When Unethical Journalists and Media Do Intend to Harm...", 8 December 2025, <https://hrwf.eu/czechia-a-teacher-fired-for-practising-yoga-in-her-private-life-a-guillotine-blow-by-the-media/>.

The concern is therefore not merely one of procedural predictability. Although the complaint explicitly alleged religion- or belief-based discrimination in employment, the Ombudsman's response did not address that discrimination allegation in its reasoning. Instead, it characterized the matter as a private-law dispute, referred to the competence of the general courts, and closed the case for lack of statutory jurisdiction. The response therefore leaves unclear why the Ombudsman's mandate as the national equality body was not applied to assess the expressly alleged religion- or belief-based discrimination.

Pavel Hlavinka

The second case was treated differently.

On 19 May 2025, a CNN Prima NEWS journalist contacted Associate Professor Pavel Hlavinka and the Faculty of Law of Palacký University in Olomouc concerning his association with the spiritual teaching of Guru Jára. The next day, the Dean informed him that the courses he taught would be discontinued and recommended termination of employment by agreement on grounds of redundancy. Hlavinka accepted the agreement several days later⁵.

In March 2026, the Ombudsman examined the case under anti-discrimination law. He described the one-day temporal connection between the Dean learning of Hlavinka's religious affiliation and announcing his redundancy as **suspicious** and acknowledged that the events could have been connected. The Faculty stated that cancellation of the courses formed part of longer-term curricular changes, and the Ombudsman noted that the courses were subsequently no longer taught. On the available evidence, he therefore did not find the causal connection proven. At the same time, the available material did not establish when the decision to cancel the courses had actually been made.

Significantly, the Ombudsman also stated that in court the close temporal connection would **probably be sufficient to shift the burden of proof to the University**, which would then have to show that cancellation of the courses had already been planned.

At the same time, **the Ombudsman questioned a more fundamental issue: whether Hlavinka's POYRA-related belief itself met the criteria for "religion", "belief" or "worldview" protected by Czech anti-discrimination law**. In his accompanying letter, he ultimately told Hlavinka that he did not expect an anti-discrimination action to succeed and therefore could not recommend bringing one.

The two cases therefore raise a broader question about **consistency and predictability of access to equality protection**. Two teachers associated with the same minority belief community reported closely related employment consequences following the same

⁵ For further details on the Pavel Hlavinka case, see *Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)*, "Media Are Not Courts: The Case of the Dismissal of Prof. Hlavinka under Media Pressure," 30 June 2025, <https://hrwf.eu/czechia-media-are-not-courts-the-case-of-the-dismissal-of-prof-pavel-hlavinka-under-media-pressure/>.

media campaign. One complaint was set aside without substantive anti-discrimination assessment; the other was examined in detail, but the protected status of the belief itself became uncertain and judicial action was discouraged.

According to the affected individuals, as of September 2026 neither Bártová nor Hlavinka has succeeded in returning to employment in their respective professional fields despite attempts to obtain new positions. **This outcome is particularly striking in light of a subsequent Spotlight interview published by Aktuálně.cz on 17 June 2025, in which the CNN Prima NEWS investigative reporter expressed approval of the employment consequences for Bártová in connection with her spiritual affiliation and indicated that she would not want people holding such beliefs to work in education.** The point is not to attribute the later employment outcomes solely to the reporter's remarks, but to illustrate the exclusionary framing surrounding the coverage and the continuing effects of that framing. POYRA considers this ongoing professional impact relevant to understanding the longer-term consequences of stigma associated with religious affiliation.

III. An unresolved threshold question: is the belief protected at all?

The Hlavinka assessment raises an issue of particular relevance to ODIHR. The Ombudsman acknowledged that anti-discrimination protection is not limited to historically established churches and may include newer or smaller religious communities, yet concluded that he could not determine whether the Path of YahRa met the criteria for “religion”, “belief” or “worldview”.

He then referred to the unsuccessful registration of its predecessor community, the Path of Guru Jara, as **an indication that these criteria might not be fulfilled**, adding that if they were not, its followers would not receive protection under the Anti-Discrimination Act on this ground.

This raises a fundamental question:

Can failure to obtain state registration legitimately function as an indication that an individual's beliefs may not qualify for protection against discrimination on grounds of religion or belief?

The ODIHR–Venice Commission *Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities* emphasize that access to legal personality should be voluntary and that the exercise of freedom of religion or belief may not be made conditional on state permission. POYRA therefore asks ODIHR to clarify the distinction between **whether a community has obtained legal registration** and **whether an individual's sincerely held religion or belief is protected against discrimination**.

European human-rights jurisprudence also provides relevant guidance. The ECtHR has interpreted freedom of religion or belief broadly and emphasized that the State has no discretion to determine whether particular religious beliefs are legitimate. At the same time, protected convictions must attain a sufficient level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance. The relevant inquiry therefore concerns the character of the belief itself, rather than state recognition or official approval of its teachings.

A useful comparative example is *Leela Förderkreis e.V. and Others v. Germany*, concerning associations belonging to the Osho movement. Despite public controversy and official “sect” and “psycho-sect” discourse, the ECtHR considered the applicants within the framework of freedom of religion or belief and reiterated the State’s duty of neutrality and impartiality. The case does not determine POYRA’s legal status, but illustrates that a controversial or non-traditional movement is not thereby placed outside the protection framework.

Against this legal background, the question is not whether the Ombudsman was required simply to accept POYRA’s own characterization of itself as religious. Rather, it is why, having identified a question requiring specialist assessment, relevant expertise was not obtained before unsuccessful state registration was relied upon as an indication that the criteria for protection might not be met.

The Ombudsman’s 2026 assessment itself acknowledged that religious-studies expertise would be required, yet does not indicate that such expertise was sought. This is notable because Czech scholars have discussed the Path of Guru Jara and its successor community for decades within the study of religion and new religious movements. Among them is Zdeněk Vojtíšek, a prominent Czech specialist in new religious movements who has served both as a judicial expert and as an expert appointed by the Ministry of Culture in proceedings concerning religious communities.

Academic or expert characterization would not itself determine whether the legal threshold is met. **The relevant point is not whether POYRA agrees with particular expert interpretations⁶, but that the religious character of the community has long been a subject of professional religious-studies analysis rather than a newly asserted claim.**

⁶ For further details on POYRA’s longstanding criticism of Zdeněk Vojtíšek’s alleged conflict of interest, see “Religious Persecution of Religious Minorities by Cooperation of State Bodies (Police, Court, Ministries) with the Anticult Movement in the Czech Republic,” side event contribution presented at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 26 September 2017, pp. 3–7. <https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/345726?download=true>.

IV. The same threshold problem appeared ten years earlier

The current issue is not entirely new.

In 2015, another member of the same belief community, who also served on the preparatory committee seeking its registration and was therefore publicly identifiable as affiliated with the community, submitted an employment-discrimination complaint to the Czech Ombudsman. He alleged that his professional collaboration in the education sector had been terminated after the organization learned of his affiliation with the Path of Guru Jara. He also documented an earlier case at a university where he was removed from teaching after his religious affiliation became known, with the connection to that affiliation explicitly stated by the head of the department.

The Ombudsman's office initially treated the matter as a discrimination complaint and requested information about the contractual relationship, termination and available evidence. It explicitly explained that the Ombudsman's role included assessing whether discrimination might have occurred and advising the complainant about available remedies.

In its final assessment of April 2016, however, it identified a threshold question and left unresolved whether the Path of Guru Jara could be considered a religion, belief or worldview under Czech anti-discrimination law. The Ombudsman stated that the issue was legally unsettled and that, in court, the complainant would first have to establish that the belief fell within one of these protected categories.

Importantly, the 2016 assessment did not treat state registration as a prerequisite for protection. The unresolved question concerned the character of the belief itself. Ten years later, essentially the same threshold question reappeared in the Hlavinka case, now with an additional element: unsuccessful state registration was identified as an indication that the community's teaching might not meet the criteria.

This continuity raises a question extending beyond POYRA:

Does this indicate a structural protection gap for members of unregistered or non-traditional belief communities, where access to anti-discrimination protection remains uncertain precisely because the state has not formally recognized the community?

Why has essentially the same threshold uncertainty remained unresolved for a decade, despite extensive publicly available information about the community, relevant ECtHR jurisprudence concerning religion or belief, and the availability of specialist expertise capable of informing that assessment?

V. Fragmented remedies and the absence of sustained institutional dialogue

Since May 2025, POYRA and affected individuals have approached numerous Czech institutions.

RRTV examined the broadcasting complaint, found no grounds to initiate proceedings and referred to the right of reply. The Ministry of Culture stated that it lacked competence to assess the truthfulness or objectivity of broadcast information, referred POYRA to criminal and civil-law remedies, and concluded that no additional protective framework was necessary because existing constitutional and international guarantees already applied. **Other institutions approached by POYRA, including the Ministry of Education — despite the direct relevance of the cases to the education sector — did not provide a substantive response.** The Ombudsman subsequently produced the differing responses described above in the Bártoová and Hlavinka cases.

POYRA also repeatedly sought dialogue with human-rights authorities, but many of these approaches went unanswered. Constructive individual contacts occurred in 2025 with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy and with the Commissioner for Interfaith Dialogue. However, repeated requests for more systematic meetings and follow-up before and after the 2025 Warsaw conference did not develop into a sustained mechanism for dialogue.

The experience of POYRA members therefore suggests not that Czech institutions provide no remedies at all, but that **the available remedies are fragmented and, in the cases described, have not resulted in effective or coordinated protection or redress**⁷. One institution addresses broadcasting law; another refers affected persons to civil or criminal remedies; the national equality body examined one employment-discrimination complaint on its merits while declining to examine the discrimination allegation in another; and the threshold question of whether the belief itself qualifies for anti-discrimination protection remains unresolved, **despite relevant OSCE/ODIHR guidance, ECtHR jurisprudence concerning religion or belief, and the availability of specialist expertise capable of informing that assessment.**

POYRA's attempts to establish broader institutional dialogue have similarly produced uneven results. While a small number of individual contacts were constructive, many other approaches received no substantive response, including repeated attempts to engage the Government Commissioner for Human Rights. Outreach to publicly

⁷ The institutional framework also changed in 2026, when several human-rights and related administrative portfolios previously situated at the Office of the Government were transferred to three ministries. The restructuring was contested by members of government advisory bodies and civil-society representatives; on 30 June 2026, 53 experts from government human-rights councils, committees and working groups resigned in protest, arguing, among other concerns, that the changes would weaken cross-ministerial coordination of human-rights protection.

supported initiatives addressing hate speech and prejudice, and to public-service media specializing in religion and spirituality, likewise did not lead to substantive engagement.

From POYRA's experience to date, no institution has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the cumulative impact on affected individuals or assumed a coordinating role across the separate dimensions of the problem.

No domestic avenue pursued so far has therefore examined the full sequence:

religious identification → anti-cult framing → media exposure and amplification → employment consequences → allegation of religious discrimination → access to an effective remedy.

VI. Why ODIHR engagement is requested

POYRA does not ask ODIHR to determine every factual dispute between the community, journalists and employers, or to endorse its religious claims. Rather, we ask ODIHR to examine the systemic questions these cases reveal.

Can membership in an unpopular or unregistered belief community become a de facto professional disadvantage in education and other public-facing professions without evidence of individual professional misconduct?

When the protected status of a belief is uncertain, what steps should a national equality body take to obtain relevant specialist evidence before unsuccessful registration is treated as an indication that anti-discrimination protection may not apply?

Why did two closely related employment complaints receive substantially different treatment, and what effective remedy remains when circumstances potentially sufficient to shift the burden of proof are identified but judicial action is discouraged?

How can media freedom be preserved while ensuring that a stigmatized minority has a meaningful opportunity to respond when serious allegations concerning its members are repeatedly amplified?

These questions extend beyond POYRA. They concern the practical accessibility of freedom of religion or belief and equality protection for small, unpopular and non-traditional communities throughout the OSCE region.

Conclusion

The central issue is whether members of a minority belief community are assessed according to their **individual professional conduct rather than assumptions attached to their religious affiliation**, and whether effective protection is available when that boundary is crossed.

The experience documented since May 2025 suggests a gap between formal protections and access to a substantive, coordinated response — particularly where uncertainty about the protected status of a belief becomes linked, even indirectly, to unsuccessful efforts to obtain state registration.

POYRA therefore asks ODIHR to examine whether these circumstances reveal a broader protection gap for unregistered or non-traditional belief communities, to clarify the relationship between registration and protection from discrimination, and to support structured dialogue with Czech authorities and relevant independent institutions.

Freedom of religion or belief — and effective protection against discrimination on that ground — should not depend in practice on whether an individual’s community has obtained formal state recognition or registration.