

53714/Θ1/11-05-2020 Joint Circular “The Universal Implementation of the Electronic Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities and Religious Ministers under Law 4301/2014 in the Registries of All Municipalities Nationwide”

We hereby inform you that, pursuant to the provisions of Law 4301/2014 (A' 223) “Organization of the Legal Form of Religious Communities and their organizations in Greece and other provisions under the competence of the General Secretariat for Religious Affairs,” as amended and currently in force, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs maintains an electronic register of religious and ecclesiastical legal entities, in which all legal entities referred to in the aforementioned law are recorded. Additionally, an electronic register of religious ministers is maintained, which includes all individuals performing religious rites with civil effects, whether they belong to a religious community organized under any legal form or belong to a community without legal personality. The register of religious ministers constitutes an official source of information for the locally competent civil registries in relation to the acts they record in their books, enabling direct verification of the status of a religious minister for the purposes of drafting the relevant act pursuant to Article 1367 of the Civil Code. By ensuring valid and immediate information regarding the status of a person as a legitimate religious minister, the register contributes both to the protection of the public interest against alleged “services” performed by unauthorized ministers, and to safeguarding citizens from serious consequences arising from invalid or voidable acts.

The electronic register, until today, includes the religious ministers of:

- automatically recognized ecclesiastical and religious legal entities included in article 13 of Law 4301/2014 (A' 223)
- religious communities that have been registered in the book of religious legal entities and have acquired legal personality by virtue of article 3 of Law 4301/2014 (A' 223), through voluntary jurisdiction at the competent Single-Member Court of First Instance and
- individual prayer houses (places of worship).

Until the completion of the procedures provided for in article 47 of Law 4559/2018 (A' 142), the present circular does not apply to, and is not applicable for: (a) religious ministers, under article 3 of the Constitution, of the Orthodox Church of Greece, or of other Orthodox Churches of Christ, whether within or outside Greece, including Patriarchates, Metropolises, or Monasteries, which are doctrinally united with the Great Church of Christ in Constantinople, and which, like it, strictly observe the holy apostolic and synodal canons and the sacred traditions, (b) religious ministers and the organizational structures of Jewish communities, for whom the provisions concerning Jewish Communities apply and (c) religious ministers and the organizational structures of Muslim communities within the territorial jurisdictions of the Muftiates.

The purpose of the present circular is the implementation of article 14 of Law 4301/2014 (A' 223) and the establishment of an electronic register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities & Religious Ministers in the Civil Registries of all Municipalities nationwide, in order to enable verification of the status of religious ministers for individuals who perform religious rites and execute the related acts under article 1367 of the Civil Code.

To achieve the aforementioned objective, a decisive role will play the effective collaboration of the Directorate of Religious Administration, the Information Systems Development Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Directorate of Civil and Municipal Status of the Ministry of Interior, through the Civil Registry Offices.

In accordance with the above, the universal implementation of the electronic register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities & Religious Ministers in the Civil Registries of all Municipalities nationwide is hereby launched.

It is noted that, under Joint Circular No. 55642/01/09-04-2019 of the Ministries of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and of Interior, the electronic register was previously piloted for a period of eight months in a total of twenty-one (21) Civil Registries across seven (7) municipalities of the country. During this period, improvements were made and issues were resolved, rendering this digital application now more effective and fully operational.

The information system of the Electronic Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities & Religious Ministers provides the competent Civil Registries with direct access to the system through authentication, in order to enable the immediate verification of the details of religious ministers who perform religious rites with civil effects, whether they belong to a religious community organized under any legal form or to a community without legal personality.

The use of the register and the access to the data it contains shall be carried out distinctly for both the authorized officials of the Directorate of Religious Administration of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, and the authorized officials of the Civil Registries, in accordance with their respective duties and responsibilities.

Specifically, the authorized officials of the Directorate of Religious Administration of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs have access to the register through the website <https://myreligionadmin.it.minedu.gov.gr> (accessible only within the Ministry) and possess full rights to process the register data and access all information recorded therein.

The authorized officials of the Civil Registries will have access to the register through the website <https://myreligionregistry.it.minedu.gov.gr> with the capability to search for Religious Ministers who are registered in the Register (and therefore authorized to perform religious rites with civil effects) for a specific date of the rite. Furthermore, the search results will indicate the religious community as well as the seat of the place of worship (worship site) where the religious minister serves. It is clarified that religious rites with civil effects may lawfully be conducted by a legitimate religious minister in a location other than the place of worship to which they are assigned.

- In the event that the information provided yields a result in the Register, the user is obliged to verify the correspondence between the Register result and the details of the religious minister appearing in the submitted act of marriage, as well as the date and time of the rite, the verification of which ensures the validity of the submitted act of religious ceremony. Only if the details correspond may the relevant civil registry act be issued.

- In the event that the search includes details of a religious minister who is not registered in the system, the rite cannot be recorded in the information system, nor can the corresponding civil registry act be issued.

Whenever the religious minister being searched for does not appear, the Civil Registry user may submit an inquiry to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs through the dedicated form provided within the application.

For the connection of authorized officials of the aforementioned Civil Registries to the Electronic Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities & Religious Ministers, the following steps shall be followed:

- Within ten (10) days from the notification of this circular, an electronic message will be sent by the competent service of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to all Civil Registries (excluding those that participated in the pilot and already have a user account in the application), providing instructions for the creation of a password for access to the information system of the Register of Religious and Ecclesiastical Legal Entities & Religious Ministers.
- Specifically, the electronic message will indicate the username corresponding to the Civil Registry and will request that the authorized official of the Civil Registry create or set a password through the application form, using a unique link included in the message received by each Civil Registry.

Within the application, a user manual will be available, as well as the capability to submit electronic inquiries and receive responses through a dedicated form within the application.

Responses and clarifications will be provided by the Administrative Affairs and Register Department of the Directorate of Religious Administration, except in cases where inquiries concern technical issues related to the operation of the database, in which case responses will be provided by the Application Support Department of the Information Systems Development Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

It is emphasized that religious ministers and their data shall not be deleted from the Register, even if they lose their official status, as, under the applicable provisions (article 49 of Law 4144/2013), a marriage may be registered at the Civil Registry of the location where the event occurred after the expiration of the forty (40) day period from the date of its performance, with the imposition of the corresponding fine by decision of the Secretary General of the Decentralized Administration.