

PORTUGAL 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The evangelical Christian Mana Church stated a Setubal court's imposition of a fine against the church and its founder violated its freedom of expression. An EU report issued in August stated non-Catholic religious groups encountered problems in ministering to persons in hospitals and prisons, and state schools had not adjusted their menus to accommodate religious minorities, especially Muslims. The government High Commission for Migration (ACM) sponsored activities to promote religious tolerance and acceptance, published religious texts, and organized education for teachers and workers interacting with persons of diverse religious backgrounds. The government Commission for Religious Freedom (CLR) established an annual prize for research on religious freedom in the country. The government granted citizenship during the year to 1,406 Sephardic descendants of Jews expelled during the Inquisition and to a total of 1,837 Sephardic descendants since the program's inception in 2015. The government rejected one Sephardic citizenship application, and 6,962 other applications remained pending at year's end. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa advocated religious tolerance and harmony at several public events.

With support from the EU, the Catholic Church launched the first private Catholic cable television channel in April, which broadcast domestically and to other Lusophone countries. There were two complaints of religious discrimination to a government-appointed religious advisory body in 2016, the most recent year for which data were available. The advisory body was still investigating the two complaints at year's end.

U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with CLR and ACM officials and discussed the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belonged to religious minority groups. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with leaders of the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.8 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the 2011 census, more than 80 percent of the population above the age of 15 is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups, each constituting less than 5 percent of the population, include Orthodox Christians, various Protestant and other Christian denominations, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. According to the census, the Protestant population includes 250,000 members of evangelical churches, and there are approximately 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine, most of whom are Eastern Orthodox. More than 600,000 people said they were not members of any religious group.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship, which may not be violated even if the government declares a state of emergency. It states no one shall be privileged, prejudiced, persecuted, or deprived of rights or exempted from civic obligations or duties because of religious beliefs or practices. The constitution states individuals may not be questioned by authorities about religious convictions or observance, with the exception of gathering statistical information that does not identify individuals, and in such cases individuals may not be prejudiced by refusal to reply. Churches and religious communities are independent from the state and have the freedom to determine their own organization and perform their own activities and worship. The constitution affords each religious community the freedom to teach its religion and use its own media to disseminate public information about its activities. It bars political parties from using names directly associated with, or symbols that may be confused with those of, religious groups. The constitution and the law recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service, including on religious grounds; they require conscientious objectors to perform equivalent alternative civilian service.

Religious groups may be organized in a variety of forms that have national, regional, or local character. A denomination may choose to organize as one national church or religious community or as several regional or local churches or religious communities. An international church or religious community may set up a representative organization of its adherents separate from the branch of the church or religious community existing in the country. A registered church or religious community may create subsidiary or affiliated organizations, such as associations, foundations, or federations.

All religious groups with an organized presence in the country may apply for registration with the registrar of religious corporate bodies in the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The requirements include providing the organization's official name, which must be distinguishable from all other religious corporate bodies in the country; the organizing documents of the church or religious community associated with the group applying for registration; the address of the organization's registered main office in the country; a statement of the group's religious purposes; documentation of the organization's assets; information on the organization's formation, composition, rules, and activities; provisions for dissolution of the organization; and the appointment method and powers of the organization's representatives. Subsidiary or affiliated organizations included in the parent group's application are also registered; if not, they must register separately. The MOJ may reject a registration application if it fails to meet legal requirements, includes false documentation, or violates constitutional rights of religious freedom. In the case where an application is rejected by the MOJ, religious groups may appeal to the CLR within 30 days of receiving the MOJ's decision.

The CLR is an independent, consultative body to parliament and the government, established by law. Its members include representatives of various religious groups in the country, such as the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, Evangelical Alliance, Israelite Community of Lisbon, Islamic Community of Lisbon, Hindu Community of Lisbon, and Aga Khan Foundation, as well as laypersons appointed by the MOJ. The Council of Ministers appoints its president. The CLR reviews and takes a position on all matters relating to the application of the law on religious freedom, including proposed amendments. It alerts the competent authorities, including the president, parliament, and others in the government, to cases involving religious freedom and discrimination, such as restrictions or prohibitions on the right to assembly and the holding of religious services; the destruction or desecration of religious property; assaults against members and clergy of religious groups; incitement of religious discord; hate speech; and violations of the rights of foreign missionaries. The CLR may file formal complaints at the national level with the ombudsman, an official position created by the constitution and supplemental legislation to defend the rights and freedoms of individual citizens, and at the international level with the European Court of Human Rights. The ombudsman has no legal enforcement power, but he or she is obligated to address complaints and provides an alternative remedy for dispute resolution.

Religious groups may register as religious corporations and receive tax-exempt status. They also receive the right to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; provide religious teaching in public schools; participate in broadcasting time on public television and radio; and national recognition of religious holidays. The government certifies religious ministers, who receive all the benefits of the social security system. Chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are state-funded positions open to all registered religious groups. A taxpayer may allocate 5 percent of his or her tax payment to any registered religious group.

Religious groups may also register as unincorporated associations or private corporations, and in that form they may receive the same benefits granted to religious corporations. The process for registering as unincorporated associations or private corporations involves the same procedures as for religious corporations. There are no practical differences between associations and private corporations; the different categories distinguish how the groups are internally administered. Unregistered religious groups are not subject to penalties and may practice their religion but do not receive the benefits associated with registration.

By law, religious groups registered in the country for at least 30 years or internationally recognized for 60 years may obtain a higher registration status of “religion settled in the country.” To show they are established, religions must demonstrate an “organized social presence” for the required length of time. These groups receive government subsidies; may conclude “mutual interest” agreements with the state on issues such as education, culture, or other forms of cooperation; and may celebrate religious marriages that have effect in the state legal system. The government has mutual interest agreements with Jewish and Islamic religious bodies and a concordat with the Holy See that serves the same function for the Catholic Church.

Public secondary schools offer an optional survey course on world religions taught by lay teachers. Optional religious instruction is available at government expense if at least 10 students attend the class. Religious groups are responsible for designing the curriculum of the religious classes and providing and training the teachers, who are lay. Private schools are required to offer the same curriculum as public schools but may provide instruction in any religion at their expense. All schools, public and private, are required to accommodate the religious practices of students, including rescheduling tests if necessary.

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals on the basis of religion and requires reasonable accommodation of employees’ religious

practices. According to the labor code, employees are allowed to take leave on their Sabbath and religious holidays, even if these are not nationally observed.

The law provides for the naturalization of Jewish descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In October the Mana Church, an evangelical Christian group, stated the Judicial Court of Setubal's decision to fine the church and its founder, Apostle Jorge Tadeu, violated Tadeu's freedom of expression. The court fined Tadeu after he spoke out against religious persecution, the closure of Christian churches, and local government corruption. According to the Mana Church, it appealed the Setubal court's decision to the Superior Council of the Judiciary, but the council declined to reopen the case.

The EU's nondiscrimination report on the country for 2016, issued in August, stated non-Catholic religious groups faced greater problems in ministering to persons in hospitals and prisons. According to the report, state schools had also not adapted their meals to meet the needs of students from minority religions, particularly Islam.

The ACM hosted events, activities, and debates, published books on religion to promote religious tolerance and acceptance, and provided education for teachers and workers interacting with individuals of diverse religious backgrounds. The ACM dedicated the month of January to the theme of "Migrations and Religions" in tribute to World Religion Day, celebrated annually on the third Sunday in January. The ACM highlighted harmony between religions through the development of closer relationships and better understanding among religious groups. The ACM made available a collection of documents, statistics, and other contents on this topic at its documentation center during the month. In May the ACM sponsored a study by Lusofona University on "Religious and Spiritual Worldviews – Educational Guide of Traditions in Portugal." Available on the ACM website, the study highlighted the different religions in the country and was intended for use as a teaching tool to foster knowledge of religious diversity.

The state-run television channel RTP continued to air a half-hour religious program five days a week, with segments written by different registered religious

groups and a weekly half-hour program highlighting activities of diverse religious groups. Participants in the programs included the Evangelical Alliance, Orthodox Church, Seventh-day Adventists, Islamic Community of Lisbon, Bahai Community, Old Catholic Church, Orthodox Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Hindu Community.

The government reported that, of 8,800 applications received since 2015, it had approved the naturalization of 1,837 Sephardic descendants of Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition, including 1,406 applications approved in 2017. The government had rejected one application, and 6,962 others remained pending. Beneficiaries of the program included individuals from Turkey (171), Israel (56), and Brazil (39). The Jewish community in Lisbon or Porto vetted each application, checking existing documentation of the applicants' ancestors and making recommendations to the government.

On January 7, President Rebelo de Sousa participated in an ecumenical Presbyterian ceremony at St. Andrew's Church of Scotland in Lisbon. The president joined the congregations of the Church of Scotland, Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and Romanian Orthodox Church to celebrate the Julian calendar Christmas. The president told reporters the visit was a "great honor in a spirit of unity, peace, and reunion." Ukrainian priest Vasyl Bundzyak said the president's attendance reflected his respect for the religious communities in the country, calling it a "grand gesture."

On March 20, during a visit to an exhibition on the Jewish presence at the national archives in Lisbon, President Rebelo de Sousa praised the importance of the Jewish communities throughout the country's history, calling the Inquisition and the persecution of Jews "a historical mistake."

On April 27, President Rebelo de Sousa visited the Lisbon Central Mosque, hosted by Head Imam Sheikh David Munir and President of the Lisbon Islamic Community Abdool Magid A. Karim Vakil. The president praised the Islamic community as an example of a religious group that was integrated in society and said religious tolerance was ingrained in the country and its people.

In May the CLR announced the establishment of an annual Religious Freedom Prize for research in the area of religious freedom. The CLR committed to publishing the winning research paper and awarding the winner 5,000 euros (\$6,000).

On May 26, the president's office released a Ramadan statement to Muslims, conveying "fraternal greetings, sharing the universal values of tolerance and peace, and respect for diversity."

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The first private Catholic television channel, Angelus TV, began broadcasting on April 27. The project represented a global investment of approximately 800,000 euros (\$960,000). It received start-up funds from the EU, and the remaining financial backing came from partners, including the Sanctuary of Fatima, which provided an office that served as headquarters, studios, and two spaces within the sanctuary for the live transmission of morning Mass and evening prayers. Angelus TV broadcast, free of charge, through cable operators in the country and other Lusophone countries. Programming also included Vatican events and information and cultural programs.

There were two complaints to the CLR during 2016, the most recent year for which data were available. The Portuguese Atheist Association filed a complaint about the naming of a public school in the town of Freamunde after Catholic Bishop Antonio Taipa on the 50th anniversary of his ordainment. The bishop was a native of Freamunde. In the second case, an individual objected to the selling of religious items in the workplace. No further details were available about the complaint. The CLR opened investigations into the two complaints but had not released the results as of the end of the year.

According to the EU's nondiscrimination report, "religious diversity remains a fairly neutral topic in Portuguese society."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with CLR and ACM officials and discussed the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belonged to religious minority groups.

The embassy sponsored the visit of a university professor to the United States from June 24 to August 5 to participate in a program on religious pluralism at Temple University.

The Ambassador and embassy representatives met with leaders of religious groups, including the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities to discuss issues of religious tolerance and encourage interfaith collaboration. The Ambassador continued his contact with Head Imam Sheikh David Munir and Arif Z. Lalani, Head of the Department for Diplomatic Affairs of the Ismaili Imam, to discuss ways in which the Muslim community and the embassy could work together to promote religious acceptance and tolerance.

On January 19, the Charge d'Affaires hosted a working lunch with then-Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality Catarina Marcelino to discuss the resettlement and integration of Yazidi refugees, who had fled religious persecution.

On February 21-23, the embassy hosted and co-organized with the nongovernmental organization (NGO) International Rescue Committee a workshop on the topic of resettlement of refugees, many of whom belonged to religious minorities, and their integration in the country. A wide variety of NGOs and government officials involved with refugee issues participated.

On May 26, the Charge d'Affaires visited the Ismaili Center and met with a delegation headed by Nazim Ahmad, Diplomatic Representative of the Ismaili Imam to Portugal and the Lusophone countries, and a member of the CLR. They discussed ways of promoting interfaith tolerance and cooperation.

On August 18, an embassy official met with Abdool Magid A. Karim Vakil, President of the Lisbon Islamic Community, at the Lisbon Central Mosque to discuss integration projects relating to Muslim refugees.

On September 13, an embassy official met with Mamadou Bah, Chairman of the Islamic Community of Tapada das Mercês, and Mem Martins to discuss outreach and cooperation between the embassy and the Islamic community.

Other religious leaders with whom embassy officials met throughout the year included Gabriel Szary Steinhardt and Esther Mucznik, President and Vice President, respectively, of the Israelite Community of Lisbon, and Rana Uddin, President of the Islamic Center of Bangladesh in Lisbon. At all of these meetings, embassy officials discussed the importance of freedom of expression of religious views, promoting tolerance and understanding among religious communities, and countering the spread of religiously motivated violence.