

PORTUGAL 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits discrimination based on religion. According to the most recent data, in 2020 the government granted citizenship to 20,892 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled during the Inquisition and rejected 163 applicants; 54,160 applications remained pending at year's end. On April 5, the Holocaust Museum opened in Porto, the first of its kind in the country. On June 22, the National Day of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa presided at a conference on the 20th anniversary of the country's religious freedom law at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, promoted by the Religious Freedom Commission (CLR) and the High Commission for Migration (ACM). On October 29, the government entered into an agreement with the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) to relocate the center's headquarters from Vienna to Lisbon. Many religious groups opposed legislation passed by parliament decriminalizing euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. The President vetoed the legislation, effectively deferring any further consideration until 2022.

In January, the producers of the *Big Brother* television reality show removed a contestant after evidence emerged of him repeatedly performing Nazi salutes in the presence of fellow contestants. In February, public officials criticized Rodrigo Sousa Castro, a retired colonel who helped lead the country's 1974 revolution, after he tweeted, "Jews, since they dominate global finance, bought and possess all the [COVID-19] vaccines they want. It's a kind of historical revenge." On October 28, media reported that a Middle Eastern grocery store in Lisbon was vandalized with graffiti and religious images that were painted on the store's windows.

U.S. embassy officials maintained regular contact with government officials from the ACM and representatives of the CLR to discuss the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belonged to minority religious groups. In February and March, the embassy sponsored interfaith dialogues, initially with leaders of the three major faiths and then with leaders of three smaller religious groups. Discussions included how the COVID-19 pandemic affected their communities, religious freedom, societal tolerance of migrants, the effect of the rise of far-right political parties in the country on religious groups, and interfaith programs and

events. On April 29, the Charge d’Affaires visited the Holocaust Museum of Porto to underscore U.S. condemnation of human rights abuses and to present a congratulatory video message by the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.3 million (midyear 2021). According to the most recent census for which results are available (from 2011), 81 percent of the population older than age 15 is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups, each constituting less than 1 percent of the population, include Orthodox Christians and various Protestant and other Christian denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Lutheran Church of Portugal, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Church of God of the Seventh Day, New Apostolic Church, and the Portuguese Evangelical Methodist Church. Other religious groups include Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs, Taoists, Zoroastrians, and Baha’is. In the census, 6.8 percent of the population said it does not belong to any religious group, and 8.2 percent did not answer the question. According to the census, nonevangelical Protestants number more than 75,000. The Muslim community estimates there are approximately 60,000 Muslims, of whom 50,000 are Sunni and 10,000 Shia, including Ismaili Shia. There are more than 56,000 members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, most of whom are immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine, and the Church of Jesus Christ estimates it has 45,000 members. There are more than 163,000 members of other Christian groups, including other evangelical Christians, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, other Protestants, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Jewish community leadership estimates the resident Jewish population is approximately 2,000, with half residing in the greater Lisbon area.

According to a survey published by the Pew Research Center in 2018, 77 percent of the population identifies as Roman Catholic, 4 percent as Protestant, and 4 percent as “other,” while 15 percent are religiously unaffiliated, a group that includes individuals who identify as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.”

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom of 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 authorities may not question individuals about their religious convictions or observance, except to gather statistical information that does not identify individuals, and 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 law recognize the right to conscientious objection to military service, including on religious grounds; they require conscientious objectors to perform equivalent alternative civilian service.

The CLR is an independent, consultative body to parliament and the government, established by law. Its members include two representatives of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (Roman Catholic); three religious representatives appointed by the Ministry of Justice from the Evangelical Alliance, Islamic Community of Lisbon, and Jewish Community of Lisbon; and five laypersons, three of whom are affiliated with the Ismaili Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities. 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. The CLR alerts the relevant 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 or the holding of religious services, destruction or desecration of religious property, assaults on members and clergy of religious groups, incitement of religious discord, hate speech, and violations of the rights of foreign missionaries.

The 2021-2025 national plan to combat racism and discrimination revised the criminal code and expanded the grounds for protection. An August 2020 law lists and defines the objectives, priorities, and general criminal policy and priority guidelines for 2020-22. It further establishes crimes motivated by racial, religious, or sexual discrimination as crimes of priority prevention. Additionally, it acknowledges the internet as the predominant vehicle of communication associated with hate crimes and prioritizes cybercrime prevention and investigation.

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 authority but is obligated to address complaints and provide an alternative remedy for dispute resolution.

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 establish 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. 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 included, they must register separately. The ministry may reject a registration application if it fails to meet legal requirements, includes false documentation, or violates the constitutional right of religious freedom. If the ministry rejects an application, religious groups may appeal to the CLR within 30 days of receiving the ministry's decision.

Religious groups may register as religious corporations and receive tax-exempt status. Registered groups receive the right to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; provide religious teaching in public schools; access broadcasting time on public television and radio; and receive national recognition of religious holidays. The government certifies religious ministers, who receive all the benefits of the social security system. According to the law, chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are state-funded positions open to all registered

religious groups, although chaplains are predominantly Catholic. A taxpayer may allocate 5 percent of income tax payments to any registered religious group.

Religious groups may also register as unincorporated associations or private corporations, which allows them to 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 the groups' internal administration. 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." There are more than 800 registered groups with this status. To show they are established, religious groups must demonstrate an "organized social presence" for the required length of time. These groups receive government subsidies based on the number of their members; may conclude "mutual interest" agreements with the state on issues such as education, culture, or other forms of cooperation; and may celebrate marriages that are recognized by 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. 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 ACM, an independent government body operating under the guidelines of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, has a statutory obligation to advocate for

religious tolerance, including the “promotion of dialogue, innovation, and intercultural and interreligious education” and “combating all forms of discrimination based on color, nationality, ethnic origin, or religion.”

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

The government reported that in 2020, the latest available data, it approved the naturalization of 20,892 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition and rejected 163 applications of 34,000 new applications submitted. Since the beginning of the program in 2015, the government reported receiving 86,557 applications, of which it approved 32,192 and rejected 273; 54,160 applications remained pending at year’s end. Israel, Turkey, Brazil, Argentina, and Morocco had the greatest number of applicants.

Most prisons, state and private hospitals, and military services designated Catholic priests to provide chaplaincy services, but these positions were open to clergy of all religious groups.

The ACM continued to hold monthly online meetings with religious groups to consult on issues such as coordination for broader representation of religious groups in chaplaincies as needed, organization of interreligious youth events, and contributions to preparing and celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 25th of April Revolution, set to take place in 2024. According to the ACM, groups often sought financial assistance from the ACM for conferences and other events.

Parliament twice approved versions of legislation decriminalizing euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. In March, President Rebelo de Sousa vetoed the first law, calling it unconstitutional. Parliament rejected public efforts for a referendum on the issue and approved a second version of the legislation on November 5, which the President vetoed on November 29. Efforts to decriminalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide were opposed throughout the year by a wide range of religious groups, including those represented in the ACM’s Interfaith Working Group and the Association of Portuguese Catholic Doctors. Surveys showed that nearly 60 percent of citizens supported such decriminalization.

The Ministry of Culture continued implementation of its policy adopted in October 2020 that the ruins of the 12th century Almoravid Mosque discovered in a refurbishment and restoration project of the cloister of Lisbon Cathedral would remain on their original site. Given the patrimonial value of the ruins, the Ministry of Culture, in dialogue with the Patriarchate of Lisbon, took steps to conserve, display, and integrate the ruins into the renovation of the Lisbon Cathedral. Researchers and the directors of archaeological work on the site said the mosque, which includes baths, schools, the mosque of the dead – where funeral ceremonies were held – and other structures, was unique to the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco.

On March 9, President Rebelo de Sousa met in Porto with the president of the Islamic Cultural Center, Abdul Rehman Manga, and participated in an interfaith ceremony attended by members of Porto’s Muslim and Jewish communities and a representative of the Catholic Church, among others. Manga characterized the President’s gesture as “a great blessing” and a call for all Portuguese to unite, “regardless of their religion, even if they do not practice any religion.” Bishop Jose Ornelas, president of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, said, “It is a very significant gesture for a president to say, upon taking office, that bridges must be built... for the good of this country and the world.” This interfaith celebration in Porto was similar to another held at the Lisbon Mosque in 2016, on the first day of the President’s term.

A new Holocaust Museum in Porto opened on April 5, organized by members of the city’s Jewish community. The museum, the first of its kind in the country, includes a reproduction of Auschwitz barracks, photographs, video footage, a memorial with the names of victims, an eternal flame, theater, conference room, and study center. The museum’s activities include teaching, professional training for educators, promoting exhibitions, and supporting research. On September 20, it conducted a seminar for teachers that was attended by Holocaust survivors and representatives from other Holocaust museums around the world. Porto’s Jewish community archives on refugees in the city includes official documents, testimonies, letters, hundreds of individual records, and two Torah scrolls from survivors, previously on loan to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., all of which form part of the new museum’s permanent collection.

On April 13, the beginning of Ramadan, Minister of Foreign Affairs Augusto Santos Silva tweeted his wish for “peace and grace to all Muslims around the world,” adding, “May this holy month be a time of hope, tolerance, and reflection. Together, we’ll work to overcome conflict, injustice, and prejudice.”

On June 22, the National Day of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue, President Rebelo de Sousa presided over the opening session of a conference on the 20th anniversary of the country's religious freedom law at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, promoted by the CLR and the ACM. Representatives of different religious groups also attended. CLR chair Jose Vera Jardim opened the session, which included readings by young persons and a minute of silence honoring those who have defended religious freedom. Minister of Justice Francisca Van Dunem gave remarks and delivered messages from the late former president Jorge Sampaio and the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, D. Manuel Clemente. The conference highlighted the progress of religious acceptance in the country since the Law on Religious Freedom came into effect 20 years ago. President Rebelo de Sousa remarked that it is necessary to go further in the "promotion of fraternal integration of believers and nonbelievers" as well as among believers of various faiths, "without monopolies of the truth."

On October 19-20, Lisbon hosted the 3rd European Policy Dialogue Forum on Refugees and Migrants, which focused on ways in which religious organizations, policymakers, and recent arrivals to Europe could encourage the participation of refugees and migrants in developing more inclusive societies in Europe. Topics included how interfaith and intercultural dialogue supports migrant integration, refugee and migrant participation in political life and democratic processes, and countering hate speech by strengthening cross-sector collaboration among religious leaders and policymakers.

In a ceremony on October 29, the government signed an agreement with KAICIID to relocate the center's headquarters from Vienna to Lisbon. Diplomatic representatives from Saudi Arabia, Austria, Spain, the Holy See, and representatives of various religious groups attended the ceremony.

State-run television channel RTP continued half-hour religious programming five days a week and a separate weekly half-hour program, with segments for both written by registered religious groups.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In January, Helder Teixeira, a contestant on the television reality show *Big Brother*, was removed for repeatedly and "jokingly" making Nazi salutes off-air in front of other contestants. Other contestants asked Teixeira to stop his actions, but he

continued to mimic the Nazi salute. The show's producers later played for Teixeira and the contestants a video of a Holocaust Jewish survivor talking about the persecution Jews and other minorities, including Roma and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex community, faced during World War II.

Rodrigo Sousa Castro, a retired colonel who helped lead the country's 1974 revolution, tweeted on February 7, "Jews, since they dominate global finance, bought and possess all the [COVID-19] vaccines they want. It's a kind of historical revenge. And I won't say anything more or the Zionist bulldogs will jump." In response, the Israeli ambassador to Portugal tweeted, "As a proud Zionist bulldog, I can promise that if Israel develops a cure for COVID-19, Colonel Sousa e Castro will have access to it if needed." Numerous public officials immediately criticized Sousa Castro, including representatives of the Lisbon and Porto Jewish communities, the Portuguese Association for Israel, and the Social Democratic Party, which introduced a draft resolution in parliament on February 9 that read, in part, "Portugal is seeing the propagation of antisemitic discourse with serious implications." To be an advocate of the 1974 revolution, it added, "means to honor its values." Sousa Castro later deleted the tweet, stating he had committed an error by making a "generalization" that was not correct and was "abusive," adding, "Many will have the right to have been offended."

On October 28, the managers of the Zaytouna Middle Eastern grocery store in Lisbon posted an image on their social media site of graffiti on the store's windows depicting a patriarchal cross linked to Christian religious movements and a phrase that associates Islam with terrorism. They said the vandalism represented "a threat to us and to our customers of different nationalities." The store, which opened in 2018, was "born from a friendship between Palestine and Portugal and a great desire to share cultures... making it what it is today: a place of tolerance, diversity, and bonds." The managers said that since hate speech is a crime, they filed a complaint with authorities, adding that although this type of act was uncommon in the country, "It must be combatted and denounced."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials spoke regularly with ACM officials to discuss the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belonged to minority religious groups. The embassy also continued regular discussions throughout the year with the CLR

leadership on various issues, including their views on the legalization of euthanasia by parliament.

Embassy leadership and other embassy representatives continued to discuss issues of religious tolerance and encouraged continued interfaith collaboration and dialogue with representatives of religious groups, including the Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Orthodox, and Jewish communities.

On February 18, the embassy organized an interfaith dialogue with Mahomed Iqbal of the Muslim Community, Father Peter Stilwell of the Roman Catholic Church, and Jose Carp of the Jewish Community. Among other topics, the leaders discussed religious freedom issues such as the effect of the government's COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures on their religious services and communities, societal tolerance of migrants, the effect on religious groups of the growing influence of the populist right-wing party *Chega!*, and interfaith programs and events. On March 11, the embassy organized a second interfaith dialogue with three other religious leaders, Kirit Bachu of the Hindu Community, Joaquim Moreira of the Church of Jesus Christ, and Fernando Soares Loja of the Evangelical Church. The leaders at both events described the cooperative efforts between the government and their groups in establishing COVID-19 guidelines related to their religious practices and in adjusting those guidelines as circumstances changed.

On April 29, the Charge d'Affaires visited the Holocaust Museum of Porto, where she underscored U.S. condemnation of atrocities and human rights abuses and reiterated a commitment to uphold and protect diversity of all religious beliefs and the rights of nonbelievers. The Charge d'Affaires also presented a congratulatory video message by the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues that coincided with the U.S. Senate passage of a resolution honoring the memory and actions of Portuguese diplomat Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who saved thousands of lives during the Holocaust.

On November 22, the embassy hosted an event with religious leaders from the country's Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Church of Jesus Christ, and evangelical communities. Discussion included how religious communities were dealing with the pandemic, including government restrictions on religious services, youth interfaith summer camps sponsored by the ACM, religious tolerance in the country, and the opportunity for religious groups to engage in activities during the Year of Action after the Summit for Democracy in December.