

PORTUGAL 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Religious Freedom Commission (CLR) is an independent, consultative body to the Assembly of the Republic (parliament) and the government that reviews all matters relating to application of the law on religious freedom. The High Commission for Migration (ACM), an independent government body, advocates 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. All religious groups with an organized presence in the country may apply for registration with the Ministry of Justice.

In 2021, the government granted citizenship to 18,121 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled during the Inquisition. In March, parliament enacted stricter rules and imposed additional documentation requirements for Sephardic Jewish citizenship applications, which became effective September 1. Authorities began an investigation into possible illegalities in the attribution of nationality to descendants of Sephardic Jews. In March, authorities arrested the rabbi of the Porto Israeli Community, Daniel Litvak, on suspicion of using privileged knowledge and connections to secure citizenship for such descendants. The Lisbon Court of Appeals in a September 27 ruling revoked what it called “coercive measures” imposed as an interim measure on Litvak by the trial court hearing the case. His trial remained pending at year’s end. In December, parliament approved a bill to decriminalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, over the objections of a wide range of religious groups. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa requested the Constitutional Court review the bill before he signed or vetoed it. The court's decision was pending at year's end. In various events and through exhibits, government officials and civic organizations honored the life of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat who during World War II helped save over 30,000 Jews from Nazi persecution.

The Faith of Man, an inter-religious program on state-owned RTP television, celebrated its 25th anniversary; officials described the programming as a vehicle for “fostering interreligious dialogue.” In October, the Lisbon municipality’s Galveias Palace housed *The Portuguese Jewish Diaspora (15th-20th centuries)* art exhibit as a tribute to historic Jewish ties with the country.

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 April, the Ambassador joined Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faith leaders to celebrate the breaking of the Ramadan fast, and she used the occasion to discuss the importance of religious freedom and tolerance, which she described as key values of both countries. In September, during embassy-sponsored presentations by a Uyghur-American religious freedom activist, government officials and civil society leaders discussed how to continue ensuring religious freedom and tolerance remained a priority in Portugal. The Ambassador, attending menorah lighting events during Hanukkah in Cascais and Lisbon, made remarks highlighting the value and importance of respect for religious diversity in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.2 million (midyear 2022). According to the 2021 census, 80 percent of the population older than age 15 is Roman Catholic. Evangelical Protestants make up 2 percent of the population. Other denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Lutheran Church of Portugal, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church of God of the Seventh Day, New Apostolic Church, Baptist Church, and Jehovah’s Witnesses comprise approximately 3 percent. According to the census, nonevangelical Protestants number more than 75,000. Other religious groups together comprising less than 1 percent are Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Taoists, Zoroastrians, Baha’is, and Jews. In the

census, 14 percent responded they did not belong to any religious group, and 3 percent did not answer the question.

Most members of the Eastern Orthodox Church are immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine. The Muslim community estimates there are approximately 60,000 members, of whom 50,000 are Sunni and 10,000 Shia, including Ismaili Shia. Jewish community leaders estimate there are approximately 3,000 Jewish residents, with half residing in the greater Lisbon area.

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, 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. The constitution 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, and 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); representatives of three religious groups (the Evangelical Alliance, the Islamic Community of Lisbon, and the Jewish Community of Lisbon) appointed by the Ministry of Justice; 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 other government officials, to cases involving religious freedom and discrimination, such as restrictions or prohibitions on the right to assemble or hold religious services, destruction or desecration of religious property, assaults on lay members and clergy incitement of religious discord, hate speech, and violations of the rights of foreign missionaries.

The *2021-25 National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination* revised the criminal code and expanded the grounds for protection. A 2020 law lists and defines the plan's objectives, priorities, and general criminal policy and priority guidelines for 2020-22. The plan further prioritizes preventing crimes motivated by racial, religious, or sexual discrimination. Additionally, it cites 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 enforcement authority but must address complaints and provide an alternative remedy for dispute resolution.

Religious groups may organize in a variety of forms that have national, regional, or local character. A denomination may 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. According to the CLR, there are 92 registered religious groups in the country, compared to 50 in 2011. The requirements for registration 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 have 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. 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 same process for registering as unincorporated associations or private corporations applies to religious corporations. There are no practical differences between them, other than 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 the higher registration status of a “religion settled in the country.” To show they qualify for this status, 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. 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. Labor laws allow employees leave on their Sabbath and religious holidays, even if 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 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

In 2021, according to the most recent statistics available, the government it granted naturalized citizenship to 18,121 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition. Parliament enacted stricter rules and imposed additional documentation requirements for Sephardic Jewish citizenship applications, which became effective September 1. The amendments followed media reports of an investigation into possible illegalities in the attribution of nationality to descendants of Sephardic Jews, and a related criminal investigation of Rabbi Daniel Litvak of Porto, suspected of facilitating such applications. The new regulations included, among other requirements, proof of direct descent or family relationship to a Sephardic Jew as well as "effective and lasting connection to Portugal," such as regular visits, ownership of property, or business ties. In 2021, the government granted naturalized citizenship to 18,121 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition.

Also in March, authorities launched an investigation into possible illegalities in the attribution of nationality to descendants of Sephardic Jews and arrested the rabbi of the Porto Israeli Community, Daniel Litvak. Litvak was awaiting trial at year's end on charges of using privileged information and connections to secure citizenship for alleged descendants of Sephardic Jews, including for Russian-Israeli oligarch Roman Abramovich in 2021. The Ministry of Justice's ongoing investigation probed additional potential crimes, including influence peddling, corruption, document forgery, money laundering, tax fraud, and criminal association. While the trial was pending, the Lisbon Court of Appeals in a September 27 ruling revoked "coercive measures" the trial court had imposed on Rabbi Litvak, including "Litvak's obligation to check in with judiciary police three times a week, and a prohibition from contacting defendant Joao Almeida Garrett [a co-defendant in the case] and from leaving national territory." The investigation was ongoing at year's end.

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, 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.

A wide range of religious groups opposed efforts to decriminalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, 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 decriminalization. On December 9, parliament approved a bill to decriminalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, supported by a majority of members of parliament from the Socialist (PS), Liberal Initiative (IL), Left Bloc (BE), People-Animals-

Nature, Livre (L) parties, and Social Democrats. The populist Chega! party and the Communist Party (PCP) voted against the legislation. The bill was then sent to President Rebelo de Sousa, an opponent of the legislation as it stood, who requested Constitutional Court review before taking final action to sign into law or veto. The court's decision was pending at year's end. Catholic bishops called parliament's endorsement "a dangerous message from the state."

On March 25, the Minister of State and of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Mariana Vieira da Silva, inaugurated an art exhibit, *Aristides de Sousa Mendes – Humanitarian Reasons*. The exhibit honored Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat who during World War II was posted in France and helped save more than 30,000 Jews by issuing visas that allowed them to travel through Portugal to escape Nazi persecution. At the opening ceremony, then-Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva stated, "Through the experience of memory and tribute, we want to contribute so that facts that occurred in 1940 are not repeated." The exhibit was the result of a partnership between the government, the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon, and the Holocaust Remembrance Commission Never Forget Program. On September 23, the State Secretary for Internationalization, Bernardo Ivo Cruz, and Lisbon mayor Carlos Moedas joined other Portuguese and French officials for the unveiling of a plaque dedicating a promenade on the Boulevard des Batignolles in Paris to de Sousa Mendes.

On April 21, during an iftar with members of the country's Ismaili community held at the Ismaili Center in Lisbon, President Rebelo de Sousa called for respect for freedom and tolerance and described Ramadan as "a privileged moment of reconciliation and peace, renewal of faith, and the practice of charity, fraternity and valuing the family." Approximately 100 persons, including two children of the Ismailis' imam/spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, joined the President. President Rebelo de Sousa commended the "holistic vision" of Ismaili Muslims as well as their "social awareness and pluralism." He said that the country and its people share with the Ismaili community the fundamental goal of doing everything

possible to improve the dignity of human life, and he described the iftar in Islam as “a source of spiritual learning.”

On June 20, President Rebelo de Sousa awarded Abdool Vakil, the leader of the Islamic Community of Lisbon for over 33 years, with the country’s highest honor, the Grand Cross of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator, recognizing his efforts in co-founding the Islamic Community of Lisbon in 1968 and his promotion of the country’s culture, history, and values. On June 23, the President similarly honored Dr. Joshua Ruah, who presided over the Jewish Community of Lisbon for 23 years, with the Grand Cross of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator.

The 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

On September 14, *The Faith of Men*, an inter-religious program broadcast on the state-owned RTP television station, celebrated its 25th anniversary. Members of the Commission on Broadcasting Time of Religious Confessions said the program was a vehicle for “fostering interreligious dialogue” and, through collaboration among the different religious denominations, “illustrates well the culture of cooperation and mutual respect that places Portugal as a reference worldwide.” The commission, comprised of representatives of the Catholic Church, Evangelical Alliance, Islamic community, Baha'i community, Hindu community, Jewish community, and Seventh-day Adventist Church, recalled interfaith ceremonies in previous years and stressed that the country “has been recognized for interfaith harmony.”

From October 12 to 29, the Lisbon municipality’s Galveias Palace housed *The Portuguese Jewish Diaspora (15th-20th centuries)* art exhibit as a tribute to

historic Jewish ties to the country. Plans continued for the construction of the Tikva Jewish Museum of Lisbon, located in Belém, a collaborative effort between the municipality of Lisbon and the Hagadá Institute.

On December 16, Lisbon mayor Moedas and the Israeli Ambassador hosted the first-ever Hanukkah candle lighting at Lisbon City Hall. The event emphasized the value and importance of respecting religious diversity. Leaders of different religious faith communities, alongside other societal leaders, together lit the menorah, and all expressed their commitment to religious freedom and diversity.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials met regularly with ACM officials to discuss the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belong to minority religious groups. The embassy also continued regular discussions with the CLR leadership on various issues, including their views on the ongoing parliamentary process to legalize euthanasia.

Senior embassy officials 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 April 27, as one of her first engagements in the country, the Ambassador joined Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders to celebrate the breaking of the Ramadan fast. The Ambassador posted on her Instagram page photos of the celebration, which was hosted by the Israeli Ambassador and included the mayor of Lisbon. She used the occasion to discuss the importance of diversity and religious freedom and tolerance, which the Ambassador described as key values of the U.S. and Portuguese people.

In September, the embassy sponsored a three-day series of presentations by a Uyghur-American religious freedom activist, attended by government officials, academics, and business and civil society leaders. The attendees discussed how to apply the lessons shared by the activist to ensure religious freedom and tolerance remained a priority in Portugal.

On December 16, the Ambassador delivered remarks emphasizing the value and importance of respecting religious diversity during the first-ever Hanukkah candle lighting at Lisbon City Hall.

On December 22, the Ambassador participated in a Chabad menorah lighting in Cascais, hosted by Cascais Mayor Carlos Carreiras, the Israeli Ambassador, and Rabbi Eli Rosenfeld. At the event, the Ambassador reaffirmed the importance of a steadfast commitment to tolerance and religious freedom and said these were common values in both nations.