

PORTUGAL 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. The government granted citizenship in the first 10 months of the year to 4,026 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled during the Inquisition. Minority religious groups said the government favored the Roman Catholic Church over other religious groups, for example by designating Catholic priests, but not others, as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, and the military. There were reports state hospitals transfused blood to Jehovah's Witnesses without their approval in emergency situations, and hospitals and prisons did not accommodate Muslim dietary requirements.

A European Commission (EC) survey published in September found 41 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the country. An EC Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism published in January found 41 percent of respondents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in the country, and 18 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years.

U.S. embassy officials continued to meet regularly with officials from the independent Commission for Religious Freedom (CLR) and the government's High Commission for Migration (ACM). They discussed the importance of mutual respect and understanding among religious communities and the integration of immigrants, many of whom belonged to minority religious groups. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religious leaders, including from the Ismaili Imamat, Jewish Community of Lisbon, and Islamic Center of Bangladesh in Lisbon, to discuss religious tolerance and interfaith collaboration. Topics discussed included anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-clerical sentiment in the country, concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities, and access to non-Catholic chaplains in hospitals and the military.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.3 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the most recent census (from 2011), 81 percent of the population older than 15 years old is Roman Catholic. Other religious groups, each constituting less than 1 percent of the population, include Orthodox

Christians; various Protestant and other Christian denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Lutheran Church of Portugal, Universal Church of Jesus Christ, New Apostolic Church, Portuguese Evangelical Methodist Church, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ); and 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, non-evangelical Protestants number more than 75,000 persons, and there are more than 56,000 members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, most of whom are immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine. There are more than 163,000 members of other Christian groups including other evangelical Christians, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other Protestants, and approximately 3,000 Jews. Jewish community leadership estimates the resident Jewish population is approximately 2,000, half in the greater Lisbon area. The Muslim community estimates there are approximately 60,000 Muslims, of which 50,000 are Sunni, and 10,000 Shia, including Ismaili Shia.

A more recent survey conducted in April-August 2017 by the Pew Research Center indicates the percentage of the population that identifies as Christian has fallen substantially (84 percent in 2002 to 72 percent in 2014) while the share of the adult population that is religiously unaffiliated, including individuals who identify as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular," is 15 percent.

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 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.

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, Jewish 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. The CLR alerts the competent authorities, including the president, parliament, and others in the government, of 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 on 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 authority, but he or she 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 (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 included, they must register separately. The MOJ may reject a registration application if it fails to meet legal requirements, includes false documentation, or violates the constitutional right of religious freedom. In the case where the MOJ rejects an application, religious groups may appeal to the CLR within 30 days of receiving the MOJ'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; participate in 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. 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, which allow 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." To show they are established, religions 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 religious 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 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 the first 10 months of the year, it approved the naturalization of 4,026 Sephardic descendants of Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition and rejected 27 applications, out of 20,955 new applications submitted. Since the beginning of this program in February 2015, 47,560 applications have been submitted: 9,711 have been approved, 31 have been rejected, and 37,818 remained pending at year's end. Beneficiaries of the program included persons from Israel, Brazil, Turkey, Argentina, and the United States.

Representatives of some religious minorities, such as evangelical Christians, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses, said the Catholic Church received privileges

not available to other religious groups. For example, most prisons, state and private hospitals, and military services designated Catholic priests to provide chaplaincy services, while other religious groups did not. Other concerns were that hospitals and prisons did not comply with Muslim dietary needs, and hospitals performed blood transfusions on Jehovah's Witnesses in violation of a tenet of their faith. In May CLR Chairman Jose Vera Jardim said there were no serious grievances from religious groups about their treatment in hospitals and prisons, and the special needs of minority groups were protected on a case-by-case basis. He said hospitalized Muslims could request a special diet, for example. Regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jardim said transfusions were administered only in life or death emergency situations. The government covered the costs of religious assistance to non-Catholics in hospitals, prisons and the military, but there were no official statistics on the percentage of chaplaincies each religious group held.

According to High Commissioner for Migration Pedro Calado and ACM Coordinator of Intercultural Dialogue Cristina Rodrigues, the ACM's Interfaith Dialogue Group (IDG), which includes representatives from 14 religious groups, published educational material on religious acceptance that was distributed for teachers to use in schools around the country. The IDG also published a guide to religious and spiritual groups present in the country, which it updated during the year.

During the year, the ACM also trained 224 police personnel and prison guards to promote better understanding of and respect for different religious traditions.

In July the IDG organized a meeting in Castelo Novo, where 19 youths from eight religious communities – Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic, evangelical Christian, Anglican, Baha'i, Ismaili, Hindu, and Church of Jesus Christ – were challenged to reflect on the current world situation and debate intercultural and interreligious ideas. The focus of lectures and debates was centered on the importance of religious freedom, respect for differences, and the willingness to conduct a dialogue for peace. There were also opportunities to socialize and share experiences and values, including an evening of music, poetry, and other forms of religious and cultural expressions.

In May the ACM organized an event, "Out of Doors," to promote interreligious dialogue that featured workshops, musical performances, and other activities hosted by members of religious communities, including Anglicans, Catholics, evangelical Christians, Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs.

In September the ACM held a day-long Citizenship and Religion Congress focused on interreligious dialogue, which brought together political leaders, representatives of various religious denominations, and international guests to discuss challenges facing various religious communities in the country, share best practices, and promote dialogue and cooperation among them.

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

On December 4, Portugal became a full member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In November a referee did not allow a 13-year-old Pakistani girl to play in a game because she wore a black long-sleeved jersey under her regular uniform, which the referees said was against regulations. The girl explained that she wore the long sleeves because her religion (Islam) did not allow her to show her arms, but the referees disqualified her. The national Basketball Federation (FPB) later presented her with another undershirt that she could wear and also meet regulations. In a public statement, the FPB denied discriminating against the girl in any way.

In May the EC carried out a study in each European Union (EU) member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 41 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Portugal, while 53 percent said it was very rare; 90 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religious than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 92 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, 86 percent said they would be with an atheist, 81 percent with a Jew, 81 percent with a Buddhist, and 75 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 92 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 84 percent if atheist, 74 percent if Jewish, 72 percent if Buddhist, and 59 percent if Muslim.

In January the EC published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December in each EU-member state. According to the survey, 41 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was

a problem in Portugal, and 18 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 43 percent; on the internet, 40 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 45 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 41 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 41 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 38 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 31 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 37 percent; and anti-Semitism in media, 36 percent.

In May Sunni and Shia leaders described relations within the country's Muslim communities as excellent. Lisbon Central Mosque Sheikh David Munir said the mosque was active in assisting recently arrived refugees, most of whom were Muslims from Syria and Iraq.

Former Jewish Community President Gabriel Szary Steinhardt said in May the country was a "paradise for Jews in Europe." He stated that while anti-Semitism acts occurred occasionally, the majority of the population appreciated and had an interest in Judaism and the Jewish people.

In May CLR President Jardim and Vice President Fernando Loja described the state of relations among all religious groups in the country as excellent. The CLR leaders said they had not perceived any Sunni-Shia tensions arising from the planned opening of the Ismaili world headquarters in Lisbon. The headquarters building was undergoing final renovation work at year's end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials continued to meet 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 minority religious groups. In May embassy officials and a visiting Department of State official met with CLR President Jardim and Vice President Loja, and High Commissioner for Migrations Calado to discuss religious freedom issues, among other things.

The Ambassador and embassy representatives continued to meet with leaders of religious groups, including the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities, to discuss issues of religious tolerance and encourage interfaith collaboration and dialogue. The Ambassador met with Sheikh Munir and Arif Z. Lalani, head of the Department for Diplomatic Affairs of the Ismaili Imamat, to

discuss ways in which the Muslim community and the embassy could work together to promote religious acceptance and tolerance.

Embassy officials continued to meet with Gabriel Szary Steinhardt and Esther Mucznik, president and vice president, respectively, of the Jewish Community of Lisbon; Maria Antonieta Rebelo Vinagre Becker-Weinberg, president of the Somej Nophlim Jewish Association; Rabbi Eliyohu Rosenfeld of Chabad Lisbon; Rana Uddin, president of the Islamic Center of Bangladesh in Lisbon; President of the Islamic Community Vakil; and Archimandrite Philip Jagnisz, vicar of Portugal and Galiza of the Eastern Orthodox Church. In these meetings, embassy officials discussed the importance of freedom of expression of religious views and promoting tolerance and understanding among religious communities. Other topics included anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-clerical sentiment in the country, concerns about societal discrimination against religious minorities, and access to non-Catholic chaplains in hospitals and the military.

In May embassy officials and a visiting Department of State official met with CLR President Jardim and Vice President Loja, the High Commissioner for Migrations (ACM), Islamic Community leadership, including President of the Islamic Community Vakil and Sheikh Munir, and representatives from the Catholic Church, and the Jewish communities. They discussed international Muslim support for refugees in the country and funding for the Central Mosque, ACM-supported training materials and events to promote interfaith understanding, and relations among Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the country.