

PORTUGAL 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects the freedom of religion and worship and prohibits granting privileges to, discriminating against, or persecuting individuals because of their religion. The government signed a cooperation agreement with the leader of the Ismaili Muslim community establishing the formal seat of the Ismaili Imamate in the country. The government's High Commission for Migration (ACM) sponsored events and activities to promote religious tolerance and acceptance, published religious texts, and organized education for teachers and workers interacting with people of diverse religious backgrounds.

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris, there were vigils across the country, and media expressed solidarity with victims. Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders privately and publicly expressed friendship, respect, and mutual understanding for other religious communities. The head imam of the Lisbon mosque stated Muslims were well integrated in the country. On April 23, the city of Ponta Delgada in the Azores opened a museum in the Sahar Hassamain Synagogue. On May 24, the Jewish community in Porto opened a museum in the Kadoorie Mekor Chaim Synagogue.

U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with ACM officials to discuss religious freedom issues. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with leaders of the Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant communities to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. The embassy worked with local foundations to promote Holocaust education.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.8 million (July 2015 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. The census indicated the Protestant population includes 250,000 members of evangelical churches. The 2011 census estimated there are 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine, most of whom are Eastern Orthodox. More than 600,000 people do not claim membership in any religious group.

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Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for the freedom of religion and worship. 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. The constitution states churches and religious communities are independent from the state, with the freedom to determine their own organization and to perform their own activities and worship. The constitution affords each religious community the freedom to teach its religion and to use its own media to disseminate public information about its activities. The constitution and the law guarantee the right to conscientious objection on religious grounds.

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 that may be 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 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 inside 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. How subsidiary or affiliated organizations of registered religious

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corporations are registered depends on the registration of the churches or religious communities that originated them.

All registered religious groups are considered to be “religious corporations” and receive tax-exempt status; the right to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; the right to provide religious teaching in public schools; the right to 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.

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 this 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.

Religious groups may also register as unincorporated associations or private corporations, and in that form may receive the same benefits granted to religious corporations. There are no practical differences between associations and private corporations. Unregistered religious groups are not subject to penalties and may practice their religion but do not receive the benefits associated with registration.

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals on the basis of religion and requires reasonable accommodation of employees’ religious practices. Employees are allowed to take leave on their Sabbath and religious holidays, even if these are not nationally observed.

Public secondary schools offer an optional survey course on world religions taught by lay teachers. Religious groups may offer optional religious instruction in schools provided the course is taught by lay teachers and 10 or more students of the faith attend the class. Religious group representatives have the right to approve

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the course's instructors. All schools, public and private, are required to accommodate the religious practices of students, including rescheduling tests if necessary.

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

The Commission for Religious Freedom (CLR), established by law, is an independent, consultative body to the parliament and government. It 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, such as the president, parliament, and 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.

Government Practices

On June 3, Foreign Minister Rui Machete and the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, signed an agreement between the government and the Ismaili Imamat (Ismaili community) for the establishment of the global seat of the Imamat in the country. The agreement marked the first such accord in the Imamat's modern history. In addition to establishing a home base for the group and its leader, observers said it would intensify cooperation between the government and the 15 million-member Ismaili Imamat. Also present at the signing ceremony were Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho and other senior government officials. Foreign Minister Machete defined the decision to host the global headquarters of the Ismaili Imamat as "a vital sign of openness by the government."

The ACM (known until 2014 as the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue) hosted events, activities, and debates and published religious texts to promote religious tolerance and acceptance. In November the

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ACM launched a calendar listing describing the holidays of major religious groups. Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, evangelical, and Bahai leaders attended the launch. Later in November the head of the ACM, the high commissioner for migration, advocated interreligious tolerance and dialogue at a roundtable to promote religious understanding held at the Lisbon Central Mosque. On December 18, the ACM released 10 publications on the integration of migrants, including religious integration, and organized courses on intercultural and religious relations for teachers and social workers, security forces, prison staff, and others who have contact with people of diverse religious backgrounds.

The state-run television channel continued to air a half-hour religious program five days a week with segments written by different registered religious groups. The government hired professionals to produce the programming and broadcast it free of charge. All registered religious groups were eligible to participate. A television commission, which included members of religious communities, determined the scheduling of segments. State television also aired a weekly half-hour program highlighting activities of different religious groups.

On March 1, the government published citizenship application procedures for descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled from the country. By year's end, 320 individuals submitted applications for citizenship to the Ministry of Justice after receiving certifications from the Jewish community that they were descendants of Sephardic Jews from the country. The ministry issued three passports. Jewish community leaders said the application process was working well.

Parliament recognized Holocaust Remembrance Day with a museum exhibit on how the Holocaust affected the lives of children and by presenting a play which addressed the Holocaust.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

After the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November, towns across the country held vigils in solidarity with victims and newspapers, magazines, and postings on social media paid homage to the victims of the attacks.

Jewish, Muslim, and Christian leaders privately and publicly expressed friendship, respect, and mutual understanding for other religious communities. They condemned the January attack in Paris on the *Charlie Hebdo* newspaper, the November 13 Paris attacks, and Da'esh's recruitment of young Europeans as

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foreign fighters. Jewish and Muslim representatives noted concerns about rising extremism in Middle Eastern immigrant communities across Western Europe, but none of the religious leaders stated they viewed religion as politically or socially divisive in the country.

Sheikh David Munir, Head Imam of Lisbon's Central Mosque, said privately the country was welcoming to Muslims, who were well-integrated in society. Expressing some concern about the potential for Portuguese Muslim youth – especially the newly arrived – to become radicalized, Munir blamed efforts to radicalize Muslims on outside sources and emphasized that recalibrating Islam's religious education worldwide to profess moderation and understanding was key.

On April 23, the city of Ponta Delgada in the Azores held the official opening of a museum in the Sahar Hassamain Synagogue attended by the Israeli Ambassador and leaders of the Jewish community. On May 24, the Jewish community in Porto opened a museum in the Kadoorie Mekor Chaim Synagogue. Local government and Jewish community members attended the official opening on June 28. The museum focused on the history of the Jewish community in the city and included a list of 842 people tortured during the Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with ACM officials to discuss religious freedom issues. The Ambassador and embassy representatives also met with leaders of religious groups, including the Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and evangelical communities to discuss issues of religious freedom. The Ambassador met with Sheikh David Munir, Head Imam of Lisbon's Central Mosque, and embassy officials engaged with such religious leaders as Nazim Ahmad, the head of the Ismaili Muslim Community and a member of the CLR; Esther Mucznik, Vice President of the Lisbon Israeli Community; Dr. Abdool Vakil, President of the Lisbon Islamic Community; Father Nuno Rosario Fernandes, Director of Communications for the Roman Catholic Cardinal-Patriarch of Lisbon; and Pastor Jorge Humberto Nobre, President of the Portuguese Evangelical Alliance. Among the issues the embassy raised with both the ACM and religious groups were the importance of freedom of expression of religious views and of promoting tolerance and understanding among religious communities, the terrorist attacks in Paris and the spread of religiously motivated violence in Europe, and efforts to integrate Muslim immigrants to the country.

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The embassy disseminated information on the importance of religious freedom on its Facebook page and in op-ed pieces in local newspapers. For example, on December 24, the Ambassador published an opinion piece in the Lisbon daily *Diario de Noticias* on religious tolerance and freedom in both countries.