

# **PORTUGAL 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and worship and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. During the year, the government granted citizenship to 20,854 descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled during the Inquisition and rejected 163 applicants. In March, parliament approved a bill declaring March 31 a day of commemoration for victims of the Inquisition. On February 17, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa met with representatives of the Interfaith Working Group (GTIR), composed of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist representatives, to hear their views against the legalization of euthanasia. On February 20, parliament enacted five bills to decriminalize assisted suicide, widely seen as a preliminary step to legalize euthanasia. On July 15, following pressure from local and international Jewish groups, parliamentarians from the Socialist (PS) and Social Democrat (PSD) political parties withdrew two amendments they had introduced in parliament that would have made it more difficult for descendants of Jews expelled during the Inquisition to obtain citizenship.

In January, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, a news magazine published a cartoon depicting the Israeli Prime Minister as a neo-Nazi pushing a coffin covered with a Palestinian flag into an oven below the words displayed at the entrance gate to the Auschwitz extermination camp. In April, the Jewish Community and Catholic Diocese of Porto introduced a film about the history of Jewish-Catholic relations in the city in the Middle Ages, part of a collaboration to combat anti-Semitism that the two organizations announced at the end of 2019.

U.S. embassy officials continued to regularly contact government officials from the High Commission for Migrations (ACM) and representatives of the independent Religious Freedom Commission (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.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 10.3 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the most recent census (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;

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, 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, 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. Jewish community leadership estimates the resident Jewish population is approximately 2,000, half in the greater Lisbon area.

A survey published by the Pew Research Center in 2018 shows that 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 including 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, of 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 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; 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 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." 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 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 during the year, it approved the naturalization of 20,854 Sephardic descendants of Jews expelled from the country during the Inquisition and rejected 163 applications, out of a total of 34,876 new applications submitted. From the beginning of the program in 2015, the government reported receiving 87,081 applications, of which it approved 32,154 and rejected 205; 54,722 applications remained pending. Countries with the greatest numbers of applicants were Israel, Brazil, Turkey, Argentina, and the United States.

Most prisons, state and private hospitals, and military services designated Catholic priests to provide chaplaincy services, but not clergy of other religious groups.

During the year, the ACM held various online events, including a religious freedom conference on June 22. On December 17, in a virtual ceremony, the ACM launched its 2021 interreligious calendar, which provides information on the major religions in the country and marks the religious holidays of each. The ACM also published a pamphlet on religious tolerance for use in schools and continued to hold monthly online meetings with religious groups to consult on issues. According to the ACM, groups often sought financial assistance from the ACM for conferences and other events.

On February 17, as part of a debate on euthanasia, President Rebelo de Sousa met with GTIR representatives, all of whom opposed the legalization of euthanasia. The GTIR is made up of representatives of the Catholic Church, Portuguese Evangelical Alliance, Islamic Community of Lisbon, Church of Jesus Christ, Israeli Community of Lisbon, Portuguese Buddhist Union, Portuguese Hindu Community, and Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists. Father Fernando Sampaio, national coordinator of hospital chaplaincies, told journalists the goal of the meeting was to express the concerns of religious confessions regarding euthanasia to the President and to transmit a message stressing “the importance of human life, of its inviolability.” He said “the foundation of legislative frameworks is life, the living, not death.” Jorge Humberto, representative of the Evangelical Alliance, said the concerns of the religious representatives were “legitimate” in the defense of “human dignity,” and that the law should instead expand palliative care.

On February 20, parliament approved in plenary session five draft bills decriminalizing assisted suicide. The vote, which was widely described as a preliminary step towards legalizing euthanasia, sent the bills to parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee for further consideration. A final vote on whether to make the bills law was expected in January 2021.

On February 21, the Portuguese Episcopal Conference issued a statement in response to parliament’s vote, expressing “enormous sadness” and stating that it supported all initiatives to defend life and oppose euthanasia. The Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon and President of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, Bishop Manuel Clemente, stated that life should be “properly contemplated throughout the existential arc” and, addressing politicians, added, “This is a common front, it is a human front, essential.”

On October 23, parliament voted down a petition containing more than 95,000 signatures that promoted a referendum on euthanasia. Prior to that vote, the

Association of Portuguese Catholic Doctors had expressed support for a referendum as an alternative to enactment of a law on euthanasia by parliament and to “close the serious gap [on a topic] that until now has had little or no public debate on such an important topic.” After parliament rejected the referendum, the association reiterated, in a statement sent to the country’s Roman Catholic news agency, Agencia Ecclesia, “its absolute opposition to any and all forms of euthanasia” and asked the President to veto the law if enacted by parliament.

On March 3, parliament enacted a bill establishing March 31 as an annual Day of Remembrance for Jewish victims of the Inquisition in the country. The law received broad support from across the political spectrum. March 31 was chosen because the Inquisition was officially disbanded in the country on that date in 1821. Reconectar, a nongovernment organization that seeks to reconnect descendants of Portuguese and Spanish Jewish communities with the Jewish world, welcomed parliament’s action.

On April 20, Prime Minister Antonio Costa met with Cardinal Clemente to discuss the conditions for lifting the restrictions imposed by the government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The Prime Minister’s Office also announced Costa would be meeting with other religious groups, including the Jewish and Muslim communities, for the same purpose but did not indicate if or when those meetings took place.

On June 22, the ACM marked Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue Day with an online conference, “Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue: New Challenges in Times of (More) Uncertainties,” organized with the GTIR and the CLR. Speakers included State Secretary for Integration and Migration Claudia Pereira, High Commissioner for Migration Sonia Pereira, Religious Freedom Commission Vice President Fernando Soares Loja, and Professor Jorge Bacelar Gouveia of the Faculty of Law at Nova University. Among the participants were representatives of the Catholic Church, Portuguese Evangelical Alliance, Presbyterian Evangelical Church of Portugal, Church of Jesus Christ, Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists, Adventist Church of Seventh Day, Portuguese Buddhist Union, Baha’i Community, Hindu Community, Lusitania Church – Anglican Communion, and Buddha’s Light Association. Following a recorded message by President Rebelo de Sousa, representatives of religious denominations addressed the conference theme of “Current Challenges to the Freedoms of Conscience, Worship, and Religion.” Professor Gouveia proposed two challenges to religious groups: that each endeavor to sign an agreement with the state to safeguard their rights and interests (similar to the Catholic Church’s concordat and

the Ismaili Imamat protocol); and that they propose a revision of the Religious Freedom Law, which had not been revised since its implementation in 2001. State Secretary Pereira said the government was open to all collaboration and committed to addressing any proposal made by the religious groups.

On July 15, parliamentarians from the PS and PSD withdrew two amendments they had introduced in parliament in May to the law allowing descendants of Jews expelled during the Inquisition to obtain citizenship. The original amendment proposed by the ruling PS would have required a two-year period of residence in the country before eligibility for citizenship. Following widespread public opposition from, among others, the Jewish Communities of Lisbon and Porto, B'nai B'rith International (which wrote to President Rebelo de Sousa on the issue), the Portuguese and Israeli Bar Associations, other political parties, and some Socialists and Social Democrats, the PS changed the amendment to require applicants to prove a “contemporary relationship” with Portugal. The amendment introduced by the PSD would have required descendants either to reside in the country for two years, have working relations with it, or hold real estate in the country for at least three years before applying for citizenship. Opponents of the amendments stated they would run counter to the law’s original intent of reconnecting expelled Jews with their historic national roots. The Jewish Community of Lisbon stated that a basic knowledge of the Portuguese language should be sufficient for descendants to apply. After failing to reach agreement on the language of the two amendments, PS and PSD members withdrew them without a parliamentary vote.

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.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

In February, according to *The Jerusalem Post*, the Israeli Ambassador criticized the publication of an anti-Semitic cartoon by Vasco Gargalo that appeared in the weekly newsmagazine *Sabado* on January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day. The cartoon, titled “The Crematorium,” showed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wearing a Nazi-like armband with a Star of David instead of a swastika, pushing a coffin covered with a Palestinian Authority flag into an oven. Above the

oven were the words posted at the entrance to the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz, “*Arbeit Macht Frei*” (Work Sets You Free).

In April, President of the Jewish Community of Porto Dias Ben Zion and Catholic Bishop of Porto Manuel Linda presented *The Light of Judah*, a film about the history of Catholic-Jewish relations in the city in the Middle Ages, by Portuguese director Luis Ismael. The film, with Hebrew subtitles, was part of a joint project between the Jewish Community of Porto and the Diocese of Porto announced in December 2019 to fight anti-Semitism. At the time of the announcement, Bishop Linda said, “This project is a break with the past of misunderstandings and the certainty of a future made hand in hand.”

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

Embassy officials continued to speak 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 continued regular discussions throughout the year with the CLR leadership on various issues, including the legalization of euthanasia under discussion in parliament.

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