

PORTUGAL 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy conducted outreach to religious organizations and communities, including the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The embassy engaged the government on issues related to religious freedom and hosted several events to promote religious freedom and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the 2011 census, the population is 10.6 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage does not actively participate in church activities. Other religious groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population include various Protestant denominations, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. The Protestant population includes 250,000 members of evangelical churches. Many of the estimated 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe, primarily from Ukraine, are Eastern Orthodox.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Churches, religious communities, associations, federations, and foundations must apply for registration as a religion with the registrar of religious corporate bodies through the Ministry of Justice. The sole registration requirement for religious groups is establishment in the country for at least 30 years or international recognition for at least 60 years. Registered religious groups receive benefits

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including full tax-exempt status; legal recognition of marriages and other rites; the right of chaplains to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; and recognition of religious holidays.

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 holidays. The law allows each religious group to negotiate its own concordat-style agreement with the government.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the government under the terms of a 1940 concordat with the Holy See, as amended in 2004 to comply with subsequent legislation. The concordat recognizes the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference and allows the Catholic Church to receive a percentage of the income tax voluntarily allocated by taxpayers to various institutions in their annual tax returns. A taxpayer may allocate a portion of his or her tax payment to any registered religious group. Chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are state-funded positions open to all legally established religious groups.

Public secondary schools offer an optional survey course on world religions taught by lay teachers. Religious groups may offer optional religion training through the schools, provided the course is taught by lay teachers and ten or more students of the faith attend the class. Religious group representatives have the right to approve the course's instructors. All schools, both public and private, are required to accommodate the religious practices of students, including rescheduling tests if necessary.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption Day, All Saints Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The state-run television channel aired segments written by different religious groups five days a week, as well as weekly 30-minute programs highlighting activities of various religious groups. Religious groups established for at least 30

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years in the country or at least 60 years in their country of origin were eligible to provide content. Delegates selected by the religious groups participated in a special television commission to determine the scheduling of segments.

To assist health care professionals, the Directorate General for Health issued a public handbook outlining the religious practices of eleven religions with regard to birth, suffering, death, and dietary rules.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

To promote religious tolerance and acceptance, the government High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation published the pamphlet “Interreligious Dialogue over Time and 33 Ideas to Meditate and Act On.” ACIDI also held a photo competition for religious groups, entitled “Multiple Experiences of Faith.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met with leaders of religious groups, including the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The ambassador engaged regularly with religious leaders, such as the imam of the Lisbon mosque, the head of the Ismaili community, and the chairman of the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal, to promote tolerance and religious freedom. Together with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Luso-American Development Foundation, the embassy co-hosted a conference promoting Holocaust education, with a focus on human rights and religious tolerance. On several occasions, the ambassador’s spouse spoke to school groups on Holocaust awareness, emphasizing religious acceptance.

To foster interfaith dialogue, the ambassador hosted an iftar in July and a Hanukkah celebration in December, bringing together guests of different faith traditions. The events marked the first time many of the guests had attended a celebration outside their own faith.