

PORTUGAL

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to 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.

During the year, the U.S. embassy engaged with the government on issues related to religious freedom. The U.S. government continued to monitor religious freedom and conducted outreach to religious organizations, including the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identifies with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage states it does not actively participate in church activities. Various Protestant denominations (including 250,000 evangelicals) and non-Christian religious groups (Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians, among others) constitute less than 5 percent of the populace. In addition, many of the estimated 200,000 immigrants from eastern Europe, more than half of whom are 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. The government is secular. Other than the constitution, the two most important documents relating to religious freedom are the 2001 Religious Freedom Act and the 1940 concordat with the Holy See.

The 2001 Religious Freedom Act created a legislative framework for religious groups established in the country for at least 30 years or those recognized

internationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religious groups with benefits previously reserved only for the Catholic Church: full tax-exempt status; legal recognition of their marriages and other rites; the right of their chaplains to minister in prisons, hospitals, and military facilities; and respect for their traditional holidays. The act prohibits public-sector employers from discriminating against persons because of their religion and requires them to reasonably accommodate employees' religious practices. This provision includes allowing employees to take leave on their Sabbath and religious holidays, even if the government does not observe these holidays officially. The act allows each religious group to negotiate its own concordat-style agreement with the government, but does not guarantee acceptance of all such agreements.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the government under the terms of the 1940 concordat as amended in 2004 to comply with the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. The concordat recognizes the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. It also allows the Catholic Church to receive a percentage of the income tax that citizens can voluntarily allocate to various institutions in their annual tax returns. In September 2009 the government established legal provisions to fully implement the 2001 act and the 2004 amendments to the concordat. Chaplaincies for military services, prisons, and hospitals are now state-funded positions open to all legally established religions.

Public secondary school curricula include an optional course called "Religion and Morals" which functions as a survey of world religious groups and is taught by laypersons. It can be used to provide instruction on Catholicism, in which case the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for the course. Other religious groups can create such a course if they have 10 or more children of that faith in a given school. Representatives from each religious group have the right to require their approval of the course's instructors. Schools, both public and private, are also required to accommodate the religious practices of students, including rescheduling tests if necessary.

During the year, the government observed 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 government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the year.

The government continued to promote interfaith understanding. For five days each week, the state television channel (Radiotelevisao Portuguesa 2) aired a 30-minute program consisting of segments written by different religious communities. The government paid for the segments. Religious communities sent delegates to a special television commission which determined the scheduling of segments. The television commission has operated on the general rule that religious communities are eligible for the program if they have been established for at least 30 years in the country or at least 60 years in their country of origin.

A government-sponsored Working Group for Interreligious Dialogue promoted multicultural, including multireligious, dialogue between the government and society. Among its objectives were fostering tolerance for religious diversity, promoting interreligious studies, and participating in national and international religious events. The group was led by a government-appointed chairman and consisted primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, had professional experience in this area.

The Church of Scientology has been recognized as a religious association since 1986 and a religion since 2007; however, it does not receive benefits under the 2001 Religious Freedom Act since it has not been established in the country for 30 years or recognized internationally for 60 years, as required under the law. Scientology leaders were concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act might have a negative effect on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the year.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy undertook several initiatives to promote religious freedom and tolerance. The ambassador engaged regularly with leaders of the Jewish and Islamic communities, including the imam of the Lisbon mosque, the head of the

Ismaili community, and the chairman of the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal to show support for tolerance and religious freedom. The ambassador participated in several Holocaust awareness events and signed an op-ed that highlighted religious tolerance. The ambassador's spouse had at least four speaking engagements in public schools centered on Holocaust awareness that underscored human rights and religious tolerance. The deputy chief of mission hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) and the ambassador hosted a Hanukkah celebration at his residence for Jewish community members and other invitees. Additionally, U.S. embassy representatives reached out to leaders of the country's religious groups, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities.