

## PORTUGAL

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### 1 MUSLIM POPULATIONS

Portugal has a rather small Muslim population which has grown mostly since decolonisation in 1974. Estimates of the communities themselves and by researchers suggest around 38,000–40,000 people, among whom are around 10,000 Isma'ilis, but who are mainly Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin, from Mozambique and, in greater numbers, from Guinea-Bissau. Other Muslim groupings from Morocco and Bangladesh have arrived more recently (noticeably since the early 1990s). Small numbers (500–1,500) of Muslims come from Iran, Senegal, India and Pakistan. While smaller Muslim communities are established in the north (mainly in Porto and Coimbra), the south (in the Algarve) and on the island of Madeira (the majority of Moroccan Muslims live in and around Porto and on the Algarve), the overwhelmingly majority live in and around the capital city Lisbon. In and around Lisbon, there is a certain (but not massive) geographical concentration in particular neighbourhoods, such as Laranjeiro and Odivelas (both having well established mosques).

The 'official' figures from the immigration control/monitoring service (*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*, SEF) and the census<sup>2</sup> do not reflect realities, and give numbers much lower than the estimates of researchers and the communities themselves. According to the 2001 census, Portugal's total population was 10,356,117, of whom 12,014 were declared to be Muslims.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for these low numbers are, first, that religious

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<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics, [www.inec.pt](http://www.inec.pt).

<sup>3</sup> Leitão, J., "The new Islamic presence in Portugal: Towards a progressive integration", in Aluffi Beck-peccoz, R. and G. Zincone (eds), *The Legal Treatment of Islamic Minorities in Europe* (Peeters: Leuven, 2004), p. 180.

affiliation is not an obligatory question in the census, so not everyone answers it, and, second, that Portuguese citizenship is quite widespread and so basing estimates from citizenship are unsatisfactory. In addition, in many cases the proportion of Muslims in the population of the countries of origin cannot be simply applied to the immigrants from those countries in Portugal, especially not in the cases of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.

The Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL) has a register of official members and supporters of the community (Muslims and non-Muslims), who number around 4,180 (according to a spokesman in December 2008). It also aims to monitor the total number of Muslims living in the country and confirms the broadly accepted estimates of 38,000–40,000. The main mosques are frequently attended by 1,500 people on Fridays and up to 15,000 (at special festivities).

## 2 ISLAM AND THE STATE

The Constitution, which recognises freedom of religion and conscience and prohibits all discrimination in this respect, provides for a system of equality and separation between the state and religious denominations. However, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys privileges not granted to other religious groups.<sup>4</sup> A decisive change came with the Religious Freedom Act of 22 June 2001, most of whose improvements for religious minorities were implemented from the year 2006. Before the implementation of the new law, the CIL, as well as smaller Islamic communities and other religious minorities, could only be officially recognized as ‘associations in private law’. In 2006, the CIL took advantage of the new rights by becoming a registered religious community, thus obtaining a legal status substantially equal to that of the Catholic Church, including agreements with the state with regard to marriages (see below) and the optional benefit of the voluntary consignment by individual tax payers of 0.5% of income tax, but no public funding. Several inequalities remain, as privileges depend on the number of adherents of the religious groups and on the period of their establishment in the country, with a minimum of 30 years required (the CIL was founded 40 years ago). In practice, the CIL can benefit from tax concessions, for example, on

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

buildings expenditure, etc. Whenever the main Islamic communities (Sunni and Isma'ili) celebrate an anniversary or special occasion, the Portuguese state is often represented at the highest level. In addition, at least one of the ex-presidents of the Republic is an honorary member of CIL, and the current CIL president was one of the advisers of the president of the republic during his last visit to India. During the visit of the Dalai Lama in 2007, the CIL organised and hosted a huge interreligious meeting in the Central Mosque, with the Dalai Lama as guest of honour—an important event, taking into account that the Portuguese government had been facing the same problems as other governments as regards to official relations.

### 3 MAIN MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

The role of a small group of Muslims from Mozambique (a Portuguese colony until 1975), who were studying at the faculties of law, medicine and economics in the metropolis was decisive in laying the foundations of Muslim organisations. Most of these community founders, as well as other Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin, had already been Portuguese citizens under colonial rule. Consequently, they did not perceive themselves as 'immigrants'. Many African Muslims gather around their Sufi leaders, and Muslims from Bangladesh have recently founded a prayer hall closer to their workplace. However, the vast majority of at least 30,000 Sunnis and their local communities are linked to and occasionally take part in the life of the central Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL). The CIL, founded in 1968, acts as an umbrella organisation for Sunni Muslims, both formally and informally. The *Mesquita Central de Lisboa*, Lisbon Central Mosque, founded 1985 (Av. José Malhoa (à Praça de Espanha), 1000 Lisboa, tel: (+351) 21 387 41 42 / 21 387 91 84, fax: (+351) 21 387 22 30, email: info@comunidadeislamica.pt, www.comunidadeislamica.pt) has as its imam Sheikh David Munir. It is also the home of the *Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa* (Islamic Community of Lisbon, CIL). Alongside common religious, cultural and social infrastructures (including a bookstore, chatrooms or the community website), three types of association were founded in the 30-year-old Central Mosque at the heart of Lisbon: the Women's Association, several groups of Guinean Muslims, and the *Comissão de Jovens da Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa* (Youth Association of the Islamic Community, CILJovem) which is organised and attended mainly (if not only) by young people of South Asian origin, including some Isma'ili Muslims.

The other main Muslim organisations are:

*Colégio Islâmico, Ensino e Atividades Educativas*, Av. Vila Amélia, lote 171, 172, Cabanas, 2950–805 Palmela, tel: 21 211 05 30, fax: 21 211 05 39, email: cipalmela@hotmail.com.

*Centro Português Árabe Pullar e C. Islâmica*, Rua José Estêvão, 3-A—r/c, Reboleira, 2720 Amadora, director: Prof. Bubacar Balde, tel: (+351) 21 496 47 12.

*Centro de Estudos Islâmicos de Portugal*, Av. da Liberdade, 73, 3 Esq., 1200 Lisboa, tel: (+351) 211-558544.

*Centro Cultural Ismaili*, Rua Abranches Ferrao, 1600–001 Lisboa, tel: (+351) 217 229 000, fax: (+351) 217 229 045, email: nationalcouncil@netcabo.pt.

#### 4 MOSQUES AND PRAYER HOUSES

Besides the Central Mosque mentioned above, there are two other mosques near Lisbon (in Odivelas and Laranjeiro) and another in Coimbra, and there are a total of 33 cultural centres and prayer halls across the country (but mainly near Lisbon), and around twelve madrasas, as well as the Jamatkhana of the Shi'a Imami Ismaili Muslim Community.

#### 5 CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

A recognised private Islamic secondary Islamic school exists in Palmela (near Lisbon). Among the approximately 100 pupils, only 5 or 6 are non-Muslims. Most young Muslims receive their Islamic education in one of the madrasas. The Law of Religious Freedom allows Islamic instruction in public schools, if there are enough pupils/parents who require it (a minimum of ten). In practice, there is currently no public school in Portugal which has enough Muslim pupils of more or less the same age who could benefit from this offer. Parents do not complain about the lack of such provision, as their children attend instruction in the madrasas.

#### 6 HIGHER AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) governs the role of imam in detail, equating imams with Roman Catholic priests in terms of legal

status, and providing for the possibility of setting up specific training institutions.<sup>5</sup> As a higher institution for the training of imams has not yet been founded, imam training is partly provided at the Islamic school of Palmela. Some imams have received their education abroad (mostly in the UK or in Pakistan).

## 7 BURIAL AND CEMETERIES

There is no exclusively Islamic cemetery in Portugal, but several municipal cemeteries reserve areas for Muslims and their communities. Such an area has existed in the cemetery of Lumiar (a district of Lisbon) since 2005, donated by the City Hall and open to Muslims from all over Portugal. It has become the most important cemetery for both Sunni and Isma'ili families, and is called 'our cemetery'. With the existence of these facilities and probably due to the fact that most Muslims in Portugal are either Portuguese citizens or in other ways deeply attached to the country, it is very rare that families prefer to arrange for relatives to be buried abroad.

## 8 'CHAPLAINCY' IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) grants the Islamic and other communities the right to exercise of freedom of religion in special situations (such as during military service, on admission to public hospitals, and in prison). In practice, there are no imams working on a regular basis in such institutions due to the lack of demand. If the need arises (mostly in hospitals), the Commission of Social Affairs (*Comissão de assuntos sociais*) of the CIL provides special care and support for the individuals and their families, including, of course, the visits of an imam.

## 9 RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

The state does not officially recognise Islamic festivals or holidays but permits absence from work and school for the main occasions on request. On these occasions, the CIL distributes information to the public, the Ministry of Justice, schools and employers and provides the appropriate

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<sup>5</sup> Leitão, "The new Islamic presence in Portugal", p. 300.

forms for applying to the authorities for leave of absence. Workers and employees are expected to maintain a flexible schedule and to make up time lost. Students may sit examinations on alternative dates.

## 10 HALAL FOOD

According to a spokesman of CIL, ritual slaughter according to Islamic rules has been permitted since 1975. Nevertheless, most ritual slaughter for Muslims was performed by the rabbi of the Lisbon synagogue until first halal butcher shops were established from 1982 on. Today there are at least six halal butcher shops in Lisbon, and three in Odivelas, one in Martim Moniz Square in the city centre, one in Laranjeiro, and another (owned by a non-Muslim) in the city centre. Halal chicken is available in the major shopping malls/supermarket chains (Continente and Jumbo). There are at least nine halal restaurants in the main cities.

## 11 DRESS CODES

The wearing of the headscarf and other distinctive clothing at school and work has not caused any conflict or controversy, but it is not a very common practice in public places.

## 12 PUBLICATIONS AND MEDIA

There are two or three small edited journals. Along with other religious groups, Muslims take part in two television programmes on the public channel RTP2, where the presentation time is divided between the communities according to the numerical strength. In practice, the time is mostly occupied by the Roman Catholic Church and, second, by Protestant and Pentecostal churches. A radio programme put out by a public broadcasting station (Antena 1) is expected to be inaugurated in 2009. The CIL runs a website ([www.comunidadeislamica.pt](http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt)) and some younger community members have activated a chatroom ([www.aliasoft.com/forumislam](http://www.aliasoft.com/forumislam)) where questions can be submitted to be answered by the imams. This chatroom is also frequented by Portuguese-speaking Muslims from outside Portugal (mainly from Brazil, but also from Mozambique and the UK).

### 13 FAMILY LAW

As noted above, since Islamic communities (and other religious minorities with long-standing tradition in the country) can register and be recognised as religious communities (and not only as associations of private law, as was the case until 2006), they can perform religious marriages which, by submission of the appropriate declarations, will be accepted in civil law. According to a spokesman of CIL, the organisation is currently making the necessary legal preparations for this process, while the Jewish community has already solemnised at least two such marriages in 2008.

### 14 PUBLIC OPINION AND DEBATE

The historically recent ‘new’ Muslim presence (as distinct from the historical presence on the Iberian Peninsular before the fifteenth century) did not attract much attention before 11 September 2001. The rhetoric of the ‘war on terror’ now puts Portuguese Muslims in a very strange situation, leaving them quite alienated in response to questions arising from a new kind of public ‘interest’. Their spokesmen deal with such questions (and sometimes insults) in their normal, patient and calm way. Researchers and Muslims know about harassment, but public Islam in Portugal always stresses that “Muslims in Portugal are not suffering from discrimination. They are well integrated citizens and members of society.”

The media mainly cover or mention special occasions (anniversaries and famous visitors to the communities) and festivals (especially the beginning and end of Ramadan).

### 15 MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS

In 2008, the major event was the fortieth anniversary of CIL, with the President of the Republic among the guests of honour.