

PORTUGAL

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1 Muslim Populations

Portugal has a rather small Muslim population which has grown mostly since the empire ended in 1974. Estimates of the communities themselves and by researchers suggest between 48,000 and 55,000 people, among them ca. 8,000 Isma'ilis, but mainly Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin from Mozambique and numerically stronger Sunni Muslims from Guinea-Bissau. Other Muslim groupings from Pakistan (4,000²) and Bangladesh (5,000³) have arrived more recently (noticeably since the early 1990s). Small numbers of Muslims stem from Morocco and Algeria (1,000–1,300), Senegal (1,500–1,900) and India (1,700). The recent increase of the Muslim population mainly derives from family reunifications among Bangladeshis (and less among Pakistanis), which now count more women, elderly people and children (for notable consequences see 3 and 5), together with some numerically rather small and predominantly male influxes from Senegal, Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau.⁴ While smaller Muslim communities

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² This number derives from a crossing of data from the SEF and estimations from inside the community. Pakistanis use to live in the centre of—and near Lisbon (Odivelas), as well as in Porto. No significant research is done to date about/among this population.

³ This number derives from a crossing of data from the Service of Foreigners and Borders (SEF) which announces 3,500 individuals, and from the data provided by the Consulate of Bangladesh in Lisbon (5,000). The number 5,000 corresponds with the estimations by researchers with ethnographic field experience. Bangladeshis mostly live in the centre of Lisbon, but also in and around Porto. See Mapril, José, “‘Bangla masdjid’: Islão e bengalidade entre bangladeshianos em Lisboa”, *Análise Social*, vol. XXXIX, no. 173 (Winter 2005), pp. 851–873.

⁴ Many recent male immigrants are settling at the Algarve to work in constructions.

are established from the north (mainly in Porto and Coimbra) to the south (in the Algarve) and on the island of Madeira, the overwhelming majority of Muslims live in and around the capital city Lisbon. The majority of Moroccan Muslims live in and around Porto and at the Algarve. In and near Lisbon, one can speak of a certain (but not massive) geographical concentration in single neighbourhoods, such as in Laranjeiro and Odivelas (both having well established, representative mosques), Damaia and Sintra (Cacém).

The “official” figures, from the immigration control/monitoring service (SEF, *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*) or from the census,⁵ do not reflect realities, with numbers usually lower than the estimates of researchers and the communities themselves. For example, according to the 2001 census, Portugal’s total population was 10,356,117 persons, of which 12,014 were declared to be Muslims.⁶ The reasons are, firstly, that religious affiliation is not recorded in the census and, secondly, that Portuguese citizenship is quite widespread and so nationality and ethnicity are unsatisfactory starting points. Additionally, in many cases the proportion of Muslims within the population of the country of origin cannot simply be transferred to the equivalent population in Portugal, especially not in the case of those coming from Mozambique or Guinea-Bissau.

2 Islam and the State

The Constitution, which recognizes 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 enjoyed privileges not granted to other religious groups.⁷ A decisive change came with the Religious Freedom Act of 22 June 2001, with important improvements for religious minorities implemented from the year 2006 on. Before the implementation of the new law, the Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL, see sect. 3), as well as smaller Islamic communities and other

⁵ National Institute of Statistics, www.ine.pt.

⁶ Leitão J., “The New Islamic Presence in Portugal: Towards a progressive integration”, in R. Aluffi B.-P. and G. Zincone (eds.), *The Legal Treatment of Islamic Minorities in Europe*, Leuven: Peeters, 2004, p. 180.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

religious minorities, could only be officially recognised as “associations in private law”. Those days, the community had once received financial support for the third of the (up to day) five phases of construction work of the Central Mosque which took place in 2002–2003. The State’s Commission for the Coordination of the Lisbon and South Targus Region (CCR, Comissão de Coordenação da Região Lisboa e Sul de Tejo) contributed 40% of the total costs to this phase of ongoing constructions/improvements. Later in 2004, the CIL has received a minor fund to support the daily costs of the Central Mosque from the City Hall of Lisbon (Câmara Municipal de Lisboa). Various donors had made the first phase of construction of the Central Mosque possible, which was concluded in the year of 1985 (the year of its inauguration, see sect. 16): The City Hall had offered the land (as it did later also for the cemetery in Lumiar, see sect. 7), and various Islamic majority countries had contributed with financial donations, as did the community members themselves.⁸

Once it was possible in 2006, the CIL converted to a registered religious community. It meant obtaining a legal status substantially equal to the one 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 general public funding. Several inequities remain, as privileges depend on the number of adherents of the religious groups and on the duration of their establishment in the country, with a minimum of 30 years required (the CIL was founded already 40 years ago). In practice, the CIL can benefit from tax advantages e.g. when spending on buildings. 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. Besides that, former presidents of the republic and also the present president have all been given the status of Honorary Members of CIL, and the current CIL president was one of the consultants of the president of the republic during his visits to India, Turkey and other countries. During the visit of the Dalai Lama to Portugal in 2007, the CIL organised and hosted a huge interreligious meeting in the Central Mosque, with the Dalai Lama

⁸ For details see N.C. Tiesler 2001, “No Bad News from the European Margin: the New Islamic Presence in Portugal”, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12(1), pp. 71–91, p. 79.

being the guest of honour—an important event, taking into account that the Portuguese government had been facing the same problems as other governments regarding the impact on official relations with China.

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 then 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 been Portuguese citizens already under colonial rule. Consequently, they did not perceive themselves as “immigrants”. Many African Muslims gather around their Sufi leaders. Muslims from Bangladesh have founded a mosque (*Mesquita Martim Moniz*) closer to their work place some years ago, and Senegalese inaugurated a prayer hall in the downtown district Anjos in 2010. However, the vast majority of at least ca. 40,000 Sunnis and their local communities are linked to and occasionally take part in the life of the central Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL, for contact details see *Mesquita Central de Lisboa*, below). The first and best known is the CIL, founded in 1968, which acts as an umbrella organisation in formal and informal ways for Sunni Muslims. The founding of an official umbrella organisation of/for Islamic communities in Portugal, akin to a Federation, has been in preparation since 2010, and will be starting with a first national congress of this kind in 2011.

The *Mesquita Central de Lisboa*, founded 1985, (Rua da Mesquita in Bairro Azul (à Praça de Espanha), 1070–283 Lisboa, tel: +351 21 387 41 42 / 21 387 91 84; fax: +351 21 387 22 30; e-mail: info@comunidade islamica.pt; www.comunidadeislamica.pt) has as its imam Sheikh David Munir. This is the home of the Islamic Community of Lisbon (CIL). Alongside common religious, cultural and social infrastructures (including a bookstore, chatrooms or the community website), three types of associations were founded in the thirty year old Central Mosque in the heart of Lisbon: the Women’s Association, several groups of Guinean Muslims, and the Youth Association of the Islamic Community (CILJovem) which is organised and frequented mainly (if not only) by young people of South Asian origin, including some

Isma'ili Muslims. The Central Mosque also provides space for meetings and projects of other associations of Muslims, such as the one founded by Senegalese.

The other main Muslim organisations are:

- *Comunidade Islâmica de Palmela* (Av. Vila Amélia, lote 171, 172, Cabanas, 2950–805 Palmela, tel: +351 21 211 05 30, fax: +351 21 211 05 39, email: cipalmela@hotmail.com), a local community in the suburbs of Lisbon where the Islamic secondary school, *Colégio Islâmico de Palmela* is also located.
- *Centro Cultural Ismaili e Fundação Aga Khan* (Rua Abranches Ferrao, 1600–001 Lisboa, tel: +351 217 229 000, fax: +351 217 229 045, email: nationalcouncil@netcabo.pt). The Aga Khan Foundation Portugal is currently running a quite efficient capacity developmental project, called K'cidade,⁹ the first project which focuses on the improvement of individual (education, integration into the labour market, citizenship training programmes) and community (child care, children's education) capacities in urban environments of a developed country (www.kcidade.com and see 5).
- *Comunidade Shi'ta de Portugal* (Ithna Ashari) (Avenida das Forças Armadas, 11 D, Almada; tel: +351 218106030; email: Bremtula__pnegra@netcabo.pt).

4 Mosques and Prayer Houses

Besides the Central Mosque mentioned above, there are two other “representative” mosques near Lisbon (in Odivelas and Laranjeiro), in Coimbra and since the year 2010 also in Funchal (Madeira Island). Altogether, one counts 36 cultural centres and prayer halls across the country, around twelve madrasa, as well as the Jamatkhana of the Shi'i Imami Isma'ili Muslim Community. Madrasa in the Portuguese context does not refer to a physical place, like a school building or class room, but announces the offer of religious instruction classes which are held in the main mosques and prayer halls.

⁹ In Portuguese pronunciation, this concept reads “capa-cidade”, as such including the term “city” in the term “capacity”.

5 Children's Education

A recognised, private secondary Islamic school exists in Palmela (near Lisbon). It counts approx. 200 pupils, with nearly 10% of them being non-Muslims. In 2009, it achieved the status of being the best school in the national ranking of public and private secondary schools (see sect. 15). Apart from the parents' engagement, most young Muslims receive their Islamic education in one of the madrasas and/or by private tutors who visit them at home. One consequence of the recent family reunifications among Muslim groupings from South Asia and from African countries is that the number of small, local community projects which focus on children's education (as well as citizenship training programs for adults) has increased over the past years. Some are initiatives of broader programs, as is e.g. the project at the Amadora mosque which makes part of the K' Cidade program of the Aga Khan Foundation.¹⁰ Religious curricula are increasingly combined with academic training, incl. alphabetization, language classes (Portuguese or, in the case of children e.g. from Guinea Conakry, French) and general capacity training (computer courses etc.).

The Law of Religious Freedom allows Islamic instruction in public schools, depending on the number of pupils/parents who require it (min. 10). In practice, there is currently no public school in Portugal with enough Muslim pupils of more or less the same age who could benefit from this offer. The parents do not complain about the lack of such service, as their children attend the instruction in the madrasas.

6 Higher and Professional Education

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) governs the position 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.¹¹ As a higher institution for the training of imams does not exist, imam training is partly provided at the Islamic school of Palmela. 15–18 women were educated there as *alimas* (Portuguese

¹⁰ While this developmental project is an initiative of the (Isma'ili) Aga Khan Foundation, the majority of communities and groupings where it provides necessary support are Sunnis.

¹¹ Leitão, p. 300.

feminine plural version of Arabic *alim*). Some imams have received their education abroad (mostly in the UK, with only few exceptions where Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia had been the preferred destination).

7 Burial and Cemeteries

There is no exclusively Islamic cemetery in Portugal, but several municipal cemeteries reserve areas for Muslims and their communities (Odivelas, Feijó). Officially since 2005 (and since 1998 in practice), such an area exists at the cemetery of Lumiar (a district of Lisbon), donated by the Municipality of Lisbon and open to Muslims from all over Portugal. More than 500 graveyards carry Muslim names. It has become the most important cemetery for both Sunni and Shi'i, both Isma'ili and Ithna-Ashari families, being called "our cemetery". Due to 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 arranging for a relative to be buried abroad.¹²

8 'Chaplaincy' in State Institutions

The Religious Freedom Act (no. 16/2001) grants members of the Islamic and other communities the right to practise their religion in special situations (such as at military service, admission to public hospitals, and imprisonment). In practice, there are no imams working exclusively or on a regular basis in such institutions due to the lack of need. If the need arises 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 which includes, of course, the visits of an imam. With regard to imprisonment, imams made visits on an informal basis until the official protocol was registered in the *Diário de República* I/185 (23.09.2009), and came into effect from 13 November 2009. Since then, community members, for

¹² Exceptions are made by people from Bangladesh, Pakistan and partly from Guinea Bissau.

example, provide late night meals to prisoners during the month of Ramadan.

9 Religious Festivals

The State does not officially recognise Islamic festivals or holidays but permits absence from work and school on 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 respective forms for applying to the authorities for time off. Workers and employees are expected to maintain a flexible schedule and to compensate working hours. Students may take their exams on alternative dates.

10 Halal Food

Ritual slaughter according to Islamic tradition is permitted, according to a spokesman of CIL, since 1975. Nevertheless, most ritual slaughter for Muslims was performed by the Rabbi of the Lisbon Synagogue until the first halal butcher shops were established in 1982. Today there are at least six halal butcher shops in Lisbon, three in Odivelas, one at the downtown square Martim Moniz, one in Laranjeiro, and another downtown in Alvalade (owned by a non-Muslim), and two in Porto. Halal chicken is even available at the major shopping malls/supermarket chains (Continente and Jumbo). At least twelve halal restaurants exist in the main cities, nine of them in Lisbon. Muslims who are living in the South of Portugal complain about the lack of halal food supply, with only chicken being available twice a week in supermarkets located in Faro and Albufeira. One can assume that this holds true for other places/regions outside Lisbon as well. A Muslim halal food supplier commented in an interview that this works according to the rules of the market, namely that if clients would ask for more (regular) supply of halal chicken, the supermarkets would order more.

11 Dress Codes

A law which targets the banning of religious dress is neither discussed among political parties, nor in the public and press in Portugal. Accordingly to spokesmen of CIL, the use of the head scarf or other

special dress at school and workplaces has not caused any conflict or controversies. In the Portuguese context, the Qur'anic concept of the "modesty of the woman" does not translate into the use of specific dress codes. Consequently, the latter is not a very common practice, neither among women nor men, apart from the occasions of religious festivals and visits at the mosque.

12 Publication and Media

With other religious groups, Muslims take part in two television programmes on the public channel RTP2, where the presentation time is divided according to the numerical strength of the communities. In practice, the time is mostly occupied by the Roman Catholic Church and, secondly, by Protestant and Pentecostal churches. A radio programme at a public broadcasting station (Antena 1), which follows the same pattern, was inaugurated on 1 November 2009. The CIL runs a website (<http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt>) and some younger community members have created a chatroom (www.aliasoft.com/forumislam) where one can also submit questions to be answered by the imams. Several blogs are used by young Muslims (muculmana.blog.com; islamicchat.blogspot.com; Portugal-islamico.blogspot.com).

Some of these virtual spaces are also frequented by Portuguese-speaking Muslims from outside Portugal (mainly from Brazil, but also from Mozambique or Portuguese Muslims who live in the UK).

There is currently only one printed journal, *Al-Furqan*, which is also available online (<http://www.alfurqan.pt>). It has a long standing tradition, is a private initiative and not related to CIL. During the last year, it even disappeared from the shelves of the book store at the Central mosque. The CIL publishes newsletters and other occasional grey literature and provides updated information on several matters on the above named community's website.

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 used to be the case until 2006), they can perform religious marriages which, by submission of respective declarations, will be

accepted by civil law. As with the Jewish and Evangelical communities, which have already solemnised a few of such marriages in 2008, the Islamic communities were able to realise the first marriages in 2010.

14 Interreligious Relations

Portuguese Muslims look back at a long tradition of interreligious relations, the latter having been informally established among leading personalities of different religious minorities already under Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique. The closest “cooperation” partner during the early years in Portugal had been the Jewish Community (see Halal slaughter). This relationship had been maintained during the negotiations about the new law of Religious Freedom which took place in the early 1990s and gained official character with the founding of the Abrahamic Forum (*Forum Abraâmico de Portugal*) in 2007 which joins Muslim, Jewish and Catholic representatives and is linked to the Three Faiths Forum (<http://www.threefaithsforum.org.uk>) with links with groups worldwide. The Abrahamic Forum organises cultural events (including lectures and debates) and assistance to people in need (of any religion and also for “the ones who might not profess any religion at all”). Such assistance is mainly organised through a task force composed of young people from the three religions joining hands to work with a selected Portuguese NGO and making food available.

In 2008, the CIL joined the Municipal Board for Interculturality and Citizenship (Conselho Municipal para Interculturalidade e Cidadania), which joins 37 religious groups and immigrant associations and is hosted at the City Hall of Lisbon.

CIL is also a party to the International Movement of Charter for Compassion (<http://charterforcompassion.org/>). Again, it was CIL, together with the Abrahamic Forum, which took the initiative and provided the space where 150 people met on a Sunday, 15 November 2009, for the Day of Compassion to reflect upon concepts of compassion (and follow up action), with speakers from 17 different religious and non-religious groups.

15 Public Opinion and Debate

The historically recent “new” Muslim presence (in distinction to the historical presence on the Iberian Peninsula before the 15th century)

did not attract much attention before 9/11 which brought more curiosity and questions about Islam and Muslims. The rhetoric of the “war on terror” is dealt with by the Portuguese Muslims and their spokesmen in their normal, utterly patient and calm way. Researchers and Muslims know about harassment. But public Islam in Portugal always stresses: “Muslims in Portugal are not suffering discrimination. They are well integrated citizens and members of society.”

The media mainly cover special occasions (anniversaries and famous visitors at the communities) and festivities (first and foremost the beginning and end of Ramadan), or mentions the Portuguese Muslim community when reporting on Muslims in other European countries or at international scale. Among the few recent occasions when Portuguese Islamic communities called the attention of the national-wide press had been the classification of the Islamic Secondary school (Palmela) on top of the national ranking (*Jornal de Notícias*, 13 November 2009), and the 25th anniversary of the Central mosque (*O Público*, 13 March 2010, see 16).

16 Major Cultural Events

The Day of Compassion (see section 14) on March 15 can be seen as the major cultural event in the year of 2009. In 2010, it was the 25th anniversary of the Central mosque, the first mosque in Portugal since the 15th century, when Muslims and Jews had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. The celebrations took place on Sunday, 14 March 2010 with the usual important guests, such as the President of the Portuguese Republic, the President of Lisbon’s City Hall and main representatives of other religions, governmental and non-governmental institutions. Portugal’s Prime Minister, José Socrates, was the guest of honour and one of the speakers in front of the numerous visitors. In his speech he highlighted the contribution of the Islamic community for “the growth and reinforcement of the Portuguese humanist and universalist tradition”, commenting that the state was secular, but not the society. The Central mosque published the following text on its website:

The celebrations will as always be an inter-religious event, counting on the presence of diverse religious confessions with which we have fraternal relationships, including as well our non-believing brothers, whether they be atheists or agnostics.

The year of 2010 was the “year of elections”. As usual, CIL elections were contested by rival lists of candidates, presenting, e.g., activity plans for the near future which include social, cultural and humanitarian aid projects. The CIL has now a new leading committee, in total 31 people (21 at the Executive Committee/Directory Board, among them five women, one of them became one of the four Vice-Presidents; five at the General Assembly; five at the Fiscal Committee). The president remained the same as during the last decades, namely Abdool Karim Magid Vakil. One of the projects, presented by candidates during the election campaigns, is getting started as a bi-monthly action in early 2011: “Soup for All” (as well as bread, fruits and juice) is provided to a general public at Fridays at the Central mosque.