

# Yearbook of Muslims in Europe

## Volume 4

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## PORTUGAL

*Nina Clara Tiesler and José Mapril<sup>1</sup>*

### 1 MUSLIM POPULATIONS

In last year's report, estimates of the size of Portugal's Muslim population from communities and researchers suggested 48,000 to 55,000 people, among which were 8,000 Isma'ilis while the remaining population was mainly Sunni Muslims of South Asian origin from Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and a smaller part composed by Muslims coming from other countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Morocco, Senegal and India. It is among this last group of more recently arrived migrants that the fluctuation in numbers seems to be more remarkable. According to a comparison of the "official" figures, stemming from the immigration control/monitoring service (SEF, *Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*), between 2009 and 2010 (the most recent figures), the number of residents from countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Morocco, Senegal and India have slightly decreased. In 2010, these amounted to 12,338 while in the previous year the registered numbers were 13,537.

There are two possible explanations for this change in numbers. First, the new nationality law, approved in 2006, allowed some migrants to

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naturalise and consequently disappear from the official statistics by becoming national citizens. The second possible explanation has to do with new migration processes related to the general economic climate and its impact in the economic structure. The lack of employment in the lower ranks of the Portuguese economy has significantly affected migrant populations and thus several have decided to move once again to other European countries. Still, in the case of Bangladesh, for instance, the existing migration flows to Portugal mainly derive from family reunifications.

While smaller Muslim communities 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 the Algarve. In and near Lisbon, one can speak of a certain (but not massive) geographical concentration in single neighbourhoods, such as Mouraria (in downtown Lisbon), Laranjeiro (Almada) and Odivelas (in these three cases there are representative mosques), Damaia and Sintra (Cacém).

## 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 enjoyed privileges not granted to other religious groups.<sup>2</sup> A decisive change came with the Religious Freedom Act of 22 June 2001, with important improvements for religious minorities implemented from 2006 on. Before the implementation of the new law, the CIL (Islamic Community of Lisbon), as well as smaller Islamic communities and other religious minorities, could only be officially recognized 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 Tagus Region (CCR, Comissão de Coordenação da Região Lisboa e Sul de Tejo) contributed to this phase of ongoing constructions/improvements with 40% of the total costs. Later in 2004, the CIL has received a minor

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

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 below 16. Major Cultural Events about the XXVth anniversary): The City Hall had offered the land (as it did later also for the cemetery in Lumiar, see section 7.), various Islamic majority countries had contributed with a financial donation, as did the community members themselves.<sup>3</sup>

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 which organised and hosted a huge interreligious meeting in the Central Mosque, with the Dalai Lama 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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

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, also known as mouros (among Guineans from Bissau) or marabouts (among Guineans from Conakri). In 2006, Muslims from Bangladesh founded the Baitul Mukarram mosque (named after Dhaka central mosque), also known informally as Mesquita do Martim Moniz, close to their work place,<sup>4</sup> which caters to five hundred believers on a regular Friday prayer and organises three hundred and fifty iftars during the whole month of Ramadan. Senegalese inaugurated a prayer hall in the downtown district Anjos in 2010 and created the ADSTP (Association des Disciples de Serigne Touba au Portugal). 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). 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.

In 2004, a group of Bangladeshi citizens formally registered the Comunidade Islâmica do Bangladesh (CIB)—the Islamic Community of Bangladesh—which is responsible for the financial and ceremonial management of the Baitul Mukarram mosque. The main funding of CIB comes from donations of the members of the congregation.

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@comunidadeislamica.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,

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<sup>4</sup> For a more comprehensive of the historical process behind the creation of this mosque see Mapril, José, “Bangla masjid: Islão e bengalidade entre bangladeshianos em Lisboa”, *Análise Social*, vol. XXXIX, no. 173 (Winter 2005), pp. 851–873.

including some Isma'ili Muslims. The Central Mosque also provides space for meetings and projects of other associations of Muslims, such 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: 21 211 05 30, fax: 21 211 05 39, email: cipalmela@hotmail.com).

*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,<sup>5</sup> the first project which focuses on the improvement of individual (education, integration into the labour market, citizenship training programs) 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).

The Bangladeshi *Baitul Mukarram mosque*, Rua do Benfornoso, 119—1º/2º/3º, 1100–083 Lisboa, Tel.: 91 738 5367

#### 4 MOSQUES AND PRAYER HOUSES

Besides the Central Mosque mentioned above, there are two purpose built mosques near Lisbon, namely in Odivelas and in Laranjeiro (the two first mosques to be built in Portugal). Oporto, Coimbra and, since the year 2010, Funchal (Madeira Island) have their own mosques. Altogether, one counts 36 cultural centres and prayer halls across the country, several of which have Islamic instruction classes (locally known as *madradas*), as well as the *Jamatkhana* of the Shi'i Imami Isma'ili Muslim Community. *Madrada* 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.

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<sup>5</sup> 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 (in Lisbon metropolitan area). It counts approx. 200 pupils, with nearly 10% of them being non-Muslims and it allows both a secular and a religious curriculum. In 2009, it achieved the status of being the best school in the national ranking of public and private secondary schools (see 12.). Part of the tuition fees for this school can be deducted in taxes, depending on the family income, and as of 2011, the Islamic college teaches the Cambridge International Curriculum.

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 programmes, as is e.g. the project at the Amadora mosque which makes part of the K'CIDADE programme of the Aga Khan Foundation.<sup>6</sup> Religious curricula are increasingly combined with academic training, incl. literacy, language classes (Portuguese or, in the case of children e.g. from Guinea Conakry, French) and general capacity training (computer courses etc.).<sup>7</sup>

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 figure of the imam in detail, equating imams with Roman Catholic priests in terms of legal

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> For a more comprehensive view see Mapril, José, (2010) *Bons muçulmanos: Educação Islâmica e cidadania na área metropolitana de Lisboa* in Vilaça, Helena e Pace, Enzo (eds.), *Religião em Movimento. Imigrantes e diversidade religiosa em Portugal e Itália*, Porto, Estratégias Criativas, pp. 37–54.

status, and providing for the possibility of setting up specific training institutions.<sup>8</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. 15–18 women were educated there as *alimas* (Portuguese feminine plural version of arab. *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). In some cases, especially among recently arrived migrants, the imams are chosen among the group in question according to their knowledge of Islamic issues—a knowledge usually acquired in their countries of origin.

## 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 graves 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".

In spite of this infrastructure, the burial place is a matter of contention. For some, usually Portuguese citizens or with family attachments to the country, the burial is frequently in the Islamic sections of Portuguese cemeteries. For others though, namely Bangladeshis and Guineans, there is a worry in burying the bodies in the country of origin. In order to do so, several informal associations or key figures collect money among other fellow countrymen. In the Guinean case, it is also common to send luggage with part of the deceased belongings.<sup>9</sup>

## 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

<sup>8</sup> Leitão, p. 300.

<sup>9</sup> See Mapril, José e Saraiva, Clara (forthcoming), "Le lieu de la bonne mort: transnationalismes funéraires entre migrants du Bangladesh et de la Guinée-Bissao", *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*.

(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 September 2009), and took effect only from 13 November 2009 on. Since then, community members, for 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.

As of 2011, the Comunidade do Bangladesh em Portugal (CBP)—Bangladesh Community in Portugal—an association created in April 2011, organises in close collaboration with the Baitul Mukarram mosque the main prayers of ‘id al-Fitr and ‘id al-Adha in a Lisbon downtown square—Martim Moniz. On both occasions, more than two thousand Muslims of South Asian and African backgrounds, gathered to pray in the square.

## 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 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 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 RTP 2, namely the programmes "A Fé dos Homens" and "Caminhos". The presentation time is divided according to the numerical strength of the communities and thus in the case of "Fé dos Homens" the Islamic community has seven minutes of each programme and in "Caminhos" a total of twenty five minutes per programme. In practice, the time is mostly occupied by the Roman Catholic Church and, secondly, by Protestant and Pentecostal churches.

The Islamic community also has a presence in two radio programmes, with the same names as the TV ones, at a public broadcasting station (Antena 1). In total, during 2011, the Islamic community organised 226 minutes of TV programs and 109 minutes of Radio broadcasting, dedicated to several different themes such as Islamic education or Islamophobia.

The CIL runs a website (<http://www.comunidadeislamica.pt>) and some younger community members have activated a chatroom ([www.aliasoft.com/forumislam](http://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](http://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. Like 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.

During 2011, eight marriages were celebrated among Sunni Muslims in Portugal, some of which were performed in Lisbon Central Mosque and others in different mosques throughout the country (in these last cases, the religious marriage is celebrated in the mosque but there is the need to perform a ceremony at a notary).

### 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.

On the 1 February 2011, the Islamic Community of Lisbon participated in the 2011 World interfaith week held at Universidade Lusófona, in Lisbon. The programme included a debate on religious minorities in the world after 11 September with Tariq Ramadan as an invited speaker. It also included the participation of Dr. Jorge Sampaio, former president of Portugal and current Representative of the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations.

During 2011, a new campaign entitled “Soup for everyone” (*sopa para todos*) was launched. During thirteen Fridays (every two months), between 7.30 and 9 pm, the Lisbon central mosque served in its canteen a hot meal with freshly baked bread and soup to all those in need. The programme was organised in close cooperation with several civil society institutions.

## 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 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. During 2011, the media coverage of Muslims in Portugal was very diverse. Some examples of the topics discussed in newspapers, television and radio programs were: the visibility of Muslims in downtown Oporto (*Islão: Muçulmanos sentem-se bem recebidos no Porto, mas ainda há preconceito*, 10 de Janeiro de 2011 *Jornalismo Porto Net*), the reaction of Muslims in Portugal to the death of Osama Bin Laden (*Os muçulmanos portugueses sublinham que o islão não tem qualquer ligação ao terrorismo*, 3 May 2011, RTP), and an ecumenical meeting for world peace between

Franciscans and Muslims, in Lisbon Central Mosque (*franciscanos e muçulmanos rezam juntos pela paz*, 27 October 2011, Ecclesia TV) and the ways Muslims perceive the current economic crises (interview with Shaik Munir to Antena 2, 11 May 2011).

## 16 MAJOR CULTURAL EVENTS

In April 2011, the Islamic Community of Lisbon together with the Luso-Turkish Friendship Association, organised an exhibition about Ebru art in Lisbon Central Mosque. It lasted three days and included children's classes about Ebru art and was open to the general public.

On 5 January 2012, Tariq Ramadan gave a lecture at Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian entitled 'Political and Religious Challenges Facing European Muslims', in an event organised by Centro de Estudos Sociais (Coimbra) and the British Council. The event had a significant impact in the public space with a number of press releases in central newspapers, among them a long interview with Tariq Ramadan in one of the main weeklies in Portugal—*Expresso* ("*Populismo é uma ameaça*", *Expresso*, 30 December 2011).