



Universal Periodic Review 47th session - Stakeholders' Report

Portugal: Freedom of Religion or Belief

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Submission by:

The Portuguese Evangelical Alliance (AEP) is an evangelical association bringing together and representing 355 affiliated local churches, in addition to 18 church associations and national churches, totalling over 700 places of worship. It was formally organized in 1921 after more than four decades of work in Portugal.

The European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) is an alliance of more than 50 European grassroots national and transnational evangelical movements from all Protestant traditions in 35 European countries. The EEA serves as a platform for common action and a voice for Europe's 15+ million Evangelicals.

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) is a network of churches in over 140 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 600 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

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Introduction

1. This report will address the following issues: a) religious freedoms and equality in Portugal, in the year marking 50 years of democracy since the Carnation Revolution and 23 years since the creation of the Religious Freedom Law; b) social initiatives and integration of the evangelical community; c) efforts in inter-religious dialogue in which Evangelicals have been involved; d) political, social, and religious concerns that need to be highlighted. We end this report with 5 recommendations.
2. According to the Registry of Religious Collective Entities, as of March 31, 2023, there were 917 non-Catholic religious entities or organisations registered, with 80% likely to be evangelical. This corresponds to approximately 730 evangelical organisations (or entities). These registered evangelical entities may correspond to several churches or places of worship.

a) Religious freedoms and equality

3. After a long journey for religious minorities in Portugal, only after the democratization that emerged with the 25th April 1974 revolution, did more solid legal foundations begin to be established in Portugal for the full recognition as legal entities of other religious groups, namely evangelicals, in addition to the Catholic Church. However, only 27 years later, on 22nd June 2001, the Religious Freedom Law was approved and published, which enshrined the rights and duties of religious groups in Portugal, with specific privileges for religious collective entities established in Portugal, i.e., those present for several decades with duly proven action.
4. One of the first achievements of Portuguese evangelicals was, from 1986 onwards, the regular broadcasting of religious programs on public television. Later, in the 1990/1991 school year, the possibility of teaching Evangelical Moral and Religious Education in public schools was granted, a privilege previously only offered to Catholics, benefiting from the Concordat with the Portuguese State of 1940 and cooperation with different political regimes over centuries.
5. Although Portuguese law on religious freedom is exemplary in the democratic space and one of the best in the world, legally speaking, in practical terms, there is still inadequacy to its contents and religious illiteracy today, as a result of centuries of Roman Catholic influence, exacerbated by the secularist and laicist attempt to push everything related to faith out of the public space. There are still limitations on freedom of expression on all matters relating to religion in general and, especially, regarding Christian morality in any public instance, whether in schools, in professional framework, in public functions, and with special intensity in the media, which limit any interventions in these

matters outside places designated for religious topics.

b) Social initiatives and integration of the Evangelical community

6. In a 2020 master's thesis¹ on Evangelical charities and the importance of creating a federative networking structure, 538 ISCEs (Evangelical Solidarity Institutions) were identified. Evangelical social and educational work dates back to its early roots in Portugal, during the 19th century. Recently, in 2021, EUNOIA – Evangelical Christian Social Federation was created with the aim of uniting and valuing the efforts of the evangelical community for integration and social support.
7. The evangelical community, like other religious groups, has naturally been crucial in supporting and integrating migrants from Brazil, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Society and political institutions cannot and should not overlook the sense of belonging that religious communities bring to those outside their countries.
8. Culturally, Christianity and the Bible have left an undeniable legacy in our country, in terms of heritage, history, arts, citizenship, and others. An example of this was the brilliant initiative developed by the Bible Society in 2004-2005, which involved schools, renowned artists, and political bodies, in a titanic effort to handwrite the full Bible by more than 100,000 scribes.
9. In recent years, the Portuguese Evangelical Alliance has also sought to develop efforts towards the study and historical and sociological knowledge of the reality of evangelical communities in Portugal, addressing issues such as the growth (or lack thereof) of communities, statistical surveys, leadership reproduction, social work, missions, interculturality in evangelical communities, lifestyles, and spirituality of adolescents and young people, and more recently on young people's openness to theological training, with surprising results.

c) Inter-Religious Dialogue

10. One of the commendable results of the Religious Freedom Law was the creation of the Inter-religious Dialogue Working Group (GT DIR), now under the responsibility of AIMA (Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum), a governmental entity. This group works at a central level, creating spaces and structures for inter-religious dialogue among various faiths.

¹ CARTAXO, P. (2020). *As Instituições de Cariz Evangélico e a Importância da Criação de uma Estrutura Federativa de Trabalho em Rede* [Mestrado]. Escola Superior de Gestão e Tecnologia, Santarém.

11. Religious confessions also have, as enshrined in the law, the opportunity for airtime on state television and radio, although still at times inaccessible to the general public.
12. Legally and for consultation with the sovereign bodies, there is the Religious Freedom Commission, which issues opinions on new religious groups or other specific issues in this field.
13. It is important to highlight the exhibition “Paths of Religious Freedom in Portugal” at the headquarters of the National Parliament, on display in 2023/2024, as another instrument for dialogue and recognition of the importance of religious groups and faith in Portugal, as well as a means of reflecting on the steps that still need to be taken.

d) Political, social, and religious concerns in the country

14. Following the trend in the European space, sympathy for populist political groups has been increasing, bringing concerns to the scientific and political community about mass manipulation, demagoguery, and xenophobic and racist extremism.
15. Recently (2023 and 2024), some corruption scandals involving government officials have emerged, culminating in the recent dissolution of the Assembly of the Republic and the calling of elections by the President of the Republic.
16. Various professional groups, teachers, police officers, railway workers, as well as associative groups, have taken to the streets to protest for better conditions, as well as for access to housing, which is currently one of the biggest problems for both nationals and foreigners. Some foreigners choose to live in tents, in vacant spaces, because they have work but do not have money to pay for a house.
17. Equal access to chaplaincies in prisons, hospitals, and military forces is not guaranteed to religious communities. Evangelicals still depend more on the goodwill of those who run the organisations than on the strict and necessary compliance with the law.
18. Also, since 2017, the government has implemented legislation that fully embraces a sociological perspective that considers gender self-determination possible, with different repercussions, including the criminalization of healthcare professionals, teachers, and religious individuals who oppose the implementation of this agenda. This severely limits conscience rights, parents' freedom of education, religious teaching, and freedom of expression rights.

Recommendations

- 1. Promote more widespread training in various ministries and government departments so that all public servants can effectively comply with the Religious Freedom Law without discrimination.**
- 2. Promote equal and fair access to all religious communities to chaplaincies in prisons, hospitals, and military forces.**
- 3. Integrate through legislation evangelical theological schools and seminaries into the national education system.**
- 4. Allocate land for the construction of worship spaces in urban planning for all religious communities, including evangelicals, and ensure protection in rental legislation, and in noise and urban planning regulations.**
- 5. Review all legislation regarding gender self-determination to ensure recognition of social and religious perspectives that do not accept personal gender self-determination.**