



PRESIDÊNCIA DO CONSELHO DE MINISTROS  
Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas

*Territorial actions and institutional experiences*

*The High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic  
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Until today Portugal has experienced a long and continued history of being a country of departure for emigrants. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it also became a host country. Today, different communities, notably the Brazilian, Ukrainian and Cape-Verdean, now make up 5% of the resident population in Portugal (around 500,000 legal immigrants) and 8% of the working population. These communities began to grow significantly from the 1990's onwards, when there were only around 100,000 immigrants, reflecting an increase of 400% in fifteen years.

Portugal has benefited in recent decades from the presence of such immigrants who have helped accelerate the process of development which our country is enjoying. Contributing 243 million Euros towards State finances, in 2002 and the positive impact in balancing the demographic pyramid are clear examples of this. However, it is also important to underline the enrichment gained from both the cultural and religious diversity introduced by immigrant communities since *“cultural diversity is one of the sources of development, understood not simply as economic growth, but also as a means of access to a satisfactory intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual existence.”*<sup>1</sup>

Since 1996, Portuguese society has developed a more consistent and coordinated policy to welcome and integrate immigrants. This has been carried out by the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME), a body reporting to the Prime Minister and the Minister to the Presidency. Its mission statement is *“to promote the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities into Portuguese society, assure the*



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*participation and cooperation of representative immigrant associations, social partners and welfare bodies in defining the policies of social inclusion and the fight against exclusion, as well as following the application of legal instruments to prevent and outlaw discrimination while exercising one's rights on the basis of race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin.*'<sup>ii</sup>

Placing responsibility for an integration policy at the centre of Government, reflects both its importance and the global and integrative vision of the areas related to it. Rather than allocating this role to internal Security or Labour and Social Affairs, it has become a central theme running through all areas of Government.

### ***Seven key principles***

The policy of welcoming and integrating immigrants in Portugal is based around seven key principles that directly influence the concrete programmes and actions that different public bodies have developed.

1. The equality of rights and responsibilities among national and foreign citizens who are present or who reside in Portugal is seen as a defining and inspiring principle. The fight against all forms of discrimination and effective rights and responsibilities define what we are arguing for on immigration policies - equal access, especially to Work, Health, Education, Social Security and Justice. In the same way, respect for the Law, civic



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participation and the payment of taxes are obligations which immigrants should comply with, in the same way as nationals. To implement and carry out this principle, we have extensive national and community legislation, the Commission for Equality and Anti-Racial Discrimination (CICDR), the representative body of various Ministries, Parliament, immigrant and anti-racist associations as well as trade unions and companies.

2. But often equality is not enough. Immigrants, especially newcomers, have competitive disadvantages or specific vulnerabilities, which demand positive actions to enable effective equality. To achieve such an objective, inspired by the principle of Hospitality, Portugal has, like other countries, developed Programmes and Actions that allow immigrants to be well received.

Sound examples of this principle include the *National Immigrant Support System*, where initiatives such as the *National Immigrant Support Centres* (like the one stop shop model) have been developed. These support centres combine the presence of public bodies which immigrants have to deal with, alongside a diversified set of *Support Offices* (Family Reunion, Employment and Legal Support etc) which speed up access to fundamental rights. Furthermore, the *National Network of Information for the Immigrant* provides useful and practical information in a variety of languages and in different formats (paper, web, media, telephone and information centres) which facilitate immigrant integration. In this area the teaching of Portuguese activated by the Programme “Portugal Receives” (*Portugal Acolhe*) is also extremely important.



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We must not ignore the case of immigrants who find themselves in an irregular situation. The law must be respected and immigration must be legalised within that law and the networks that exploit irregular immigration should be fought against. One must also remember that being an illegal immigrant does not constitute being a criminal. These people have core, fundamental rights, irrespective of their documental situation. An individual's human dignity is untouchable and should be protected in the most extreme of adversities and this requires maintaining a core of essential rights due to any person. Examples of special note in our experience include the need of access to essential health care, temporary shelter in an emergency situation or voluntary return to the country of origin. Providing solidarity and competent legal support that legally defines an immigrant's situation is also important because a lack of knowledge of the law and of one's rights often leads to an "irregular" situation and/or no means to defend oneself. And when there is no alternative but forced exclusion, this can also be carried out with all due humanity and respect.

3. The exercise of Equality naturally leads us on to the principle of full Citizenship. While still non-nationals, we would argue that immigrants are citizens with full rights. They are active builders of a destination community, even though they do not share a common origin. Even the restrictions still in place at the level of political participation should gradually disappear, since political participation at the local authority level, which the Portuguese Constitution foresees, is not sufficient in itself.

A form of access to citizenship *par excellence* is the acquisition of Portuguese nationality, and this has been made easier by the recent change



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in the Citizenship Law; something of particular importance to the descendants of immigrants who are now able to benefit from the various ways of obtaining Portuguese nationality.

4/5. This vision leads to another consequence in immigration policy, affirming the principles of *Co-responsibility* and of *Participation*. An inclusive society can only be built on respect for the principle of full cultural and political participation of all citizens – national and immigrant. Immigrants should seek this participation and the host society should also be open to that participation within its *polis*.

In this way, it is hoped that immigrants, as citizens, will participate and have co-responsibility for the Common Good and, particularly with regard to immigration policy, be part of the solution. The influence of their associations, the presence of socio-cultural mediators from the immigrant communities in public services and the voice of their representatives in the *Advisory Council for Immigration Affairs*, a body advising the government on immigration policy issues, all reflect what has already been achieved.

6. In another particularly sensitive area, the management of cultural diversity, the Portuguese option has been very clear; the principle of Interculturality has been applied. Within a framework of mutual respect and acting within the Law, it has promoted richness of diversity through dialogue. More than just different communities peacefully co-existing, the intercultural model is at the crossroads of cultural miscegenation, with neither side being destroyed nor imposed upon. Rather than the simple



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acceptance of “others”, the intercultural model proposes the welcoming of “others” and the transformation of both within that relationship

The *Entreculturas Office* prioritised work within the field of Education and since 1991 has been developing an important programme of intercultural education, using training activities and producing pedagogical materials.

7. Finally, the construction of immigration policy in Portugal has been characterised by the principle of *Consensus*. The permanent search surrounding questions of immigration, through dialogue and negotiation, for a widened political and social consensus is not merely a question of tactics. It is an essential option for keeping immigration policy away from fractious territory where populist anti-immigration arguments flourish, as seen in many European countries. An example is the change in the Citizenship Law which has become more open and humanistic, with an extremely wide parliamentary consensus and without a single vote being cast against it.

However, in democratic societies, building such a consensus implies, among other things, raising awareness of public opinion in relation to welcoming immigrants, as well as by demystifying stereotypes and incorrect public preconceptions. In this regard the media has given much attention to the treatment of the immigration question. Initiatives such as the *Journalism for Tolerance Prize* or producing the television programme *Nós (We)* are encouraging and concrete expressions of this work.

These are seven mobilising principles both for the State and for civil society. We would argue that the State should become the main ally of



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immigrant integration. This can only be achieved by an ongoing cooperation between different State bodies, through seeking coherent responses which embrace a variety of sectors. Particular attention should be given to the local aspect of welcoming, and promoting local integration. At the same time, it is essential to reinforce the alliance with civil society bodies through empowering their generous, flexible and, normally, more efficient intervention.

Portugal is still learning to become a country that receives immigrants. Its integration policy needs to be developed and consolidated. We have much to do and to improve upon. But it is a priority aim and we know what we want.

In the 21st century, immigration policy will be one of the factors that will define each Society: *“tell me which immigration policy you have and I will tell you who you are”*. And each of our societies needs to be attentive, so that one day it does not become ashamed of who it is.

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<sup>i</sup> Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity. (UNESCO, 2001)

<sup>ii</sup> Art. 1, No. 2, DL 251/2002”