



## Intercultural Cities Programme

### City of Setúbal visit report

---

#### Background

Setúbal is a municipality located in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region of Portugal. The city is on the edge of the Setúbal peninsula, on the north bank of the Sado estuary, roughly 40 km south of Lisbon.

Setúbal has a total area of 230,3km<sup>2</sup>, divided into 8 civil parishes. The total population, according to the 2011 census, is 121.185. Most of the population is concentrated in the city itself, with 4 of the 8 parishes having a significantly lower population density.

Setúbal's importance has always been linked to its location and natural port. During the period of Portuguese maritime expansion, Setúbal gained further importance, as some expeditions left from the city. The 1755 earthquake destroyed a lot of the city, especially the Riverside areas.

During the second half of the 19 century the first railway track arrived, as well as the first fish canning factories. This brought a new era of prosperity for Setúbal. In the 20th century, the city witnessed several industrial developments in fertilizers, cement, paper, metalworking and shipbuilding.

Setúbal's industry saw a steady decline towards the end of the 20th century, resulting in a large increase in the unemployment figures. The city, traditionally seen as a working class town (as opposed to some of its suburbs, populated by wealthy landowners), has traditionally been ruled by a succession of left wing parties (PS, Socialist Party, and CDU, Portuguese Communist Party).

The current Mayor, Maria das Dores Meira, represents the Portuguese Communist Party. The Councillors represent the communist, Green and socialist parties.

In 2004, the city saw the central government approve a bailout plan which allowed the municipality to pay off some of its debts. The plan involved a restructuring of the municipality's human resources to curb costs.

#### Cultural and Ethnic Diversity

87 different nationalities are present in the Municipality of Setúbal, according to the latest data available (2011). The foreign population of Setúbal totals 6 621, representing 5% of the population. The figures are in line with the Portuguese national pattern. These figures don't take into account irregular migrants and those who have acquired Portuguese citizenship. After Lisbon, the Setúbal district has the highest number of regular migrants in Portugal.

During the 1960s and 70s, Setúbal saw a significant influx of migrants both from other regions in Portugal (Alentejo) and ex-colonies (mainly Portuguese speaking African nations), as the industrial boom in the city offered a lot of jobs. At the time, Cape Verde was one of the main countries of origin. Currently, nationals of the island-state are still the third group in terms of numbers.

Turing the 1990s and the turn of the 20th century, as a result of a construction boom and a generous availability of EU funds, Portugal saw a large influx of migrants from Brazil and Eastern Europe.

The breakdown of migrant groups by nationalities is described in the table below:

Country of origin	Population	% of total foreign population
Brazil	3095	41
Romania	804	11
Cape Verde	741	10
Ukraine	586	8
Angola	474	6
Moldova	399	5
China	227	3
Bulgaria	160	2
Guinea	143	2
São Tomé and Príncipe	92	1
Russia	83	1
Other	1085	14

Setúbal's Roma community is ranked as the 3-4th most numerous in Portugal. The vast majority of them are Portuguese citizens, although in recent years the municipality has seen a few arrivals of isolated Roma groups from Eastern Europe.

Most migrants live in São Sebastião parish, where the majority of social housing (including the Bela Vista Neighbourhood) is located.

The economic and financial crisis has had an impact on Setúbal's migrant population. Besides the unemployment phenomenon (Portugal's unemployment went over 17% in 2013), in recent years, migrants from countries with significant economic growth have chosen to return to their countries of origin. This is most notable in the Brazilian community.

### **Complex neighbourhoods**

Setúbal has some neighbourhoods with complex social and structural challenges. The better known and stigmatized is Bela Vista district, located in San Sebastiao parish with an estimated population of 4,422 residents spread over three distinct neighbourhoods (called yellow, blue and red). This social housing district was created to locate industrial workers, those relocated from shanty towns and people who came from Portuguese ex-colonies.

The population is quite young with an average age of 34. Portuguese nationals are the majority in the neighbourhood. 10% of residents are Roma, and the neighbourhood has a diverse ethnic background, with

the African population representing the biggest group ( 21 % ). The educational level of the residents is quite low with most having just completed the first cycle of basic education and 10% of the population being illiterate. The unemployment rate is high and about 45 % of the residents live on family support. According to a social diagnosis conducted by the intercultural mediation service through many interviews with residents, 60% of respondents were satisfied with living in the neighbourhood. Among the negative aspects highlighted were degradation of housing and urban spaces, alcoholism and drugs as well as noise and some problems of coexistence and security-related problems. The neighbourhood has a negative image nation-wide, due to a series of incidents which received disproportionate media attention. The result was an automatic association of Bela Vista with delinquency and violence<sup>1</sup>. The origin of the most problems is related to high unemployment, low levels of education, dysfunctional families with many social problems and high degree of heterogeneity and cultural diversity.

The work that has been done by institutions to improve neighbourhood conditions in recent years was positively valued, although the study detects a lack of coordination between institutions involved. Residents also valued as positive the recent creation of public spaces and services either in the same neighbourhood or in nearby areas, such as Parque da Bela Vista Verde , Manteigada municipal pool , a municipal library and a supermarket , kindergarten and home support service .

In 2011 the council launched the “Nosso Bairro Nossa Cidade” (our neighbourhood, our city) project. The premise is that improving neighbourhood conditions depends both on the intervention of the institutions and the active participation of its residents and then fostering responsibility, autonomy and community building. The project has promoted actions run by residents related to improving the physical conditions of the neighbourhood such as painting the outer walls of building, maintenance of cleanliness, cultural activities, sports , health and awareness actions.

We had the opportunity to walk around Bela Vista and were impressed by an urban reality difficult to be “called” a neighbourhood. We could see the concern and efforts of the local council, being innovative and working together with local residents. However this seems far from enough in order to make a real change here. Whatever difficulties, this should be a main priority not only local one but also at national level.

The other social neighbourhood is Bairro da Manteigada that was built in 2010 near Bela Vista with a population with diverse cultural origins and also with similar problems linked to poor existence of services like public transport , leisure facilities, pharmacies, health centres , supermarkets etc.

Apart from Bela Vista and Manteigada, the Intercultural Mediation in Public services identify two other priority areas. The first one is the Bairro do Troino, a historic neighbourhood with residents traditionally linked to the fishing sector, although this has changed due to the crisis in this sector. The area has an aging populatoin with houses in a poor condition. However there is a lot of trade and local grilled fish restaurants very frequented by locals and tourists. In recent years have seen the arrival of younger and cosmopolitan new residents, who have brought new energy and various social and cultural associations have been created. Since the 90s of last century many immigrants came to the neighbourhood, the most representative being Brazilians.

---

<sup>1</sup> See University of Coimbra study

The last priority area is Freguesia do Sado District that presents semi-urban characteristics with some weight of agriculture and fishing but also locates major industries. Some migrants, most from Romania came to work in the marine industry and in factories close to these neighbourhoods. Some problems were identified linked to difficulties of access to healthcare and other services by some residents and also related to minor delinquency and some illegal occupation of houses. On the other hand, the perception of residents were quite positive in terms of good level of social relations between migrants and locals, being favoured by the characteristics of houses and urban space which facilitate this social interaction among neighbours.

### **Diversity Management in Portugal**

The current High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue has its origin in the 90's, when a central government body was set up to deal with immigration. Before this period, most immigration came from ex-colonies. Those that arrived already spoke the language, and to an extent there was a lesser need to formulate policies to accommodate them. The growing diversity of the migrant population, the opening of borders with the accession to the Schengen agreement, bilateral agreements with Portuguese- countries amongst other factors were met with a strategic response from the Government. In 1996 this body became known as the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME), and in 2007 this became the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI). ACIDI Works under the direct authority of the Minister's Council.

Portugal is one of the few European countries to have adopted an instrument for global orientation of public policy on the integration of immigrants in the form of the first Plan for Immigrant Integration, effective from 2007 to 2009, and a second Plan for the period 2010-2013, which comprises 90 measures across various policy areas. It is also one of the few countries where a single public body, ACIDI, takes responsibility for policies on intercultural dialogue. As such ACIDI oversees the Immigration Observatory, numerous pro-active integration programme and a country-wide network of 86 National Immigration Assistance Centres (CLAI). These centres assist migrants in dealing with a wide range of bureaucratic and other tasks.

Immigration has notoriously been absent from electoral discourse in Portugal. Only in the 90's was there some polarization in the Portuguese parliament over immigration laws. Portugal's most recent nationality law was passed in 2007. It reduces the requirements for obtaining citizenship and introduces new ways of obtaining it. The law eliminates discrimination by country of origin for the +period during which a foreigner must have lived in Portugal before having access to citizenship, as well as the type of visa or residence permit he/she had during that time.

### **Diversity Management in Setúbal - Municipality**

Setúbal appears to have a positive political discourse on immigration. The deputy mayor, who kicked off the expert visit, emphasized the importance of not only working for migrants but also with their associations.

In Setúbal, the GIME (Office for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities) is the administrative unity responsible for this area. Structurally, it is part of the social inclusion division, housed in a department which includes culture, education and sport (DCED). This results in a transversal approach to migrants and diversity, at least where these policy areas are concerned. Notably, within each division, there is a unit dedicated to working with civil society.

As concerns education, the municipality has limited input, as most policy is determined by the central government. However, the DCED was aware of the fact that there is a concentration of migrant children in the neighbourhoods they live in, with a limited number of autochthonous children going to these neighbourhoods, mainly for logistical reasons related to transport. The education division sees problem more in terms of educational difficulties than origin.

In terms of sports and culture, Setúbal has good facilities which it allows the local civil society to use. The cultural division supposedly promotes the use of its facilities with migrant associations, however the ones we met with did not know of any such activity.

Some activities run by minorities have a limited cross-cultural attendance. On the other hand there is evidence of good attendance by the general public of “intercultural” activities and a good amount of inclusion of diversity in the cultural programming. Examples of this include the Setúbal Musical Festival, the Santiago Fair or the Intercultural Afternoons<sup>2</sup>.

The GIME has an inclusive approach to diversity and migration, and handles a number of issues related to this segment of the population. For example, it acts as the bridge between migrant associations and the rest of the municipal structure. Through Setúbal, Ethnicities and Immigration (SEI), the GIME provides a number of services to migrants, connecting them with a number of public and private entities and the functions they perform<sup>3</sup>. The GIME also helps with consular acts and electoral procedures for foreigners in their home countries.

The GIME also implements a number of ACIDI programmes in the Setúbal County, including the Escolhas programme and mediation services.

### **Diversity Management in Setúbal – Other entities**

A number of other entities, beyond the administrative scope of the municipality, are involved in the management of Setúbal’s diversity. The Borders and Foreigners Service (SEF) has 3 mediators operating in the Setúbal district, who usually work on the most difficult cases. The SEF officer who met with us stated that Setúbal often attracts Africans and Brazilians related to crime, although no statistical data was presented to prove this fact.

Setúbal, contrary to other municipalities in Portugal, does not have a Municipal Police (PM) force. Security is guaranteed by the national police (Policia de Segurança Pública, PSP). According to the officers present, trouble in neighbourhoods often occurs due to the presence of different ethnic groups in the same neighbourhoods<sup>4</sup>. The PSP have a proximity policing presence in some Setúbal neighbourhoods. Those involved are chosen according to their profile and then given training. However, the policing is often seen as inadequate for the local reality. There are district level guidelines for this aspect

---

<sup>2</sup> The Setúbal Music Festival takes place during the Intercultural Dialogue Month of May. The municipality has given an intercultural element to the festival, adding world music to the programme and a grass roots elements, with schools and migrant associations invited to participate in a percussion march through the city, which results in a good interaction between all (one of CoE experts visited the festival). The yearly Santiago Fair which takes place during the summer was moved to a more “problematic” neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city, in an effort to bring more people to the area and destigmatize it. Intercultural events have also been included in the programme.

<sup>3</sup> These include Border Control (SEF), Education and Health services, employment office, ombudsman, Caritas, OIM etc.

<sup>4</sup> This was also referred to by some of the migrant associations. The negative media coverage of the Bela Vista neighbourhood stems from this phenomenon.

Setúbal's hospital<sup>5</sup> has had to adapt to diversity in order to maintain its certification under the Joint Commission. As examples of this, the representative present cited information leaflets in Chinese, and the regular use of the SOS Imigrante hotline in cases where interpretation was necessary. In addition, a number of professionals from other countries work at the hospital, although in Portugal this is usually the case due to the shortage of medical staff. The Social Security representative dispelled the myth of welfare abuse: In Portugal, people can only benefit from this once they have contributed to the system. They have taken a proactive attitude to migrant unemployment, setting up Portuguese language courses to increase migrants' chances of getting a job. Their mediators also go out into the community to provide counsel to those who need it. The issue of domestic violence was also raised: Many migrant women who are victims are afraid of leaving their partners for fear of losing the right to stay in the country. The problem appears to be the lack of information, or the fact that it isn't reaching the intended target.

### **Local associations**

A number of migrant associations, representing the main communities, were present at the meeting. There were no representatives of the Roma community, as it appears they are not organised as such. The associations have a range of different scopes of activity and indeed of effectiveness and proactivity. In general they are satisfied with the way in which the municipality works with regards to them and those they represent, given the constraints currently faced by public administration. Some of the points raised are described below. Issues such as cuts in language courses provided by the employment office, delays in foreign qualification recognition or lack of adaptation of the education system were referred, but are beyond Setúbal's competence.

- The lack of some public services in the neighbourhoods where most of them are based (Bela Vista and Manteigadas), meaning that they have to go into the centre for these things. However, others saw this as positive as it encourages interaction. Transport was generally seen as inadequate.
- One association questioned the usefulness of the mediation services, although the fact that they are one of the oldest communities present historically and speak Portuguese as a mother tongue must be considered.
- The historic relocation of those previously living in shantytowns towards council housing neighbourhoods was done in the 80's, with little consideration for who was being relocated. According to one of those present, the relocation should be rethought by the municipality, with more dispersion throughout the city. Many people avoid giving a Bela Vista address when looking for jobs, due to the stigma attached to the area. Often people from the neighbourhood feel like they are not a part of the city.
- As concerns culture, some of the present mentioned that although the municipality cedes its facilities, there is little or no other support for cultural production. As a result, they feel left out of the cultural programming available to them.
- The participation in local politics was seen as a positive factor, particularly under the municipality's encouragement. The municipality should reinforce its work in the field, as it is perhaps the most effective way to make people feel included in their host society

---

<sup>5</sup> Hospitals are run by central government, Ministry of Health

- The perception of migrants is not the best, and some felt discrimination was increasing. They felt the municipality should work on improving the perceptions on diversity through education. A debate on racism was proposed to the municipality, who never responded.

## **CLAI**

There are a number of different ways the CLAI function in the 86 towns and cities they are present. The ACIDI is always one of the stakeholders. In some cases, the municipality is a partner, in others civil society. In Setúbal, the local partner is the parish (Catholic, as opposed to civil parish). The Bishop did not respond to the municipality's request for a meeting during the visit. The opening of the CLAI in Setúbal caused some unease with the municipality, as they were not consulted. A number of associations were also estranged by the opening, as they were not consulted.

In addition, the CLAI provides many of the same services as the SEI.

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions highlight the key findings of the visit, identifying strengths and weaknesses of Setúbal in the context of diversity and intercultural policies.

### Strengths:

1. The municipality of Setúbal has been committed for years to a positive discourse on cultural diversity and a proactive approach to the promotion and implementation of policies for managing this diversity.
2. Both political discourse and policies that have been implemented have evolved over the years and have consolidated a quite clear commitment to the principles of interculturalism.
3. This approach has been favoured by a state-wide context in this direction, promoting policies, creating agencies and allocating a significant amount of resources to promote the integration of immigrants and positive diversity management.
4. The political context in Portugal, where immigration has never been taken up during electoral campaigns is important to take into account to better understand the local context and policies.
5. There are specific elements that allow us to corroborate Setúbal's real commitment to promote policies that encourage intercultural integration in the context of a municipality which traditionally has shown particular sensitivity to prevent social exclusion of various groups (such as the elderly , people with disabilities etc.)
6. The creation in 2004 of the GIME gave a renewed importance to integration and diversity policies. It provides an umbrella for a set of initiatives to support not only immigrant integration but to promote awareness and intercultural relations between all citizens.
7. Beyond the creation of this specific agency, it is remarkable the commitment of the city to move towards a more cross-departmental approach in their policies for social inclusion and diversity. This approach works best within the DCED, but also in the communication policy, providing a positive image of cultural diversity linked to the city identity.

8. An example of this view is the set of transversal initiatives and events organized at the city level in which culture, education or sports are very present and constitute great opportunity to foster intercultural relations.

9. Intercultural mediation in the public services of Setúbal is a service that is doing important work in some specific districts prioritized by their high level of cultural diversity and complex social realities. The social diagnosis made of these neighbourhoods is a good tool to adapt policies and rethink priorities.

10. The existence of more than 250 civil society organisations in the fields of culture, sports, social inclusion etc. is a great asset to Setúbal that has been enriched in recent years with the consolidation of 7-8 associations of immigrants.

### Weaknesses

1. The impact of the economic crisis and cuts in public budgets that has affected the whole country has led to a deterioration of many social and economic indicators of Setúbal . Coupled with the financial restraints specific to Setúbal, the capacity for investment and implementation of structural policies, especially on social housing, has been hampered..

2. In Setúbal this is a serious issue. High prices along with the end of new council housing building have resulted in a long waiting list council housing that can take up to 10 years. Council housing is concentrated in a few specific neighbourhoods, with no policy to distribute its residents throughout the city. Consequently, some neighbourhoods have become highly stigmatised. However, it seems that some changes lately introduced to the access criteria have shown some positive results.

3. The economic crisis is forcing some migrants to leaving the city to other countries or returning to their country of origin. In some cases relatives stay in Setúbal and risk social exclusion and poverty.

4. The city has experienced a lower economic development in recent decades than neighbouring municipalities. These have profited more from tourism and new industrial installations (a large VW factory in Palmela, for example). There is some perception in Setúbal of a collective feeling of low self-esteem, with and inward image of an unattractive urban centre with a number of social issues. However it seems Setúbal residents have also a strong sense of belonging to the city.

6. The Bela Vista neighbourhood is one of the most negative examples of the ghettoization of certain urban areas in Europe, with serious structural problems. Despite the city's efforts to try to improve the conditions of these neighbourhoods, the intervention seems far from enough to provide a real solution. Without a commitment from the state together with the city to turn around this situation we are not optimistic about the future of Bela Vista, which probably constitutes the biggest stigma in the collective imagination of Setúbal.

7. In terms of intercultural policies, the main weakness identified is the lack of an overall strategic plan. Many policies are well focused and addressed from a cross-departmental and intercultural perspective. However there is a need to set strategic priorities and objectives and define an action plan for the long term.



8. One of the challenges shared with many other European cities refers to the situation of Roma, the most discriminated of all minorities. Attempts made by the council to work with this group do not appear to have been successful.

9. One of the main challenges identified in many cities is to ensure good coordination between institutions and organizations active in the territory. In the case of Setúbal, it seems there is some lack of coordination between the state and city services related to immigrant's integration. Several interviewees have highlighted a better coordination as an improvement that could have an impact on the effectiveness of policies.

10. Despite promoting various activities to encourage participation and awareness of all citizens and promote intercultural relations, we found some consensus that more efforts could be put on policies targeting the whole population to fight negative stereotypes and prejudices and to prevent racism.

11. Despite the transversal approach of many referred policies, mainstreaming is generally confined to the areas of education, culture, sports and social inclusion. It does not yet include areas such as economic development or urban planning. Note that this deficiency is widely shared by most European cities.

## **Recommendations**

### 1. The definition of a city intercultural strategy

There is a very favourable context for the development of such a strategy: genuine political commitment, professional technical structures, support for and collaboration with local associations. Defining a strategy serves not only to define new actions but would also help to better manage the numerous existing activities and policies. It allows the definition of strategic objectives and evaluation systems that can assess progress and results.

A previous diagnosis (including this report and that produced by the MISP) would help to confirm the challenges faced by the city, adding value to many current policies and identifying needs and possible actions (e.g. welcoming programs, creating an intercultural network of local entities, working on intercultural indicators and better data collection involving areas such as economics to focus more on migrants and diversity opportunities on entrepreneurship, urban planning department collaboration on how to deal with structural problems in certain neighbourhoods and how to define public spaces to facilitate more interaction etc. )

In the framework of the European network of intercultural cities there are several examples of intercultural strategies that can inspire Setúbal (Copenhagen, Neuchâtel , Barcelona ..)

## 2. The future of Bela Vista

The Bela Vista neighbourhoods should be a priority not only locally but nationally. There are measures that can be taken by the council, but there are others that are beyond their capabilities.

Setúbal should consider fostering a national debate to demand real answers to the urban realities like Bela Vista. The city alone cannot carry out structural reforms which are necessary but should prioritize the design of a coherent plan, adding pressure on the government and getting support from other institutions and agencies to find a real long-term solution to the ghettoization and of these neighbourhoods. This should go beyond investments in different projects, rather in a comprehensive plan with clear objectives and the participation of a large number of actors (urban planning, education, social services, culture, mobility etc.) and with the participation of the residents. We could see the city government is committed to face this challenge, but there is a need to get real support.

The reality of Bela Vista poses a very complex debate but needs to be addressed. It requires a deep analysis and reflection. It must be seen as an opportunity to join forces and be ambitious. The reality of Bela Vista is hardly compatible with reinforcing pride in the city and much less of an intercultural city.

The housing problem is closely related to the difficulties found in these neighbourhoods. The lack of resources to build social housing need to be addressed but must be complemented by other actions. There is evidence that changing access criteria has shown good results. The promotion of social renting, support for rehabilitation and improvement of buildings, changes in the local laws that can facilitate access to empty houses etc. must be taken into account.

## 4. Social and political participation of immigrants.

Setúbal has worked hard to strength relationships with immigrant organizations. Important steps have been taken to listen, support and collaborate with these groups. However, the city lacks a formal body of participation in which these voices are represented. It would be advisable to analyse different experiences of European cities that have created such bodies. (Copenhagen, Lisbon, Barcelona...)

On the other hand, it would be desirable to encourage initiatives to promote the political participation of ethnic minorities. The lack of political representation of the culturally diverse population is a handicap that has a negative impact on integration processes and developing a sense of belonging. The leaders of immigrant communities emphasized the importance of this.

## 5. Prevention of negative stereotypes and racism

Setúbal has been working hard to support migrant integration and promoting several actions to raise awareness of the whole population with a positive discourse on cultural diversity. However we think it would be desirable to make more effort on policies targeting the whole population to fight against negative stereotypes, prejudices and racism. Although the perception may exist that racism is not a major problem, the risks involved in not maintaining a sustainable policy for its prevention cannot be underestimated. The impact of the economic crisis, competition for scarce resources, the stigmatization of certain neighbourhoods and groups (especially the Roma ) pose a sensitive challenge. The reality of countries like Greece is a sign that maintaining a firm attitude to prevent racism is an investment that must be constant.

Experiences such as the SPARDA programme<sup>6</sup> or Barcelona's anti-rumour strategy<sup>7</sup> are now being extended to 10 European cities thanks to a project launched by the Council of Europe involving some Portuguese cities. This can be taken as an example to consider in Setúbal, including for future replication in the Portuguese Network of Intercultural Cities. There are some innovative experiences in Setúbal that could to be reinforced (such as the intercultural afternoons).

Working on these issues with professionals like police bodies is also very important to improve their capacity to deal with diverse and complex environments. A good experience on this can be found in the Spanish city of Fuenlabrada, who has a good track-record on introducing diversity plans and training to better manage diversity related issues.

## 6. ACIDI

Although Setúbal successfully implements a number of programmes run by ACIDI, the CLAI situation should be cleared up. By joining forces, the CLAI and ACIDI could work to better serve the migrant population of the city in its bureaucratic demarches.

## 7. The Roma

The most stigmatized group in Setúbal, as in many other European cities, are the Roma, many of them Portuguese but also some from Eastern European countries. The situation is not comparable to other European countries, and the ACIDI's locally implemented response is ground breaking. However, this is a very complex reality for which European institutions have shown concern, providing resources to member-states to support initiatives to better deal with challenges faced by these communities. The collaboration between different levels of government is essential as well as the dialogue and exchange of experiences at a European level. Taking a proactive stance on this complex issue is essential.

---

<sup>6</sup> [www.coe.int/sparda](http://www.coe.int/sparda)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bcnantirumors.cat/>