



Role of national strategy and cooperation(s) for effective implementation of laws and policies - *High Commission for Migration, Portugal*

Madam chair,

Fellow panellists,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe for the invitation to participate in this conference on a topic of the most relevance and pertinence in the framework of the current global challenges. The situation of migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women and girls is particularly relevant for the work of the Public Institute that I represent here today, the High Commission for Migration. ACM works under the direct supervision of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and is responsible for collaborating in the definition, implementation and evaluation of public policies regarding the integration of migrants, including refugees, in Portugal.

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Considering the growing migratory challenges, the Portuguese option was to have a national mechanism for the integration of migrants and to prioritize integration as a transversal folder, not limited to the management of borders, migratory flows or labour market interests. The creation of a public deliverance structure, was of absolute importance in assuring that all horizontal levels of governance (different ministries and agencies) and also that the vertical levels of governance are mobilized (regional, local and third sector).

Since its creation in 1996, by the thirteenth Constitutional Government of Portugal, led at the time by António Guterres (the current United Nations General-Secretary), under the title “High Commissioner for the Integration of Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities, reflected the emergence of a new sensibility regarding the important role of having dialogue and cooperation, be it with civil society organizations - in particular with Immigrant Associations -



be it at the sectorial level, with areas such as labour, social security, housing, health, education and justice, and the encouragement for having better integration practices.

The creation of this institution was based on a process of dialogue and collaboration between the immigrant Associations, focused on the precarious conditions in which at the time most immigrants lived in, and the Urban Federation of Lisbon, a Socialist structure led at the time by António Costa, the current Prime-Minister of Portugal. As its mission, it was proposed the promotion of the access of immigrants to the effective exercise of their rights and obligations as embedded in the Constitution of the Republic, which includes Fundamental Rights, Rights, Liberties and Guarantees, as well as the Rights embedded in ordinary Law.

In order to respond to this challenge of receiving and integrating migrants, which include more and more pressing challenges, ACM firms its action in a clear political option of whole-of-government approach based on the consolidated participation of civil society, in particular Immigrant Associations, in the public policies for the integration of migrants, as well as at in the sectorial level with areas such as labour, social security, housing, health, education and justice, among others.

Portugal has been clarifying the integration policy options since 2007 through the Action Plans for Immigrant Integration, where each relevant ministry's role and measures are defined. The scope of this instrument was widened and reinforced after 2014, in line with the updated mission of the High Commission, in the Strategic Plan for Migration. The current Plan follows the transversal approach and involves thirteen ministries, being defined around 106 practical measures and organized into thematic sections. The Plan was publicly discussed, and civil society – including immigrant associations – was highly mobilized to give inputs. The fact that it has an extended duration of six years (which is longer than the period of governmental election) reflects the overall consensus and commitment of the Portuguese authorities in these matters.



Portugal was pioneer in creating the National Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants in 2004, following the one-stop-shop model. In July 2016, the Government established the National Support Network for the Integration of Migrants composed by 3 National Centres (CNAIM) and 98 Local Centres with the objective of developing a modern and integrated migration policy, more appropriate to the contemporary migration dynamics and current needs, and making it more inclusive and comprehensive, including immigrants and refugees.

Each National Centre provides a range of Government and non-Government services for free and under one roof, in a variety of languages. Services include, among others, the provision of information and direct assistance regarding legalisation and visa issues, family reunification, the educational system, access to healthcare, professional and educational skill recognition, social security and welfare issues, employment concerns, legal aid and support for immigrant associations. All services are provided free of charge. Since March 2004, there have been more than de 4.5 Million cases in these Centres, where the average daily visits are around 1100.

The Strategic Plan for Migration considers the promotion of gender equality as a transversal issue in the identified measures and strives to reinforce the personal and professional autonomy and the civic integration of migrant women in Portuguese society.

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We are presently witnessing at the global level a growing feminization of the migration flows since the end of the 20th century, and a paradigm shift in regard to women and migration, where it is no longer mainly associated to family reunification. The migratory flows in Portugal confirm this tendency, which makes the importance of transversal gender sensitive policies, activities and services for the integration of migrants more and more relevant.

Data from the Border and Foreign Services reflect a growing proportion of women with foreign nationalities among the total foreign residents, where the number of foreign women has surpassed the number of foreign men since 2012, +4,8% in 2017.



The integration of the gender dimension in the migration area contributes to the European and international human rights framework, including the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, the Council of Europe's recent Gender Equality Strategy, and the Council of Europe's Convention for the Prevention and Combat of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

Portugal was the first Member State to sign the Istanbul Convention on the day it opened for signature, 11 May 2011, and ratified it in February 2013 without reservation. The transposition of the Istanbul Convention resulted in alterations to the Portuguese criminal code (Law 83/2015), widening the definition of other forms of violence against women to include stalking, female genital mutilation and forced marriages.

Under this Convention, Portugal reported, presented and welcomed the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in their country visit in 2018, following the periodic monitorization of the implementation of the Convention in Portugal. The High Commission for Migration had an active participation in this monitoring process, considering the Chapter dedicated to Migration and Asylum, and the country report with the recommendations by the Group of Experts will soon be available.

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Migrant women are often identified as victims of multiple discrimination - for being women and for being migrants. Some of the challenges specific to migrant women are related to matters of religion and/or tradition (both in the country of origin and in the host country), to sexual and reproductive rights, to violence against women, to matters related to employment and work conditions and to participation in public and political life.

To respond to these challenges, in addition to the commitments made by the High Commission for Migration in the current Equality and Non-discrimination Strategy (2018-2030, aligned with the 2030 Agenda) and respective Action Plans, and the previous National Plans for Equality, this High Commission has created a work area for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in the integration of migrants, transversal to all its work.



In the area Female Genital Mutilation, ACM became part of a Working Group for the elimination of FGM promoted by the Secretary of State for Equality in October 2017. This Group was responsible for the elaboration of the national Action Programmes for the End of Female Genital Mutilation; the third Programme ended in December of 2017.

Currently there is national Action Plan specific for FGM and this area is included under “Harmful Traditional Practices” in the new national Action Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2018-2020, in the National Strategy for Equality and Citizenship.

Recognizing the importance of continuing the work and expertise in the area of Female Genital Mutilation, the current Secretary of State for Equality and Citizenship is promoting a pilot-project in this area to be launched later this month, in close articulation with the Secretary of State for Health. The project aims to work this dimension in the territories with higher prevalence of cases, and will be put into action by the Public Health Units of five Health Centres. The High Commission for Migration will have a role as one of the coordination entities, namely in reaching the communities and in supporting the health professionals in their capacity building process.

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Portugal embraces the challenge to develop and implement gender sensitive policies for the integration of migrants, taking into consideration the particular needs of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, and in line with the European and international recommendations – such as the Istanbul Convention and the 2030 Agenda – assuring that it will not leave anyone behind.

Thank you