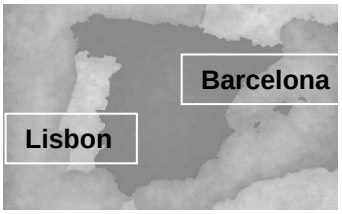
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Committee on Migration Issues

Integration of migrants: Complementarity between civil society and institutions

Field study visit to Lisbon - Portugal

Carried out by Mr Daniel Guéry (Vice-Chair) - Mr Marc Van den Reeck (Bureau member)

Monday 12 and Tuesday 13 October 2026

From 12 to 16 October 2026, the Committee on Migration Issues of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe travelled to Lisbon (Portugal) and Barcelona (Spain).
The "field visit" to Lisbon made it possible to explore several aspects of migration issues:

1. **Specific features of the Portuguese situation**
   - ✓ An inflow of 1.5 million people in two years, in a population of 11 million;
   - ✓ A particularly high percentage of Portuguese-speaking migrants
   - ✓ Non-Portuguese speakers come mainly from Nepal, Bangladesh and India, countries for which security concerns are less acute and interference by the governments of the countries of origin is limited or non-existent.

2. **Main points of the discussions**

   Integration can only be achieved over the long term, and the **stability** of the strategy and of efforts is essential. Local proximity policies are the most appropriate: they foster close collaboration between local authorities (freguesias) and civil society (NGOs), as well as the **flexibility** to identify individual situations more easily and respond to them appropriately.

   Civil society expressed some concern about the vulnerabilities linked to this local proximity approach:

   - Local proximity does not relieve the national authorities of the need to put in place an overall strategy.
   - Civil society is concerned about the decentralisation of the integration strategy: at municipal level, operational resources are often limited, and political commitment is not guaranteed everywhere either.
   - Even at the lowest level of local authorities, political orientations can change with election results, which also risks causing discontinuity in concrete action.

- There is a risk of marginalising the smallest civil society organisations, which nevertheless often enjoy the greatest trust of the migrant population.

3. The fundamental place of the child:

- ✓ There was unanimous agreement among the various bodies met that integration efforts aimed at children are fundamental to the integration of the whole family. The "bridging" role played by language learning at school also draws parents into the process; the child's social experience, in or outside school, is seen as practically the only way to open a path for mothers – women who often remain "hidden" – to integrate into society.
- ✓ Conversely, children can be an obstacle to integration if there is no childcare for the very young. Authorities and civil society have an important task to ensure that mothers can leave the family sphere and take part in the social life of the neighbourhood and the city.

4. Family reunification

Civil society notes a rollback of family reunification in Portuguese policy, including for communities from countries whose culture and social values are close to, and consistent with, those of Portugal (for example Brazil). This is a real concern for the civil society organisations we met.

Yet it is clear that a person's integration is greatly facilitated within a family rather than in a "solitary" situation.

5. Education

The "bridging" role between the school community and the person who needs to integrate into society as a whole is obvious.

Portugal has the interesting concept of TEIP ("Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária"), which makes it possible to identify neighbourhoods and places where integration requires additional effort, based on criteria of financial situation (poverty) and cultural diversity. Although financial support does not always follow, this concept creates a constructive spirit among stakeholders that strengthens and enriches collaboration between local authorities and the civil society environment.

For example, projects observed at a public school where 45% of pupils are of foreign origin: alongside regular lessons, Portuguese language learning is offered, in which pupils take part according to their individual needs (duration and intensity of language acquisition periods). The school also builds around it a local network involving NGOs as well as local public bodies specialising in one aspect or another of integration.

This is a very good example of a complementary local proximity approach.

6. Housing

For several decades there has been no investment in affordable rental housing. Several NGOs consider the lack of housing a greater obstacle to integration than language proficiency or the language barrier.

The overall lack of affordable housing is also exploited by far-right parties as an argument against migration.
The only lever available to civil society is advocacy.

7. **Employment**

In the period between entering the country and obtaining legal status, migrants are allowed to work, but if they lose their job they are left without social protection. Moreover, since recognition of qualifications and diplomas is not always ensured, migrants with solid qualifications obtain jobs below their abilities and are therefore too often victims of exploitation.

Job instability and poor financial conditions are obstacles to genuine integration.

8. **Length of procedures:**

General concern within civil society about the length of regularisation procedures and of final decisions on migrants' legal status.
Explaining this problem solely by a decline in political will, in Portugal as in other countries, is too simplistic! It must nevertheless be acknowledged that this decline is smaller in Portugal.
This decline can also be attributed to technical and operational malfunctions at the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA).

9. **Role of religions**

- Portugal is a fundamentally **Christian** country, where **Christian charitable institutions** enjoy great credibility. As a result, solidarity bodies directly linked to the Churches have a special place and play a major role in society's effort to integrate migrants in dignified conditions.
- Originally, the **Muslim community** was formed by migrants from former Portuguese colonies with large Muslim communities (Mozambique). Today, these Muslim and Hindu communities are growing with the arrival of people from the Asian subcontinent (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal) and, more recently, from the Arab world.
The imam of the Central Mosque of Lisbon acknowledges that, for some years now, an incipient phenomenon of radicalisation has been emerging, especially among young people.
In response, the Imam strives to promote integration, notably by organising language classes for men and for women. His addresses at the mosque, mostly in Portuguese, explicitly call for genuine integration into Portuguese society. This does not stop him from worrying about the radicalising influence of a small minority of his community.

<u>This report was made possible thanks to</u>

The host INGOs that prepared the visit:
- MIAMSI – Ms Assunção Mexia
- Pax Romana – Alfreda Ferreira da Fonseca

The institutions / NGOs we met:
- Caritas: President Drª Rita Valadas and Secretary-General Dr João Pereira
- Dr José Leitão, first "**Alto Comissário para as Minorias Étnicas**" (High Commissioner for Ethnic Minorities)

- **Passos Manuel School Cluster**: Director Prof. Ricardo Moreira,
  Chair of the General Council, Prof. Raquel Pereira: “Espaço Mais” project, etc.
- Office of the local council (junta) of the **Freguesia da Misericórdia**
- **"Casa do Brasil"**

- CEPAC at the **CLAIM Lisboa - Estrela** centre (Local Centre for the Integration of Migrants).
  Drª Ana Mansoa
- Muslim community: **Sheikh David Munir and Samir Acoobaker.**
- Meeting with members of **European embassies** in Lisbon under the auspices of
  the Ambassador of Belgium, HE Bart Lammens.

Lisbon, 13 October 2026