

Diversity, Equality, Interaction, Participation

BUILDING BRIDGES, BREAKING WALLS



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

OEIRAS

INTERCULTURAL PROFILE

Following the Expert Visit of the Council of Europe on 3rd and 4th December 2025

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F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

France

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Executive summary

Oeiras, located on the northern side of the Tagus River between Lisbon and Cascais, covers an area of 46 square kilometres. It makes the second largest contribution as a municipality to (non-financial) business turnover in Portugal and enjoys a purchasing power almost two thirds above the national average. It has become a prosperous urban location for high-technology modern enterprises, attracting a cosmopolitan workforce. Some 117 nationalities are represented among a (majority-female) population of 176 000 – there were 5 371 applications for residence in 2023 alone – and the proportion of adults with higher education is well above the national (and Lisbon) average.

The latest index report for Oeiras shows marked progress from its predecessor in 2018. Then, the index revealed the municipality to be performing roughly in line with others of similar population size (100 000–200 000) within the Intercultural Cities network. This time around, however, Oeiras fell within the top quartile of its peers, significantly outperforming the average in application of the intercultural lens to its work, international outlook and intercultural intelligence / competence – all indicative of an enhanced awareness and capacity for reflection in this regard.

Oeiras does publish its commitment to its intercultural vocation. An active member of the Portuguese national network of intercultural cities (RPCI), one of the values underpinning its Strategic Development Plan is 'diversity, openness and tolerance'. The intercultural work of the authority is conducted by the Social Cohesion Division of its Department for Social Development. The Social Development Plan agreed by the Municipal Executive in 2025 pledges that an intercultural strategy will be prepared, allied to structured training for professionals and organisations as well as awareness-raising and information campaigns.

A major strength of Oeiras' intercultural work is its organic connection to migrant and Roma associations rooted in neighbourhoods and communities – as testified during the expert visit by the dominance of meetings with NGOs rather than officials. Oeiras has made expansive use of the Local Security Contracts (CLS) national programme, linking interculturalism with social inclusion in various dimensions and embedding it in precarious neighbourhoods in liaison with migrant associations.

Education also provides examples of good practice: the Oeiras Educa+ programme, brokering links between education professionals and non-formal education practitioners; an Intercultural Educators network, supported by the RPCI; and a Roma-mediation project, in a school group in a low-income area. Within the municipality, there is an Action Plan for Diversity and Inclusion to raise awareness and improve intercultural competences of staff, which was recognised in a national award. And Oeiras promotes a Charter for Diversity among local companies, while working with employers on social responsibility and supporting social enterprise.

Looking ahead, Oeiras might want to think of how it can engage the public at large in the municipality more with this work and encourage more interaction – bringing together in particular for intercultural encounters those often more privileged non-Lusophone migrants, the professionals who work in the major national public institutions located in the municipality, the generally more marginalised migrants from the former colonies and individuals from the Roma community.

The main recommendations are as follows:

- **Develop a new intercultural strategy**, with wide participation of NGOs and experts/practitioners, using a variety of methodologies.
- **Establish a round-table structure**, as elsewhere among ICC members, ensuring iterative dialogue between the municipality and migrant and Roma associations, with working groups and an annual workplan.
- **Consider moving leadership on interculturalism** into the mayor's office, while retaining the involvement of expert staff in Social Development and co-ordinating across the municipality via an interdepartmental committee.
- **Develop a general intercultural-mediation service**, helping to make the strategy real on the street, working with the associations.
- **Challenge media negativity about migrants** (linking with crime, poverty, etc) with positive affirmations of diversity in public space, such as through intercultural festivals and storytelling initiatives.

If these recommendations were to be implemented effectively, they would likely herald a further measurable advance when the next index report for the municipality comes to be compiled.

OEIRAS
Intercultural Profile
DECEMBER 2025

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This report is based upon the visit of the Council of Europe on 3 and 4 December 2025, including Council of Europe staff and the Intercultural Cities (ICC) expert Robin Wilson. It should be read in parallel with the most recent [index report](#) for Oeiras, which contains many more recommendations and examples of good practice.

The Council of Europe has defined the intercultural city as encompassing people with different nationality, origin, language or religion/ belief, where:

- political leaders and most citizens regard diversity positively, as a resource;
- the city actively combats discrimination and adapts its governance, institutions and services to the needs of a diverse population;
- the city has a strategy and tools to deal with diversity and cultural conflict and to enhance participation;
- the city encourages greater mixing and meaningful interaction between diverse groups in public spaces.¹

Real equality, diversity, meaningful intercultural interaction and participation and active citizenship are four interlinked values that underpin the development and sustenance of an intercultural city.²

Equality refers to the state of being treated equally, whether before the law, in policy or in practice. This includes equal enjoyment of human dignity and fundamental human rights, and equal access to services and opportunities. More broadly, equality of life chances (or 'access') can be distinguished from equality of outcomes, with different political and economic philosophies putting differing emphases on each end of this spectrum. Within interculturalism, equality is most closely linked to the principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, and there is particular attention paid to equity: that is, allocating resources and opportunities to each person, according to their circumstances and needs, in order to obtain a more equal outcome.

Diversity is the condition of a group or entity within which individuals differ from one another in various ways, some but not all of which are characteristics protected by human rights law. Aspects of identity such as age, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, mental and physical abilities, social class, education, economic background, religion, work experience, language, geographic location, political opinion, or family status, are among the sources of diversity.

Meaningful intercultural interaction is any constructive encounter in a social setting between individuals or groups from different cultures and lifestyles in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation. Intercultural policy speaks of 'meaningful interactions' between different cultural or ethnic groups, which recognise both the differences and similarities between such groups/individuals, promote the atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation, and counter the tendency towards self-segregation. Meaningful interactions are those that take place on equal terms, be they challenging or positive, and which should ultimately be fulfilling for all involved, advancing common goals.

¹ The Intercultural City Step by Step: Practical guide for applying the urban model of urban integration, Council of Europe, 2019, page 14.

² Council of Europe, Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level, Intercultural integration strategies: managing diversity as an opportunity, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093421-gbr-2555-intercultural-integration-strategies-cdadi-web-a/1680a476bd>

Participation and active citizenship occur when stakeholders (all citizens, including foreign residents where appropriate) have the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and the support to freely express their opinions and influence decision-making on matters that affect them. In some situations, participation may mean those who are directly affected taking the lead and driving the process. Intercultural participation requires an equal and respectful basis, in which everyone feels heard, and involves tackling obstacles that may hinder certain stakeholders' active participation.

These four principles should also follow two key transversal approaches – a **whole of society** and **whole of government** approach. For the former, that means working with all sectors of society for inclusion – not just migrants or those of a migration background. It means that everyone has a responsibility to promote inclusion and develop intercultural competences which means that society as a whole is strengthened. For the latter, a whole of government approach, it means that cities need to break down institutional silos which often act as a barrier to a holistic approach to inclusion – too often separated off in an office dealing with equality or migration. Instead, every part of the administration should aim to see its activities through an intercultural lens – whether that's human resources or urban planning, education or city strategy. Whatever the sector, applying an intercultural lens will help ensure that public policy works for everyone.

This report provides an updated intercultural profile of Oeiras following its previous profile from [2019](#) and ICC Index reports completed in [2018](#) and [2025](#).³

1. Introduction to Oeiras

Oeiras, located on the northern side of the Tagus River between Lisbon and Cascais, covers an area of 46 square kilometres. It makes the second largest contribution as a municipality to (non-financial) business turnover in Portugal and enjoys a purchasing power almost two thirds above the national average. Like the ICC members [Oslo](#) in Norway and [Neuchâtel](#) in Switzerland, it has become an example of a prosperous urban location for high-technology modern enterprises, attracting a cosmopolitan workforce. Some 117 nationalities are represented among a (majority-female) population of 176 000 – there were 5 371 applications for residence in 2023 alone – and the proportion of adults with higher education is well above the national (and Lisbon) average.

On closer inspection, successive layers of migration have been sedimented in the municipality. Oeiras' (unsuccessful) bid to become European Capital of Culture 2027 affirmed:

The Oeiras of today is a territory created by people who have come from outside for very different reasons: internal migrants attracted by the region's economic growth from the 1950s onwards, the Portuguese who returned from former colonial territories following the Carnation Revolution [in April 1974], a wave of immigration from Portuguese-speaking countries in the early 1980s, and finally, migrants who come from all over the world to work for the economic powerhouses that were established in Oeiras throughout the 1990s.

Oeiras is not thus universally affluent. It comprises five parishes: Barcarena; Porto Salvo; União de Freguesias de Algés, Linda-a-Velha e Cruz Quebrada Dafundo; União de Freguesias de Carnaxide e Queijas; and União de Freguesias de Oeiras São Julião da Barra, Paço de

³ Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/oeiras>

Arcos e Caxias. Carnaxide and Porto Salvo contain poorer neighbourhoods – reflected in dependence on social housing, drop-out from school and unemployment – with greater concentrations of visible minorities.

Indeed, as the municipality acknowledged in its proposal for a project called *Todos Somos Oeiras* (We are All Oeiras), most migrant employees do not occupy high-technology, high-salary posts but have jobs in catering, domestic services, distribution, security and civil construction. Their main difficulties, it reports, are in access to housing and health and other services, precariousness, limited proficiency in Portuguese and lack of recognition of professional qualifications.

While recognising that this is an underestimate of the diversity of Oeiras' population owing to naturalisation of migrants from the former colonies (who would, of course, have been treated as Portuguese nationals in colonial times), almost 20 000 of its residents (11.2%) are of foreign nationality. Of these, more than half are from Brazil (43%), Cape Verde (8%) and Angola (4%). (There would be too still some *retornados*, mentioned above, who were Portuguese-born but returned after 1974.)

The linguistic dimension of cultural diversity has tended to be understated, given a shared Lusophone milieu, although the global span of more recent immigration is changing that – one in ten of the foreign-born population is from other European Union member states – and will indeed for some, particularly around Oeiras' technology enterprises and science institutions, introduce an English *lingua franca*. In addition, there is the asylum-seeker population, with notably 1 271 applications by Ukrainian refugees, mainly young women, being registered in Oeiras by 1 August 2023, following the full-scale Russian invasion of their country the previous year.

2. National policy context

In the postwar period, especially under the pre-1974 dictatorship, Portugal was very much a country of *emigration*, particularly to France. With democracy and associated relative prosperity, it has become a country of immigration, particularly in and around Lisbon, like a number of other European countries, such as its neighbour, Spain. Indeed, in 2023 the number of foreign citizens living in Portugal [surpassed](#) one million, out of an overall population that year of more than ten million – their number roughly doubling in the space of five years. And the influx has had a non-negligible positive impact on the welfare budget: in 2022, 800 000 immigrants paid over a billion euros into the social-security system, while receiving only some €257 million in social benefits.

This has inevitably placed the management of cultural diversity on the political and public agenda. In 2021 the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in a country memorandum, [expressed](#) concern about increasing hate speech and hate crime in Portugal – especially targeted at individuals from Africa and at Roma – and urged the authorities to act more resolutely against rising racism. Until recently, Portugal lacked a right-wing populist party exploiting tensions over people movement, as elsewhere in Europe; in 2019, *Chega* (Enough) emerged to fill this gap and it came second in the snap parliamentary election in 2025. At the time of the expert visit, a billboard promoting the *Chega* candidate for the January 2026 presidential election implied migrants were all welfare dependants. Yet in the spring 2025 Eurobarometer survey Portuguese respondents [volunteered](#) 'immigration' as only the sixth most important issue facing their country – way behind the day-to-day concerns of health, the cost of living and housing.

Government did respond to this challenge with its first-ever National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination (2021-25) and, in 2024, a reformed Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination. The National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (2018-30) focuses primarily on gender equality and LGBT+ rights. There is a longstanding presence of Roma in Portugal, though they are not counted as such by the census (the population is estimated by community representatives at about 70,000 today). A National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (2013-23) [expired](#) without a successor.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [notes](#) in its most recent country report that ‘Portugal lacks a specific action plan on the integration and inclusion of migrants’. Indeed, the 2025 Migration Integration Policy Index from the Migration Policy Group reveals that Portugal, which previously performed far above the EU average, has regressed towards the mean. A nationality law passed in October raises the residency requirement for naturalisation from five to 10 years (seven for individuals from Lusophone countries), makes it conditional on a civics and language test and makes it harder for children to acquire citizenship.

3. Local diversity and policy context

Portugal is uncharacteristic of western-European democracies, except Ireland, in lacking a significant regional dimension of government, in addition to the local and the national. (There is some administrative devolution to 18 districts.)

Within this relatively centralised structure, the competences of the 308 municipalities are limited: for example, they do not have the power to use public procurement to support intercultural integration via tendering criteria. In terms of the governance of diversity, a [national network](#) of Local Centres of Support for Migrant Integration (CLAIM) is supported by a statewide Agency for Integration, Migrations and Asylum (AIMA).

In June 2025, Oeiras [published](#) a Municipal Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan 2024-2030, ‘Oireas+Equal’, in line with the national strategy to that effect. The primary focus is again gender equality but it does also address racism in part. There is too a Local Plan for the Integration of Roma Communities, which remains extant.

Oeiras and its neighbouring municipalities, Lisbon and Cascais and, to the north, Amadora are all members of the Portuguese network of intercultural cities ([RPCI](#)), as are the non-contiguous Loures and Setúbal within the greater Lisbon conglomeration. As with other national networks, especially in Spain and Italy, the RPCI provides a valuable national forum for mutual learning.

4. Commitment and index summary

Oeiras does publish its [commitment](#) to its intercultural vocation. It joined the RPCI network in 2017 and has undergone the Intercultural Index reporting process twice since. One of the values underpinning its Strategic Development Plan is ‘diversity, openness and tolerance’. And on its relevant web page it says:

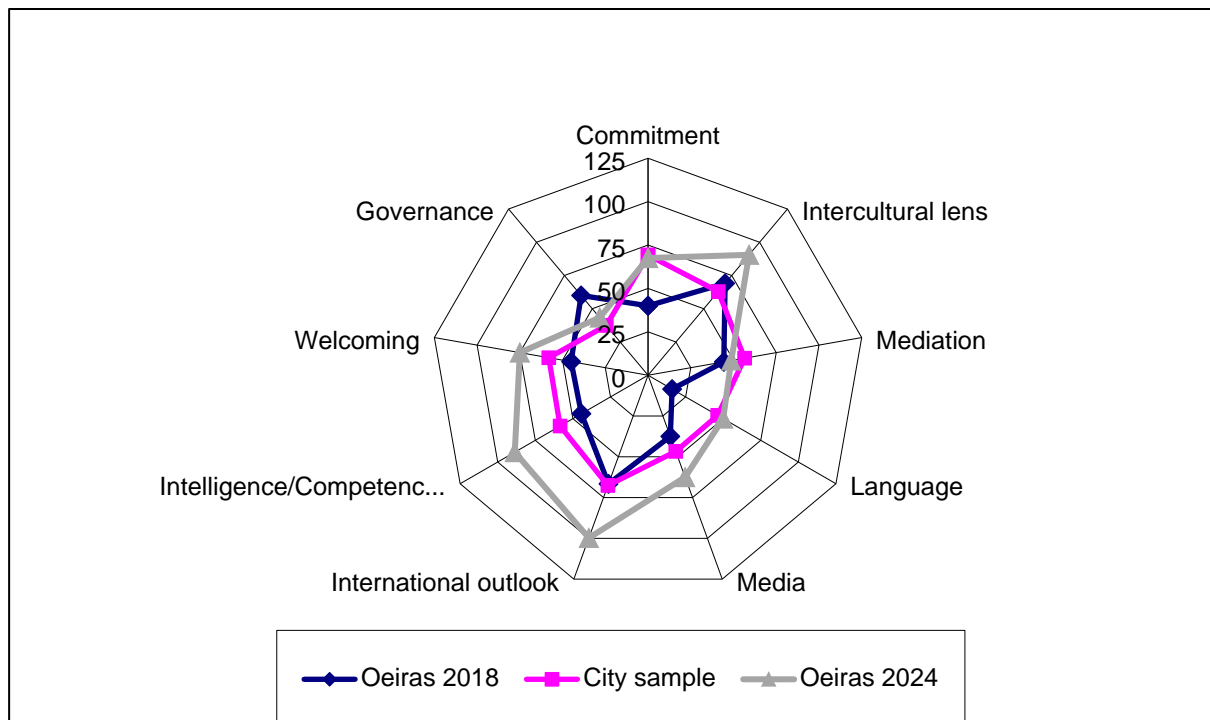
Interculturality, or interculturalism, one of the expressions of cultural pluralism, goes far beyond mere multicultural coexistence. In addition to defending the principles of equality and difference, it promotes positive interaction, dialogue and the construction of bridges to build a society in which all people have a say.

One concrete manifestation of this is the local CLAIM centres, especially a satellite office of CLAIM in the disadvantaged neighbourhood of Carnaxide. In the full time centre in Alto da Loba, which also offers arts and crafts workshops, classes, a study area and a gym, a note from a user in the CLAIM office on 10 November 2025 described it as ‘the door of entry of the dreams of migrants’.

Oeiras agreed a Municipal Plan for the Integration of Immigrants a decade ago. But this was set to run only until 2017 – whereas a contemporary plan for Lisbon with a similar title was [updated](#) for 2020-22. A 2024 bid by the municipality to the European Commission Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, linked to an update of the plan, was unsuccessful. The Todos Somos Oeiras proposal recognised that this, and the absence of a dedicated resource, represented a constraint. Moreover, it is important to recognise that intercultural integration is a [‘two-sided process’](#) in which the whole society is implicated, not just those who are newcomers to it as the title of the plan suggested.

The intercultural work of the authority is conducted by the Social Cohesion Division of its Department for Social Development. And the Social Development Plan agreed by the Municipal Executive and presented to the Social Network representing the NGOs in February 2025 points towards enhanced commitment. The plan includes an axis on interculturalism. This pledges that an intercultural strategy will be prepared, allied to structured training for professionals and organisations as well as awareness-raising and information campaigns.

The latest index report for Oeiras shows marked progress from its predecessor in 2018. Then, the index revealed the municipality to be performing roughly in line with others of similar population size (100,000–200,000) within the ICC network. This time around, however, Oeiras fell within the top quartile of its peers in this regard, significantly outperforming the average in application of the intercultural lens to its work, international outlook and intercultural intelligence / competence.



This is not coincidental: improvement in these specific areas reflects a heightened awareness. Municipalities applying the intercultural lens effectively ‘see’ issues associated with, say, public services, to which others may be blind. A high score on international outlook reflects an ability to stand back and view the municipality’s work in a wider context. And strong performance on intercultural intelligence and competence indicates a recognition that staff across the municipality need to have the sensitivities and skills to serve diverse users well.

As to more specific achievements revealed by the index process, one can point to the Oeiras Educa+ programme, brokering links between education professionals and non-formal education practitioners, and the development of an Intercultural Educators network, led by the RPCI in which Oeiras was a partner. One could also highlight Oeiras’ expansive use of the Local Security Contracts (CLS) national programme, linking interculturalism with social inclusion in various dimensions and embedding it in precarious neighbourhoods in liaison with migrant associations.

Within the municipality, moreover, there is an Action Plan for Diversity and Inclusion to raise awareness and improve intercultural competences of staff, which was recognised in a national award. And, externally, Oeiras promotes a Charter for Diversity among local companies and works with employers on social responsibility and support for social enterprise.

5. Opening session

The expert visit began in an elegant municipal building amid the Oeiras Poets’ Park, with a passionate speech by Francisco Gonçalves, deputy mayor. ‘Portugal, Mr Gonçalves said, had a singular experience as a bridge to the world.’ Rejecting any equation of ‘Portugal’ (the country) with ‘Portuguese’ (its population), he described it as ‘the only small country in the world with a global presence’. In an implicit reference to populist xenophobia, he rhetorically asked: how could anyone say ‘This is not your land?’. He also drew on his own heritage and background to discuss the experience of those with migration background or heritage from Portugal’s former colonies, in modern day Portugal.

Mr Gonçalves stressed the commitment of the municipality to interculturalism. Multiculturalism created ‘small ghettos’ with different rules; exclusions were not acceptable. The intercultural approach meant people being respected as equals in their diversity – looking at the other person in their individual specificity. Empathy was key.

After a presentation of the framework of the ICC programme, Carla Calado, RPCI co-ordinator, elaborated on the Portuguese national network. This had 19 member cities, she said, with others pending. The goal for each was a city where everyone felt they belonged, regardless of their cultural reference points – including full access to citizenship and associated services – and which promoted its diversity through a positive narrative. Ms Calado highlighted the strong commitment of Oeiras to the RPCI. For example, along with Amadora and Loures, it had participated in a [project](#) in 2021 developing a handbook on inclusive labour-market recruitment. Additionally, in 2024 it worked with RPCI on the [Intercultural Schools](#) project, and in 2025, the Intercultural Educators project.

Dr Wilson presented the Intercultural Index results for Oeiras. The municipality’s ICC co-ordinator, Cristina Ribeiro of its Social Development Department, said these indicated a pathway forward.

6. Civil society

A major strength of Oeiras' intercultural work is its organic connection to migrant and Roma associations rooted in neighbourhoods and communities – as testified during the expert visit by the predominance of meetings with NGOs rather than officials. This makes all the difference between a rhetorical municipal commitment and practices which have real traction on the ground. The reason for this is that the management of cultural diversity is inherently dependent on the tacit knowledge of practitioners and advocates in each particular location and context – by definition, a one-size-fits-all approach to diversity management will not work – and on the trust they enjoy, particularly among the socially marginalised and stigmatised.

The migrant association *Mundo Feliz* (Happy World) is a good example, including in its longevity: it is 14 years old, its Romanian founder, Cecilia Minascurta, having lived in Oeiras for 24 years. While based in the municipality it has become national in reach, with more than 21,000 members (6,000 new ones in the past year alone). The association provides detailed and comprehensive advice for newcomers, with its 10 multinational staff dealing with 100-200 users per day, in a ratio of about 70:30 women:men. These are in the main from Portugal's former African colonies and Brazil but support is offered in a range of languages – recall the increasing non-Lusophone in-migration referred to earlier.

Critically, *Mundo Feliz* supports users on their individual paths through the domestic institutional administrative labyrinth, from arrival to citizenship, while offering a wide range of social support, drawing on a network of 30 volunteers. So although the CLAIM centres around the country are 'one-stop shops', it has a wider remit and public agencies refer individuals to it. It makes available clothes (and hygiene products) in partnership with the ENTRAJUDA association. It provides food in partnership with Food Bank Against Hunger and there is a kids' activity area. It organises intercultural events and trips. Its partnerships with the private sector favour labour-market insertion, including a monthly jobs fair brokering relations with employers – and companies now come to the association in search of workers. It also helps with migrant entrepreneurship (a route to legalisation for individuals in the informal economy) and self-employment (valuable where employers are reluctant to put workers on contracts).

The Friends of Angolan Women (AAMA) provides another interesting example from the municipality's associational milieu, of even longer lifespan than *Mundo Feliz*. Based in Carnaxide, but again extending beyond Oeiras, it was set up in 1990 amid the post-independence, left-right civil war in Angola to promote peace and humanitarian goals. At that time it was a pioneer in Europe as an African-migrant organisation. But NGOs have to keep adapting if they are to stay relevant. Now it is committed to a broader interculturalism, supported by funding from the national AIMA. It makes available workspaces for partner organisations and help with needs assessments and evaluations. There are five staff and it also draws on many volunteers.

AAMA's Active Interculturality project allows of structured activities such as workshops, fostering relationships and empathy across communities and bringing down barriers of mistrust. It supports individuals with no literacy in Portuguese or where mediation is required – receiving referrals too from public services – as well as with food. It helps where children have issues at schools, brokering relationships with parents. In practice most such social support in its neighbourhood goes to Cape Verdeans (and Roma). It has a strong value base of respectful treatment, including work on psychological aspects of integration and personal development, offering a safe space to talk.

While CLS projects take place under a contract between national government and the municipality, in Oeiras these have a synergistic relationship with associational activity, rather than supplanting it. The scope has broadened over time, with the number of areas of intervention under the contract expanding from four to nine. This reflects the personal commitment of the mayor, Isaltino Morais – the contract is under his direct supervision. The two priority territories are Carnaxide and Bairro dos Navegadores and some projects developed in the territories have since been taken up by the municipality.

The interventions – for instance, to tackle school failure or dropout – take a holistic approach across a wide range of domains: sport, culture, education, environment and so on. There are partners in their delivery in each territory. Examples are the *Bairro EnCena* project for young adults to develop artistic skills, *Futsal para Todos* promoting social skills and wellbeing and *Projeto Família* addressing familial issues. There are also specific activities building relationships with the municipal police – it was notable that a murder by an officer in Amadora last year did not excite strong reactions in the CLS territories because of these prior contacts with police. Future plans include a monitoring-and-evaluation model, engaging the local university on a sociological study of the populations involved and extending partners outside the territories.

To focus on Bairro EnCena, which began in 2023, the project is delivered by the cultural association *Palco Unânime* (Together on Stage). It uses theatre, singing, dancing and the audio-visual arts, aiming to develop skills in scenography, costumes, production, lighting and sound – leading to public performances in local theatres for the community at large. A spin-off has been the employment of four of the roughly 50 youngsters involved, with two responsible for organising the *LusoFolia* festival in 2025 celebrating Oeiras' cultural diversity.

7. Education

Zooming further in in Carnaxide, the School Sofia de Mello Breyner Carnaxide Portela is pursuing a specific project, in the framework of the CLS, involving Roma mediators. The vice-principal explained that this was a multicultural school with strong community bonds. It sought to promote a sense of belonging, equal opportunities and integration. There were several cultural-mediation initiatives to strengthen relationships with families, promote attendance, reduce conflicts and foster an environment of mutual respect among all pupils.

Representing the CLS, Margarida Simão added that a quarter of the school's pupils were Roma and there was a drop-out problem. Seeking to replicate a successful project in a school in Amadora, discussions had been opened with Roma organisations. The project started in the school at the beginning of 2025, focusing initially on improving attendance but now also on elevating grades. Roma cultural practices were presented in school to increase awareness among non-Roma kids. Work with families was key. It was long-term work and the municipality was happy to sustain support as long as it continued to see progress. (Teachers surveyed in the school group were unanimous after the first six months that there had been benefits to the school community, including in relations among parents, pupils and teachers.)

The chair of the Roma association *Techari* (Liberty), created in 2020, explained that it promoted Roma inclusion in three municipalities. Oeiras had been very amenable in that regard. In Sofia de Mello Breyner the Roma mediators – one male, one female, drawn from the communities from which the pupils came – were key to brokering connections and

explaining what was happening in the school (and what support was available), so that families were properly informed (and the school in turn), rather than prejudices prevailing. This allowed conflicts to be resolved informally before they escalated. It was indeed long-term work but results had already been seen in terms of increased attendance to final grade. The two mediators in Sofia de Mello Breyner (as also in the linked primary school) provided role models, including in encouraging compliance with rules while challenging stereotypes. The children looked up to these Roma adults in the school and would now, for instance, report slights to the mediators which would have gone unreported previously.

There was a need for all families to be educated about cultural differences and for the wider society to open doors, he said. Now parents allowed girls to stay in school to the final stage, whereas previously they were taking them out at 12 (linked to traditional concerns about pre-marital loss of virginity), and now mothers were taking up educational opportunities in the local municipal centre themselves. Sustained support was needed for successive cohorts of children, including in pre-school. Techari was advocating for projects such as these to become national policy. Beyond school, the next stage was access to employment: then an individual became no longer a 'Roma' but a colleague at work.

8. Youth

Non-formal education has been [recognised](#) by the Council of Europe as important in promoting interculturalism. Two neighbourhood-based projects encountered during the visit bore this out.

The association *Pombal XXI*, based in the eponymous neighbourhood and an adjacent one, goes back to 2005, following a reallocation of residents – mostly of Cape Verdean origin – from shanty towns elsewhere in Oeiras. Their social needs however extended beyond housing and the association – its current chair and secretary explained – was envisaged as a bridge to the municipality, through support for disadvantaged households with daily challenges. Its more than 50 activities include facilitating a neighbourhood market.

Gradually it came to invest in education from 2020, in the context of disruption to schooling due to the pandemic (local households did not have the wherewithal for home-schooling). It has a close relationships with local schools, which refer individuals for support. Fully 58 kids are now involved in after-school studies, assisted by seven teachers, funded by the education department of the municipality. There is a link to an adjacent karate (and futsal) club; for youngsters who take part in educational activities, the subscription is free and the idea is to link progress in both—indeed members have won national karate trophies.

Pombal XXI sees itself as a pioneer of what are now eight such study centres. The association is proud to have influenced others in Oeiras and beyond (the chair also supports projects in Cape Verde). Hundreds of youngsters have been through its programme and almost all have progressed a level as a result, with the centre in turn progressing to higher-level schooling support. Along that pathway, it is worth noting the investment of the municipality in scholarships for higher-education entry for low-income students.

When *Lage em Movimento* was established, there was a lack of engagement in this neighbourhood in Porto Salvo, so life took place on the street. The goal of the association was to build a sense of community. It works with 6-20 year-olds in the neighbourhood, using education, culture (dance, mainly with girls) and sport (football, with boys). The youngsters have to take part in the educational activities as a 'contract' to pursue the others. There are

three staff teachers and the work with the youngsters is after-school and during holidays. There is a link with the local football club.

Study activities include catch-up but also identifying a positive educational future for each individual. For example, a project called Reading in Motion links the reading of a book to activities inspired by it, to encourage reading. The teachers (in normal school) connect with the work of the association in terms of their charges. The youngsters have an assembly twice a month to discuss neighbourhood problems and activities as possible solutions, which the association can take on board. It organises many visits outside the neighbourhood.

Sandra Borges, volunteer leader of *Moinho em Movimento*, founded this association back in 2008. The offices in the neighbourhood were provided by the constructor of the local social housing project and the motto on the wall is 'stronger together'. Again it offers after-school study (three teachers involved with 40 kids) and African dance for young people, as well as adult literacy and a soup kitchen (catering for 90 households). It works in collaboration with other associations and Ms Borges feels it has developed a partnership with the municipality – as a bridge to the community and a voice for it. She was recently elected to the parish council, having felt others were not speaking for the community, to focus on social affairs.

Again, the municipality plays a facilitating and stimulating role *vis-à-vis* the NGO arena – this time through its youth unit, whose projects are defined by the Social Development Department. These are open to all, rather than targeted at 'vulnerable' youth specifically, and delivered in partnership with youth associations and schools. As the expert visit was taking place, public consultation on a municipal youth plan for 2025-30 was ending. This process began with a consultation of around 500 young people in 2024, with facilitated dialogue covering several themes and results validated by the Municipal Youth Council. Individual municipal departments considered proposals and the draft plan remained to be approved by the municipality, following the addition of an action plan. Municipal Youth Council thematic groups will monitor the plan during its implementation.

A Youth Parliament on Education had at time of writing just been elected (mostly girls presented themselves), part of a national initiative. The unit supports democratic participation in secondary schools, including through visits to support the formation of student associations (again girls are more active in putting themselves forward). Overall, interculturalism is supported through encouraging broad participation, pluralism and equity, and meaningful interactions. The unit provides teachers with a spreadsheet of non-formal education options from which they can choose.

9. Intercultural competences

Translating political commitment into effective intercultural practice requires, among other things, enhanced sensitivities among municipal staff to the demands of managing diversity. Oeiras developed [an ongoing project](#) since 2022 to develop intercultural training, in the context of its Action Plan for Diversity and Inclusion (see above). In 2025, it took this a step further with a project called [Rainbow Connections](#), funded by the ICC programme, addressing the specific concerns of LGBT+ individuals within the municipal staff. The project was conducted in partnership with Leeds in the UK, stemming from a meeting at an event organised by the No Hate Speech network. It engaged the Portuguese section of the international LGBT+ association ILGA as expert adviser.

Ms Ribeiro explained how the project had brought together the Human Resources and Social Development departments of the municipality for training, including of officers in the municipal police. It had come up against the relative invisibility of the LGBT+ community in Oeiras and a lack of data. The aim was to promote a comprehensive understanding of LGBT+ issues in the workforce, through international exchanges, sharing expertise, developing a training pack and supporting staff networks. Over five months, four two-day modules of non-formal training were delivered by the former chair of an LGBT+ youth NGO who was himself a professional trainer. The themes covered included intercultural competences, inclusive services for LGBT+ individuals, communication and sensitive situations, operationalisation and institutional change.

Questionnaires *ex ante* and *ex post* as to knowledge and attitudes revealed very positive evaluations of the training by participants, Ms Ribeiro said, as did a focus-group discussion. Leeds did parallel training (although much shorter) with staff from its already-existing LGBT+ network. A delegation came to Oeiras in October. A 72-page bilingual manual generated by the project would be shared with other ICCs as a good-practice model. Only if staff had the necessary relational competences could the formal legal rights enjoyed by LGBT+ individuals be embedded in institutional practice. The aim again was to incorporate this project – endorsed in the staff newsletter by the councillor responsible for HR – into HR training in the context of the action plan. The manual and other resources produced in the project will be published shortly.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

The expert visit reinforced the strong commitment of Oeiras to its intercultural path. That does involve expenditure, although this investment is rewarded via the '[diversity advantage](#)' which then accrues. Its demography, including high earners, and its large-business magnetism ensure that the municipality, though small, is relatively revenue-rich. But perhaps of even greater import than this economic base is the social power of the associational network on which it can draw and the high trust between officials and association representatives.

Looking ahead, Oeiras might want to think of how it can engage the public at large in the municipality more with this work and encourage more interaction – bringing together in particular for intercultural encounters those often more privileged non-Lusophone migrants, the professionals who work in the major national public institutions located in the municipality, the generally more marginalised migrants from the former colonies and individuals from the Roma community. The sterling work of the municipality in engaging with the latter two categories of the population should not be undermined by an unintentional failure fully to engage the former two as well.

In this way a public authority, such as the municipality, can not only manage its diversity better but enhance the diversity advantage which accrues to it and its public. This can also act to undermine stereotypes in the face of the growing pressure from xenophobic political forces falsely representing 'immigrants' as a drain on the public purse.

The main recommendations to the municipality follow from these conclusions.

1. Recommendation 1.

Develop a new intercultural strategy, with wide participation of NGOs and experts/practitioners, using a variety of methodologies.

The absence of such a strategy, and its constraining effects, has been noted above. The Oeiras'27 Bid Book admitted that, while 'home to highly diverse communities', Oeiras 'nevertheless lacks a distinctive cultural personality'. This is where a municipal intercultural strategy can act as a vector: the aim designated for such a strategy, after widespread deliberation, can identify the goal the authority seeks to realise, as a positive self-affirmation.

The strategy agreed by [Valletta](#) in Malta in 2015 provides an example of the defining role such a (one-sentence) aim can play. The aim can be broken down into a small number of discrete objectives, which can in turn be translated into concrete programmes and projects – in the same manner as the Model Framework for an Intercultural Integration Strategy at the National Level endorsed by the Committee of Ministers in 2022 [sets out](#). The very process of developing such a strategy can validate the confidence of associations that they have a voice to which the municipality listens while stimulating wider public debate on interculturalism in Oeiras.

2. Recommendation 2.

Establish a round-table structure, as elsewhere among ICCs, ensuring iterative dialogue between the municipality and migrant and Roma associations, with working groups and an annual workplan.

The excellent informal relationships between the municipality and the associations represent a sound platform for a more formal, recurrent conversation between the public authority and civil-society organisations in Oeiras. This has proved a good practice for the governance of cultural diversity across the ICCs network over the years. Such a structure is ideal to monitor the implementation of an intercultural strategy and to steer its revision and renewal.

Take [Bilbao](#), for instance. Its Immigration Council is chaired by a councillor nominated by the mayor, with representatives of the political parties and more than 20 migrant associations around the table. It agrees an annual workplan and meets in plenary twice a year, with six working groups meeting in between.

3. Recommendation 3.

Consider moving leadership on interculturalism into the mayor's office, while retaining the involvement of expert staff in Social Development and co-ordinating across the municipality via an interdepartmental committee.

The mayor is recurrently and publicly associated with Oeiras' intercultural work. While currently this work is led by the Department for Social Development, there is a strong case, given the transversal nature of intercultural integration, for leadership to come from the highest level of the municipality, indicating to all departments – beyond the arena of social policy into the economy, arts and culture, and so on – the part that they are expected to play. A model for this was Antonio Costa's mayorship of Lisbon (twice re-elected) in 2007-15. An intercultural strategy endorsed by the elected representatives and led from the office of the mayor – while still drawing to the full on the expertise of staff in Social Development and retaining the link between intercultural integration and social inclusion – has a key role in making this possible.

Oeiras might also look in this context at the [Barcelona](#) example. Its second intercultural plan, running through this decade, includes an Interdepartmental Interculturality Committee 'to promote interculturality in a cross-cutting manner within the municipal organisation' and to 'ensure governance with an intercultural perspective in the city'. Such co-ordination is essential to secure a 'joined-up' approach.

4. Recommendation 4.

Develop a general intercultural-mediation service, helping to make the strategy real on the street, working with the associations.

Mediation appears in the Oeiras index report as one area where its performance falls uncharacteristically below the average for its peers. Building on the successful school-based, Roma-mediation project, it could develop a progressively more general mediation service, in both scope and coverage.

Oeiras might again look in this regard to the example of [Barcelona](#), which has a comprehensive intercultural-mediation strategy within the framework of its Intercultural Plan. This covers a range of themes, including mediating between service professionals and users and the resolution of disputes; and it operates in a variety of institutions, from hospitals to police stations.

5. Recommendation 5.

Challenge media negativity about migrants (linking with crime, poverty, etc.) with positive affirmations of diversity in public space, such as through intercultural festivals and storytelling initiatives.

Oeiras might build on the *LusoFolia* (Portuguese Spree) festival in 2025 – going beyond the ‘Luso’ cultural boundaries – and learning also from the long experience of [Lisbon](#) with its annual *Todos* (for Everyone) intercultural festival. *Todos* is explicitly rotated around areas of the capital every few years, so that interculturalism is understood as mattering to all its residents, not just migrants and refugees.

[Braga](#) has made storytelling, through videos and audio interviews, part of a dedicated project, *DiverCidade Braga*, collating a wealth of material about the city's ‘intercultural journey’. The project is pursued in partnership with migrant associations. Were Oeiras to develop its own intercultural strategy, as suggested above, this approach might inspire in terms of bringing the strategy to life.

There are many other detailed recommendations in the index report on Oeiras. But these ones might be prioritised – especially the first three, which are evidently interlinked. If implemented effectively, they would likely herald a further measurable advance when the next index report for the municipality comes to be compiled.

The Intercultural Cities programme would like to thank the municipality of Oeiras for an interesting visit and congratulate the municipality for its continued engagement and commitment to the programme. The work done to date is inspiring and several areas were identified as good practices to share with other cities.



Council of Europe Intercultural Cities Programme Expert visit to Oeiras, 3&4 December 2025

Agenda

Date	Time	Venue	Participants / Theme
03/dez	09h30- 12h00	Templo da Poesia Oeiras (Auditorium)	Opening Session by The Vice-President- Francisco Gonçalves Introduction of Intercultural Approach and the Intercultural Cities programme -Ben Freeman Portuguese intercultural cities network - Carla Calado Presentation of the Intercultural Cities Index results of Oeiras -Robin Wilson Q&A, discussion
	12h00-14h00	City Hall	Lunch
	14h00-18h30	Local Associations headquarters	Mundo Feliz
			AAMA
			Lage em Movimento
18h30 –22h00	Local Community Center Alto da Loba	Partners Oeiras’s Migrations and Interculturality integrated network Dinner and cultural event	
04/dez	09h00 – 10h30	School Sofia de Mello Breyner Carnaxide Portela	Mediation in Scholl Context
	12h00- 14h00	City hall	Lunch
	14h00-16h00	Youth Unit	Youth participation Projects
	17h00-18h0	Human Resources	Projet Rainbow Connections (Inter City Grants)
	18h00-19h00	Local Association headquarters	Moinho em Movimento Local Association
	19h00-20h00		Pombal XXI

Diversity has become a key feature of societies today and is particularly tangible in urban centres. While people of diverse national, ethnic, linguistic and faith backgrounds have immensely contributed to post-war prosperity, inequalities related to origin, culture and skin colour persist, and anxiety about pluralism, identity and shared values is often politically instrumentalised. The challenge of fostering equity and cohesion in culturally diverse societies has become more acute. Cities are uniquely placed to imagine and test responses to this challenge.

The Council of Europe and its partner cities have developed and validated an intercultural approach to integration and inclusion which enables cities to reap the benefits and minimise the risks related to human mobility and cultural diversity. Almost two decades after the start of this work, there is growing evidence that diversity, when recognised and managed as a resource, produces positive outcomes in terms of creativity, wellbeing and economic development.

The Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme invites cities in Europe and beyond to explore and apply policies that harness diversity for personal and societal development.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

