



The cycle of webinars "Gender and Interculturalism" has started!
Here's what we've learned from the latest one focused on Health

On 30 May 2022, the webinar "Health, Gender and Interculturalism" took place. This event is part of the project "Gender and Interculturalism", developed by the Cooperative Portuguese Network of Intercultural Cities in partnership with the cities of Lisbon, Oeiras and Vila Verde and funded by the Council of Europe.

The objective of the meeting was to broaden and deepen the debate regarding the construction of public policies for health that take into consideration gender issues and intersectionality under an intercultural perspective. The event started with the presentation of the RPCI and the "Gender and Interculturality" Project, after which a round table was held with the presence of the following participants:

- [Beatriz Padilla](#): researcher affiliated to CIES-ISCTE;
- [Cyntia de Paula](#): current president of the board of directors of the Casa do Brasil association in Lisbon;

- Goizane Mota Gago, responsible for Programmes directed at community prevention and empowerment of migrant women in [Bilbao](#) City Council, Spain;
- [Cátia Ramos](#): Habits and Routines Coach and amateur athlete;
- [Joana Canedo](#) from [GAT](#): rights activist for people who under medical treatment;
- Helena Viegas, journalist, representative of [Corações com Coroa](#);
- [Teresa Vieira](#): mediator of the [ACM](#)'s Support Centre for Roma Communities.

Learnings and reflections

Beatriz Padilla opened the meeting with an overview of the issues at stake, addressing important points on health, gender and interculturality, which were further explored.

Respecting, accepting and valuing cultural differences involving aspects such as migration, ethno-racial issues and gender were considered as key elements of a successful approach to manage health in a gender inclusive and intersectional way. In addition the importance of empowering interculturality and diversity, without using practices that may be perceived as patronising, condescending, prejudiced or ethnocentric was also noted.

The importance of an integrated intercultural vision was discussed as a way to assess and address the challenges related to people's access to public systems and services; migrant reception policies in relation to health were also discussed, noting a lack of welcoming protocols especially when they seek medical assistance. The language barrier from the first-contact staff was pointed as one of the elements that hinders successful interaction and trust. In addition, the medical language itself may create a barrier to communication with people who have a low level of education; it was further noted the need to create capacity and knowledge about the different cultural practices and to trigger a reflection on existing prejudices and practices, which may lead, for example, to obstetric violence against women.

The importance of multidisciplinary work

It is paramount to create a positive understanding of diversity and to raise attention on the importance of intercultural competence for meaningful interaction. Unfortunately, the initial contacts are often biased by the ethnic/racial/cultural approaches, in which migrants are seen as foreigners, strangers, or the "other", i.e. people who do not belong to the broader society and who may even pose threats to the community, especially in moments of crisis.

A holistic/integrated and intersectional approach to migrants and migration would help understanding the multiple identities and dimensions that every individual has, and help considering migrants as part of a whole. Therefore, integrated services should promote greater awareness of health systems, including professionals and the whole civil society, so that as a result there is an improvement for all people, including those in socio-economic vulnerability.

Regarding existing practices, participants identified the following:

Mobile health units: the NHS **mobile** health unit located in Venda Nova, Amadora, provided an important service to the population. It involved the provision of proximity services in relation to maternal, child and reproductive health, as well as support in making appointments and sought to address the difficulties encountered by migrants, especially those with irregular residency status, when trying to access the National Health System. However, as a result of the natural evolution of the NHS, this mobile unit was transformed into a family health unit which, by definition, cannot provide support to undocumented migrants, thus putting an end to the existence of this good practice.

Informa em Ação Project: Casa do Brasil, presented the project ["Informa em Ação"](#) developed through a participative process that counted with the involvement of professionals from several areas and migrant people. The result was the elaboration of information guides available in 6 languages: Bengali, French, English, Mandarin, Nepali and Portuguese, with the translation being done by people from the community itself.

Mujer, Salud y Violencia Programme: the [project](#) developed by the city of Bilbao, Spain, focused on the empowerment of immigrant women through the prevention of gender violence and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. They use a multiplier effect consisting in establishing transmission channels in the communities of the participants, raising awareness and informing women in their surroundings, in five lines of intervention: Training and consolidation of empowerment agents; Consolidation of the network of stakeholders; Comprehensive prevention of female genital mutilation; Women's guide; Guide for dialogues between women.

Menarche goes to school: ["Menarche goes to school"](#) is a project targeting 8th grade students and developed by the team of the #WeAllDeserve movement and "Corações com coroa" (Hearts with a Crown) association, with the aim of broadening the debate on menstruation, menstrual poverty and sustainability. Actions were undertaken to deconstruct the taboos that still persist on the topic of health linked to menstruation. The importance of the project having been developed from the beginning in a school environment was reinforced.

Group of women survivors of violence: This is a community space in which women belonging to socially excluded groups can socialise and hold mutual support meetings; the encounters take place weekly in the space of Sirigaita, a cultural association in the Intendente neighbourhood. All decisions are made in a horizontal assembly; taking into account that the target group encompass about 10 nationalities, intercultural communication is a guiding principle for all activities. One of the group's objectives is also to act as a network, so that there is dialogue with other feminist collectives in the city, in order to contribute to the construction of public policies.

Work aimed at men: a conversation started after Cátia Ramos presented her initiatives to commemorate Cape Verdean Women's Day in 2022, with significant male

participation, in which it was possible to discuss gender differences in a healthy and respectful manner. The success of this approach can be verified by the fact that men themselves requested another meeting of this type, showing an openness in the construction of new cultural perspectives.

Difficulties encountered in promoting more intercultural health

Participants noted that, regardless of the nature of the approach used or the initiatives undertaken to improve the health field, they all face similar constraints and challenges, in particular when it comes to funding initiatives for the community and ensuring temporal continuity of successful actions.

Ensuring a long-term perspective and sustainability of actions is particularly relevant for work with Roma communities since, due to generational issues, awareness and support projects may take long before delivering results.

Also, there was strong agreement on the need to foster intercultural competence and administrative training of people working in health centres, as well as on the need to invest in knowledge about the different groups living in Portugal, in order to promote the construction of medical teams that are more empathetic, respectful and able to manage diversity positively.

Upcoming meetings

If you are interested in the subject and could not be present, do not worry! Within the project "gender and interculturality" we will still hold the following meetings:

27 June, 14:30-16:30 - Communication, Gender and Interculturalism (program to be confirmed)

Next Webinar, don't miss it!

26th September, 14:30-16:30 - Education, Gender and Interculturalism (program to be confirmed)

The events are free and open to all. Registration can be done through this [form](#).

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