

Study visit of the European Integration Network to Portugal

4 and 5 June 2018

The study visit in Portugal was the third mutual learning activity of the European Integration Network (EIN) after Sweden and Germany in 2017. Over the course of two days, 26 representatives of governmental and non-governmental institutions from 13 countries gained an insight in the Portuguese integration system, with a focus on the extremely well developed multi-stakeholder and the "whole-of-government" approach.

Below a summary of the issues and initiatives presented discussed during the visit. All slides and material presented to participants are attached as complement to this summary.

The Portuguese integration policies: options and challenges

The visit was opened by the Secretary of State for Education, who stated how diversity is an asset for society, and how the school system has to cater for everyone and promote diversity since the start. Inter-culturality and diversity have to be taught in schools, and have to be considered as important as mathematics and geography: only through this a real shift in mentality can be achieved.

The Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality presented the four pillars of the integration policy in Portugal: 1) Integration based on proximity (93 local centres and 3 national one-stop-shops for integration); 2) Partnership and cooperation with municipalities and civil society; 3) Participation of migrant communities through the Council for Migration; 4) Policies based on inter-cultural model for integration.



The integrated strategy and the whole-of-government approach

The High Commissioner for Migration presented the context in which the High Commission operates within the country. A public institute with more than 200 staff members, the High Commission has competence over all foreigners in Portugal (third-country nationals as well as EU mobile citizens). With a net migration close to zero,

the most recent flows have seen an increase of international students, EU retirees, and citizens from China and the Hindustan region. More than half of the migrant population in Portugal is composed by women. Migrants are also doing better in the labour market than Portuguese citizens themselves (in particular, the entrepreneurial rate is 6 times as high as the rate for natives). The contribution of

migrants to the Portuguese economy is therefore a good argument to support a positive narrative and prove the positive balance to the national welfare system.

Migration in Portugal is seen as an inter-ministerial area. Therefore, to achieve a proper mainstreaming, the responsibility was put under the Ministry of the Presidency and the strategic plan was given a 6 years timespan so to last beyond any governmental mandate.

Municipalities are key actors in the implementation of policies on migration and integration. More and more municipalities have now adopted a local integration plan, whose implementation is partly funded through AMIF.

The High Commissioner concluded saying that although integration is never a finished deal, policies put in place in Portugal have been bearing good results – one of the few EU Member States with no xenophobic and anti-migration party represented in government.

The integration of migrants in schools

The Deputy Director General for Education presented the main features of the Portuguese school system. Currently at 12,6%, the aim is to achieve an early drop-out rate under 10% by 2020. Portugal is often referred to as the new Finland in that the school system has recently shown great improvements which are reflected in the results of the OECD PISA survey.

The group then visited the **one-stop-shop centre of Lisbon**, which serves around 600 migrants a day (the 3 national centres – Lisbon, Porto and faro – serve around 1100 persons a day). The centre offers all early integration services (education, health, employment, social security, residence permits, legal advice, entrepreneurship...) and provides offices for several ministries and public administrations, in



order to allow the migrant not to have to go from one place to another to look for support, but to receive a comprehensive and individual support from the very start.



Cultural mediators speaking 14 languages are available to guide the newly arrived person through the Portuguese public administration. All services offered are free of charge. The centre offers a children lounge with a child carer available, as well as a telephone line available between 9am and 6pm to provide support over the phone. It is important to stress that this type of centre is strongly supported by the EU as 50% of the costs of the centre are financed through EU Funds (AMIF and ESF).

Sintra Municipality

With around 400.000 inhabitants and 30.000 third-country nationals, Sintra is the second biggest municipality in Portugal and has a significant migrant population. The group was received by the Mayor and his Deputy, both very committed to invest in integration for a cohesive and inclusive society. Alongside other 90 municipalities in Portugal, Sintra has a Local Integration Plan containing 55 measures to be implemented by different actors to promote migrant integration. The city also offers support to irregular migrants (health, transport etc.). The 3 critical areas mentioned by the Deputy Mayor are the following: language (newly arrived migrants are offered 600 hours of language course – 4h/day), regularisation and housing (the latter being not necessarily migrant specific, but rather an issue for the whole population).



Sintra has also put in place a specific Plan for refugees due to their specificities and vulnerabilities. Thanks to the specific support for refugees provided through this plan, the twelve families relocated in Sintra are now well settled in the community and have not left the country for another EU Member State.

The city invests a lot in the involvement and participation of the local population as it is considered a key factor of success

for the integration process. For example, before hosting one family in a given building, the municipality makes sure that the people living in this building are informed and ready to help the newcomers.

The Deputy Mayor stressed the importance of remembering that for every migrant living in Portugal, there are 10 Portuguese living abroad: it is thanks to this history of emigration that the society is open to welcoming newcomers and understands the importance of supporting migrants and refugees.

On the second day of the visit, the group went to Casal de Cambra and Cascais (Bairro da Torre) to visit 2 projects focusing on youth, both supported by the Choices Programme. The first one was Inovar 3E and consisted in supporting the social inclusion of children from disadvantageous groups - especially children with a migrant background – through training and activities related to innovation and technology (in particular construction of model airplanes, drones etc). The second project was the **Takelt! Youth Centre** of a difficult neighbourhood, where young people are engaged in several activities helping them to bring out their talent and avoid falling into criminality. In particular, a project on street art was presented, whereby the facades of social housing are decorated with urban street arts which are also featuring on tourist tours of the city of Cascais. The Centre also helps youth to set up a small entrepreneurial activity, such as a music studio, barber shop, community kitchen. These efforts helped improve the reputation of the neighbourhood, foster the social cohesion and reduce criminality.



The main topic of the last afternoon session was **inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue**. The group had the opportunity to meet with several leaders of religious communities (the Mormons, the Ishmaelite, the Adventist Church and the Muslim community), who all work together under the patronage of the High Commission for Migration to promote dialogue among religious confessions, contribute to the exchange between communities, and foster integration of newcomers.

A presentation on **facts and figures related to migration and integration** in Portugal was also given, which proved very interesting in the group discussion on how to promote a more positive narrative on these topics.

The study visits was concluded with a short moment in which each participant shared their impressions and take-away from the visit. Initial feedback was very positive, the study visit having provided a lot of food-for-thought and ideas which could be used in other contexts and Member States.

