IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION: THE PORTUGUESE WAY

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Portugal, after a long history of being a country of origin for emigrants – which is still the case – also became a host country at the end of the 20th century. Today, different communities, from which one can highlight Brazilian, Ukrainian and Cape-Verdean immigrants, now make up 5% of the population resident in Portugal (approximately 500,000 legal immigrants) and 8% of the active population. The growth of these communities has basically been seen from the 1990s onwards, when there were only approximately 100,000 immigrants, and this reflects a 400% increase in 15 years.

Portugal has benefited in recent decades from this presence of immigrants who have contributed greatly to the accelerated process of development that our country has been experiencing. Their contribution of 5% to the national Gross Value-Added (GVA), with particular emphasis on the Civil Construction (15%), Hotel and Catering (11%) and Services and Companies (10%) sectors (Sousa Ferreira et al. 2004), the positive balance of their contribution towards the State's finances – 243 million Euros, in 2002 – or the contribution made towards balancing the demographic pyramid, are some evident examples of the contribution which immigrants have brought us. But it is also important to highlight the rich cultural and religious diversity introduced by immigrant communities since "cultural diversity is one of the sources of development, understood not simply as economic growth, but also as a means of access to a satisfactory intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual existence."[1]

This new context has meant that Portuguese society, since 1996, has been required to develop a more consistent and coordinated policy of welcoming and integrating immigrants, by the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME), a body reporting to the Prime Minister and the Minister to the Presidency. Its mission statement is "to promote the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities into Portuguese society, ensure the participation and cooperation of representative immigrant associations, social partners and welfare bodies in defining the policies of social insertion and the fight against exclusion, as well as following the application of legal instruments to prevent and outlaw discrimination while exercising one's rights on the basis of race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin."[2]

This option to take this institutional pattern, through placing responsibility for the integration policy at the centre of government, reflects the importance it has been given and the global and integrative vision of the various related areas that underlie it. Rather than allocating this role to internal Security or Labour and Social Affairs, it has been taken on board as a central theme throughout all areas of government.

Seven key principles

The policy of welcoming and integrating immigrants in Portugal is built upon seven key principles that directly influence the concrete programmes and actions that different public bodies have developed in the service of immigrants.

1. Equality

Equality of rights and responsibilities amongst national and foreign citizens who are present or who reside in Portugal, with the exception of some political rights, is seen as a determining and inspiring principle. In this way, the fight against all forms of discrimination and the effective carrying out of rights and responsibilities determines what we are arguing for in immigration policies – equal access to work, health, education, social security, justice and all the other sector areas. In the same manner, respect for the law, civic participation or the payment of taxes are obligations for immigrants, as well as nationals. Extensive national and community legislation support this principle, as well as the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination (CICDR), the representative entity of various ministries, Parliament, immigrant and anti-racist associations, trade unions and companies.

2. Hospitality

But often equality is not enough. Immigrants, particularly recent arrivals, have competitive disadvantages or specific vulnerabilities, which demand positive actions to enable effective equality. To achieve such an objective, inspired by the principle of hospitality, Portugal has, similarly to other countries, developed Programmes and Actions that allow immigrants to be well received.

Specific expressions of this principle include, for example, the National Immigrant Support System, where initiatives such as the National Immigrant Support Centres (one-stop shops) have been developed. These support centres combine the presence of public bodies with which immigrants have to deal, with a diversified set of Support Offices (Family Reunion, Employment, Legal Support…) which speed up access to fundamental rights. as well, the National Network of Information for the Immigrant provides useful and practical information in a variety of languages and formats (paper, Web, media, telephone, information centres) in order to facilitate the integration of immigrants. It is also worth mentioning, in this regard the activities involving the teaching of Portuguese, initiated by the Programme Portugal Receives (Portugal Acolhe).

It is also important, in this field, to recognize cases and circumstances, should an immigrant be law-abiding and the law respected, and should networks involving the exploitation of irregular immigration should be fought against, one must also bear in mind that *the dignity of the human person remains untouchable and should be protected against the most extreme adversities*. This requires the extension of *essential rights due to any person, irrespective of their documental situation*. In our experience, the importance of consolidating access to essential health care, temporary shelter in an emergency situation or voluntary return to the country of origin are but a few of such cases. But it is also important to provide competent legal and solidarity support that specifies their situation with rigour and justice, since a lack of knowledge of the law and rights often leads to a situation of irregularity due to ignorance or a lack of means to mount a defence. And when there is no alternative to forced exclusion, this option may be carried out with humanity and respect.

3. Citizenship

The exercise of equality naturally leads to the principle of full citizenship. Whilst still non-nationals, we would argue that immigrants are citizens with full rights. They are active constructors of a destination community, even though they do not share a common origin. Even the restrictions still placed at the level of political participation should gradually disappear, since political participation at the local authority level, in a regime of reciprocity, which the Portuguese Constitution foresees, is not sufficient in itself.

A form of access to citizenship *par excellence* is the acquisition of Portuguese nationality, and this has become easier with recent modifications to the *Nationality Law*. It is of particular importance to the descendants of immigrants who are now able to obtain Portuguese nationality more easily.

4 & 5. Co-responsibility and participation

This vision leads to another consequence of immigration policy: the affirmation of the principles of co-responsibility and of participation. An inclusive society can only be built through respect for the principle of full cultural and political participation of all citizens – national and immigrant – who constitute a society within a specific time and space. Immigrants should seek this participation and, above all, the host society should be open to that participation within its *polis*.

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In this way, it is hoped that immigrants, as citizens, will be participative and co-responsible for the Common Good and, particularly with respect to immigration policy, be part of the solution. The force of their associations, the presence of socio-cultural mediators from the immigrant communities in public services and the voice of their representatives in the Advisory Council for Immigration Affairs, the organ that advises the government on immigration policy issues, are examples of what has already been achieved.

6. Interculturality

In another area that is particularly sensitive in our days – the management of cultural diversity – the Portuguese option has been very clear and has involved the affirmation of the principle of interculturality. Within a framework of mutual respect and acting within the Law, it has promoted the affirmation of richness of diversity in dialogue. More than a peaceful co-existence of different communities, the intercultural model expresses itself at the crossroads of cultural miscegenation, with no one culture being annihilated, nor imposed. Much more than the simple acceptance of the "other," the intercultural model proposes the welcoming of the "other" and the transformation of both within this meeting.

Opting to give priority to work within the field of education, the Entreculturas Office has, since 1991, been developing an important programme of intercultural education, using training activities and producing pedagogic materials.

7. Consensus

Finally, the construction of immigration policy in Portugal has been characterized by the principle of consensus. On questions of immigration, the permanent search for a widened political and social consensus through dialogue and negotiation is not a mere question of tactics. It is necessary to keep immigration policy away from fractious territory where populist anti-immigration arguments flourish, as has been verified in many European countries. For example, it has been possible to alter the *Nationality Law*, making it more open and humanistic, with an extremely wide parliamentary consensus, without a single vote cast against it.

However, in democratic societies, the construction of this consensus implies, among other things, raising public awareness regarding the welcoming of immigrants, by debunking stereotypes and preconceived false ideas. In this regard, much attention has been given to the treatment of immigration issues by the media, and the introduction of new perspectives. Initiatives such as the Journalism for Tolerance Prize or the production of the television programme *Nós* (We) are concrete expressions of this work.

These are seven mobilizing principles both for the State and for civil society. We would argue that the *State should become the main ally in the integration of immigrants*. This goal can only be achieved if the principle of ongoing cooperation between different State entities is respected, seeking coherent responses that cut across and into a variety of sectors. Particular attention should be given to the local aspect of reception, and to the promotion of proximity integration. At the same time, it is essential to reinforce the alliance with bodies from *civil society* by empowering their generous, flexible and, normally, more efficient intervention.

Portugal is still learning to be a country that receives immigrants. Its integration policy needs to be developed and consolidated. We have much to do and to improve. But this is a priority and we know what we want.

In the 21st century, immigration policy will be one of the factors that will define each society: "tell me which immigration policy you have and I will tell you who you are." And each society needs to pay attention, so that one day it will not be ashamed of who it is.

References

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UNESCO. 2001. Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity.

Notes

[1] Article 3 of UNESCO's *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity*.

[2] Article 1, No. 2, DL 251/2002.