

3. Portugal

3.1 Definition of a minority in Portugal

There is no formal definition of minority in the Portuguese legislation. Officially and legally, minorities do not exist. Nevertheless, seen from a sociological point of view, there is a national ethnic minority: the Portuguese Roma community moving around the Southern parts of the country.

In relation to migrating minorities, it is important to notice that Portugal is mainly shaped by its emigration experiences of the last centuries. Only recently, immigration became an issue. Moreover, Portugal shows the lowest numbers of asylum seekers in the EU¹.

Lately, the Timorese community could be seen as an ethnic and socio-cultural minority in Portugal (around 1,600 individuals²), but they do not necessarily form part of a minority in East Timor. At the same time, they received straight away the Portuguese nationality when they arrived after their escape, so they legally were not refugees, because they did not get the convention status. Since the restoration of independence in East Timor on 20th of May 2002, newcomers are treated like any other foreigner from a third country (Schengen visa necessary, etc.) Apart from this group, there are some Roma who come from Romania, but they do not identify themselves with the Portuguese Roma. Usually, Romanian Roma do not want to go back, but resettle in a third country. Also, there is a small number of (mainly Pakistani) Muslims.

The definitions gathered during the interviews can be resumed to the following statements: A minority is a small group of people with determined characteristics: nationality, customs, experiences, life style, cultural values, habits, language, way of being, a group not integrated in the general society and isolated by its specific religious or cultural customs, characterized by different cultural and social identifications.

3.2 The national institutional framework and its responsibilities

Institution	Activities facilitating return
ACIME – Alto Comissário para os Imigrantes e Minorias Étnicas, High Commissioner for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities	Integration of foreigners into Portuguese society, fight against discrimination. Special department for cultural rights: “Intercultura”
SEF – Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, Border Police	Process of Asylum seeking, visa, repatriation in collaboration with IOM.
Segurança Social, Social Security	One-time travel costs for Timorese who fell out of subsidy scheme in 2004. 5 years prohibition to re-enter.

¹ After a peak of 1659 persons in 1993, the trend is declining: 271 (1999), 202 (2000), 193 (2001), 180 (2002), 88 (2003). In the first semester 2004, 42 persons were asking for asylum. Correspondingly, the numbers of accepted refugee applications is also very small: from 1993 until 2003, 129 refugees got the convention status; from 1998 to 2003, 187 persons got the status of residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

² Source: Embassy of East Timor in Portugal.

3.3 Portuguese Organisations supporting Minorities

NGO/ International Organization	Activities facilitating return
CPR – Conselho Português para os Refugiados, Portuguese Refugee Council	Operational partner of UNHCR since they left. Legal advice, mentoring for IOM programme.
INDE – intercooperação e desenvolvimento, srl., interco-operation and development	Voluntary return project for refugees, especially from East Timor. Interviews, counselling, mentoring, training, creation of a small individual life project, travel, visa costs, transport of belongings to the COR, follow up assistance by local team.
IOM – Organização Internacional para as Migrações, International Organization for Migration	“Assisted Voluntary Return” programme since 1998. Migrants/ undocumented foreigners funded by SEF/ government ³ , refugees/ asylum seekers funded by CPR, ERF/EQUAL. Information campaign, orientation, legal help, travel costs, reinstallation help, medical consultation. Addressing organisation (CPR, JRS, AMI, embassy, Social Security) does mentoring, preparation, follow up. 5 years prohibition to re-enter.
AMI – Assistência Médica Internacional, International Medical Assistance	Accompaniment for IOM programme, contact after return.
Jesuit Refugee Service	Collaboration with CPR

3.4 Perceptions and expectations among the minority groups

Among the refugees interviewed, the main preconditions mentioned are employment, political stability and housing. On second place, infrastructure, investment, financial starting help, training, transport for goods, travel costs and micro credit schemes are mentioned. There is also concern about the transferability of pensions and a support for self-organisation, e.g. founding a cooperative.

Some showed awareness of and prepared themselves for the wrong ideas about life in exile that persist in the country of origin, e.g. that people are on holiday, etc.

In terms of employment, a work permit during the time in exile would allow the refugee to earn some savings which can facilitate economical reintegration after return.

3.5 Perceptions and expectations among the officials⁴

All entities interviewed treat the returnee as an individual, not as a member of a minority. They all see the lack of involvement in the country of origin as the main failure of reintegration programmes. Proposals to improve this situation include investment, governmental development programmes, creation of individual life projects, creation of income generating activities and mentoring. Another point commonly mentioned is the need

³ The numbers of voluntary return candidates of the Portuguese Border Police SEF do not discriminate between migrants and refugees. Both groups together show a huge variety in country of origin, so that it is difficult to abstract a general trend. In 2001, 362 persons returned with SEF, in 2002 132 and in 2003 95. In the first two years of the decade, the most numerous were the group of citizens from Ukraine, Russia and Brazil.

⁴ The opinions mentioned here are statements made by individual representatives of the organizations and cannot represent the official position.

for awareness raising of the public in the host countries, education for peace and multiculturalism.

3.6 Perceptions and expectations among the NGOs

AMI underlines strongly the need for a continuous, intense, personalized mentoring of the person who wants to return, both in the host country as in the country of origin. It is also important to give information and deeply analyze the situation – in terms of context and conditions, but also individually. In the worst cases (poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, etc.), there is a important psychological help necessary in order to overcome shame and depression and find the courage to go back, where at least there is a family and a home. If it is possible, the professional and health situation should be improved or stabilized before the return, and also continue afterwards. In the countries of origin, there is information missing both in the political and diplomatic elites, but also in the families.

IOM position is in favour for an open consultation process, where the person receives a comprehensive information about both integration (legal regularization, etc.) and reintegration (return programmes, etc.). Afterwards, the individually best decision can be taken in a well informed and prepared way. Nevertheless, the poor budget does not allow a comprehensive and profound preparation and mentoring at the moment. Moreover, it is difficult to evaluate the programme and verify its effectiveness. Apart from the general necessities, also special cases need to be taken into account, e.g. severe sick persons who want to go back. In theses cases, information about the conditions (hospitals, doctors, medicine) is crucial. The main points deciding about success or failure of the reintegration are the political will in the country of origin, the resources and the economical base.

CPR is very alert to the security situation in the country of origin. The reintegration programme should include the travel to the home village, not only to the capital, and also post-arrival activities, e.g. a partnership with an organization in the country of origin, so that a continuous mentoring is guaranteed and one knows what happened with the returnee.

Reintegration and return ask for a very individualized processing, which almost always demands a case to case treatment. A commonality, though, is the key factor education and training.

3.7 Recommendations and Conclusions drawn from the findings

Socio-economic reintegration is fundamentally linked with development questions. In order to prevent social exclusion, the personal capacities of the returnee have to be improved (training, life project, etc.) and the community's general socio-economic situation strengthened (integrated approach). Both an elaborated preparation process in the host country and an inclusive, complex reintegration phase in the country of origin are important for a sustainable return.