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Integration of immigrants in Portugal and support to work-life balance

A practical guide

Funding by

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants



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Title

Integration of immigrants in Portugal and support to work-life balance: a practical guide

Project

Boomerang — Study on the perceptions of the economic impact of unequal sharing of unpaid labour on the lives of immigrant women and men in Portugal

Programme operator

Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality — CIG

Promoting organisation

Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon (ISCSP-ULisboa) — Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (CIEG/ISCSP-ULisboa)

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Partnerships

Maia University, Plano i Association, Alberta University, Centre for Migration Studies and Intercultural Relations, Portuguese Red Cross (Braga Delegation), SOS Racismo and Odalnaeringshage

Funding

European Economic Area Financial Mechanism (EEA Grants)

Publisher

© ISCSP — Institute of Social and Political Sciences
Rua Almerindo Lessa, Campus Universitário do Alto da Ajuda
1300-663 Lisbon
www.iscsp.ulisboa.pt

Graphic design

Guidesign

Production

Guide — Artes Gráficas

Legal deposit

524 753/23

ISBN

978-989-646-173-7

Funded by

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway grants



Programme operator



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Partnerships



Contents

Introduction 5

The Boomerang Project — presentation 8

The Boomerang Project — main results 13

Qualitative data 13

Quantitative data 15

Recommendations / Good practices 18

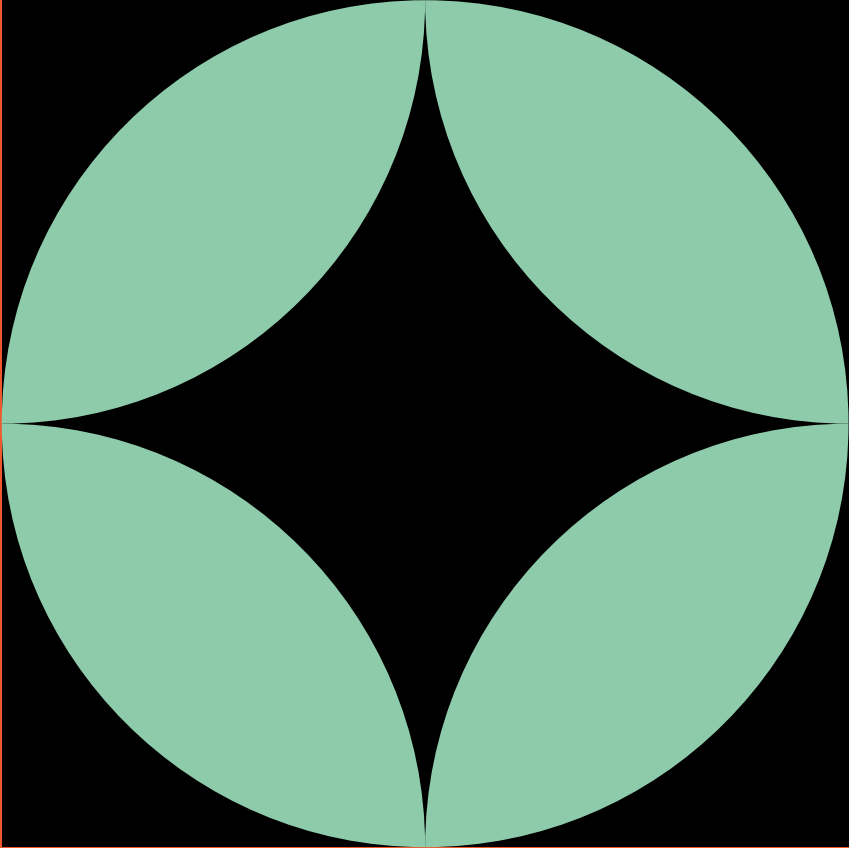
1. Investment in studies and programmes for inclusion
and gender equality 19

2. Facilitating dialogue, partnerships and cooperation 21

3. Promoting integration and equal opportunities 24

4. Promoting shared responsibility in the household
and family 28

Resources 32



Introduction

This **practical guide on the integration of immigrants in Portugal and support to work-life balance**, is the result of the Boomerang Project — Study on the perceptions of the economic impact of the unequal sharing of unpaid work (domestic and care) on the lives of immigrant women and men in Portugal. Its entire content was drawn up based on the main results obtained.

In recent decades, scientific analysis of the situation of immigrants in Portugal has made it possible to map not only the sociodemographic characteristics of those who immigrate, but also the relational processes and social and cultural dynamics associated with their experiences in a variety of contexts, such as family, school, and work.

Although the reasons behind people's decision to migrate can be very different, migratory processes involve personal and societal challenges that must be understood within the framework of the current political situation. While it is true that the era of globalisation is full of potential, it is also true that it accentuates and/or reinforces structural vulnerabilities.

Even if migratory processes can foster development, studies have shown that immigrants are often subject to discrimination and violence, and that their living conditions in receiving countries are marked by precariousness, unemployment, and poverty.

Dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and marital status, to name but a few, contribute to unequal access to opportunities and resources, crystallising asymmetries between people and groups.

An intersectional view of the experiences of immigrant people is therefore crucial to capture the specificity and diversity inherent to them. The Boomerang Project, which is presented below, is based on this assumption, both from a theoretical and methodological point of view.

Seeking to promote equality in the time spent on paid and unpaid work to support family life performed by immigrant women and men in Portugal, this project, supported by partner organisations, aimed to delve deeper into the subject with the aim of producing more in-depth and systematised knowledge and presenting recommendations that would enable the implementation of policies and the application of more concrete measures to ensure the progressive improvement in living conditions and more effective integration of immigrant people.

As well as encouraging social and economic development through migration and defending the human dignity and well-being of immigrants, the set of recommendations in this practical guide* acknowledges unpaid care and domestic work in a gender-sensitive and intersectional approach, based on respect for human rights.

* The use of this practical guide does not dispense with consulting other national and international documents, scientific or otherwise, drawn up for the same purpose.



The Boomerang Project — presentation

The Boomerang Project was promoted by the Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon, under the scientific responsibility of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies, between November 2021 and December 2023.

As part of the Conciliation and Gender Equality Programme, the project was funded by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism — EEA Grants* and had the support of the Maia University, Plano I Association, Aberta University, Centre for Migration Studies and Intercultural Relations, Portuguese Red Cross (Braga Delegation), SOS Racismo, as well as Odalnaeringshage.

With an interdisciplinary team, the general aim of the Boomerang Project was to characterise the perceptions of the economic impact of unequal sharing of unpaid work and divorce on the lives of immigrant women and men in Portugal, analysing its effects from the point of view of reconciling personal, family, and professional life.

* Through the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway are partners in the internal market with the Member States of the European Union. As a way of promoting a continuous and balanced strengthening of economic and trade relations, the parties to the EEA Agreement have established a multi-annual Financial Mechanism, known as EEA Grants. These aim to reduce social and economic disparities in Europe and strengthen bilateral relations between these three countries and the beneficiary countries. For the 2014-2021 period, a total contribution of 2.8 billion euros has been agreed for 15 beneficiary countries. Portugal will receive 102.7 million euros. Find out more at eeagrants.gov.pt.

Its main objectives were:

To characterise the experiences of Brazilian, Cape Verdean and Ukrainian immigrant men and women in Portugal in reconciling their personal, family, and professional lives;

To identify the strategies used by immigrant women and men in family and professional life to facilitate reconciliation;

To understand the inequalities between immigrant women and men in terms of unpaid work (domestic and care work);

To characterise the impact of divorce on the lives of immigrant women and men;

To understand how the migration process has an impact on unpaid work and gender equality.

In order to fulfil the general purpose and specific objectives, three complementary studies were carried out:

Study 1

Focus Groups with immigrants

43 women and 27 men

Study 2

Focus Groups with professionals

31 women and 8 men

Study 3

Immigrant surveys

151 women, 54 men and
1 non-binary person

The Focus Group interview script is made up of four main sections, in addition to sociodemographic characterisation, namely:

- 1) migration,
- 2) paid work,
- 3) unpaid work and
- 4) reconciling personal, family, and professional life.

The survey, in its Portuguese and Ukrainian versions, consists of 12 sections, namely:

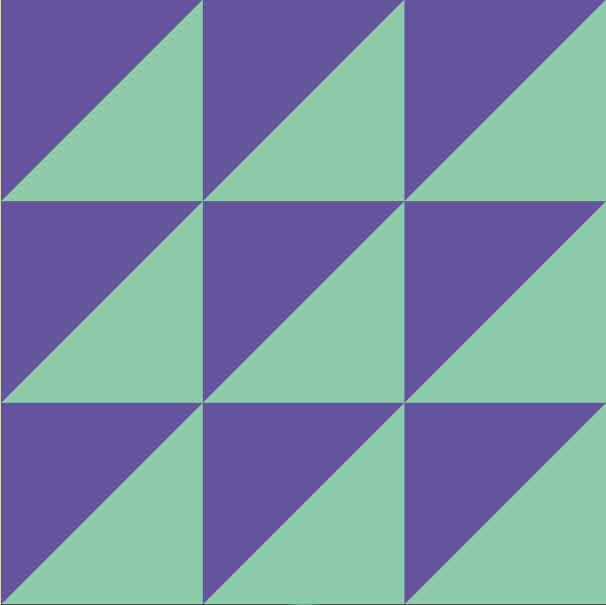
- 1) sociodemographic characterisation;
- 2) academic-professional profile;
- 3) characterisation of the current partner;
- 4) characterisation of the household;
- 5) characterisation of the migration route;
- 6) characterisation of the division of unpaid work, more specifically housework;
- 7) characterisation of the division of unpaid work, more specifically childcare;
- 8) characterisation of the division of unpaid work, more specifically caring for adults;
- 9) characterisation of the division of unpaid work;
- 10) characterisation of leisure activities; and
- 11) Work-Family Reconciliation Strategies Scale (Matias & Fontaine, 2014)*.

Section 12 is for any final comments.

Data collection followed all the ethical precepts of scientific research with human beings.

Having collected qualitative and quantitative data, the main results of the Boomerang Project bring together the information from the three studies carried out.

* Matias, M., & Fontaine, A. M. (2014). Managing multiple roles: Development of the Work-Family Conciliation Strategies Scale. *Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 17(e56), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sjp.2014.51>



The Boomerang Project — main results

Qualitative data

(Studies 1 and 2)

- Immigrants generally take the decision to immigrate in order to improve their living conditions, to develop scientifically and professionally, as well as to reunite their families.
- Portugal is chosen as a receiving country because of language issues (particularly for Brazilians and Cape Verdeans), security issues and the prior existence of support networks (e.g., family, friends, and acquaintances).
- Working life is often characterised by de-skilling, an overload of tasks, excessive working hours (not keeping to the hours stipulated in the employment contract), inadequate salaries, irregular payments and instability and precariousness.
- Both women's and men's accounts of the practices show that, compared to men, it is women who devote more time to unpaid work, namely housework and childcare.
- In some cases, women rely on the occasional participation of their husband/partner, particularly when it comes to looking after the children (bathing, dressing, taking and/or bringing them to/from school).
- As a strategy to balance their personal, family, and professional lives, and if they can't rely on their husband/partner to help them, women turn to family members (e.g., mother or siblings) and friends for help.

■ The unequal sharing of unpaid work has an impact on personal, family, and professional life, felt particularly by women: physical and psychological tiredness, difficulties in career progression and/or obtaining more rewarding salaries, as well as tensions and conflicts in the marital relationship which can even lead to marital breakdown (separation/divorce).

■ In divorce situations it is usually the women who have custody of the children.

■ Divorces are mostly by mutual consent, but their negative economic and emotional impacts (for women, children, and some men) stand out, difficulties that are added to those of being an immigrant. In certain cases, divorce can be a potential empowerment factor for women.

■ At the root of gender inequality are aspects related to structural factors (patriarchal societies, culture, tradition, education — an embedded view of stereotypes and gender roles that contribute to the persistence of conservative and traditional beliefs about gender) and/or relational aspects (communication and marital dynamics), which foster and perpetuate unequal sharing

Quantitative data

(Study 3)

- On average, immigrant women devote more time than men to unpaid work. Women devote 14.25 hours a week to domestic chores and 22.90 hours a week to childcare, while men devote less time to these tasks: 9.57 hours a week to domestic chores and 10.73 hours a week to childcare. The burden on immigrant families is exacerbated when they have children under the age of 12, particularly regarding the unequal sharing of household chores.
- On average, men devote more time per week (41.23h) than women (37.67h) to paid work.
- Men devote more time (12.07h) per week to leisure activities than women (9.35h).
- Regarding strategies for reconciling family and professional life:
 - It is men who score higher in some dimensions of emotional support (e.g., "we talk to each other") and management and planning skills (e.g., "I don't take work problems home").
 - People with children are the ones with the highest scores in some areas of management and planning skills and professional commitments.
 - People with children over the age of 12 are the ones with the highest scores in some areas of mutual emotional support, positive outlook on dual employment and professional compromises.
 - Married or cohabiting people are the ones with the highest scores when it comes to management and planning skills.

- The lack of family support, combined with the lack of public resources, constrains autonomy, especially for women who are mothers.
- The unequal distribution of unpaid work (domestic and care) means that women are disadvantaged in terms of their career progression and retirement.
- Much of the gender inequality is the result of factors such as religion, education, as well as culture.



Recommendations / Good practices

Based on the main results of the Boomerang Project and, in particular, on the testimonials of women and men — not only those who have migrated, but also those who, on the ground, as professionals and technicians, try to welcome, help, guide and protect them — the following is a set of recommendations and good practices to be adopted in order to improve the integration of immigrants in Portugal and make it easier for them to reconcile their personal, family and professional lives. These suggestions are aimed at organisations that can work directly with the immigrant population and at political decision-makers looking to design and implement gender equality policies that promote greater integration for immigrant people. They are organised into 4 areas of intervention, which reflect the main areas identified in the systematisation of information.

1. Investment in studies and programmes for inclusion and gender equality
2. Facilitating dialogue, partnerships, and cooperation
3. Promoting integration and equal opportunities
4. Promoting shared responsibility within the household and family

A few additional resources are also provided towards the end, which can be consulted for further information.

1. Investment in studies and programmes for inclusion and gender equality

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide financial support for more extensive and/or in-depth studies on the immigrant population in Portugal and a whole range of dimensions of their lives: family organisation and dynamics, access to work, housing, health, and education. There are also gaps in terms of the quantity, quality, access, and dispersion of data on topics that require their integration, such as the relationship between migration and sustainable development.
- Continue the Government's commitment to the PPT Programme (Portuguese for All) and its dissemination to immigrant support associations to facilitate the civic and linguistic integration of immigrant people. Articulate efforts between public bodies (town halls, parish councils) and immigrant support associations to set up these courses at different times so that, depending on their professional and family situations, immigrant people can access them.
- Optimise the use of public funding for immigrant associations so that they can meet the needs of immigrant people in a timely manner and promote the rights and interests of immigrants and their descendants in everything related to their development, and social integration.
- Implement programmes accessible to immigrants that encourage participation in social and associative life.

- Combating gender and immigrant norms and stereotypes rooted in society is a first step towards inclusion and integration and towards redistributing the responsibilities for care and domestic work between women and men, which is why we should continue to focus on education on racial issues and gender equality by promoting specific programmes for the different levels of schooling.
- Developing gender-sensitive indicators on the uses of total working time — paid and unpaid (care and domestic) — of immigrant men and women (including men and women in divorce situations).
- Working on legislation to recognise unpaid work.

*Firstly, State acknowledgement for unpaid work. There is no such acknowledgement of this in society. There is still too much of an idea that this is work that should be the responsibility of women. But it isn't. The State doesn't acknowledge the importance of this work in the functioning of society, because if we think about it, if women, and some men of course, purely and simply stop doing domestic work, it will have an enormous impact on the economy and the labour market in terms of goods and services. I think that this is the first measure. The first step to follow, which is for the State, as the regulator of society, to acknowledge **that domestic work must be labour that is properly recognised, identified and paid for.***

Woman/37 years old/Professional/Graduate/Lisbon area

- Expand and strengthen the database on the movement of people and increase access to migration data, taking gender into account. In addition to closing data gaps and advocating for data protection and innovation,

ensuring active access to data is also key to good migration governance and to supporting the implementation and follow-up of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

*In order to think about the issue of reconciling private life with work, it is crucial to **know the data and, above all, to understand where the inequalities are**, who the people who suffer the most are. I think this is essential to **build public policies from there. And gender equality policies must be intersectional**. This breakdown of inequalities is key.*

Woman/36 years old/Professional/Master/Lisbon area

2. Facilitating dialogue, partnerships and cooperation

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COOPERATION

- Fostering collaboration between the academic community, policymakers, associations, and civil society, with a view to pursuing constructive dialogue, implementing, and evaluating scientifically informed public policies that effectively improve the social, family and personal reality of immigrant people.
- Training interlocutors in the different employability support services in order to speed up professional integration processes.
- Strengthen cooperation at local and regional level between actors to accelerate the integration of immigrant people into active labour market measures.

■ Expanding transnational cooperation based on effective co-ordination between recipient countries and countries of origin in sharing responsibilities and complying with agreements.

■ Create and extend means of immediate support from social support structures and government agencies and/or local administrations that are easily accessible to those living in peripheral locations, thus favouring integrated and multidisciplinary approaches.

*I think the associations should ask the government of the countries of origin if they can set up a **citizens' house** like the Brazilian citizens' house in one of said associations. That would help a great deal.*

Woman/ 66 years old/Professional/Secondary Education/Lisbon area

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING PROFESSIONALS

■ Encouraging the training of professionals in the field of gender equality issues and, specifically, family-work reconciliation issues.

■ Support the training of professionals (public employment services, NGOs, social security, local authorities) who provide counselling to immigrant people in order to better meet their specific needs. There are still differences and often inconsistencies regarding terminology, fundamental definitions related to migration and mobility and ways of acting.

*In the most diverse State entities that work with immigrants on a daily basis, namely social security, IEFP, health centres, etc., **there is a huge lack of knowledge about this whole legalisation process.** A massive lack of knowledge [...] The people **who work in these services have no training on immigration.** And when they do, it's already too late.*

Man/47 years old/Professional/Graduate/Alentejo area

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT

- Create mechanisms to disseminate information to immigrants in order to promote awareness about their rights and duties.
- To publicise services that provide free information to immigrants, particularly regarding regularising their migratory situation on national territory, as well as access to community resources.
- Disseminate, through online publications in specific groups, brochures and/or pamphlets, in several languages, in public institutions (e.g., hospitals, health centres, police stations, schools), voluntary associations and/or immigrant support associations, more information related to family-work reconciliation issues.
- Carry out, with the support of public and private bodies and non-governmental organisations, through traditional media and social networking websites, campaigns, and awareness-raising actions on the importance of gender equality, to encourage acknowledgement of the unpaid care work done mostly by women in the domestic sphere.

■ To listen to immigrants about their information/training needs around gender equality and reconciling family and work, in order to improve their commitment to exercising citizenship on national territory.

*We feel that there is a lot of confusion in the legalization process, in filling out documents, and **immigrants often don't know how to approach institutions**. This type of bureaucracy is always very complicated here in Portugal and **immigrants always need a lot of support in this regard**, not only for newly arrived immigrants but also for those who have been here for a longer period.*

Man/40 years old/Professional/Master/Algarve area

3. Promoting integration and equal opportunities

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING THE SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK

- Creation of social support networks by facilitating contact with immigrant associations and psychological support groups for immigrants.
- Increase the potential of the support network between immigrant groups and state/municipal services.
- Guarantee access to and offer supplementary activities and programmes (e.g., seminars, courses, and mentoring) at times other than working hours, so that all immigrants have the opportunity to participate in social and associative life.

*I think it would be crucial to create **a space so that once a week women could go out, leave their children**, to take part in the activities of the associations or if they want to go and see a show.*

I think that institutions have to think about this.

Woman/Professional/54 years old/Graduate/Northern Area

ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increasing the public service transport network in some specific regions of the country, such as the Alentejo and the Algarve, in order to recover significant time losses and allow immigrant people, particularly women, the necessary mobility so that it cannot be an obstacle to employment opportunities.
- Support access to housing through the promotion of associations and/or organizations that provide assistance to immigrants, particularly in the search for accommodation with decent conditions and at affordable prices, mitigating possible abuses in rental conditions (overcrowding, number of months requested as a rent deposit, illicit and deceptive exploitation, etc.). In the case of immigrant workers, key requirements must be put in place to provide them with adequate, gender-sensitive housing.

*One thing that we are experiencing, and which we admit is a shortcoming, is housing. **There is no housing solution for these people.** Our waiting list for social housing is immense.*

Woman/44 years old/Professional/Graduate/Centre area

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSESSING COMPETENCES

- Innovating accreditation systems and speeding up the recognition and certification of skills and qualifications of immigrant people in order to better meet the needs of the labour market and strengthen their employability and/or referral to training courses capable of meeting the needs of the labour market and promoting the employability of immigrants.
- Support people with incomplete documentation and introduce procedures for validating competences free of charge and/or at reduced cost.

*Looking at Brazil too, especially at the latest migration, which is much more qualified, generally more qualified, **they are unable to work in qualified jobs due to the recognition of diplomas**, and access to professional organisations is also problematic.*

Woman/36 years old/Professional/Master/Lisbon area

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAID WORK

- Valuing and strengthen the importance of immigrants' positive contribution, not only to the Social Security system, but to the Portuguese economy in general.
- Recognising and valuing the educational qualifications of immigrant people in the jobs they perform on the national labour market in order to reduce job insecurity and vulnerability.

- Guaranteeing work opportunities with the same level of recognition and equal pay for men and women, as well as support for hiring immigrant women who are pregnant and/or have small children.
- Increasing employment protection, particularly for women, guaranteeing their right to become pregnant, have children and return to work without suffering adverse effects (e.g. intensifying the legal consequences for employers when the Labour Code is not duly complied with).
- Promote inclusive recruitment processes among companies.
- Strengthen labour inspections and the penalisation, more specifically, of organisations that violate the rights of immigrant workers, especially pregnant women and/or those with small children, in order to avoid discriminatory practices that are biased towards the law.
- Offering ways of organising working time that promote the reconciliation of work and family life, specifically flexible working hours adapted to the needs of immigrant families and part-time work schemes and/or the possibility of accumulating hours.
- Providing support and information on the type of services that could be useful to workers with children or other dependants, such as assistance and care services, as well as neighbourhood services such as launderettes and ready-to-eat meals.

*There's really no control over how these people are working. It would be important for **the organisations** that really have power **to regulate, to control, to increase this response capacity,** because there are many cases of abuse.*

Woman/45 years old/Professional/Graduate/Alentejo area

4. Promoting shared responsibility in the household and family

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CARE SERVICE

■ Increase the availability, affordability, and quality of care services for children, the elderly, and people with disabilities by promoting large-scale investment in the care sector, particularly in support and back-up infrastructure for dependent children. Investment in care provision, in addition to promoting the social inclusion of immigrant children and helping to resolve care deficits, could guarantee the possibility of reconciliation and prevent one of the most potentially discriminatory factors for immigrant women, since the limited supply of this type of service puts them in situations where they are forced to take a step back in their professional lives. It would also enable the creation of new jobs, not only for those directly employed in the care sector but also for those working in related sectors, since jobs in the care sector are crucial for the proper functioning of society and the economy.

■ Establish partnerships between employers and childcare centres and kindergarten services so that they can provide childcare.

Investment in services, not only childcare centres, but even a network of support services for children [...] because from my point of view Portugal has invested in gender equality measures mainly in terms of leave and education, which is very good, but leave is not the only thing that has an impact on reducing inequality between reconciling private and family life [...] I think Portugal should invest more in services.

Woman/27 years old/Professional/Graduate/Lisbon area

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF LEAVES

- Increasing the parental allowance, in particular the father's exclusive initial parental allowance, which could contribute to greater gender equality.
- Encourage the use of parental leave by immigrant men in order to build a new culture of care and contribute to greater gender equality.
- Making working hours more flexible in line with the needs of immigrants in terms of reconciling work and family life. Many of the working hours used do not consider the need to adapt to family life.
- Supporting family logistics, namely encouraging employers to maintain and extend the hours of childcare services in order to support workers, particularly shift-worker couples.

*Sharing paternity leave should also be promoted among the immigrant population. If they are aware of it, particularly the fathers, they will also benefit from it and in some way, **it encourages positive changes within the family.***

Woman/44 years old/Professional/Graduate/Centre area



Resources

- CESIE — Snapshot of Good Practices for Integration of Migrant Children
- CMAP — Immigrant Integration Toolkit
- EU — Collection of best practices and models for immigration and integration policies
- EU — Migration and asylum policy
- EUROCID — European policies in response to the challenge of migration
- EUROMED Rights — Migrants and Refugees
- FFMS — Migration and demographic sustainability
- FRA — Handbook on European law relating to asylum, borders and immigration
- HRW — Europe: Refugees & Migrants' Rights
- ILO — Work-life balance
- IMMERSE — Online Digital Database of good practices and resources in social integration of refugee and migrant children
- INE — Demographic Statistics 2021
- IOM — Good Practices
- IOM — Multidimensional Integration Measurement Toolkit
- IOM — World Migration Report 2022
- Migration Data Portal
- Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020
- MPI — European Union
- OECD — International Migration Outlook 2022
- OECD — Migration Policy Debates and Data Briefs
- OM — Publications
- OSCE — Good Practices in Migrant Integration
- PORDATA — Portugal Census 2021
- SEF — SEFSTAT | Statistics Portal
- SPRING — Sustainable practices of integration
- UN — International Migration
- UN NM — Promising Practices in the Provision of Essential Services to Migrants

