

Global Immigration alert

July 2025

Portugal

New action plan to address immigration challenges and reform citizenship laws

Executive summary

The Portuguese government recently announced a new action plan to address immigration challenges and reform the nationality law that is focused on more efficient regularization processes, stronger integration requirements and revised pathways to citizenship.

Background

To address the high pressure on Portugal's immigration and nationality systems, due to the high volume of pending applications and long processing times, the Portuguese government has proposed a new action plan to improve the management of immigration application processing and reduce delays. The new action plan also seeks to tighten the rules for acquiring Portuguese citizenship. As part of the proposal, the Portuguese authorities released two drafts of proposed amendments to the Portuguese Nationality and Immigration Law and indicated that they will provide further information regarding these proposals in September.

Key developments

The drafts propose the introduction of the following amendments to Portuguese immigration and citizenship laws:

- **Legal residence requirement.** The government proposes to increase the time requirement to acquire Portuguese citizenship to seven or 10 years of legal residence depending on the applicant's country of origin (up from five years currently).
- **Language requirements.** Proficiency in the Portuguese language and cultural knowledge would need to be demonstrated (this is not currently required).
- **Criminal records.** Applicants would need to provide proof that they do not have a criminal record (i.e., no conviction for serious crime). This is not currently required.

- **Citizenship requirements.** Children born to foreign citizens in Portugal would need to demonstrate that they have at least one parent who has resided legally in Portugal for more than three years. Currently, the requirement is that at the time of birth, at least one parent must either reside legally in Portugal or have resided in the country for at least one year, irrespective of their legal status.
- **Nationality by descent.** Nationality by descent would be limited to great-grandchildren only. There are no rules around this currently.
- **Citizenship revocation.** Naturalized citizens who are charged with serious crimes (i.e., that carry prison sentences over five years) within ten years of acquiring citizenship could lose their citizenship if convicted, subject to judicial review.
- **Sephardic nationality policy update.** Sephardic regime applications would no longer be accepted, effectively ending the possibility for Sephardic Jews to become Portuguese nationals via this route. Currently, this provision allows them to acquire Portuguese nationality if they can provide proof of their Jewish heritage.
- **Job-seeker visa update.** The job-seeker visa would be restricted to individuals with proven technical skills (as defined by ministerial order) or "highly qualified" skills. Currently, the visa is available to applicants regardless of their academic or professional background.
- **CPLP (Community of Portuguese Language Countries) residence permit update.** Eligibility for residence permits under the CPLP agreement would be limited to individuals holding a valid residence visa. These individuals would also require a border security review. Currently, applicants may obtain a residence permit without a prior residence visa (e.g., if they entered pursuant to a visa waiver agreement).



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- **Family reunification reforms.** The following changes to family reunification rules were also proposed:
 - Stricter family reunification criteria, namely requiring two years of legal residence in Portugal before an applicant may sponsor family members abroad. Minor children already residing in Portugal would remain exempt, as well as family members who have legally entered the country, are residing in Portugal, and are living with and dependent on the main applicants, provided the latter hold EU blue cards, golden visas or residence permits for highly qualified activities.
 - New timelines and transparency obligations for the immigration agency (AIMA) to schedule and process interviews.
 - The establishment of the National Unit for Foreigners and Borders (UNEF) within the Public Security Police (PSP), tasked with border control and immigration enforcement.

Impact on employers

The action plan and government's proposals focus on regulating and limiting the inflow of migrants to Portugal, while safeguarding immigration pathways for highly skilled talent and improving process transparency to help employers find qualified candidates. Employers may remain informed of upcoming changes to ensure continued alignment with applicable immigration procedures.

Key steps

EY will continue to monitor these developments. Should you have any questions, we encourage you to contact one of our immigration professionals.

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