



MURAL in Portugal [ENG]

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Mutual Understanding, Respect and Learning - MURAL is an international project enabling the meeting of six partners from the European Union: Poland, Great Britain, Portugal, Greece, the Netherlands and Germany, chaired by the British Council Foundation.

The project is implemented by the Department of Social Policy and Health. MURAL is co-financed by the European Commission under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship program. MURAL, by carrying out activities supporting the growth of tolerance and respect for various faiths, religious beliefs and ethnic identities, aims to counteract the growing problem of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim prejudices in Europe. The project promotes the principles of pluralism and democracy, supports transnational cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and the most effective practices to counteract intolerance.

The addressees of the project are people who encounter discrimination in their everyday work (as activists and activists, leaders and leaders or representatives of regional authorities).

Krakow involved 60 teachers, social activists, employees of community centers and libraries who until December 2019 will carry out dozens of projects targeted at local communities. One of the elements of the project are study visits in countries that are involved in the project. At the beginning of May, a visit to Portugal took place, where four representatives from Poland were present. Renata Kocłęga-Hilevsky, participant of the project described her impressions of the visit to Portugal.

/Renata Kocłęga - Hilevsky/

In the times when nationalistic and anti-immigrant tendencies are growing in power, where shall we look for good practices and inspirations? In Portugal! This country has chosen so called “controlled openness to migration” policy and has been considered to have a leading position regarding migration legislation worldwide. It belongs to an exclusive group of European countries where nationalistic parties do not have their representatives in parliament. Portugal - like many other countries of our region - is facing demographic crisis; openness to migration is considered by governors to be a chance and a factor stabilizing the economy. Portuguese Strategic Plan for Migration 2015-2020 (PEM) sets a further development of the chain of institutions and practical solutions fostering integration processes and is dedicated not only to new incomers, but also to Portuguese citizens.

Every migrant can get assistance in a National Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants (CNAIM), a public body located in Lisbon, Porto and Faro and in its local divisions (GAPLIM). The core of this kind of support is a comprehensive array of services and efficient network of related institutions. The first word an alien can see coming to this Centre is “Welcome” (written in eight languages), and that generates at the very beginning a sense of security and acceptance. Customer service is provided in more than fifty languages (thanks to a chain of translators engaged) and on Centre’s staff are often ex-migrants, who can truly understand the difficulties that newcomers can experience in a new country. While waiting to see a clerk, migrant’s children are being taken care of by a professional in a room dedicated virtually to this purpose.



A migrant can also get help of intercultural mediators (needed in a conflicting situation brought by a cultural differences) as well as a nurse (if an arrangement a visit in a health centre or a hospital is necessary). The Centre provides informational and educational services; for example, on May 3rd 2019 Mr. Pedro Calado, The High Commissioner for Migration presented to the MURAL project participants (including Polish delegation) the facts and myths regarding migration. Are people leaving their home countries too often these days? The answer is: no. Actually, only 3% of a world population is migrating. Is a number of illegal aliens in Europe equal or even exceed the number of legal migrants? Sorry to say, but 76% of Europeans believe so, while their number makes only 5%. The Center breaks down stereotypes and supports dissemination of reliable research findings on migration.

The Centres and their partner institutions also offer:

- Migrant Support Line (MSL) available in nine languages
- Translation Service (STT)
- Immigrant Occupational Insertion Offices (RGI)
- Local Inspiring Practices (LIP)
- Network of Municipalities Friends of Immigrants (RMAD)

Among many practical solutions that are being implemented in Portugal these days, Support Units for the Integration of Refugees (NAIR), as well as Migrant Entrepreneur Support Offices (GAEM) are worth stressing. They provide vocational services, from a step by step assistance in starting one's own business to disseminating good practices. Special attention should be paid in this respect to a Mentoring Programme for Migrants; it provides to incomers - through a volunteering - the assistance in the daily worries and struggles, given by native citizens or local community members. Thanks to a joint initiative of a three ministries and European Social Fund the Portuguese for All Programme (PPT) has been launched. It provides free course with a workload of 150 hours, as well as a 25- hour Business Portuguese course (available in the area of Retail, Tourism, Beauty Care, Construction and Engineering), which can better migrant's chance for a successful employment. There are Online Platform for the learners and teachers and Choices Programmes (PE) which aims at school inclusion and integration in education sector. There is a Committee on Equality and Combating Discrimination based on colour, nationality and ethnic origin; it is made out of government and parliament members as well as representatives of migrant communities, human rights activists and influential public persons.

The strong presence of the idea of tolerance in Portugal is widely seen in a street art (on mural's pictures or slogans), as well as a part of protests, or public debates (as you can see on the pictures attached). A good example is a Conference "Europe - where are you going?" that took place in Braga on May 9th to 11th; a workshop on "Using humor in combating discrimination" was a part of that event.

It is an elevating experience to observe Christian values in practice...