



## Portugal's Immigration Challenges: A Light at the End of the Tunnel for Investors

### Immigration Overview

For years, Portugal has been one of the most appealing countries to live in, because of numerous factors, such as the country's opportunities, safety, high quality of life, mild climate, inviting culture and, naturally, a flexible migration policy, which favored one of the biggest influxes of people in recent history.

The attractiveness of the country proved to be a challenge for the Portuguese entities in the midst of a pandemic, successive changes in government, and even a major restructuring of the entity responsible for handling the immigration processes, which materialized in the extinction of the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) and the creation of the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum - "AIMA".

According to the Portuguese government, during the most congested period, there were 900,000 backlogged processes, between applications under the "expression of interest" and CPLP regimes, renewals of expired residence cards, as well as Golden Visa applications. Since 2024, the Portuguese government has pursued a two-track approach: allocating resources and refining internal procedures in order to clear process backlogs and, in parallel, tightening eligibility for certain residency permits, reducing the influx of people.

It seems that the Portuguese government's approach has been fruitful and that the worst is behind us, as the vast majority of the backlogged processes – applications under the "expression of interest" and CPLP regimes, as well as the renewals of expired residence cards– have already been concluded.

### The Golden Visa Program

In October 2025, the Portuguese government undertook to accelerate the Golden Visa program by publicly committing to a targeted clearing of the Golden Visa backlog during 2026.

Launched in 2012, the Golden Visa is residence-by-investment program which grants non-EU investors and qualifying family members the right to live,



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work and study in Portugal, entailing access to the country's public services, as well as, Schengen mobility, while creating a pathway to permanent residence and, potentially, citizenship, if all the requirements are met.

In an effort to ensure long-term integration and genuine ties to the country, the government is currently seeking a revision of the citizenship legal framework by increasing the minimum period of residency for eligibility for Portuguese citizenship from 5 years to 7 years or 10 years, depending on the applicant's country of origin. However, the legal changes to the citizenship framework approved by the Portuguese Parliament have been deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court and, therefore, at the time of writing, the legal regime still remains unchanged.

Regardless of the possible increase in the residency time requirement towards citizenship, and despite the slow turnaround in recent years, the program's benefits continue to attract investors and, as AIMA completes the bulk of its historic backlog and stabilizes its operations, the program is expected to run smoother.

More than a decade since the launch of the Portuguese Golden Visa program, it still remains one of the most attractive residence-by-investment programs in Europe and, with improved processing capacity, clearer procedures and renewed political backing, 2026 is expected to mark not only the resolution of the past backlog, but also the start of a more efficient and investor-friendly phase for Portugal's immigration system, allowing the country to secure much-needed foreign investment.

## IN THE FIRM

### • SÉRVULO Launches the SÉRVULO INNOVATION LAB

Sérvulo & Associados has launched the SÉRVULO INNOVATION LAB (SIL), a training and innovation hub designed to support teams and organisations in developing legal, management, social, leadership, and soft skills. SIL is structured around four pillars: tailor-made training programmes, conferences and seminars open to the public, protocols and partnerships with external organisations, and an international dimension through the SÉRVULO LATITUDE network.



Programmes are developed in close collaboration with each client, ensuring an effective response to specific training needs, supported by multidisciplinary teams and external partners when topics extend beyond the legal field. Through the international SÉRVULO LATITUDE network, SIL enables a multijurisdictional analysis of transnational issues, fostering innovation, knowledge sharing, and excellence in a global context.

### • Sérvulo in the World

While remaining an independent Portuguese law firm, SÉRVULO ensures a global reach through:

- (i) the partnerships of SÉRVULO LATITUDE with leading law firms in strategic jurisdictions,
- (ii) membership in four international law firm networks, and
- (iii) its Foreign Desks, offering bespoke services to clients from various countries.

SÉRVULO LATITUDE is a multilateral network of leading Portuguese-speaking law firms, based on trust, flexibility, and autonomy, combining close collaboration with the independence of each firm. By fostering stronger relationships, the network enhances each member's reach and brand value.

Its objective is to serve clients and advise investors in key jurisdictions where the network operates, including Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Macao, and East Timor, acting as a privileged channel for trade and legal relations across four continents.

