



Lusophone legal connections

Legal partnerships between Portugal, Brazil, Africa and Asia are evolving, fuelled by shared history, a common language and new markets

by glória paiva

In February, Vieira de Almeida (VdA) announced the appointment of its first resident partner in Brazil. The timing was no coincidence: Brazilian interest in the European country has never been greater. Likewise, alliances between Portuguese law firms and those in Portuguese-speaking Africa and Asia continue to grow. This movement is supported by strong historical, legal, and cultural ties between these countries, but is also driven by new economic opportunities.

The main Portuguese law firms have been present in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) since the early 1990s, in a longstanding relationship that also benefits from a common civil law system. Miranda, for example, began its international operations the same year it was founded, in 1987. “Our first client had a major energy project in Angola. Expanding our practice to other Portuguese-speaking countries was a natural evolution”, says **Diogo Xavier da Cunha**, managing partner at Miranda.



DIOGO XAVIER DA CUNHA



FRANCISCA MENDES DA COSTA

The demand for legal advisory services in foreign investments, compliance, and arbitration within the CPLP has kept this exchange active to this day. Recent partnerships include Morais Leitão and JLA Advogados e Consultores in Timor-Leste; Sérvulo and MLA in Cape Verde; Antas da Cunha Ecija and the Angolan law firm DC Lawyers; Melo Alves and LS Lawyers in Macau, and MFA Legal in Angola.

Since these are economies undergoing evolution and diversification, there is still room for growth in all industries, with an emphasis on energy, mining, infrastructure, financial systems, and telecommunications. Angola and Mozambique, currently in economic recovery, stand out in these sectors, while Cape Verde focuses on tourism and clean energy. Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe present opportunities in fishing and agriculture. “In the context of the global economy, Africa has shown one of the highest potentials for growth, attractiveness, and opportunities”, says **Francisca Mendes da Costa**, partner in the public

law department at Sérvulo & Associados. In the Lusophone Africa, the energy and natural resources sectors are among the primary focuses of the Miranda Alliance. “We are also active in sectors such as ports and other infrastructure, construction and real estate, finance, aviation, and agriculture”, explains Xavier da Cunha. Sérvulo also highlights international arbitration, capital markets, corporate governance, public contracts, and public procurement as growing fields. “We have participated in various legislative review and public procurement system update projects in countries such as São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola”, reports Mendes da Costa.

Lusophone Asia, represented by Timor-Leste and Macau, also attracts investors. Timor-Leste

is seeking to diversify its economy, creating opportunities in infrastructure, tourism, and agriculture. The Macau Special Administrative Region, in turn, is seen as a bridge to the Chinese market and offers opportunities in trade, arbitration, and financial regulation, with its casino sector and integration into the Greater Bay Area.

LOCAL ALLIANCES, GLOBAL EXPERTISE

The international presence of Portuguese law firms is usually established through local alliances, ensuring knowledge of local regulatory particularities. The hybrid model combines local expertise with a global vision, allowing for specialized advisory services adapted to each context. “Network-based operations

BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL, A SHARED LEGAL PATH

Brazil and Portugal share enduring ties, including in the legal field. The origins of the Brazilian Bar Association, in the late 19th century, were influenced by the Lisbon Lawyers' Association. “Portuguese lawyers have always been admitted to practice in Brazil, and vice versa”, explains **João Ribeiro da Costa**, partner at Brazilian law firm TozziniFreire. Historically, Portuguese firms have operated in Brazil through partnerships with local firms, he notes.

In the modern world, the exchange between Portuguese and Brazilian legal professionals has had three significant moments, according to the partner. The first was in the late 1990s when privatizations attracted large Portuguese companies to Brazil, such as Galp, Sonae, EDP, and others, which were assisted by Portuguese law firms. The second moment came in 2008 when a major investment by Embraer in a factory in Évora sparked new interest from Brazilian companies in Portugal. Lastly, there has been a significant movement of high-net-worth Brazilians relocating to the former metropolis, says Ribeiro da Costa. According to Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, more than 500,000 Brazilians live in Portugal. “VdA in Brazil serves many clients with a ‘high-net-worth individual’ profile, who seek support in migration, real estate, and asset-related matters”, says **Fernando Prado Ferreira**, international partner and head of the Vieira de Almeida office in Brazil.

For Brazilian investors, Portugal represents access to the European Union and Portuguese-speaking Africa, Ferreira believes. “There is a massive flow of Brazilians, Angolans, Belgians, Americans, and French people heading to Portugal, interested in real estate purchases, business ventures, and various activities—even in agriculture and winemaking,” he observes.

According to the VdA partner, relations between Brazil and Portugal are set to grow, as evidenced by the 14th Luso-Brazilian Summit. In February, heads of government Luís Montenegro and Lula da Silva signed 19 new bilateral agreements to boost trade and exchange. “The ease of communication and travel will only increase collaboration between the two countries. The demand for specialized legal services is expected to grow along with this movement”, Ferreira notes.



JOÃO RIBEIRO DA COSTA

provide a competitive advantage over local and international competitors”, notes Mendes da Costa. However, aspects such as bureaucracy, legislative changes, and political volatility in some countries can bring challenges. According to Xavier da

Cunha, issues like security and political risk also tend to influence foreign investors, especially in the Lusophone Africa. “There is also a strong concern regarding capital movement in exchange control regimes”, he observes.

The legal market in the CPLP is expected to grow with increasing foreign investment and regulatory reforms. “The digitalization of law, the modernization of public procurement systems, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms will become even more relevant, promoting greater legal certainty in these markets”, adds the partner of Sérvulo. The internationalization of relationships is also expected to help consolidate law as a global profession. “In many Portuguese-speaking countries, new challenges arise from projects that previously did not exist, requiring innovative solutions for their implementation through international collaboration”, says Miranda’s managing partner.



FERNANDO PRADO FERREIRA

OVERSEAS RECENT MOVES



- Morais Leitão — JLA Advogados e Consultores (Timor-Leste)
- Sérvulo & Associados — MLA (Cape Verde)
- Antas da Cunha Ecija — DC Lawyers (Angola)
- Melo Alves — LS Lawyers (Macau)
- Melo Alves — MFA Legal (Angola)
- VdA — new partners in Brazil and Spain