

# “The State is failing immigrants.”

**Portugal relies on immigration to sustain several of its economic sectors. How can a country so dependent on immigration simplify its processes to ensure simple and safe entry for those arriving in the country?**

The entire sector requires urgent and comprehensive reform, ranging from the implementation of coherent and stable legislation to adequate resourcing for AIMA and consular services, and a move towards simplification and digital transition. The challenges begin with Portuguese consular services, where obtaining an appointment for a short or long-term visa application, or even for document legalization, is difficult and involves months of waiting. This, combined with the lack of available appointments at AIMA, can delay the process by one or two years. The state is failing, and this situation encourages the entry and stay of foreign nationals who lack the necessary authorization, with all the implications for the protection of their rights and security.

**How do you assess the implementation of AIMA replacing SEF and the operational changes that come with it?**

AIMA inherited approximately 360,000 pending cases from SEF, along with severe organizational issues and a lack of resources. The transition lacked any form of planning. For instance, the staff did not receive prior training, there was only a single email address to handle all types of requests, and the contact phone line, as well as the scheduling and renewal platforms, are still not operational. This is an example of how not to proceed. AIMA has announced a backlog recovery program, starting in March 2024 and concluding in the summer of 2025. There will be a public tender for solicitors and lawyers to address these backlogs, and new AIMA offices will be established. The family reunification portal is being gradually launched.

**What impact does not having their legalization process completed have on an immigrant?**

In addition to the psychological component and the fear of deportation, there are also difficulties in registering with the national health service, enrolling children in educational institutions, opening bank accounts, renting a house, and, of course, the inconvenience of not being able to leave the country until they are granted residency, a process that can take two or more years.

**What are the advantages of being aided by a lawyer through such a process?**

Working with an immigration lawyer substantially reduces the risks. It provides a guarantee that the

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process will be properly outlined and managed, thereby reducing delays and the risk of rejection. It is important to note that this not only involves the approval of the visa or residency application, but all the planning required for a residency transfer, including areas such as taxation, employment, inheritance, real estate, and more.

**When it comes to family reunification, for example, do bureaucratic timelines extend over time?**

In January 2024, AIMA launched the portal for family reunification, currently applicable only to households containing minors between the ages of five and fifteen who live in Portugal. The initial appointments have been scheduled, but given that this is a new procedure, we will not know its effectiveness for a few weeks.

**In your opinion, what are the essential things which must be done to ensure that these immigration processes can be completed more quickly and with fewer obstacles?**

There is an urgent need to strengthen human resources and invest in technological infrastructure. We must promote transparency, provide clear and unambiguous information, speed up communication, simplify the system, strengthen the means of biometric collection processes and open more face-to-face service desks.