

Portugal Grants Citizens' Rights to Migrants During Pandemic

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"It is a duty of a society of solidarity in times of crisis to ensure that migrant citizens have access to health and social security," the Minister of Internal Affairs said.

The current socialist government in Portugal decided to grant citizenship rights to all migrants and asylum seekers with pending residency applications from Monday until July 1 at least due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's authorities announced Saturday.

The decision aims at ensuring that migrants can access services during the COVID-19 crisis, including the national health service, welfare benefits, bank accounts, work, and rental contracts.

"People should not be deprived of their rights to health and public service just because their application has not yet been processed," Claudia Veloso, spokeswoman for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, told Reuters.

"In these exceptional times, the rights of migrants must be guaranteed."

The Minister of Internal Affairs Eduardo Cabrita explained that

"it is a duty of a society of solidarity in times of crisis to ensure that migrant citizens have access to health and social security."

Brazilians comprise the majority of migrants in Portugal, official data shows, followed by Romanians, Ukrainians, Britons, and Chinese.

On Sunday the total number of infections in the European country reached 5,962, with 119 deaths – including that of a 14-year-old boy who became Europe's youngest coronavirus victim. It is not clear whether or not the schoolboy had underlying health conditions.

Police have been increasing surveillance measures to enforce social distancing, with the use of drones in Porto and Lisbon.

The army has been distributing food to the homeless in the capital, as the country is trying to combat the spread of the deadly disease that has infected more than 700,000 people worldwide and killed almost 34,000.

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Featured image: Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa's socialist party returned the country to economic growth while reversing austerity policies. | Photo: EFE

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