

FAQs FOR FOREIGN CITIZENS IN PORTUGAL REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Is there any provision to support foreign citizens retained in Portugal due to flight cancellations / closing of borders of their respective countries and who do not have the financial resources to maintain their situation and/or ensure their wellbeing?

As a rule, embassies and consulates provide support to their citizens. Contacts developed so far indicate that currently there is no need for interventions by the Institute for Social Security (*Instituto da Segurança Social* - ISS, IP), given that the embassies or consulates themselves have been providing support to their fellow citizens. However, any foreign citizen, regardless of their legal situation in Portugal, who is in a situation of social vulnerability, may be referred to the social services of the ISS, IP; or, in case of an emergency, they may contact the National Social Emergency Hotline (*Linha Nacional de Emergência Social*). If there is a need for support or even for the accommodation of a larger group of foreign citizens, the situation will be examined on a case-by-case basis between the ISS, IP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the embassy or consulate of the citizens in question.

In these cases of particular vulnerability, if the Portuguese language is a barrier when contacting Portuguese public services, a free telephone translation service is available, and is only subject to the payment of the call itself. You can find more information on how to use this service [HERE](#). A Support Line is also available to provide more information: 808 257 257 (for landlines) and 21 810 61 91 (for mobile networks and for those calling from abroad).

Is there any provision for temporary accommodation supported/provided by the Portuguese State for foreign citizens who were staying in tourist accommodation units or others (such as accommodation provided by employers) that have since closed?

Currently, support may be provided in Emergency Social Accommodation Centres or hotel units, as part of the social service or National Social Emergency Hotline response to the crisis.

What social benefits may be provided to foreign workers who are laid off or let go by their employers due to lack of work and who are not yet registered with Social Security, because their regularisation process in Portugal has not yet been completed?

It is important to assess whether the worker concerned falls within the scope of Order n^o 3863-B/2020, of 27 March. This Order (*Despacho*) states that the management of services provided and scheduling of appointments is done so as to unequivocally safeguard the rights of all foreign citizens **with pending cases before the Immigration and Borders Service (*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras* - SEF) up to the date of the declaration of the National State of Emergency, 18 March 2020. In those cases**, their stay in national territory is deemed regular.

Therefore, the documents expressly referred in that Order are valid for all public services, namely for access to social support benefits:

- a) **Statement of interest or application issued by the registry platforms in use in SEF** - In applications for a residence permit for employed workers, residence permit for self-employed workers or for entrepreneur immigrants and residence permit for investment purposes;
- b) **Document scheduling an appointment at SEF or of receipt of an application by the SEF** - For other types of pending cases with the SEF, namely issuance or renewal of a residence permit, either under the general regimen or one of the exceptional regimens.

In practice, any foreign citizens who has filed an expression of interest with the SEF platform, or a candidacy to the ARI (*Autorização de Residência para Atividade de Investimento* – Residency Permit for Investment Activities) with either the SAPA (*Sistema Automático de Pré-Agendamento* – Automatic Pre-Scheduling System) or ARI platforms, respectively, may request a certificate of registration. This certificate can be validated with the SEF by public and private authorities through a QR Code access and reading key.

In all other situations of pending cases of issuance or renewal of a Residence Permit by the SEF, the email confirming the scheduling of an appointment or the receipt for the application with the SEF serve as proof.

Access to social benefits or access to any set of measures designed to fight the pandemic for recipients of benefits is contingent with the presentation of a Social Security Identification Number (*Número de Identificação de Segurança Social* – NISS), which means that only applicants with a NISS can access some of these social support measures or benefits.

Access to benefits is dependent on securing a NISS. The type of applicable social benefits depends both on the retroactive effects of NISS allocation and on the existence of contributory periods.

A foreign citizen let go by their employer is entitled to unemployment benefits or social unemployment benefits if they have:

- worked as a contractor and made deductions, as such, to Social Security for at least 360 days in the 24 months immediately preceding the date in which they became unemployed; or if they have
- worked as a contractor and made deductions, as such, to Social Security for at least 180 days in the 12 months immediately preceding the date of unemployment, or 120 days in cases of involuntary unemployment due to the expiration of the fixed-term employment contract; or by termination of the employment contract by the employer during the experimental period.

The foreign citizen must also be a legal resident in Portugal (if they do not already have a residence permit, they must assess whether their case falls under those specified in Order n.º 3863-B/2020, of 27 March).

If the employer opts for a lay-off, these workers will also be included.

I am a foreign citizen and my documents will expire in the next few days. What should I do? Has the deadline been extended for any expired document?

Many documents can be renewed online. Further information can be found in the [ePortugal Portal](#). However, national authorities will accept, until 30 June and for all legal purposes, any documents expired after 24 February of 2020.

Documents **expired after 24 February** that are accepted by the Portuguese authorities until 30 June include, for example, the citizen card, driver's licence, criminal record, as well as certificates, **documents and visas related to the right to stay in national territory**. Any documents that must be renewed after 24 February are **acceptable for all legal purposes until 30 June**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFy9AJC60Ls>

Can I consult information and advice on COVID 19 in other languages?

Yes. Useful information and advice on COVID 19 is available in 22 languages (Portuguese, English, French, Castilian, Italian, German, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Polish, Turkish, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Finnish, Mandinka, Nepali, Bengali, Swedish and Hebrew)

The different versions can be found [HERE](#).

I am a foreign citizen and I need general information about my rights, as well as available support. Whom can I speak to?

The High Commission for Migration has National Support Centres for the Integration of Migrants that can provide information of varied nature. Due to the SARS-Cov-2 (COVID-19) pandemic but services are still accessible through the following contacts:

- E-mail: cnaim.lisboa@acm.gov.pt; cnaim.norte@acm.gov.pt; cnaim.algarve@acm.gov.pt
- Migrant Support Line: 808 257 257 (for landline calls) and 21 810 61 91 (for mobile network calls and for calls from abroad).

I am a foreign citizen and I cannot make myself understood by the authorities that I contact. Is there any support for those who are not fluent in Portuguese?

The High Commission for Migration has a Telephone Translation Service (*Serviço de Tradução Telefónica* - STT) that can help you bridge the contact with the services or entities with which you wish to communicate. This service is free, being only subject to the payment of the call itself. To access the STT call 808 257 257 (for landline calls) and 21 810 61 91 (for mobile network calls and for calls from abroad).