

COIMBRA REGION PORTUGAL

FACILITATING STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS FOR TERRITORIAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

GLASGOW
FOOD AND
CLIMATE
DECLARATION

This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with Paula Silvestre, Administrative and Financial Division, and Vera Lopes, Economic and Social Development, of the Coimbra Region Intermunicipal Community. Written by Cecília Delgado, NOVA University Lisbon, CICS.NOVA, NOVA FCSH.

In Portugal, the Intermunicipal Communities (CIMs) correspond to a territorial unit composed of a set of municipalities. In administrative terms, the CIMs manage the economic, social, and environmental development strategies of the territories covered, prioritizing the coordination of municipal investments and community funds.

The Coimbra Region Intermunicipal Community (CIM RC) comprises 19 municipalities, with a total of 437,000 inhabitants (INE, 2021) in a territory of 4,300 km² (average of 101.7 inhabitants/km²). The municipalities exhibit very heterogeneous population characteristics. For example, there is a low level of education despite having one of the oldest universities in Europe, the University of Coimbra, founded in 1290. There is also a substantial dichotomy between coastal vs. inland and urban vs. rural municipalities.

In 2017, a forest fire of dramatic proportions affecting 7 of the 19 municipalities in the Coimbra Region (RC) resulted in more than 50 casualties, the loss of animal life, and thousands of hectares of burnt land and infrastructure. The natural disaster led the CIM RC to launch climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, with a perspective for economic and social development based on the endogenous potential of the territory. Since 2018, the CIM RC has coordinated climate and food initiatives, particularly the ClimAgir project and the Coimbra European Region of Gastronomy award.

The CLIMAGIR project is one of the elements of the Intermunicipal Climate Change Adaptation Plan (PIAAC), prepared by the CIM RC and the University of Coimbra in 2017 following the forest fire. Between 2021-2022 the Coimbra Region was awarded the EUROPEAN REGION OF GASTRONOMY award by IGCAT, the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts, and Tourism, based in Barcelona.

ENABLERS

The 2017 fires created a wave of collective sensitivity towards the importance of environmental education and climate change mitigation, culminating in the PIAAC.

The CIMs have their own line of funding, the Pacts for Territorial Development, where finance is negotiated directly with the central government regarding the intended investments in each European Union community framework. In this sense, CIMs have a mechanism to overcome the financial difficulties that most Portuguese municipalities face.

For each European Union community framework, a strategy is defined by a council of local stakeholders: public institutions, municipalities, non-profit organizations, regional scientific and technological entities, and businesses. It is up to the local participants to include such strategic topics as climate, forestry, food, or agriculture. Hearing the different priorities of the diverse stakeholders builds trust and adds richness to the processes but requires time, awareness, and deconstructing pre-established ideas.

FOOD POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

- The ClimAgir project aims to communicate and raise awareness, particularly among young people, on climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. This project was recognized as a GOOD PRACTICE project by the Interreg Europe Programme. The Operational Programme for Sustainability and Efficiency in the Use of Resources, Portugal 2020, and the Cohesion Fund financed the project.
- A budget of €2.5 million (\$2.65 million) has been allocated for a wide range of initiatives following the European Region of Gastronomy award. Such as a Gastronomy Passport, restaurant voucher, and the Taste Coimbra Region Menu. The restaurant voucher grants a discount of €15.00 on a meal from the Taste Coimbra Region Menu valued at €30.00 or more. Two thousand vouchers were made available, representing an investment of €30,000 (\$31,750).

BARRIERS

Policy alignment is a challenge that requires dialogue and time, something that CIMs and municipalities cannot easily coordinate within the short and overlapping deadlines for funding applications. When several lines of funding are launched by the central government at the same time, there is a risk that the parties involved develop similar projects, with no coordination of actions on the ground or over time. Further, sectoral policymaking within CIMs continues to challenge public policy alignment.

Communication between different stakeholders is also a challenge, especially given some farmers' low levels of education. According to statistical data from 2019, the average age of a Portuguese farmer is 64 years old, and 52.4% of farmers have only four years of schooling. Communication needs to be adjusted based on participants' needs. For example, technical terms must be simplified. To help with this challenge, the European URBACT project, FOOD CORRIDORS, led by the CIM RC will work to overcome the communication barriers between the stakeholders.

Finally, administrative boundaries between the different CIMs remain an obstacle. For example, managing resources such as forests and agricultural land is not always compatible between neighboring territories.

Since 2018, the ClimAgir project has involved 324 classes and a total of 6,898 students (aged 6 to 18 years old). In addition to the school participants, around 50,000 residents from 9 municipalities in the CIM RC participated in ClimAgir. Within the project's scope, mobile exhibition spaces were promoted and toured in the municipalities, including distributing food and native plant species for reforestation. Bearing in mind that the CIM's priority is to attract investment for initiatives, it remains vital to map out territorial needs, particularly for agricultural producers, and understand what has already been done and what remains to be done. This will create transparency on the ground and ensure projects are not redundant.

“ In the coming years, we want to understand how to circularly connect waste and inputs from different sectors to foster further economic growth for the region. ”

“There is a lack of time and opportunities for technicians, politicians, and other stakeholders to interact and exchange ideas and experiences. If there is a lack of inclusive community engagement, it will be challenging for us to be efficient and effective in our actions.”

