Economic, social and territorial situation of Portugal

This briefing was prepared to provide information for the European Parliament’s Committee on Regional Development delegation visit to Portugal of 27 February to 1 March 2019.

1. Introduction to Portugal and its political and administrative system

Portugal is the westernmost country of mainland Europe, located in the Iberian peninsula. To the north and east, Portugal borders Spain. The western and southern coastline totals 1240 km in length and is bathed by the Atlantic Ocean. Portugal’s territory also comprises the Atlantic archipelagos of the Azores and Madeira.

Northern Portugal is mountainous, while southern Portugal is an area of gently rolling hills and plains. The highest peak of Portugal is Mount Pico in the Azores, while the highest point in mainland Portugal is part of the Serra da Estrela. Portugal has a warm and moderate climate.

Mainland Portugal and Madeira are in the Western European time zone, which means that when in Brussels it is noon, in Portugal it is 11 a.m. (as in the United Kingdom). As the Azores are further to the west, at noon Brussels time it is 10 a.m. in the archipelago.

Map 1: Mainland Portugal

Source: European Parliament.
Portugal has the twelfth biggest population (10.2 million inhabitants) and the thirteenth largest territory (92 211.9 km²) in the European Union.

Portugal has been a member of the European Union since 1986. In 1999, it was among the fonder members of the euro area. Portugal is a member of both NATO and the OECD.

The official language is Portuguese. Also in use in north-eastern Portugal (in the area of Miranda do Douro) is Mirandese, which is recognised officially as a minority language. The Portuguese language is widely diffused across the world. The Community of Portuguese Language Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa) has nine member states on four continents, including Brazil (with around 210 million inhabitants) and Angola (around 25 million inhabitants).

Table 1: Key data

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Flag</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total area</td>
<td>92 211,9 km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population (2018)</td>
<td>10 291 027</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population density (2016)</td>
<td>113.5 inhabitants per km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU-28 estimate: 117.5 inhabitants per km²</td>
<td>113.5 inhabitants per km²</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>Euro</td>
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Source: Eurostat.

Portugal is a semi-presidential republic and a parliamentary democracy. The president is the head of state. He or she is directly elected for a maximum two consecutive terms of five years each. Since 2016 the president is Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (former leader of Social Democratic Party, member of EPP). The next presidential elections are expected in January 2021.

The Portuguese government is formed in the light of the results of the legislative elections and is responsible to the parliament. It is headed by a prime minister. The current prime minister is António Costa from the Socialist Party (member of S&D). The Socialist Party forms a minority government. It received the support of the Left Bloc, the Portuguese Communist Party and the Green Party. The government is responsible for the country’s general policy and directs the public administration, which implements government policy.

The Assembly of the Republic (Assembleia da República) is Portugal’s unicameral parliament. Its 230 members are elected for a four-year term, using a closed party list system with proportional representation based on the d’Hondt method. The most recent elections took place in October 2015. The party with the largest number of seats is the Social Democratic Party (89), but the main government party is the Socialist Party (with 86 seats). The next elections are expected in September-October 2019.

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1 Source: https://www.cplp.org.
The following political parties or groups sit in the Assembly of the Republic:

- Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata, PSD) – Member of EPP;
- Socialist Party (Partido Socialista, PS) - Member of S&D;
- Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, BE) - Member of GUE/NGL;
- Social Democratic Centre - Popular Party (Centro Democrático e Social – Partido Popular, CDS-PP) - Member of EPP;
- Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português, PCP) - Member of GUE/NGL;
- People-Animals-Nature Party (Pessoas-Animais-Natureza, PAN) - Not present in the EP.

In addition, the following political parties are represented in the European Parliament:

- Democratic Republican Party (Partido Democrático Republicano, PDR) - Member of ALDE;
- Earth Party (Partido da Terra, MPT) - Member of EPP.

Portugal has 21 representatives in the European Parliament. They are members of the EPP group (8), the S&D (8), ALDE (1) and GUE/NGL (4).

Portugal has 11 representatives in the Committee of the Regions and 12 representatives in the European Economic and Social Committee.

Table 2: Political summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head of State – President</th>
<th>Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Government – Prime Minister</td>
<td>António Costa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister responsible for cohesion policy</td>
<td>Nelson de Souza, Minister of Planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Presidential elections | Most recent: January 2016  
Next: 2021 |
| Legislative elections | Most recent: October 2015  
Next: September – October 2019 |
| Local elections | Most recent: October 2017  
Next: 2021 |

The local authorities in mainland Portugal are parishes\(^2\) (freguesias), municipalities (municípios) and administrative regions (regiões administrativas). The Constitution enshrines the principle of administrative decentralisation (Article 237) and the financial autonomy of local authorities (Article 238).

Portugal has two autonomous regions, namely the Azores and Madeira. By reason of their particular geographical, economic, social and cultural characteristics and the island populations’ historic aspirations, they are granted a specific form of autonomous organisation. They enjoy extensive

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\(^2\) In many sources, the authors refer to ‘communes’ or ‘civil parishes’. However, the English version of the Portuguese Constitution, published on the website of the Assembly of the Republic, provides the expression ‘parishes’.
legislative powers and define their own policies, except in the fields of foreign policy and defence and internal security. Both autonomous regions have as their self-government organs a Legislative Assembly and a Regional Government. Their local authorities comprise parishes and municipalities. The Azores and Madeira are both classified as EU outermost regions.

There are five administrative regions in mainland Portugal. They are in charge of decentralised administration services empowered with financial and administrative autonomy. However, administrative regions do not have elected councils. In 1998, in a national referendum, the Portuguese voters rejected a proposed regionalisation reform which would have created self-governing regions. Administration of regions is mainly performed by the Regional Coordination and Development Committees (CCDRs), which are decentralised bodies of central government with financial and administrative autonomy.

Administrative regions and autonomous regions are classified as NUTS 2 areas and are entitled to implement their own regional operational programmes (ROPs). Autonomous regions are also classified as NUTS 1 and NUTS 3 areas.

There are 308 municipalities in Portugal. Nearly all municipalities are subdivided into multiple parishes. The representative organs of a municipality are the municipal assembly (assembleia municipal) and the municipal council (câmara municipal). The municipal assembly is a deliberative and decision-making organ. It is composed of members directly elected for four years, as well as of the chairs of all the parish councils located in each municipality’s jurisdiction. The number of directly elected members has to be greater than that of the chairs of the parish councils. The municipal council is the municipality’s collegial executive organ. Its members are elected by direct universal suffrage. It is headed by the mayor (presidente). Municipalities may form associations and federations in order to manage common interest activities.

There are 3,092 parishes in Portugal. Their representative organs are the parish assembly (assembleia de freguesia) and the parish council (junta de freguesia). The parish assembly is the parish’s deliberative body. Members of the parish assembly are elected for four year term. The parish council is the parish’s collegial executive organ. Its chair (presidente) is a member of the municipal council within which the parish is located. Parishes may form associations in order to manage common interest activities.

The tasks of municipalities and parishes are associated with the fulfilment of the needs of local communities, for example as regards socio-economic development, spatial planning, utilities, sewage collection, culture, the environment, etc.
Table 3: Competences of parishes and municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Municipality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Rural and urban infrastructure</td>
<td>• Rural and urban infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Public supply</td>
<td>• Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education</td>
<td>• Transport and communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Culture, leisure and sport</td>
<td>• Education, vocational education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primary healthcare</td>
<td>• Heritage, culture and science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social welfare</td>
<td>• Leisure and sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Civil protection</td>
<td>• Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environment and health</td>
<td>• Social welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Development</td>
<td>• Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Urban and rural planning</td>
<td>• Civil protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Community protection</td>
<td>• Environment, drainage and sanitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The duties of the parishes also include,</td>
<td>• Consumer protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>where applicable and in accordance with the</td>
<td>• Promoting development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>law, planning, management and investment</td>
<td>• Territorial and urban planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td>• Municipal police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• External cooperation</td>
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</table>

Source: Committee of the Regions.

Alongside the municipalities and parishes, Portuguese local self-government units include other types of authorities, such as 21 inter-municipal communities (*comunidades intermunicipais*), associations of municipalities and two metropolitan areas (*áreas metropolitanas*) (Lisbon and Porto), as well as urban communities. The function of these authorities is principally to coordinate municipal investments of intermunicipal interest. Their areas of competence also include strategic, economic, social and territorial management³.

Map 2: Administrative division of Portugal

Source: © Image used under license from Shutterstock.com.

³ Source: Committee of the Regions.
2. Socio-economic situation

Portugal has over 10 million inhabitants. With 113.5 people per square kilometre, Portugal is close to the EU average (117.5 inhabitants per km² in the EU-28). The total fertility rate is 1.36 and is visibly lower than the EU average (1.6). Since 2010, the population of Portugal has slowly been declining - from 10.57 million inhabitants to 10.29 million in 2018. The level of education is systematically improving. In 2000, only 11 % of the population aged 30 to 34 had successfully completed tertiary education. In 2017, the equivalent figure was already 33.5 % (the average for the EU was 39.9 %)\(^4\).

Lisbon is the capital of Portugal. With a population of over 550,000 inhabitants it is the biggest Portuguese municipality. Together with 17 other municipalities it forms the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, with a population of around 3 million. The second metropolitan area is formed by Porto together with 16 other municipalities. These two metropolitan areas concentrate nearly half of the Portuguese population.

Portugal’s economy was hard hit by the economic crisis. The country had difficulties with its rising public deficit and debt. In 2011 Portugal had to apply for financial assistance and obtained a bailout worth EUR 78 billion from the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Since then Portugal’s economy has registered a gradual recovery. The structural reforms introduced with the help of the EU and the IMF have improved productivity and competitiveness. The present government has managed to effectively reduce the public deficit. In 2016, it stood at 2 % of GDP, the lowest level since Portugal joined the euro area in 1999. In 2017 real GDP growth reached 2.8 %, the highest rate since 2000. What is important is that this growth generates new jobs. The unemployment rate has dropped from 16.4 % in 2013 to 7.0 % in 2018 (from 38.1 % to 20.1 % for young people). However, the very high public debt (of around 120 %) is still an important vulnerability of the country’s economy.

Since its accession Portugal has been one of the EU’s least developed Member States. In 2006, its GDP per capita expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) stood at 83 % of the EU average and was lower not only than that of Greece but also of new Member States Cyprus and Slovenia. Despite economic recovery, in 2017 Portugal’s GDP per capita in PPS was on the level of 77 % of the EU average and was the ninth lowest in the EU.

Table 4: Real GDP growth rate (%)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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Source: Eurostat.
Table 5: General government deficit/surplus (% of GDP)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>-9.8</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
<td>-7.4</td>
<td>-5.7</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
<td>-7.2</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
<td>-6.4</td>
<td>-4.6</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
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Source: Eurostat.

Table 6: General government gross debt (% of GDP)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>126.2</td>
<td>129.0</td>
<td>130.6</td>
<td>128.8</td>
<td>129.2</td>
<td>124.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat.

Table 7: Employment rate, age group 20-64

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat.

Table 8: Unemployment rate (%)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat.

Before the economic crisis, exports accounted for only 31.0 % of Portugal’s GDP, and imports for 38.6 %: in 2007, the trade deficit stood at -7.6 %. However, since then Portugal’s imports have been stable and exports has been almost constantly growing. Since 2013, Portugal has had a slight trade surplus. In 2017, exports accounted for 42.7 % and imports for 41.9 % of GDP, resulting in a trade surplus of 0.8 % of GDP.

Major export destinations are Spain (20.9 %), France (13.4 %), Germany (10.7 %), the UK (9.5 %) and US (5.5 %). For historical reasons, the former Portuguese colonies are also important trade partners. In 2017, exports to Angola accounted for 3.3 % of total exports while for Brazil the corresponding figure was 2.7 %. Portugal’s main exports are minerals and metals, machinery, chemicals and agri-food products.

Portugal’s main import partners are Spain (30 %), Germany (12.7 %), France (7.7 %), the Netherlands (5.1 %) and Italy (4.8 %). The main imports are similar to the exports: minerals and metals, machinery, chemicals and agri-food products.

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5 Source: Eurostat.
Portugal is an important tourist destination. In 2017, it was the ninth biggest EU destination measured in nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments (72 million nights in total, including 48.9 million spent by non-residents). The total number of guests amounted to 24.5 million (of whom 14.3 million were non-residents).\(^7\)

3. **EU cohesion policy in Portugal, 2014-2020**\(^8\)

Over the 2014-2020 programming period, Portugal is allocated EUR 25.8 billion from the ESI Funds (including the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)), which, together with a national contribution of EUR 6.9 billion, adds up to a total of EUR 32.7 billion in support of the socio-economic development of the country.

![Figure 1: ESI Fund allocations in Portugal, 2014-2020](image)

**ESI FUNDS BUDGET FOR PORTUGAL (2014-2020)**

- EUR 10.78 billion through the ERDF
- EUR 7.54 billion through the ESF
- EUR 4.06 billion through the EAFRD
- EUR 2.86 billion through the CF
- EUR 392 million through the EMFF
- EUR 161 million through the YEI


In 2014-2020, Portugal is eligible for EUR 21.46 billion under the EU cohesion policy:

- EUR 16.67 billion for less developed regions (Norte, Centro, Alentejo and Azores);
- EUR 257.6 million for transition regions (Algarve);
- EUR 1.28 billion for more developed regions (Lisboa and Madeira);
- EUR 2.86 billion through the Cohesion Fund;
- EUR 122.4 million for European Territorial Cooperation;
- EUR 115.7 million special allocation for the outermost regions;
- EUR 160.8 million for the Youth Employment Initiative.

Of this, ESF funding in Portugal will represent EUR 7.6 billion, which will help redress the social impact of the economic crisis and support a job-rich recovery.

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\(^7\) Source: Eurostat.

\(^8\) This section is based on the webpages of the European Commission, mainly [European Structural and Investment Funds – Portugal: Country Factsheet 2016](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funds/factsheets/country/pt) and [Cohesion Policy and Portugal](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policies/cohesion).
Portugal manages eleven operational programmes under EU cohesion policy, namely:

- Seven regional operational programmes (including two for outermost regions), which receive funding from the ERDF and the ESF;
- Four thematic operational programmes (OPs): ‘Competitiveness and Internationalisation’ (co-financed by the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund); ‘Sustainable Development and Efficient Use of Natural Resources’ (co-financed by the Cohesion Fund); and ‘Human Capital’ and ‘Social Inclusion and Employment’ (both co-financed by the ESF);

In addition, there is also one OP for technical assistance.

Map 3: Structural Funds (ERDF and ESF) eligibility 2014-2020

Mainland Portugal is subdivided into five NUTS 2 regions: one more developed cohesion region (Lisboa), one transition region (the Algarve) and three less developed regions (Norte, Centro, and Alentejo). In addition, the Azores are classified as a less developed region and Madeira as a more developed region.
The Partnership Agreement for Portugal identified the following challenges and priorities for investment:

- Improving entrepreneurship and business innovation – including developing the economy and improving access for SMEs to finance their investments and advanced business services;
- Boosting R&D knowledge transfer between academia and businesses, strengthening research and innovation systems in enterprises and developing an innovation-friendly business environment;
- Increasing economic competitiveness by enhancing the production of tradable goods and services;
- Tackling unemployment, in particular youth unemployment through the Youth Employment Initiative, improving the quality of education and training and a better match with labour market demand; raising the qualifications and skills of the active labour force and preventing early school leaving;
- Poverty reduction through improved access to services and support to the social economy;
- Contributing to the modernisation of the public administration through capacity-building and investment in human resources development and e-governance;
- Supporting the shift to a low carbon and resource-efficient economy: energy efficiency and improved management of natural resources.

In Portugal, EU cohesion policy is coordinated by the Ministry of Planning. The current Minister is Nelson de Souza.

4. European Territorial Cooperation

In the 2014–2020 programming period, Portugal is participating in nine European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes: two cross-border, three transnational and four interregional.

Portugal is participating in the following cross-border programmes:
- Cooperation Programme ‘Interreg V-A Spain-Portugal (Madeira-Açores-Canarias (MAC))’ (ERDF contribution: EUR 126.5 million);
- Cooperation Programme ‘Interreg V-A Spain-Portugal (POCTEP)’ (ERDF contribution: EUR 365.7 million).

Portugal is participating in the following three transnational programmes:
- Atlantic Area [ES-FR-PT] (ERDF contribution: EUR 140 million);
- Mediterranean [EL-ES-FR-HR-IT-MT-PT-SL] (ERDF contribution: EUR 224.3 million);
- South-west Europe [ES-FR-PT] (ERDF contribution: EUR 141.8 million).

Portugal is participating in the following four interregional programmes: INTERREG EUROPE, INTERACT, ESPON and URBACT.

5. The Norte region, Porto and Braga

The Norte region is the northernmost administrative region of Portugal. It has a 568 km-long border with Spain and 143 km of coastline. The region accounts for 23 % of Portugal’s total surface area and approximately 35 % of its population. With a population of around 3.6 million inhabitants, it is the most populous region in Portugal. Its population density of 168 persons per km² is much higher than both the national and the EU average.
The region can be divided into a coastal area which is predominantly urban and heavily industrialised, and an inland area where the primary sector still plays an important role. The region is characterised by traditional sector industries (e.g. textiles, clothing, footwear and metallurgy), but also encompasses medium- and high-tech sectors, in particular industrial equipment, automotive components, pharmaceuticals, precision equipment, communication equipment and computers. In 2013, economic activities in the secondary sector (manufacturing and construction) accounted for about 30.5 % of regional gross value added, which was the highest figure among all Portuguese regions. 67.8 % of regional GVA came from the tertiary sector, and 1.7 % from the primary sector. In 2016, the Norte region had the lowest GDP per capita in Portugal (EUR 15 200 as against the national average of EUR 17 900).

Map 4: Territorial division of NUTS II Norte Region: NUTS III and municipalities

Porto is the second largest city in Portugal after Lisbon. The municipality has a population of around 214 000. The Mayor of Porto is Rui Moreira. Porto is at the centre of one of the two metropolitan areas in Portugal. The metropolitan area consists of 17 municipalities and has a population of around 1.7 million. The municipalities that form the metropolitan area are:

- Arouca
- Espinho
- Gondomar
- Maia
- Matosinhos
- Oliveira de Azeméis
- Paredes
- Porto

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9 Source: European Commission.
10 Source: Eurostat.
• Póvoa de Varzim
• Santa Maria da Feira
• Santo Tirso
• São João da Madeira
• Trofa
• Vale de Cambra
• Valongo
• Vila do Conde
• Vila Nova de Gaia

Braga is a municipality in northern Portugal. It has a population of 181 000, and, together with the surrounding municipalities, forms the third largest urban agglomeration in Portugal. With its 2000-year history, Roman legacy and outstanding architecture, Braga is a very popular tourist destination. It is ranked the second best European destination in the 2019 tourist ranking of the ‘European Best Destination’ organisation. The Mayor of Braga is Ricardo Rio, of the Social Democratic Party.

6. Regional Operational Programme Norte

For the programming period 2014-2020, the Operational Programme ‘Norte’ has a budget of EUR 4.2 billion, with the EU financial contribution standing at EUR 3.38 billion (EUR 2.72 billion from the ERDF and EUR 0.68 billion from the ESF). The programme will focus on nine main priorities:

• Research, development and innovation;
• Competitiveness and internationalisation of the regional economy;
• Low-carbon economy;
• Environmental quality;
• Urban system;
• Employment and labour mobility;
• Social inclusion and poverty;
• Education and lifelong learning;
• Institutional capacity;

The managing authority is the Norte Portugal Regional Coordination and Development Commission (Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Norte 2020).
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