



Portuguese Nationality vs Permanent Residency for non-EU residents in Portugal

When deciding to pursue residence in another country, it is relevant to consider the long-term options. **After five years of legal residence in Portugal**, it is possible to apply for Permanent Residency in Portugal and/or Portuguese Citizenship.

To decide and plan accordingly to the applicant's final goal, we must understand the differences and timings of each process. Although both possibilities allow legal residence in Portugal, the rights of those who acquire Portuguese citizenship are different from the prerogatives of permanent residence permit holders.

Portuguese Nationality

Portuguese nationality may be attributed by law or by will, or acquired by will, adoption or naturalisation. From our experience, the two most recurrent groups of cases are:

- The interested party is residing in a certain country has Portuguese ancestors, i.e., being a child of or a grandson of a Portuguese national and, in what concerns the acquisition of nationality, the cases in which the interested party is married or maintains a stable union with a Portuguese national, or
- The applicant has been legally residing in Portugal for at least five years - the most adjusted option for the scope of this analyses.

In short, portuguese citizenship is permanent and guarantees all the rights inherent to Portuguese nationality, including the right to vote, transit and reside in any country of the European Union. In practice, the holder will have a citizen card and a Portuguese passport - one of the most widely accepted passports without the common visa restrictions imposed on other passports.

Permanent Residence Permit

Permanent residency is a type of immigration status granted to foreign nationals residing in Portugal from a minimum period that meet some eligibility requirements.



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In Portugal, you can apply for Permanent Residency after spending five years as a legal temporary resident. Once the applicant hits the five-year mark, there is the option of continuing to renew the temporary residence, applying for Permanent Residency or, at the same time, applying for Portuguese citizenship by naturalisation.

Permanent residency in Portugal grants several advantages over temporary residency, namely:

- One can hold permanent residency status without validity – although there are minimum stay requirements, mentioned below –, which must be renewed every 5 years;
- Less paperwork and less bureaucracy, due to less renewals.
- Permanent residency status in Portugal may be useful for citizens of countries where dual citizenship is not allowed, and the applicant does not want to renounce his/her original nationality.

However, it may also be relevant to consider that Permanent Residency requirements include learning the basics of Portuguese language, as well as Citizenship.

Citizenship vs Permanent Residency

Considering the same time requirement for both applications – Permanent Residency and Citizenship - it is crucial to understand the main differences:

1. Citizenship allows one to hold a “EU passport”, which entitles the holder to easily live, work, and retire in another EU country. Permanent residency does not come with those benefits, although it can facilitate the transfer of residence to another EU country.
2. Citizenship is, in principle, perpetual. Permanent residency comes with minimum stay requirements: absences can not exceed two consecutive years, or 30 months in three years.
3. Less paperwork and bureaucracy with Portuguese Citizenship.

The background of the top section is a historical map of the world, likely a 16th-century style map, featuring a large compass rose in the center. A person is standing on the map, looking at it. The map shows continents and oceans with various geographical details and text.

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Why choosing Permanent Residency over Citizenship?

For the majority of people, especially those that do not have an “EU passport”, obtaining Portuguese citizenship is a goal from the start of the relocation process. However, there are reasons that may justify keeping Permanent resident status instead.

Although Portugal recognizes dual citizenship, some countries do not allow it. If this is the case, one may prefer to hold onto his/her current passport and keep Portuguese permanent residency. While this would not allow one to move to another EU country so easily, it would still be granted the possibility of living in Portugal and easily travel within the Schengen Area.

Notwithstanding all the above-mentioned pros and cons, in practical terms, at the 5 years of residency, applying for citizenship instead or renewing or temporary residency or applying for permanent residency may not be exactly an option: considering citizenship will not be granted automatically, in practice, the applicant needs to proceed with his/her residency (temporary or permanent residency) process while, at the same time, applies for citizenship.

To conclude, for most residents in Portugal, getting permanent residency is an optional step on the pathway to Portuguese citizenship. Being the latest the primary goal, namely for Golden Visa applicants.

The above reflection was designed for non-EU citizens residing in Portugal, please note that for EU citizens residing in Portugal, there is also an option to apply for a Permanent Residence status, however there are several relevant differences when compared to Permanent residence for non-EU citizen, for instance regarding the Portuguese language requirements.

Our team is available to assist with all Immigration related questions and advise regarding specific cases.