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# Portuguese Cultural Standards from an Eastern European Perspective, Focusing on the Experiences of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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# Resumo

O principal objetivo desta tese é explorar e identificar os padrões culturais portugueses a partir da perspectiva de migrantes da Europa Oriental, especificamente russos, bielorrussos e ucranianos. Ao examinar essas interações interculturais, o estudo visa desvendar os desafios culturais e os processos de adaptação vivenciados por esses migrantes em Portugal. Para alcançar este objetivo, foi empregada a Metodologia dos Padrões Culturais, utilizando entrevistas narrativas com 15 migrantes da Europa Oriental que residem em Portugal há pelo menos um ano. Essa abordagem qualitativa permitiu identificar incidentes críticos que revelaram diferenças culturais significativas e estratégias de adaptação. A análise revelou vários padrões culturais portugueses chave a partir da perspectiva dos europeus orientais, incluindo um ritmo de vida mais lento, uma abordagem mais relaxada em relação ao trabalho e uma forte ênfase na família e na comunidade. Além disso, ineficiências burocráticas e diferenças na gestão do tempo foram desafios recorrentes para esses migrantes. Apesar dessas dificuldades, o estudo também destaca os aspectos positivos da cultura portuguesa, como a calorosidade, hospitalidade e fortes laços comunitários. Esta pesquisa preenche uma lacuna na literatura existente ao focar nas experiências de migrantes da Europa Oriental em Portugal, um grupo que tem recebido atenção limitada em estudos interculturais. Os resultados oferecem insights práticos para melhorar a integração cultural de migrantes e promover um maior entendimento entre a sociedade portuguesa e as comunidades da Europa Oriental.

**Palavras-chave**: Padrões Culturais Portugueses, Migrantes da Europa Oriental, Russos, Bielorrussos, Ucranianos, Adaptação Intercultural, Metodologia dos Padrões Culturais.

# Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to explore and identify Portuguese cultural standards from the perspective of Eastern European migrants, specifically Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. By examining these cross-cultural interactions, the study aims to uncover the cultural challenges and adaptation processes experienced by these migrants in Portugal. To achieve this objective, the Cultural Standards Method was employed, using narrative interviews with 15 Eastern European migrants who have lived in Portugal for at least one year. This qualitative approach allowed for the identification of critical incidents that revealed significant cultural differences and adaptation strategies. The analysis revealed several key Portuguese cultural standards from an Eastern European perspective, including a slower life rhythm, a more relaxed approach to work, and a strong emphasis on family and community. Additionally, bureaucratic inefficiencies and differences in time management were recurring challenges for these migrants. Despite these difficulties, the study also highlights the positive aspects of Portuguese culture, such as warmth, hospitality, and strong communal ties. This research fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the experiences of Eastern European migrants in Portugal, a group that has received limited attention in cross-cultural studies. The findings offer practical insights for enhancing the cultural integration of migrants and fostering greater understanding between Portuguese society and Eastern European communities.

**Keywords**: Portuguese Cultural Standards, Eastern European Migrants, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Cultural Standards Method.

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# 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, globalization has reshaped how nations interact and connect, reducing geographical and cultural barriers. Portugal, with its rich history as a global trading and colonial power, has increasingly become a hub for cross-cultural interaction, welcoming a growing number of migrants from diverse regions. Among these groups, Eastern Europeans—particularly Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians—have formed a significant presence, driven by work, education, or family reunification. This influx of Eastern European migrants into Portugal brings about new cultural dynamics, where differences in values, traditions, and social practices come into play.

As cross-cultural interactions between Portugal and Eastern European countries deepen, it becomes crucial to understand the experiences of these migrants in navigating Portuguese cultural norms. These interactions often reveal subtle, yet significant, cultural differences that influence how individuals from these regions adapt to Portuguese society. From perceptions of time and social relationships to work ethics and daily routines, the lived experiences of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians offer unique insights into the cultural standards that define Portugal.

The primary aim of this thesis is to identify and explore the Portuguese cultural standards from the perspective of Eastern Europeans, focusing specifically on Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. By using the Cultural Standards Method, this study seeks to uncover the key cultural differences that shape their experiences in Portugal, shedding light on how these standards influence their adaptation to Portuguese life. The findings will not only contribute to a better understanding of Eastern European migrants' experiences but also provide valuable insights into fostering cross-cultural understanding and cooperation between Portugal and Eastern Europe.

This research is particularly relevant as the Eastern European presence in Portugal grows, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of cultural adaptation processes. Despite the increasing number of Eastern European migrants, there remains a gap in literature that addresses their specific experiences within the Portuguese cultural context. This thesis, therefore, aims to fill that gap by providing a focused study on the experiences of Russians,

Belarusians, and Ukrainians, who, while sharing common Eastern European roots, also bring diverse cultural backgrounds to their interactions with Portugal.

The thesis is structured into several chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework, discussing the concepts of culture, cross-culturalism, and interculturalism. The second chapter provides a detailed literature review on cultural dimensions and standards, emphasizing the differences and similarities between Portuguese and Eastern European cultural values. The third chapter focuses on the methodology, employing the Cultural Standards Method through narrative interviews with individuals from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. The results and analysis of these interviews are presented in the subsequent chapters, culminating in a discussion on the identified Portuguese cultural standards from an Eastern European perspective. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and suggests potential applications of this research for improving cross-cultural understanding in Portugal.

Through this study, it is hoped that not only the subtle cultural differences between Portugal and Eastern Europe will be illuminated, but also that practical insights will emerge, contributing to more harmonious interactions and integrations between these distinct cultural groups.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Culture

Culture, as a central concept in understanding human behavior and societal structures, has been defined and interpreted across a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and psychology. One of the earliest and most foundational definitions comes from Edward Tylor, who described culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Primitive Culture, 1871) (Tylor, 1871). Tylor's definition emphasizes the holistic nature of culture, suggesting that it encompasses every aspect of human life, from daily behaviors to deep-seated values, shaping how individuals interact within their social environments.

Over time, interpretations of culture evolved, with more emphasis placed on the symbolic and interpretive aspects of culture. Clifford Geertz, a key figure in symbolic anthropology, offered a more focused definition in his work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). He described culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1977). Geertz's view highlights the importance of symbols—such as language, rituals, and artifacts—that people use to interpret and navigate their world. This symbolic nature of culture is particularly relevant when examining intercultural interactions, as individuals often assign different meanings to the same symbols based on their cultural background.

From a psychological standpoint, Geert Hofstede's definition of culture offers a more structured approach, particularly in the context of comparing national cultures. Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001). His research, which focused on comparing cultural dimensions across countries, has become one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding cultural differences in areas like international business, management, and cross-cultural communication.

An emerging consideration in the study of culture is the role of globalization and digital communication in shaping cultural exchange. The rapid expansion of digital platforms and

social media has accelerated cultural interactions, blurring the boundaries between national cultures and increasing the frequency of intercultural encounters. This dynamic is especially pertinent for Eastern European migrants, such as Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, who not only navigate the traditional aspects of Portuguese culture but also interact with the modern, globalized layers of Portuguese society through digital means.

### 2.1.1. Hofstede's Onion Model of Culture

To conceptualize the layers of culture, Geert Hofstede developed the Onion Model of Culture, which presents culture as consisting of multiple layers, each representing different aspects of human behavior and values. This model, often depicted as an onion, visualizes culture as having four layers: symbols, heroes, rituals, and values (Hofstede, n.d.).

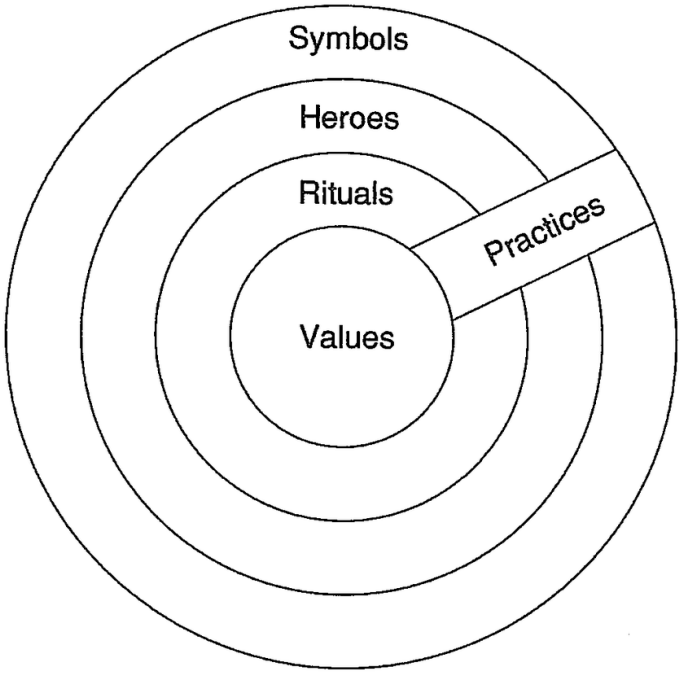


Figure 1 - Hofstede's Onion Model

**Symbols:** These are the most superficial and visible aspects of culture, including language, dress, or gestures, which can be easily observed but may not always be understood by outsiders. For example, the use of specific hand gestures or colloquial expressions might differ significantly between cultures.

**Heroes:** These are figures, real or fictional, who are highly regarded in a society and embody its core values. Cultural heroes often serve as role models, influencing how

individuals within the society behave and think. In Portugal, for example, historical figures like Vasco da Gama are considered cultural heroes, symbolizing exploration and national pride.

**Rituals:** Rituals are collective activities that are socially essential within a culture, such as religious ceremonies, greetings, or social gatherings. These activities, while seemingly routine, play a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and are often key to understanding a culture's deeper values. For instance, the Portuguese tradition of weekly family meals or fado music performances are important social rituals.

**Values:** At the core of the onion model are values, which are deeply embedded and often unconscious preferences for certain behaviors and beliefs. These values are instilled early in life and shape how individuals perceive good and bad, right and wrong. They are the most difficult to observe directly but exert the most profound influence on behavior (Hofstede, n.d.).

Hofstede's model is particularly useful for understanding cross-cultural interactions, as it allows researchers to peel back the visible layers of culture to reveal the deeper, underlying values that drive behavior. In this study, Hofstede's model will help examine how Eastern European migrants, such as Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians, navigate the layers of Portuguese culture, from surface-level symbols to core values.

### 2.1.2. Layers of Culture

In addition to the onion model's focus on symbols, heroes, rituals, and values, Hofstede also emphasized that individuals carry multiple layers of cultural influence based on their affiliations to various social groups. These layers of cultural "mental programming" are shaped by one's nationality, regional identity, religion, profession, and even organizational culture (Hofstede, 2001). This means that culture is not monolithic but consists of multiple, overlapping influences that can interact or even conflict with one another.

For example, a migrant from Belarus living in Portugal may carry the cultural programming of their national identity, alongside influences from regional traditions, religious beliefs, and exposure to globalized cultural norms through media. Understanding these layers is crucial for analyzing the experiences of Eastern European migrants in Portugal, as they are often negotiating between multiple cultural frameworks while integrating into a new society.

## 2.2. Cross-Culturalism and Interculturalism

In the field of cross-cultural studies, it is important to distinguish between cross-culturalism and interculturalism. Cross-culturalism refers to the comparison of two or more cultures, focusing on identifying differences and similarities (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). It is often used in academic and business contexts to highlight how different cultural values and practices affect behavior in various settings. For example, comparing the collectivist nature of Russian society with the individualistic tendencies in Portuguese society is an example of cross-cultural analysis.

On the other hand, interculturalism focuses on the interaction between cultures, particularly in settings where individuals from different cultural backgrounds engage directly with each other. Interculturalism is less concerned with comparison and more focused on the exchange of cultural practices, values, and ideas. As Bukrieieva and Afanasieva (2020) note, interculturalism is "focused not on the protection of cultural differences but on the search for ways of interaction between holders of different cultural systems" (Bukrieieva & Afanasieva, 2020).

This distinction is particularly relevant for this thesis, which aims to explore both cross-cultural and intercultural dynamics. While comparing Portuguese and Eastern European cultural values (cross-culturalism) provides a foundational understanding, the focus will also be on how these migrants interact with and adapt to Portuguese society (interculturalism). The interaction between Eastern European migrants and Portuguese society is a dynamic process, shaped by both structural differences and personal experiences of cultural adaptation.

## 2.3. Cross-Cultural Studies

Cross-cultural studies have a long history, beginning in anthropology and expanding into fields like psychology, sociology, and business management. The primary goal of cross-cultural research is to compare different cultures to identify common patterns in human behavior, values, and societal structures. Edward Tylor’s early work in the 19th century laid the groundwork for this comparative approach, and by the mid-20th century, scholars such as Geert Hofstede and Fons Trompenaars further developed systematic methods for comparing national cultures (Trompenaars, 1994).

One of the challenges in cross-cultural research is finding a balance between recognizing the uniqueness of each culture while also identifying universal patterns. According to Ember and Ember (2009), "comparing cultures is essential because it allows us to identify the deeper, often unconscious assumptions that guide behavior in different societies" (Ember & Ember, 2009). This idea is particularly pertinent to this study, as it seeks to compare the cultural values of Portuguese society with those of Eastern European migrants to understand how these differences influence their integration.

### 2.3.1. Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a comprehensive framework for comparing national cultures based on a set of universal values. His research, originally conducted through surveys of IBM employees in over 70 countries, identified six key dimensions that differentiate cultures. These dimensions help explain how people in different societies prioritize certain values and behaviors, which in turn shape social interactions, business practices, and governance (Hofstede, 2001). The six dimensions are as follows:

1. **Power Distance (PDI)**: Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In cultures with **high power distance**, hierarchical structures are accepted and even expected, with clear distinctions between individuals of different social statuses. Subordinates are unlikely to question authority, and decisions are typically made by those in power. Countries like Russia and Belarus often exhibit higher power distance due to strong centralized political control and historical legacies of authoritarian governance. In contrast, **low power distance** cultures, such as those found in Northern Europe, favor egalitarian relationships. Individuals are more likely to challenge authority, and there is a preference for decentralized decision-making. Portugal tends to sit in the middle of this spectrum, with moderate power distance, where hierarchies exist but are more flexible, especially in informal social interactions.
2. **Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)**: This dimension measures whether a culture places greater emphasis on individual achievement and autonomy (**individualism**) or on group cohesion and collective responsibility (**collectivism**). In **individualistic cultures**, personal freedom, self-reliance, and individual rights are prioritized. People tend to view themselves as independent from their social groups, making decisions

based on personal interests. The United States and Western European countries often score high on individualism.

On the other hand, in **collectivist cultures**, individuals see themselves as part of a cohesive group, whether it be family, a workgroup, or society at large. Decisions are made with the group's well-being in mind, and there is a strong sense of loyalty to these groups. Eastern European countries like Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine exhibit collectivist tendencies, shaped by their shared Soviet history, where collective values were emphasized. Portugal also leans towards collectivism, particularly in its emphasis on family and community relationships, though urban areas display more individualistic traits.

3. **Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)**: This dimension describes the distribution of emotional roles between the genders. **Masculine cultures** value competitiveness, assertiveness, and material success, where social gender roles are clearly distinct—men are expected to be ambitious and competitive, while women are expected to focus on nurturing roles. Countries such as Japan and Germany are considered highly masculine cultures, where achievements, competition, and success are dominant social drivers. In contrast, **feminine cultures** prioritize relationships, care for others, and quality of life. In these cultures, gender roles are less distinct, and both men and women are encouraged to be modest, caring, and cooperative. Feminine societies, such as the Scandinavian countries, emphasize work-life balance and social support systems. Portugal tends to be more **feminine**, focusing on social harmony, quality of life, and family well-being, while Eastern European countries like Russia are often more **masculine**, placing value on assertiveness and strong leadership, especially in professional and political arenas.
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)**: This dimension measures how comfortable a society is with uncertainty, ambiguity, and change. **High uncertainty avoidance** cultures have a low tolerance for ambiguity and prefer clear rules, regulations, and stability. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance tend to avoid risk and may exhibit a high degree of anxiety about the future. As a result, they often have rigid codes of behavior, extensive laws, and a preference for maintaining the status quo. Portugal scores high on uncertainty avoidance, reflecting its society's preference for structure, predictability, and adherence to traditions. The high levels of bureaucracy in government and organizations are evidence of this cultural trait.

In contrast, cultures with **low uncertainty avoidance** are more comfortable with ambiguity and taking risks. They are more adaptable to new situations, and rules and regulations are viewed as flexible. Eastern European countries like Russia and Ukraine have moderate uncertainty avoidance; while there is some adherence to rules, their societies have historically had to adapt to sudden political and social changes, creating a certain resilience in the face of uncertainty.

5. **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)**: This dimension reflects whether a culture emphasizes long-term planning, perseverance, and thriftiness (**long-term orientation**) or values tradition, immediate results, and social obligations (**short-term orientation**). **Long-term oriented** cultures, such as China and Japan, focus on future rewards, fostering virtues like perseverance, prudence, and savings. These cultures are more adaptable to change and are willing to delay immediate gratification for long-term success.

   In contrast, **short-term oriented** cultures are more focused on maintaining traditions, preserving social obligations, and achieving immediate results. These cultures are typically more resistant to change, and there is a greater emphasis on the past and present. Eastern European countries like Russia and Belarus tend to lean towards short-term orientation due to their emphasis on tradition, history, and maintaining social cohesion. Portugal also reflects elements of short-term orientation, with a strong cultural emphasis on family values, national pride, and maintaining traditions passed down through generations.

6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)**: This dimension looks at the degree to which societies allow free gratification of basic human desires related to enjoying life and having fun (**indulgence**) versus the extent to which they suppress gratification through strict social norms (**restraint**). **Indulgent cultures**, like those in Latin America and Western Europe, emphasize personal freedom, leisure, and individual happiness. In these societies, people are encouraged to pursue enjoyment and express emotions freely. **Restrained cultures**, on the other hand, focus more on strict social norms, and gratification of desires is often frowned upon. Societies with high restraint tend to regulate individuals' behavior, often placing a stronger emphasis on duty and work over pleasure. Many Eastern European countries exhibit **restraint**, shaped by years of political and economic instability, where survival and adherence to social norms were necessary. Portugal, while enjoying some degree of indulgence, also has a history of

restraint, particularly in more rural or conservative areas, where traditional Catholic values emphasize modesty and self-control.

### 2.3.2. Cultural Standards

The Cultural Standards Method, developed by Alexander Thomas (1996), takes a more qualitative approach to cross-cultural research, focusing on the lived experiences of individuals in intercultural settings. Unlike Hofstede's quantitative dimensions, the Cultural Standards Method uses narrative interviews and case studies to identify specific cultural norms that influence behavior (Thomas, 2001). Thomas defines cultural standards as "the guidelines for perception, thought, judgment, and action that are considered normal by members of a particular cultural group" (Thomas, 2001).

This method is particularly effective for identifying critical incidents, moments where cultural misunderstandings occur that reveal deeper cultural differences. For this study, the Cultural Standards Method will be used to examine how Eastern European migrants perceive and adapt to Portuguese cultural standards in everyday life, from social interactions to professional settings.

### 2.3.3. Comparison between Cultural Dimensions and Cultural Standards

While both cultural dimensions and cultural standards are valuable for understanding cross-cultural interactions, they serve different purposes. Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer a broad, comparative framework, while the Cultural Standards Method provides deeper insights into the specific behaviors and experiences of individuals within cross-cultural encounters. For this thesis, both approaches will be combined to create a comprehensive analysis of how Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians navigate Portuguese cultural standards. This dual approach will allow for a richer understanding of both the structural differences between cultures and the personal experiences of cultural adaptation.

# 3. Cross-Cultural Comparison

## 3.1. Historical Background

To fully understand the cultural differences between Eastern Europe (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) and Portugal, it's important to delve into their historical contexts. Historical events have shaped the values, norms, and behaviors of these countries, leaving lasting cultural legacies. Understanding this history is key to explaining the results in Hofstede's cultural dimensions and how these shape cross-cultural interactions between Eastern European migrants and Portuguese society (Hofstede, 2001).

Given the deep cultural, linguistic, and historical connections between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, I have grouped them as one unit for the purposes of this cross-cultural comparison. These nations share a common past under the Soviet Union, a regime that left a profound imprint on their political structures, economies, and societal values (World Bank, 2020a). This shared Soviet experience has resulted in similar cultural orientations across all dimensions of Hofstede's research. While there are differences between the countries, especially in their post-Soviet development, the broader trends reveal a collective cultural framework.

Portugal, on the other hand, follows a distinct historical trajectory, influenced by its colonial past, political revolutions, and integration into the European Union (World Bank, 2020d). The contrast between Portugal's and Eastern Europe's historical paths offers valuable insights into their cultural divergences and the potential challenges Eastern European migrants may face when adapting to life in Portugal.

### 3.1.1. Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine

The history of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine is inextricably linked, particularly during the Soviet period, but also stretches back centuries to their origins in the Kievan Rus', a medieval federation of Slavic tribes (World Bank, 2020a). Over the centuries, these nations experienced periods of both unity and division. By the late 18th century, Ukraine and Belarus were largely absorbed into the Russian Empire, setting the stage for their shared fate under the Soviet Union in the 20th century.

The formation of the Soviet Union in 1922 had a profound impact on these three countries. For nearly 70 years, they were governed by a centralized communist regime that imposed collectivist values, top-down political control, and a planned economy (World Bank, 2020a). This period instilled strong collectivist tendencies, emphasizing group over individual success, which continues to shape societal behaviors even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The legacy of authoritarianism, centralized power, and collectivist values has left an imprint on their political and cultural systems, creating a tendency to defer to authority and value social cohesion over individual autonomy.

Economically, the Soviet regime promoted rapid industrialization, particularly in heavy industries such as steel, mining, and manufacturing (World Bank, 2020a). This development was achieved through centralized control, with the state managing most of the economy. The transition from a state-controlled economy to a more market-based system after the fall of the Soviet Union has been difficult, particularly in Ukraine and Belarus, which have experienced political instability, economic hardship, and slow reforms (World Bank, 2020b). Russia, with its vast natural resources, especially oil and gas, managed to stabilize economically more quickly, although it continues to struggle with political centralization and limited democratic freedoms (World Bank, 2020a).

Culturally, the Soviet emphasis on education and literacy resulted in high levels of academic achievement and a focus on technical expertise. However, the Soviet regime also suppressed individual expression, leading to a culture where personal desires and individual freedoms were often subordinated to the collective good (World Bank, 2020a). This historical experience continues to influence attitudes toward authority, individualism, and collectivism in modern Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

### 3.1.2. Portugal

Portugal's history is markedly different from that of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. As one of the oldest nations in Europe, with established borders dating back to 1143, Portugal developed as a maritime power in the 15th and 16th centuries, creating a vast colonial empire that stretched across Africa, Asia, and South America (World Bank, 2020d). The wealth generated from its colonies, especially Brazil, made Portugal one of the most powerful nations in the world during the Age of Discovery (World Bank, 2020d).

However, by the 19th century, Portugal had begun to lose its colonial territories, and the economic and political decline led to internal instability. In 1910, Portugal became a republic after the fall of the monarchy, but the country entered a long period of political turmoil, culminating in the establishment of the authoritarian Estado Novo regime in 1933, led by António de Oliveira Salazar (World Bank, 2020d). This regime lasted until 1974, when the peaceful Carnation Revolution restored democracy and ended the dictatorship (World Bank, 2020d).

The revolution also marked the end of Portugal's colonial empire, as former colonies such as Angola and Mozambique gained independence. Following the revolution, Portugal sought integration into Western Europe, joining the European Economic Community (now the European Union) in 1986 (World Bank, 2020d). Portugal's accession to the EU and the introduction of the Euro in 2002 helped to modernize its economy and political structures, aligning it more closely with its Western European neighbors (World Bank, 2020d).

In contrast to the collectivism of Eastern Europe, Portugal's history has emphasized individual achievement, particularly during its period of maritime exploration, though its long dictatorship fostered a more restrained society. Today, Portugal balances its traditional values with a growing sense of modernity, particularly in its urban centers, making it more individualistic and forward-thinking compared to its Eastern European counterparts.

## 3.2. Cross-Cultural Comparison Based on Hofstede's Dimensions

Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a framework, we can systematically compare the cultural values of Eastern Europe (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) with those of Portugal (Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions provide a clear understanding of how historical events and societal structures have shaped the ways these cultures approach power, authority, individuality, and uncertainty.

### 3.2.1. Power Distance (PDI)

Power Distance refers to the degree to which less powerful members of society accept unequal distributions of power (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, shaped by centuries of centralized control—first under imperial rule, then Soviet authoritarianism—have high power distance scores (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b; World Bank, 2020c). Historically, power has been concentrated in the hands of a few, with limited opportunities for

the average citizen to challenge authority. This cultural acceptance of hierarchy continues to influence behavior in the workplace and in social settings.

Portugal, with its history of monarchy and dictatorship, also exhibits a moderately high Power Distance. However, since the Carnation Revolution and the restoration of democracy, power structures have become more flexible (Hofstede, 2001). In modern Portugal, while hierarchical systems exist, particularly in business and politics, there is a greater openness to dialogue between different levels of authority compared to Eastern Europe (World Bank, 2020d).

### 3.2.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)

Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine have historically leaned towards collectivism, influenced by their shared Soviet past. The collective nature of Soviet society, where individualism was discouraged and group cohesion was paramount, still resonates today (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). People in these countries tend to place great importance on family, community, and loyalty to social groups, with personal decisions often being made in the context of what benefits the larger group (Hofstede, 2001).

Portugal, though historically collectivist due to its Catholic heritage and emphasis on family, has become more individualistic in recent decades, particularly in urban centers. This shift towards individualism is evident in the growing entrepreneurial spirit and personal autonomy found in modern Portuguese society, though traditional values still hold significant influence, especially in rural areas (Hofstede, 2001; World Bank, 2020d).

### 3.2.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)

The Masculinity vs. Femininity dimension examines a culture's preference for competitiveness, achievement, and assertiveness (masculinity) versus care, cooperation, and quality of life (femininity) (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine display masculine traits, particularly in their professional environments, where success is measured by material achievements and strong leadership (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). However, remnants of Soviet egalitarianism—where men and women were expected to contribute equally to the workforce—have tempered these traditionally masculine values (Hofstede, 2001).

Portugal, on the other hand, ranks lower on the masculinity scale, indicating a more feminine society. In Portugal, quality of life, social harmony, and cooperation are prioritized over competition (World Bank, 2020d). This cultural trait is reflected in the work-life balance many Portuguese strive for, with an emphasis on leisure time and family (Hofstede, 2001). This difference may present a challenge for Eastern European migrants, who may be accustomed to more assertive work environments.

### 3.2.4. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)

Both Portugal and the Eastern European countries have high scores in Uncertainty Avoidance, reflecting a strong preference for stability, rules, and structured environments (Hofstede, 2001). In Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, this cultural trait stems from the unpredictable nature of Soviet rule and the economic instability that followed its collapse (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). As a result, people in these countries value clear guidelines and resist change (Hofstede, 2001).

Similarly, Portugal's long history of political upheaval—culminating in the 1974 revolution—has made its society wary of uncertainty (World Bank, 2020d). The bureaucratic nature of Portuguese society, where procedures are detailed and rules are followed, mirrors the Eastern European preference for structure (Hofstede, 2001). However, Portugal's integration into the European Union and its exposure to global markets have gradually introduced a greater tolerance for ambiguity, particularly in younger generations (World Bank, 2020d).

### 3.2.5. Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation (LTO)

Long-Term Orientation reflects a society's focus on future planning versus maintaining traditions. Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine have become more pragmatic over the years, particularly in their approach to economic development and political reform (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). The need to plan for long-term stability in the face of post-Soviet economic struggles has fostered a more future-oriented mindset, particularly among younger generations (Hofstede, 2001).

Portugal, with its deep-rooted traditions and emphasis on preserving cultural heritage, scores lower on Long-Term Orientation (Hofstede, 2001). While there is a growing focus on modernization, particularly in urban areas, many Portuguese still value short-term goals and the preservation of long-established customs (World Bank, 2020d).

### 3.2.6. Indulgence vs. Restraint (IVR)

This dimension measures the extent to which societies allow gratification of desires or enforce restraint (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine are generally more restrained cultures, shaped by years of economic hardship and political repression (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). As a result, people are less likely to prioritize leisure and self-indulgence, focusing instead on survival and long-term security (Hofstede, 2001).

Portugal, while also somewhat restrained due to its conservative Catholic roots, shows more indulgent tendencies, particularly in its emphasis on enjoying life, socializing, and celebrating cultural traditions (World Bank, 2020d). Portuguese people place a high value on leisure, family time, and cultural festivals, though this indulgence is often balanced with a strong work ethic (Hofstede, 2001).

## 3.3 Conclusion of Cross-Cultural Comparison

The historical experiences of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Portugal have deeply influenced their cultural orientations. The shared Soviet past of Eastern Europe has resulted in a collectivist, hierarchical, and uncertainty-averse culture (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b), while Portugal's distinct history of maritime exploration, colonialism, and political revolution has led to a more individualistic, yet traditional society (World Bank, 2020d). Despite some shared preferences for stability and restraint, significant differences in individualism, masculinity, and indulgence point to potential cultural challenges for Eastern European migrants adapting to Portuguese life (Hofstede, 2001). This cross-cultural comparison will serve as a foundation for understanding the adaptation processes and experiences of these migrants in the subsequent sections of this study.

# 4. Methodology

## 4.1. The Cultural Standards Method

The Cultural Standards Method is an essential tool for examining cross-cultural interactions, especially between two distinct cultural groups. This method differs from other models like Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, which categorize cultural traits across many nations. The Cultural Standards Method focuses on the nuanced, qualitative experiences that arise when two cultures interact directly (Thomas, 1996, as cited in Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). It was chosen for this thesis to analyze the cultural interactions between Eastern European migrants (Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians) and Portuguese people.

Given the shared history and cultural ties between Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, they are treated as a single cultural group in this study (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b). Research shows that these three nations exhibit similar results in Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions due to their common experiences under Soviet rule (Hofstede, 2001). As such, this methodology will specifically compare the cultural standards of Portuguese society from the perspective of Eastern European migrants.

This method is particularly suitable for identifying subtle cultural differences, which may not be captured through quantitative approaches like Hofstede's. The Cultural Standards Method focuses on qualitative data collection, identifying "critical incidents" where cultural misunderstandings or differences become evident (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 4.1.1. Introducing the Cultural Standards Method

The Cultural Standards Method, developed by Alexander Thomas in 1993, is based on the theories of Piaget (1962, 1976) and Boesch (1980). This method aims to identify and analyze cultural standards, which Thomas defines as:

"Cultural standards combine all forms of perception, thinking, judgment, and behavior which people sharing a common cultural background rate as normal, self-evident, typical and binding for themselves and for others" (Thomas, 1993, as cited in Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002, p. 3-4).

These standards guide behavior and interpretations of social interactions but are often unconscious to the individuals within the same cultural group. They become apparent when

people from different cultural backgrounds engage with one another, particularly when critical incidents occur—moments of cultural misunderstanding or misalignment (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

For this thesis, the Cultural Standards Method will compare the experiences of Eastern European migrants in Portugal, identifying the key areas where cultural standards diverge or align. The method is highly contextual, focusing only on the two cultures being compared (in this case, Eastern European and Portuguese). The findings from this method cannot be generalized to other cultural comparisons (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

## 4.2. Cultural Standards Research Methodology

The research process for the Cultural Standards Method follows a structured approach involving narrative interviews, data analysis, and group feedback (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). The goal is to uncover critical incidents that reveal deeper cultural standards and help define the differences between Eastern European and Portuguese cultural behaviors. The methodology can be broken down into three primary steps:

Narrative Interviews

Analysis and Categorization

Group Discussion and Feedback

This process ensures that the cultural standards identified are based on real-life experiences and are not biased by preconceived notions or stereotypes (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 4.2.1. Narrative Interview

The first step involves conducting narrative interviews, which are used to gather detailed accounts of cultural experiences (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). This type of interview allows participants to recount their interactions freely, focusing on critical incidents where cultural differences became particularly noticeable. By avoiding a rigid question-and-answer format, narrative interviews provide a more in-depth and organic view of cross-cultural experiences (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

For this research, 15 interviews will be conducted: 5 with Russians, 5 with Belarusians, and 5 with Ukrainians, all of whom have lived in Portugal for at least one year. These interviews will focus on their day-to-day experiences in Portuguese society, including their interactions in the

workplace, social settings, and public services. Each participant will be asked to describe specific incidents that illustrate cultural misunderstandings, challenges, or adjustments (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

The narrative interview process includes five stages (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002, p. 7):

**Explanatory Stage:** Establish a comfortable environment to encourage detailed storytelling.

**Introductory Stage:** Explain the purpose of the interview and set expectations without influencing the respondent's narrative.

**Narrative Stage:** The respondent recounts their experiences without interruption. The interviewer listens actively, allowing the respondent to control the flow of information.

**Investigative Stage:** After the initial narrative, the interviewer may ask follow-up questions to clarify or expand on certain points.

**Assessment Stage:** The interview is concluded, and both the respondent and interviewer reflect on the stories shared, identifying key themes.

### 4.2.2. Categorization

After the narrative interviews are completed, the next step is to analyze and categorize the critical incidents mentioned by participants. This involves transcribing the interviews and conducting a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) to identify recurring themes or cultural behaviors (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). The critical incidents that are repeatedly mentioned will be grouped into categories representing different aspects of cultural standards, such as communication styles, attitudes toward hierarchy, or approaches to time management.

The goal is to create preliminary cultural standards based on the most frequently mentioned themes (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). Incidents that are less common or seem specific to individual experiences may be excluded to ensure that the final standards are representative of broader cultural patterns.

### 4.2.3. Group Discussion and Feedback

The final step involves presenting the preliminary cultural standards to the interviewees and other cultural experts for feedback (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). This stage is crucial to ensure that the identified standards are accurate and reflect broader cultural trends rather than individual experiences. By engaging in group discussions and seeking feedback from cultural experts, the research ensures that any potential biases or misconceptions are addressed (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

The feedback from both the interviewees and external experts will be analyzed, and the final cultural standards will be revised accordingly (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). This process guarantees that the results are valid and provide a clear picture of the cultural differences between Eastern European migrants and Portuguese society.

## 4.3. Interview Questions for the Research

To gather relevant data from the 15 interviewees (5 Russians, 5 Belarusians, and 5 Ukrainians), the interview questions will be designed to focus on their personal experiences in Portugal, particularly in areas where cultural differences may have led to critical incidents (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). The questions will cover a range of topics, including social interactions, work experiences, and public services. Below are some sample interview questions:

**Background Information:**

How long have you lived in Portugal?

What was your initial impression of Portuguese culture when you arrived?

**Social Interactions:**

Can you describe a situation where you experienced a cultural misunderstanding with Portuguese people? How did you handle it?

How do you find the social etiquette in Portugal compared to your home country?

**Workplace Culture:**

Have you noticed any differences in workplace communication or hierarchy in Portugal compared to your home country?

Can you recall an incident where the cultural differences in the workplace caused confusion or conflict?

**Public Services:**

What has your experience been like with Portuguese bureaucracy or public services?

Can you share an experience where cultural differences in dealing with public services became apparent?

**Language and Communication:**

How has the language barrier (if any) affected your integration into Portuguese society?

Can you describe an incident where communication styles led to a misunderstanding or conflict?

**Adapting to Portuguese Culture:**

How have you adapted to the cultural differences in Portugal? What aspects were easiest or hardest to adjust to?

What advice would you give to someone from your home country moving to Portugal?

# 5. Results from the Empirical Research

## 5.1. Overview of the Research

### 5.1.1. Sample Group

The goal of this research is to gather cross-cultural experiences and critical incidents between Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian migrants in Portugal, in order to understand Portuguese cultural standards from their perspectives. The selected sample group consists of individuals from these three countries who have lived in Portugal for at least a year.

The sample group comprises 15 people—5 from Russia, 5 from Belarus, and 5 from Ukraine. There are 7 men and 8 women in the group, with ages ranging between 28 and 40 years old, and the average age of the group being 34.6 years. The length of their stay in Portugal varies, with the shortest being 1 year and the longest 5 years. Regarding Portuguese language proficiency, 3 people are fluent, 5 have an intermediate conversational level, 5 are at a basic level or are still learning, and 2 do not speak Portuguese.

The following charts summarize the staying length of the sample group and their age distribution:

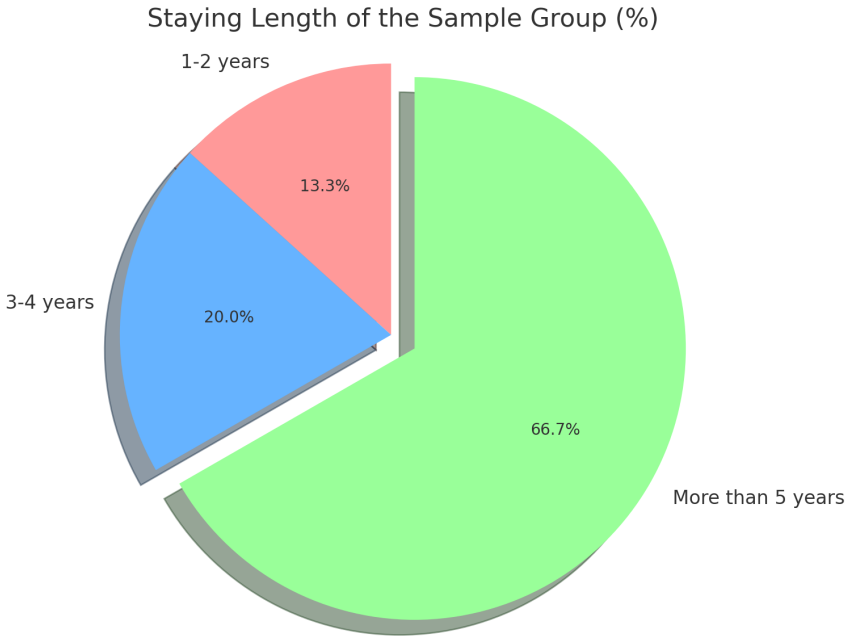


**Figure 2 – Staying Length of the Sample Group (%)**

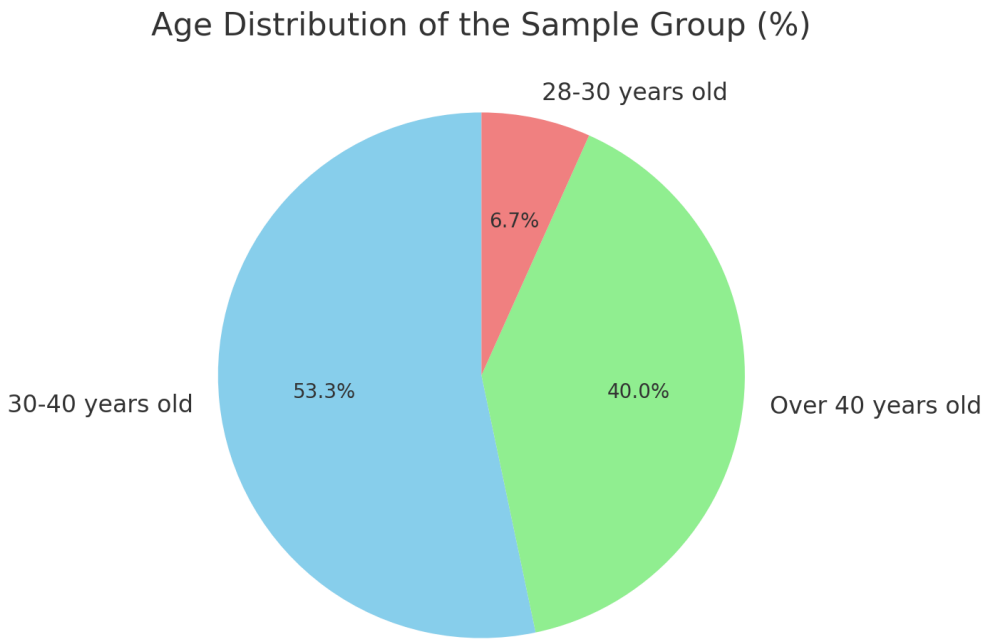


**Figure 3 – Age Distribution of the Sample Group (%)**

In terms of education, 9 participants hold university degrees and 6 have completed secondary education. Most of the participants reside in Lisbon (9 people), followed by 3 in Porto, 2 in Coimbra, and 1 in Braga. The sample group includes people with diverse professions: 6 are employed by companies, 5 are self-employed or business owners, and 4 are students.

The following table provides detailed information about the interviewees, including their nationality, gender, age, education level, profession, length of stay in Portugal, and Portuguese language proficiency:

**Table 1 - Overview of the Sample Group**

| Nr | Country | Gender | Age | Education | Profession | Stay in Portugal (Years) | Portuguese Knowledge | District of Residence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Russia | F | 32 | University | PhD Student | 5 | Moderate | Lisbon |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | Ukraine | F | 35 | High School | Freelancer | 1.9 | Poor | Lisbon |
| 3 | Russia | F | 36 | University | Consultant | 2.5 | Fluent | Lisbon |
| 4 | Belarus | F | 35 | University | Freelance Artist | 1.3 | Basic | Porto |
| 5 | Belarus | F | 35 | University | Marketing Manager | 2.5 | Basic | Porto |
| 6 | Russia | M | 38 | University | IT Consultant | 2.5 | Basic | Lisbon |
| 7 | Russia | M | 32 | University | Freelancer | 2 | None | Lisbon |
| 8 | Belarus | F | 35 | University | Project Manager | 2.5 | Moderate | Coimbra |
| 9 | Belarus | M | 40 | University | Business Owner | 3 | Fluent | Coimbra |
| 10 | Belarus | M | 37 | High School | Self-employed | 2.5 | Intermediate | Lisbon |
| 11 | Ukraine | F | 30 | High School | Retail Worker | 2 | Intermediate | Porto |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | Ukraine | M | 37 | High School | Self-employed | 2.5 | Intermediate | Lisbon |
| 13 | Ukraine | F | 34 | University | Consultant | 3 | Moderate | Lisbon |
| 14 | Russia | M | 28 | University | Freelancer | 2 | Basic | Lisbon |
| 15 | Belarus | F | 33 | High School | Business Owner | 5 | Fluent | Braga |

### 5.1.2. Interview

The sample group was formed by reaching out to individuals through personal contacts, friends, and friends of friends within the Russian-speaking community in Portugal. Given the large size of this community, about 20 people were initially approached, and 15 agreed to participate in the interview process. The selection criteria required participants to be either from Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus, and to have lived in Portugal for at least one year.

Out of the 15 interviews conducted, 6 were carried out in person, while the remaining 9 were conducted online via platforms such as Zoom or Telegram, depending on the participants' preference. The interviews were conducted in Russian to ensure the participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and experiences. The interview lengths varied, with the longest session lasting about an hour and the shortest around 20 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the consent and full awareness of the participants, ensuring confidentiality and transparency throughout the process.

## 5.2. Analysis of Results

In this section, the identified Cultural Standards are presented, reflecting the key cultural aspects encountered by Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian migrants during their adaptation to life in Portugal. The analysis of interviews revealed a wide variety of cultural experiences and adjustments. Despite originating from countries with similar cultural traits, the

interviewees highlighted several significant differences in Portuguese culture, particularly in areas such as the pace of life, work ethic, relationships, and bureaucratic processes. These narratives were organized into specific themes that capture the most common cultural standards identified by the participants, offering a nuanced understanding of the cross-cultural adjustment process (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

The table below summarizes the Cultural Standards and the frequency with which each one was mentioned by the interviewees:

**Table 2 - Overview of the Cultural Standards and the frequency**

| Cultural Standard | Frequency (out of 15) |
|---|---|
| Slow life rhythm | 15/15 |
| Punctuality | 14/15 |
| Bureaucratic inefficiency | 15/15 |
| Relaxed work ethic | 10/15 |
| Importance of family/community | 8/15 |
| Break habits | 7/15 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Food culture | 5/15 |
| Social gatherings/hospitality | 8/15 |
| Privacy vs. openness | 6/15 |
| Generalization of identity | 12/15 |

### 5.2.1. Slow Life Rhythm

Rhythm defines how individuals structure their daily routines and interactions, and it strongly influences how both personal and professional matters unfold. When individuals from cultures where life moves quickly relocate to a place like Portugal, where the pace is notably slower, they often experience difficulty in adjusting. This theme of a slower life rhythm was consistently mentioned throughout the interviews, with all 15 interviewees acknowledging this cultural difference. The most prominent topics related to this slower pace included delays in bureaucracy, public services, and everyday interactions.

All interviewees pointed out that life in Portugal operates at a much slower pace compared to their home countries. Interviewee number two emphasized the slower pace of public services: "In my home country, things happen much faster—people are used to moving quickly. Here in Portugal, everything is slow, from getting documents to waiting for appointments. It takes time to adjust to this rhythm."

Similarly, Interviewee number three highlighted how this slow pace also applies to daily routines, saying: "Everything here takes time. From something as simple as standing in line at the grocery store to getting anything official done, there’s no rush. It’s frustrating when you’re used to things moving faster." This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee number five, who found that the relaxed pace was initially appealing but soon became a source of frustration:

"I used to think that the slow pace was a blessing—less stress, more time to enjoy life. But over time, it became clear that it also means inefficiency, especially when it comes to getting things done."

The slower rhythm of public services and businesses in particular was a major adjustment for the interviewees. Interviewee number eight noted: "Whether you're at the bank, the post office, or dealing with any government institution, things move at a snail's pace. It's just how it is here." This slow pace was not only confined to official institutions but was a general feature of life in Portugal.

The perception of time and punctuality was another recurring theme. In contrast to their home countries, where punctuality is valued and schedules are adhered to strictly, the interviewees noticed that in Portugal, people are more relaxed about time. Interviewee number seven remarked: "People here don't feel the same urgency about being on time. You arrange a meeting, and they show up half an hour late—it's just how things work." Interviewee number eight found it particularly challenging to adapt: "In my home country, you'd never show up late to a meeting without a good reason. Here, it's normal, and no one seems to mind. It took me a while to stop stressing about it."

The relaxed work ethic in Portugal was also consistently mentioned by all 15 interviewees as part of the slower life rhythm. The slower pace was not only felt in public services but also in professional environments, where deadlines were approached more casually and long breaks were common. While some interviewees appreciated this shift towards a better work-life balance, many found it challenging to reconcile with their own more fast-paced, results-driven work culture.

Overall, the slower rhythm of life in Portugal, both personally and professionally, was one of the most frequently mentioned cultural differences in the interviews. Although some interviewees eventually adjusted to it, many still found it challenging, particularly in environments where efficiency and speed were expected.

### 5.2.2. Punctuality

Punctuality plays a significant role in how time is managed and respected within different cultures. In many Eastern European countries, including Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, being on time is often seen as a sign of respect and professionalism. However, 14 out

of 15 interviewees consistently noted that in Portugal, a more relaxed attitude towards punctuality is prevalent, which caused initial frustration and confusion. All participants, at some point, remarked on this cultural difference, highlighting how challenging it was to adapt to a society where being late is often accepted or even expected.

Interviewee number three expressed surprise at the lax approach to punctuality: "In my home country, if you say you'll meet at 3:00, people arrive at 2:50 to be early. Here, it's normal to show up 20 or 30 minutes late without even an apology. It's not considered rude—it's just part of the culture." This attitude towards time was something that almost all interviewees pointed out as a significant cultural difference that required adjustment.

Interviewee number six added to this by describing experiences with both social and professional meetings: "When I first started working with Portuguese clients, I would get frustrated when they were late to meetings. In my home country, being late is seen as disrespectful, especially in business. Here, it's just a different attitude. People don't see time in the same rigid way." Over time, Interviewee number six, like others, learned to accept this cultural norm, though admitted it was difficult to understand initially.

Interviewee number eight found it particularly challenging to reconcile with the local concept of punctuality. They remarked: "In my home country, everything runs on time. Whether it's work or meeting friends, people make an effort to be punctual. In Portugal, time seems flexible, and it's not unusual for people to be late by 10, 20, or even 30 minutes. It really took me a while to adjust to that mindset." This adjustment process was echoed by several other interviewees who had previously been accustomed to more structured and timely environments.

The relaxed approach to punctuality in Portugal also extended into daily social interactions. Interviewee number five shared an experience: "I arranged to meet with a friend at 7:00 pm, and she didn't arrive until almost 7:45. I was about to leave when she casually strolled in, saying, 'Oh, I lost track of time.' In my home country, you would at least send a message to explain why you're late. But here, no one seems to worry about it." This experience reflects a common sentiment among the interviewees—while lateness is not malicious or disrespectful, it is simply part of the cultural fabric.

Several interviewees also discussed how this difference in punctuality manifested in the workplace. Interviewee number seven remarked on how this relaxed attitude toward

punctuality sometimes even extended to work-related meetings: "In my home country, you don’t dare show up late for a meeting with your boss or clients. In Portugal, I’ve had colleagues casually stroll in late, and it’s not a big deal. At first, it shocked me. Now, I just take it as part of the work culture."

Interviewee number two expressed similar frustrations, noting: "When I was new to Portugal, I used to get anxious waiting for people who were late, especially in professional settings. Over time, I realized that people here don’t see lateness the same way. There’s less pressure to be perfectly on time, and while it bothered me at first, I’ve learned to relax about it."

While many interviewees initially struggled with this aspect of Portuguese culture, several eventually adapted to the more flexible approach to punctuality. Some, like Interviewee number eight, found it liberating: "It’s funny, but now I’m not always in a rush to be early. I’ve learned to accept that if I show up 10 minutes late, no one will care. It’s a more relaxed way of living."

Overall, the difference in attitudes toward punctuality was one of the most commonly mentioned aspects of cultural adjustment. Although it caused some frustration and confusion at first, most interviewees eventually adapted to Portugal’s more relaxed approach to time, recognizing it as a fundamental difference in lifestyle.

### 5.2.3. Bureaucratic Inefficiency

One of the most frequently cited frustrations by interviewees was the inefficiency and complexity of the bureaucratic system in Portugal. Bureaucratic inefficiency in Portugal was a major point of frustration for 15 out of 15 interviewees. Whether dealing with setting up businesses, registering for services, or interacting with government agencies, all participants expressed that the slow and cumbersome nature of Portugal's bureaucracy created significant challenges. These inefficiencies were particularly stark in contrast to their home countries, where systems tend to be more streamlined, predictable, and faster.

Interviewee number six shared frustrations when trying to open a small business in Portugal: "When I went to register my business, it felt like they were throwing obstacles in my way. The process took months, and every time I thought I had completed one step, they would tell me something else was needed. It was incredibly frustrating. In my home country, it might

be bureaucratic, but at least it moves faster. Here, they don't seem to be in any hurry, and they don't care that you're stuck waiting." This sentiment of endless delays and unclear procedures was a recurring theme across the interviews.

For many interviewees, the slow pace of bureaucracy in Portugal felt like a significant barrier to settling into the country. Interviewee number eight described their experience with the immigration office (SEF), which handles residence permits: "It was a nightmare. The first time I went to SEF, I was there for hours, only to be told I didn't have the right documents. Then, when I came back with the correct paperwork, they said the rules had changed, and I would have to apply again. It took me months just to get an appointment, and when I finally did, the whole process took even longer than expected. It feels like there's no consistency, and no one seems to care about how much time you waste."

Similarly, Interviewee number three recounted struggles with Portuguese bureaucracy when applying for a residence permit: "In my home country, if you submit the correct documents, things usually get done on time or earlier. Here, it's like they enjoy making you wait. I had to apply for a residence permit, and they kept sending me back to get more papers. Even when I had everything, they said I had to wait because they were behind schedule. It was exhausting." Interviewee number three further explained that the inefficiency of the system seemed to be embedded in the culture: "Nobody is in a rush. Even when you're clearly stressed about delays, they look at you like you're the crazy one for wanting it done quickly."

Another point of frustration was the lack of clear communication from government offices. Many interviewees noted that it was difficult to get accurate information about procedures, and in some cases, they felt misled by the advice given by officials. Interviewee number five recalled an experience dealing with public services in Portugal: "You call one office, and they tell you one thing, and then you go in person, and they tell you something completely different. It's maddening. I've had situations where they told me I needed certain documents, only to show up with them and be told they weren't necessary after all. It's like nobody knows what they're doing."

Interviewee number seven shared frustration with the inefficiency of the Portuguese system, contrasting it with experiences in their home country: "In my home country, I know people complain about bureaucracy, but at least there's some logic to it. Here, it feels like you're going in circles. I once had to wait over a month just to get an appointment at SEF, and when

I finally went, they made me wait another two weeks for a follow-up. There's no sense of urgency, and you can tell that they don't care if you're stuck in limbo." Interviewee number seven also mentioned how this inefficiency impacts daily life, from registering for services to dealing with utilities: "Everything takes longer than it should. Even setting up utilities like gas and electricity was a painful process. You would think it would be simple, but there are always complications."

Interviewee number two echoed these sentiments, describing their experience trying to set up essential services after moving to Portugal: "It took me weeks to set up a bank account, and even longer to get utilities connected. Every time I called, they would pass me to someone else, and it felt like no one knew what was happening. In my home country, things might not always be smooth, but at least when you're told something will be done, it usually gets done within the timeframe. Here, you just wait and hope." The inefficiency they encountered was a major source of stress, especially when dealing with time-sensitive matters.

Language barriers further complicated interactions with the bureaucracy for some interviewees. Although many Portuguese officials speak English, interviewees recounted instances where a lack of proficiency in Portuguese added to the delays. Interviewee number six explained: "When I first arrived, my Portuguese wasn't great, and I often felt like that was held against me. If you don't speak the language fluently, they seem to take even longer with you. It's almost like an excuse for why things are taking so much time. In some offices, they wouldn't even try to help me in English, which just added to the frustration."

The slow pace of bureaucratic processes also extended to daily activities, such as obtaining necessary documents, paying taxes, or interacting with the healthcare system. Interviewee number three recounted a particularly frustrating encounter when dealing with healthcare: "I had to renew my health card, and it took me over six months to do it. I kept going back and forth between different offices, and every time, they told me something different. The system feels so disjointed. You never know where to go or who to talk to. And nobody seems to care that you're waiting for essential services."

Interviewee number eight described the complexity of navigating the tax system: "Paying taxes in Portugal feels like it's designed to be difficult. You go to one office, and they tell you to submit everything online. Then, when you try to do it online, the system crashes, or you get an error message, and you end up going back to the office anyway. It's such a waste of

time." Interviewee number eight also noted that even when things are submitted correctly, there are often long delays in processing: "I submitted my tax forms three months ago, and I'm still waiting for a response. Every time I check, they tell me it's being processed. In my home country, this would have been done in a few days."

In addition to the slow pace and lack of clarity, many interviewees pointed out the need for a more modern and digitized system in Portugal. Interviewee number five expressed frustration at how outdated the system felt: "Everything is still done with paper and in person. In my home country, so much of this can be done online. It feels like Portugal is behind in terms of technology, which only adds to the inefficiency." This sentiment was shared by Interviewee number seven, who noted: "I was surprised by how much paperwork there still is. In my home country, we have our bureaucratic issues, but at least much of it can be done digitally now. In Portugal, it feels like they're still stuck in the past."

In sum, bureaucratic inefficiency emerged as one of the most significant challenges for the interviewees in adapting to life in Portugal. The slow processes, lack of clear communication, and outdated systems were all sources of frustration. While some interviewees eventually learned to navigate the system more effectively, most continued to find it an obstacle to fully integrating into Portuguese society.

### 5.2.4. Relaxed Work Ethic and Professional Environment

A recurring theme across the interviews was the perception of a more relaxed work ethic and professional environment in Portugal, especially when compared to the participants' home countries, where work tends to be more fast-paced and results-oriented. The relaxed work ethic in Portugal was mentioned by 10 out of 15 interviewees. Many expressed both relief and frustration at the differences, acknowledging the benefits of a more balanced lifestyle while also struggling to adapt to the slower pace of work and the less competitive professional culture.

Several participants noted that while the slower pace could be refreshing, it also often led to inefficiency and a lack of productivity. Interviewee number three captured this sentiment: "In my home country, everything moves fast. People are always working hard to get things done. Here, it's different. At work, there's no rush. People take long breaks, and sometimes it feels like no one cares about getting things done on time. It was hard for me to adjust to that." This contrast in work ethic was challenging for many interviewees, especially those coming from environments where deadlines and efficiency were highly prioritized.

Interviewee number six shared a similar experience, noting that "In my home country, especially in business, you're always pushing to be ahead, to be more efficient. Here, in Portugal, people seem content with just doing the minimum. There's no real pressure to excel. It's like they do their job, go home, and don't think about work again until the next day." This laid-back approach to work was, for some, a welcome change, but for others, it led to feelings of frustration, particularly in professional settings where they felt more urgency was needed.

Several interviewees also discussed how this relaxed approach to work extended to the way people in Portugal manage their time during the workday. Interviewee number eight described their first experience working in a Portuguese company: "I was surprised by how long lunch breaks were. People would go out for coffee and chat for what felt like hours. In my home country, we're used to shorter breaks and getting back to work quickly. Here, there's no rush." Interviewee number eight's experience reflects the broader cultural difference in how work-life balance is maintained in Portugal. This more leisurely pace during the workday can promote a healthier work-life balance, but it can also be perceived as a lack of urgency or productivity.

Interviewee number seven pointed out the contrast in attitudes toward work and deadlines: "In my home country, if you're late or don't meet a deadline, it's a big deal. Here, it's like nobody really cares. I've seen people miss deadlines, and instead of rushing to fix it, they just shrug and say 'we'll do it tomorrow.' It's frustrating if you're used to a more fast-paced work culture." This lack of urgency in meeting deadlines or responding to work demands was a common frustration among the interviewees.

However, not all interviewees viewed this relaxed work ethic negatively. Some appreciated the opportunity to escape from the pressure and competition they experienced in their home countries. Interviewee number five reflected on how the Portuguese work environment allowed them to focus on personal well-being: "In my home country, it's all about competition. You always have to be better, faster, smarter. Here, people work to live, not live to work. It's refreshing to not feel that constant pressure to perform at your best all the time." This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee number two, who added: "I've learned to enjoy the slower pace. It gives me time to actually enjoy life outside of work, which is something I didn't really experience back home."

Despite the differences in pace and urgency, many interviewees recognized that the more relaxed work ethic in Portugal was closely tied to a cultural value of prioritizing personal time, relationships, and well-being over professional achievement. Interviewee number six summed it up: "In my home country, your career is everything. Here, people value their free time more. It's not that they don't care about their jobs, but they don't let work consume their lives." This cultural difference highlights a more holistic approach to life in Portugal, where work is seen as just one aspect of a person's overall well-being, rather than the defining factor of success.

In conclusion, the relaxed work ethic and professional environment in Portugal presented both challenges and opportunities for the interviewees. While some struggled to adjust to the slower pace and perceived lack of productivity, others found it refreshing and beneficial for their personal lives. The key takeaway is that the Portuguese work environment reflects a broader cultural value of prioritizing work-life balance and personal well-being over constant professional pressure and competition.

### 5.2.5. Importance of Family and Community

Another central theme that emerged from the interviews was the strong emphasis on family and community in Portuguese culture. The importance of family and community in Portuguese culture was noted by 8 out of 15 interviewees. Relationships, both familial and communal, played a more prominent role in Portugal than in their home countries. This cultural standard was appreciated by many interviewees, as it fostered a sense of belonging and support, even though it sometimes clashed with their own expectations about privacy and individuality.

Interviewee number three observed the centrality of family gatherings and how Portuguese people make time for their loved ones: "One thing I noticed is how often families get together here. It's not just for holidays, but for regular meals and weekends. It's very different from my home country, where people are often too busy with work to see their family that often. Here, family seems to come first, no matter what." This strong emphasis on family ties was a marked difference for many interviewees, who were used to a more individualistic approach in their home countries.

Similarly, Interviewee number five described their surprise at how integrated family life is with social life in Portugal: "In my home country, we keep things separate. You have your family life and your social life. Here, it's all mixed together. People invite their family

and friends to the same events, and it's normal to see parents, kids, and friends all together at parties or dinners. It was a bit strange at first, but I've come to appreciate how close everyone is." This blending of family and social circles was a significant cultural adjustment for some interviewees but was generally seen in a positive light.

The importance of community was also highlighted by several interviewees, who noted that Portuguese people are generally warm and welcoming, not just within their families, but also within their neighborhoods and social circles. Interviewee number eight described how their neighbors in Portugal made them feel part of the community: "When I first moved here, I didn't expect my neighbors to be so friendly. In my home country, we tend to keep to ourselves, but here, everyone is always ready to help. They invited me to their homes, offered to help with anything I needed, and made me feel like I was part of their community." This sense of belonging was something many interviewees found comforting and valuable, particularly when they were far from their own families.

Interviewee number two shared a similar experience: "When we lived with a Portuguese family for a few months, they treated us like their own. It wasn't just about sharing a space; they genuinely cared about us and included us in their family events. It was heartwarming to see how strong the sense of community is here." This deep connection between individuals and their community, even extending to those from outside, was a notable difference from the more individualistic cultures many interviewees were used to.

Interviewee number seven pointed out that while this close-knit community was comforting, it could sometimes feel overwhelming: "The sense of community here is strong, which is great, but sometimes it feels like there's no privacy. Everyone knows everyone's business, and they're not afraid to ask personal questions. In my home country, people are more reserved. Here, your neighbors will ask you about your life, your job, even your personal relationships. It took some getting used to." Despite this initial discomfort, Interviewee number seven acknowledged that this closeness fostered a sense of safety and support.

Family values in Portugal also extend to a strong sense of respect for elders, which several interviewees noted. Interviewee number two commented: "I was surprised by how much respect people here show for their parents and grandparents. In my home country, we respect our elders too, but here it's on another level. People make time to visit their parents regularly, and family decisions are often made together, with input from everyone, including

the older generations." This respect for family hierarchy and the involvement of elders in family life was something that stood out to many interviewees.

In terms of raising children, interviewees also noticed how family-centric Portuguese culture is. Interviewee number eight explained: "Children are the center of family life here. In my home country, parents are often too busy with work to spend a lot of time with their kids, but here, you see families spending time together all the time. It's clear that family is the most important thing." This observation was echoed by several others, who noted that children are often included in all family activities and are seen as a central part of the family's social life.

In conclusion, the importance of family and community in Portugal was one of the most positively perceived cultural differences by the interviewees. While it took some time for them to adjust to the more integrated and communal approach to relationships, most found it to be a source of comfort and connection. The strong emphasis on family ties, the welcoming nature of communities, and the respect for elders were all aspects of Portuguese culture that the interviewees appreciated and felt enriched their experience living in the country.

### 5.2.6. Break Habits

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was the distinct approach to breaks and leisure during the workday, which many interviewees noted as being more relaxed and frequent in Portugal compared to their home countries. A more relaxed approach to taking breaks during the workday was observed by 7 out of 15 interviewees. This difference in break habits, particularly during the workday, was seen by several participants as both a positive and frustrating aspect of Portuguese culture.

Interviewee number three shared her initial surprise at the number and length of breaks during the workday: "In my home country, we have quick breaks—just a few minutes to grab a coffee or eat lunch. But in Portugal, people take their time. Lunch breaks last two hours sometimes, and people sit at cafés just chatting. At first, I thought they weren't serious about work, but now I see it's more about enjoying the moment."

Similarly, Interviewee number eight described how these longer breaks made the workday feel less pressured but also less productive: "I've gotten used to the slower pace, but it was strange at first. People go for coffee, sit for an hour, and then come back to work. There's

less pressure, which is nice, but I feel like we could get more done if we worked without so many breaks."

Interviewee number seven found the relaxed approach to breaks both surprising and refreshing: "Back in my home country, you don't really have time to step away during work hours. Here, people actually take breaks to rest, and it's part of the culture. I used to feel guilty for taking a break, but now I understand it's normal here."

Overall, the relaxed approach to breaks reflects a broader cultural emphasis on enjoying life and taking time to rest. While it initially clashed with the faster, more productivity-oriented cultures of the interviewees, many came to appreciate the value of these moments of rest and reflection throughout the workday.

### 5.2.7. Food Culture

Food culture is another theme that frequently emerged from the interviews, as many participants noted differences in how meals are structured and consumed in Portugal compared to their home countries. Food culture, including the timing and nature of meals, was mentioned by 5 out of 15 interviewees. The way people eat, the timing of meals, and the types of food available all contributed to the cultural adaptation process for the interviewees.

One of the most striking differences was the late timing of meals in Portugal. Interviewee number two observed: "In my home country, we eat dinner early, around 6 or 7 pm. But here, it's normal to have dinner at 9 or even 10 pm. At first, it was hard to get used to, but now I understand it's part of the relaxed lifestyle here."

The concept of long, leisurely meals was another noticeable contrast. Interviewee number five explained: "Back home, meals are more functional—eat quickly and move on with your day. In Portugal, meals are social events. People sit for hours, talking and eating slowly. It's a completely different experience."

Additionally, the variety and flavor of Portuguese food were points of discussion. Interviewee number six noted the difference in flavor profiles: "Portuguese food is much less spicy or flavored compared to dishes from my home country. There's more seafood here, and while it's fresh and tasty, it took some time to adjust to the different flavors."

The importance of sharing meals was also emphasized by some interviewees. Interviewee number eight found that family gatherings often revolved around shared meals: "In my home country, we have family dinners, but here it feels like food brings people together in a deeper way. Every family event revolves around a big meal, and it's always a celebration, whether it's a weekend lunch or a holiday dinner."

This emphasis on social meals reflects the communal aspect of Portuguese culture, where food plays a significant role in building relationships and maintaining family ties. While the late meal times and leisurely dining habits were initially challenging for many interviewees, they ultimately saw the social value in these practices.

### 5.2.8. Social Gatherings and Hospitality

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the importance of social gatherings and the welcoming nature of Portuguese hospitality. The warmth and hospitality experienced in Portuguese social gatherings were highlighted by 8 out of 15 interviewees. Many participants described their experiences with the strong sense of community and the warmth of their Portuguese friends and neighbors.

Interviewee number two recounted how their Portuguese neighbors welcomed them into their social circle: "When I first moved here, I didn't expect my neighbors to be so friendly. In my home country, we keep to ourselves, but here, everyone is always ready to help. They invited me to their homes, and we became friends very quickly. It was a pleasant surprise."

Similarly, Interviewee number five described how social gatherings often included both family and friends, something they weren't used to in their home country: "Back home, we keep our family life and social life separate. Here, they're mixed together. People invite their family and friends to the same gatherings, and it's normal to have everyone together at the table. It felt strange at first, but now I see it's just part of the culture."

Interviewee number three also emphasized the role of hospitality in Portuguese culture: "Whenever I visit a Portuguese friend's house, they make sure I'm fed, comfortable, and part of the group. It's not just politeness—it's genuine hospitality. They go out of their way to make you feel like part of the family."

These experiences of warmth and inclusion highlight a core aspect of Portuguese culture: the value placed on relationships and community. For many interviewees, the welcoming nature of their Portuguese friends and neighbors helped them feel more integrated into the local culture, even if the level of openness initially felt overwhelming.

### 5.2.9. Privacy vs. Openness

Another interesting cultural contrast that surfaced in the interviews was the difference in attitudes toward privacy and openness. Privacy versus openness was mentioned by 6 out of 15 interviewees. Many participants noted that Portuguese people are generally more open about their personal lives and more willing to share details about their families and relationships than they were accustomed to in their home countries.

Interviewee number seven commented on how this openness sometimes felt intrusive: "In my home country, people are more reserved. You don't ask personal questions unless you're very close with someone. But here, my neighbors ask me about my family, my work, even my love life. It was a bit uncomfortable at first, but I've learned that it's just part of their friendliness."

Interviewee number eight shared a similar experience: "At work, people talk openly about their personal lives, which isn't something I'm used to. In my home country, we tend to keep things more private, especially in the workplace. But here, people chat about everything, and it helps build relationships."

This contrast between privacy and openness reflects broader cultural differences between more reserved Eastern European cultures and the more social, open nature of Portuguese society. While it took time for some interviewees to adjust to this openness, many eventually saw it as a positive aspect of their integration into Portuguese culture.

### 5.2.10. Generalization of Eastern European Identity

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the interviews was the generalization and stereotyping of Eastern European individuals, particularly those from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The generalization and stereotyping of Eastern European identities were mentioned by 12 out of 15 interviewees. Several participants recounted instances where their national identities were misunderstood or conflated with others, and how these generalizations

sometimes shaped their experiences in Portugal. Interviewees often mentioned that people would assume they were from Russia, regardless of their actual nationality, or make broad assumptions based on stereotypes associated with the region.

Interviewee number three shared their experience with this generalization, noting: "It seems like when people hear my accent or see that I'm from Eastern Europe, they immediately assume I'm Russian. Even when I explain that I'm from a different country, they bring up stereotypes about Russians being cold or tough, which isn't true for everyone. It feels like people don't understand that Eastern Europe is made up of many different countries and cultures."

This sense of being lumped into a single identity was also echoed by Interviewee number five, who found that even when they corrected people about their nationality, the generalization persisted: "In Portugal, when people hear I'm from my home country, they often ask if that's part of Russia or Ukraine. It's frustrating because my country has its own identity and history, but people here seem to think it's all the same. I have to explain that we have our own culture, language, and traditions, but most people don't seem to know the difference."

For Ukrainian interviewees, the assumption that they were Russian was particularly difficult, especially given the recent political tensions between Russia and Ukraine. Interviewee number two recounted: "People often think I'm Russian when I tell them I'm from Ukraine. I have to constantly explain that Ukraine is not part of Russia, and that we have a different language and culture. It's uncomfortable sometimes because they don't understand the importance of this distinction, especially now with everything happening in Ukraine."

The tendency to stereotype individuals from Eastern Europe extended beyond nationality to broader cultural characteristics. Interviewee number seven mentioned how people often associate Eastern Europeans with being harsh or emotionless: "There's this idea that Russians, and by extension people from Eastern Europe, are tough, unfriendly, or even cold. I've had people tell me that I don't fit the 'Russian stereotype' because I'm more outgoing. It's strange because they expect me to act a certain way based on where I'm from."

This stereotyping was not always limited to negative traits. Interviewee number eight observed that people often assume that Eastern Europeans, particularly women, are strong or resilient: "I've had people tell me that they expect Eastern European women to be very strong and independent, like we've had to survive difficult conditions all the time. While it's true that

many of us are resilient, it’s still a stereotype that doesn’t capture the full picture of who we are as individuals."

Despite the frustrations that came with these generalizations, several interviewees expressed that, over time, they learned to navigate these misunderstandings by educating people about their cultures. Interviewee number six explained how they handled these situations: "At first, it was frustrating to always have to correct people. But I started seeing it as an opportunity to share more about my country and its culture. Now, when someone assumes something wrong about where I’m from, I try to explain the reality and break down those stereotypes. It’s a slow process, but I think it helps."

Overall, the generalization of Eastern European identities was a common experience for the interviewees, reflecting the lack of nuanced understanding about the region in Portugal. While this sometimes led to uncomfortable interactions, many participants also saw it as an opportunity to educate others and highlight the diversity within Eastern Europe. This theme underscores the importance of recognizing individual cultural identities and moving beyond stereotypes when interacting with people from different backgrounds.

## 5.3. Feedback

To validate the identified Cultural Standards, confirm their applicability, and gather constructive criticism or additional insights, an email with the preliminary Cultural Standards—essentially the findings of the empirical research—was sent to the fifteen participants who took part in the interviews. Additionally, the same email was shared with six other individuals from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus who have been living in Portugal for over a year but did not participate in the original interviews. This outreach was intended to collect external feedback and serve as an additional source of validation (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

Of the 15 contacted individuals, eight responded with feedback. None of the respondents raised objections to the identified Cultural Standards, and most found them to be well-explained and reflective of their own experiences.

Overall, the interviewees agreed with the presented Cultural Standards. One participant, Interviewee number eight, mentioned that they felt the standards accurately captured the Portuguese culture as experienced by someone from Eastern Europe. They particularly appreciated the section on "Relaxed Work Ethic," noting that it resonated strongly with their

experience in the workplace. Another interviewee, Interviewee number two, remarked that they felt the Cultural Standards were comprehensive and didn't require further adjustments. They also expressed appreciation for the analysis on "Importance of Family and Community," stating that it was a key part of their adjustment to life in Portugal.

Regarding the external feedback, two participants who had not been involved in the original interviews provided additional commentary. Both individuals largely agreed with the Cultural Standards, though they offered nuanced views on a few specific points.

One external respondent, a Ukrainian woman who has lived in Portugal for three years, provided feedback on the Cultural Standard related to Bureaucratic Inefficiency. She shared: "I agree with the description, especially about the inefficiency of public services. My experience with Finanças was very similar to what you described. I had to return multiple times with different documents, and there was always a delay. It's frustrating because in Ukraine, even though bureaucracy exists, things generally get done faster." She also highlighted that the reliance on paperwork, as described in the Technological Efficiency section, was an ongoing frustration for her.

Another external respondent, a Russian man living in Portugal for over four years, offered feedback on Punctuality and Slow Life Rhythm. He disagreed slightly with the framing of punctuality as entirely lax, explaining: "While it's true that people are more relaxed about time here compared to Russia, I've found that in professional settings, some people still value punctuality. It seems to depend on the context and the person you are dealing with." This perspective added nuance to the feedback, acknowledging that while there are cultural differences, individual behavior can vary widely.

In terms of Food Culture, one participant commented specifically on the topic of Eating Times, noting that while the later meal schedules in Portugal took time to adjust to, they eventually found it to be part of the charm of living in the country: "At first, I found it difficult to wait until 8 or 9 PM for dinner. In my home country, we eat much earlier. But now, I've grown used to the later meals and the relaxed dining culture. It's not rushed, and people really take time to enjoy their food and company."

Finally, on the topic of Technological Efficiency, another respondent reflected on how much the inefficiency of public services impacted their daily life. "Setting up a bank account, getting internet, or even dealing with utility companies took forever. The systems here are

outdated compared to what we're used to in my home country, where much of this can be done online. I know they are slowly improving things, but it was a shock at first how paper-based everything still is here." This reinforced the feedback that bureaucratic and technological inefficiencies are a common frustration among Eastern European migrants.

In summary, the feedback received from both the interviewees and external respondents supported the Cultural Standards identified through the research. While a few nuanced differences in individual experiences were highlighted, the overall consensus was that the standards effectively encapsulated the lived experiences of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians in Portugal. The feedback not only validated the findings but also provided deeper insight into how these cultural standards manifest in day-to-day life.

## 5.4. Comparison of Results with Hofstede's Dimensions

In Chapter 3, we compared Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions scores for Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Portugal. The analysis of these dimensions revealed both similarities and differences between these Eastern European countries and Portugal. After conducting interviews and identifying Cultural Standards, it becomes possible to draw further parallels and contrasts with Hofstede's model. It is important to note that the Cultural Standards identified in the interviews offer more specific insights related to the lived experiences of Eastern European migrants in Portugal, while Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions provide a broader framework for comparing countries (Hofstede, 2001).

### 5.4.1. Power Distance

In Hofstede's model, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus all score high on **Power Distance**, meaning that hierarchy and authority are highly respected, and there is a significant gap between those in power and those in lower positions. Portugal, although lower, also scores moderately high on Power Distance (Hofstede, 2001). The findings in this research reflect a contrast to this dimension, particularly in the identified Cultural Standard of Relaxed Work Ethic and Professional Environment. Many interviewees mentioned how in Portugal, the relationship between superiors and subordinates felt more relaxed and egalitarian than they were accustomed to in their home countries. For instance, Interviewee number seven noted: "In my home country, you would never be so informal with your boss. Here, people are much more friendly, and it's easier to communicate with those in higher positions." This reflects a

notable difference in how hierarchy is perceived in everyday professional interactions, which is less rigid in Portugal compared to the participants' countries of origin (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 5.4.2. Individualism vs. Collectivism

According to Hofstede's **Individualism** dimension, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are classified as more collectivist cultures, where the interests of the group often outweigh those of the individual. Portugal, by contrast, has a moderate score, indicating a mix of both individualist and collectivist tendencies (Hofstede, 2001). The Cultural Standards found in this research—particularly Importance of Family and Community—align with these findings. Many interviewees remarked on the strong familial and communal ties in Portugal, which they found to be somewhat similar to their own cultures, where family plays a central role. Interviewee number three commented: "Family is so important here, and people spend a lot of time with their loved ones, just like back home." At the same time, the blending of social and family life, where friends and family are often integrated into social events, was seen as a new cultural element for the interviewees, marking a subtle shift from the more defined separation of family and social life they were used to (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 5.4.3. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Hofstede's **Masculinity** dimension refers to how much a culture values competition, achievement, and success (masculinity), as opposed to caring for others and quality of life (femininity) (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus score higher on the masculinity scale, indicating more competitive environments, especially in professional contexts. Portugal, on the other hand, scores lower, suggesting a more feminine culture focused on quality of life and work-life balance. The Cultural Standard of Relaxed Work Ethic and Professional Environment reflects this difference clearly. Many interviewees from Eastern Europe, like Interviewee number six, noted how Portuguese people value personal time and are less focused on professional competition: "In my home country, you're always pushing to be better, faster, more efficient. Here, people seem content with doing their job and going home, without stressing about being the best." This distinction aligns with Hofstede's classification, as the interviewees found the work culture in Portugal to be more relaxed and less competitive, which was initially a challenge for many to adapt to (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 5.4.4. Uncertainty Avoidance

In terms of **Uncertainty Avoidance**, both Eastern European countries and Portugal score high, indicating that both regions prefer structure, avoid ambiguity, and adhere to established rules and processes (Hofstede, 2001). However, the identified Cultural Standard of Bureaucratic Inefficiency reveals a paradox. While both regions theoretically avoid uncertainty, the interviewees found Portugal's bureaucracy to be inefficient and unpredictable. Interviewee number two shared their frustration: "In my home country, things are bureaucratic too, but at least there's a system, and you can expect things to get done. Here, everything takes forever, and it feels like no one knows what's happening." This inconsistency between a high Uncertainty Avoidance score and the inefficiency of bureaucratic processes highlights a cultural tension where the structure exists but does not function as expected (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 5.4.5. Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation

This dimension refers to the extent to which a culture values long-term planning and perseverance versus short-term goals and traditions (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus score higher in **Long-Term Orientation**, while Portugal scores lower, reflecting a more traditional and short-term focus. However, the Cultural Standards identified in this research did not directly align with this dimension. Although some interviewees commented on how they felt that Portugal tends to focus more on the present rather than long-term goals, such observations were not prominent enough to form a distinct Cultural Standard. Interviewee number five mentioned: "In Portugal, people seem to care more about today—about enjoying life now—than worrying about the future. Back home, we're always thinking ahead." This subtle difference reflects the broader trend identified by Hofstede, though it was not central to the interviewees' experiences (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

### 5.4.6. Indulgence vs. Restraint

The final dimension, **Indulgence versus Restraint**, measures how much a society allows or suppresses gratification of desires (Hofstede, 2001). Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus score low on indulgence, reflecting cultures that are more restrained in allowing people to freely enjoy leisure activities. Portugal, with a higher indulgence score, shows a greater emphasis on enjoying life and leisure. The Cultural Standard of Relaxed Lifestyle echoes this,

as many interviewees noticed the greater importance given to holidays, socializing, and leisure activities in Portugal. Interviewee number fiveobserved: "Here, people take their holidays seriously, and they make time to enjoy life. It’s a big difference from back home, where work often comes first." This contrast highlights how the more indulgent Portuguese lifestyle, with its emphasis on relaxation and enjoyment, stood out to interviewees accustomed to more restrained cultures (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

# 6. Conclusion

Portuguese and Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian individuals, specifically by analyzing interactions between these groups. The results have been synthesized into a set of Portuguese Cultural Standards, which can be valuable for individuals from these Eastern European countries who are living in or interacting with Portuguese society. These standards serve as a practical guide to help ease cross-cultural interactions and foster better understanding between these cultures (Thomas, 1996). It is important to note, however, that these Cultural Standards are context-specific and are only applicable when comparing Portuguese culture with the cultures of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The research was grounded in the experiences of 15 interviewees from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, each of whom has lived in Portugal for at least one year. This duration allowed participants to form meaningful opinions and experiences about cultural differences. The participants came from diverse regions and professional backgrounds, adding depth to the analysis. The research employed the Cultural Standards method, which is known for its innovative approach to studying cross-cultural differences (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002). The process involved several phases, beginning with narrative interviews, followed by content analysis to identify critical incidents, and ultimately, the creation of the Cultural Standards. These standards were further validated through feedback from both the interviewees and additional individuals who had not participated in the initial interviews but were also living in Portugal.

The six Portuguese Cultural Standards identified are as follows:

1. **Slow Life Rhythm** – Interviewees consistently noted that life in Portugal moves at a slower pace than in Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus. This was evident not only in daily interactions but also in institutional processes, particularly bureaucratic ones.
2. **Food Culture** – Differences in food preferences, tastes, and eating habits were among the most noticeable aspects of cultural divergence. Interviewees mentioned adjusting to the timing of meals and the types of food commonly consumed in Portugal.
3. **Relaxed Work Ethic and Professional Environment** – The Portuguese work environment was described as less competitive, with a clear distinction between work and personal life. Interviewees appreciated the reduced pressure but also struggled with adapting to the slower pace of work and perceived lack of urgency.

4. **Importance of Family and Community** – Family and community relationships are deeply valued in Portugal, and interviewees noticed that social and family life are often intertwined. This was different from the more individualistic approaches to family and community in their home countries.
5. **Technological Efficiency** – Compared to the high-tech systems in Eastern Europe, interviewees found Portugal's use of technology in services and daily life to be less advanced and often inefficient.
6. **Generalization of Eastern European Cultures** – Many interviewees felt that Portuguese people tended to generalize or oversimplify the cultural backgrounds of Eastern Europeans, often assuming shared traits among Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians without recognizing individual differences.

The Cultural Standards identified in this research confirm that significant cultural differences exist between Portugal and these Eastern European countries. These findings were further compared with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, revealing some alignment and contradictions (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, the Cultural Standards supported the dimension of Individualism, reflecting how Portuguese society values personal relationships and community. However, the findings contradicted Power Distance, Masculinity, and Indulgence, as the interviewees found Portuguese work culture to be more egalitarian and less competitive than their home countries. There were no clear connections between the Cultural Standards and Hofstede's dimensions of Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term Orientation.

In today's world, with increasing migration and intercultural exchanges, understanding and identifying cultural differences is critical for fostering mutual understanding and effective communication. The Cultural Standards derived from this research provide a valuable tool for facilitating smoother interactions between individuals from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Portugal (Brueck & Kainzbauer, 2002).

Although this study was limited by the relatively small sample size, future research involving a larger group of Eastern European migrants could provide further insights. Additionally, a reverse study—examining Portuguese Cultural Standards from the perspective of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians—could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural exchange between these regions.

Finally, this thesis offers a modest contribution to the existing literature on Eastern European cultures in Portugal, a topic with limited academic exploration. It is hoped that future studies will continue to expand on these findings, providing more nuanced insights into the cultural dynamics between Portugal and other countries in Eastern Europe.

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# Appendix 1: Overview of Hofstede's PDI Values

| Country | PDI Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 93 | Russia scores very high on Power Distance, indicating a strong acceptance of hierarchical order where authority is centralized and unchallenged. |
| **Ukraine** | 92 | Ukraine also scores high on Power Distance, reflecting the acceptance of unequal distribution of power and respect for authority figures. |
| **Belarus** | 90 | Similar to Russia and Ukraine, Belarus has a high PDI score, showing deference to authority and centralized decision-making. |
| **Portugal** | 63 | Portugal scores moderately high on Power Distance, meaning that hierarchies exist, but there is greater flexibility and more openness to dialogue. |

# Appendix 2: Overview of Hofstede's IDV Values

| Country | IDV Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 39 | Russia scores low on Individualism, indicating a collectivist culture where people prioritize group goals, loyalty, and strong social networks over individual achievement. |
| **Ukraine** | 25 | Ukraine has a low IDV score, reflecting a highly collectivist society where individuals see themselves as part of tightly-knit groups, such as family or close friends. |
| **Belarus** | 28 | Belarus also shows a strong collectivist tendency, where group cohesion and collective responsibility are emphasized over personal goals and individualism. |
| **Portugal** | 27 | Portugal scores low in Individualism, highlighting the importance of relationships and group membership, though modern urban areas show a slight trend towards individualism. |

# Appendix 3: Overview of Hofstede's MAS Values

| Country | MAS Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 36 | Russia scores moderately low on Masculinity, indicating a society that values modesty, care for others, and quality of life over competitiveness and achievement. Gender roles are somewhat fluid, and cooperation is often preferred over assertiveness. |
| **Ukraine** | 25 | Ukraine has a low MAS score, signifying a more feminine culture where care, cooperation, and work-life balance are prioritized. Gender equality and the well-being of people are more important than power and competition. |
| **Belarus** | 21 | Belarus scores low on the Masculinity index, reflecting a preference for caring, nurturing roles, and a focus on quality of life. Competition and assertiveness are less prominent in the culture compared to feminine qualities like compassion. |
| **Portugal** | 31 | Portugal also has a relatively low Masculinity score, indicating a culture that values relationships, quality of life, and cooperation over aggressive competition or assertive behavior. Social harmony and modesty are culturally significant. |

# Appendix 4: Overview of Hofstede's UAI Values

| Country | UAI Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 95 | Russia has a very high UAI score, indicating a strong preference for avoiding uncertainty. Russians generally prefer structured situations, clear rules, and are uncomfortable with ambiguity or change, leading to high levels of bureaucracy. |
| **Ukraine** | 95 | Similar to Russia, Ukraine scores very high on the UAI index. Ukrainians tend to avoid risk and ambiguity, placing importance on established protocols, traditions, and regulations to maintain order and stability. |
| **Belarus** | 90 | Belarus also has a high UAI score, reflecting a cultural preference for avoiding uncertainty through rigid structures, rules, and procedures. There is a strong resistance to change and a desire for predictability. |
| **Portugal** | 104 | Portugal scores extremely high in Uncertainty Avoidance, demonstrating a preference for rules, regulations, and structure to avoid ambiguity. Portuguese society tends to emphasize formalized processes and is often risk-averse. |

# Appendix 5: Overview of Hofstede's LTO Values

| Country | LTO Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 81 | Russia scores high on Long-Term Orientation, indicating a culture that values perseverance, future-oriented planning, and adaptability to changing circumstances. Russians tend to prioritize long-term success over short-term gains. |
| **Ukraine** | 55 | Ukraine has a moderate LTO score, reflecting a balance between maintaining traditions and being open to changes and future-oriented planning. There is a tendency to focus on both short-term and long-term goals. |
| **Belarus** | 63 | Belarus shows a relatively high LTO score, indicating a culture that values planning and pragmatism for the long term. There is a focus on perseverance and practical decisions aimed at long-term outcomes, balanced with traditional values. |
| **Portugal** | 28 | Portugal scores low on Long-Term Orientation, reflecting a culture that places greater emphasis on tradition, immediate results, and maintaining the social fabric. Portuguese society tends to value the present and short-term achievements. |

# Appendix 6: Overview of Hofstede's IVR Values

| Country | IVR Score | Description |
|---|---|---|
| **Russia** | 20 | Russia scores low on Indulgence, indicating a restrained culture where gratification of desires is controlled, and people are less likely to prioritize leisure or the free expression of emotions. Social norms and duty often outweigh individual desires. |
| **Ukraine** | 18 | Ukraine, similar to Russia, has a low score in Indulgence, reflecting a society where restraint is emphasized over indulgence. People in Ukraine tend to have a more controlled approach to life, with less emphasis on leisure and personal gratification. |
| **Belarus** | 25 | Belarus also scores low on Indulgence, representing a restrained society where control over desires is prevalent. People focus more on hard work and practical concerns than on immediate pleasure or personal freedom. |
| **Portugal** | 33 | Portugal scores somewhat higher than Eastern European countries but is still considered a restrained society. While there is a strong appreciation for leisure and social life, particularly in family and community gatherings, societal norms maintain control over desires. |