

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST FOR NATIONALITY ACQUISITION:

Practical Guide 2026

What counts, what doesn't, and how to obtain a certificate accepted by the IRN and AIMA.

The acquisition of Portuguese nationality by naturalisation or by declaration of will requires knowledge of the Portuguese language. In 2026, the IRN and AIMA became more demanding regarding the origin and form of the certificate required to prove this requirement. Following reports of fraud in Portuguese courses for foreigners, it is important to bear in mind that not all certificates available on the market are actually valid. A rigorous documentary **audit is recommended** for pending nationality acquisition proceedings.

With the entry into force of the new Organic Law No. 1/2026 on 19 May 2026, the requirement under the Nationality Law was substantially broadened. The applicant must prove, through a test or certificate, sufficient knowledge of the Portuguese language and culture, history, and national symbols. The new rules apply to proceedings initiated from 19 May onwards, with the outlines briefly presented below.

I. Applications Filed up to 18 May 2026 (Strictly Linguistic Regime)

All proceedings administratively registered up to 18 May 2026 continue to be fully assessed under the previous rules, where the integration requirement is limited to linguistic proficiency.

1. What do you need to know

- The legal requirement of Portuguese language knowledge for nationality acquisition purposes results from Article 25 of the Portuguese Nationality Regulation (RNP, “Decree-Law n.º 237-A/2006”), which exhaustively lists the admissible means of proof.
- The minimum level of linguistic knowledge required is A2 of the CEFR — an elementary user capable of communicating in simple, everyday situations.
- Not all “Portuguese” course certificates are accepted: only those from PLA (Portuguese as a Host Language) are relevant under Article 25(2)(e) of the RNP, excluding PLE (Portuguese as a Foreign Language) courses.

- PLA certificates issued by private training entities are only accepted if validated by a public school or IEFP centre (Institute for Employment and Vocational Training, I.P.), pursuant to Article 9(3) of “Portaria n.º 183/2020”.
- There are several valid alternatives to PLA courses for proving linguistic knowledge:

a) School qualification certificates

Attendance with pass marks in the subject of Portuguese or Portuguese as a Non-Native Language (PLNM) in at least two academic years, at a recognised educational establishment (public, private, or cooperative).

b) Approval in an official Portuguese language test

Tests carried out within the public education network under “Portaria n.º 176/2014”: in national territory, managed by EduQA (Institute of Education, Quality and Assessment, I.P.); abroad, by Instituto Camões (Institute of Cooperation and Language, I.P.). The minimum level is A2.

c) CAPLE Certificate

Certificate issued by the Centre for Assessment and Certification of Portuguese as a Foreign Language (CAPLE), a unit of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon.

d) A2+ Certificate under (repealed) Portaria 1262/2009 — PFOL

The former Portuguese for Speakers of Other Languages (PFOL) courses, issued by public schools or IEFP centres, still appear historically in proceedings. “Portaria n.º 1262/2009” has been repealed, but certificates issued during its validity remain valid.

e) PLA Certificate — Portuguese as a Host Language (Portaria 183/2020)

This is currently the most commonly used pathway. However, only certificates issued directly by public education establishments or by IEFP directly/jointly managed centres are exempt from validation. PLA courses promoted by the Qualifica Centres network, as well as by any private entities, mandatorily require validation by one of those two public entities.

f) CNQ units totalling ≥ 100 hours

Attendance with pass marks in short-term training units (UFCD) of the CNQ in the Portuguese area, in dual certification pathways, with a minimum of 100 hours, under “Decree-Law n.º 396/2007”.

Note: Illiterate citizens aged 60 or over, or persons with serious health problems, may request tests adapted to their limitations.

2. The 5 most frequent errors that block proceedings

The analysis of proceedings before the IRN and AIMA reveals recurrent grounds for refusal or need for documentary improvement:

- **PLE certificates** instead of PLA. "Portuguese for Foreigners" courses in area 222 (PLE) certified under "Portaria n.º 474/2010", instead of Portuguese as a Host Language (PLA) courses, in area 223 of the CNQ, certified under "Portaria n.º 183/2020";
- **Lack of validation.** Certificates from courses issued by private entities or by Qualifica Centres without validation by a public school or IEFP centre (Article 9(3) of "Portaria n.º 183/2020").
- **Training Entity outside the network.** Courses delivered by entities without DGERT certification in area 223 of the CNQ, without an IEFP protocol and without integration in the Qualifica Centres network;
- **SIGO inconsistencies.** Poorly completed SIGO fields (course designation, CNQ code, workload, exit level, certifying entity) raise doubts that may preclude recognition.
- **Insufficient workload.** UFCD pathways with less than 100 hours, under Article 25(2)(f) of the RNP.

II. Applications Filed from 19 May 2026 (Reinforced Requirement)

1. What do you need to know

- For new nationality acquisition applications submitted from 19 May 2026, the language knowledge assessment ceases to exist in isolation and becomes part of a broadened citizenship examination (Article 6(1)(c) of the Nationality Law)
- Cumulative proof of competence in four distinct areas is required:
 - a) **Portuguese Language:** Maintenance of the linguistic proficiency requirement (A2 level).
 - b) **Culture and History:** Proof, through a test or certificate, of knowledge about the history, cultural landmarks and national symbols of Portugal.
 - c) **Civics and Political Organisation:** Demonstration of sufficient knowledge of the fundamental rights and duties set out in the Constitution and the political organisation of the Portuguese State.
 - d) **Formal Declaration:** Mandatory signing of a declaration of adherence to the principles of the democratic rule of law.

- Although these new requirements apply immediately to new applications, the practical implementation rules have not yet been published. The Government has a 90-day period to amend the Portuguese Nationality Regulation (RNP) and define how, where and by whom these tests will be conducted.
- The IRN and AIMA do not yet have the test papers, IT platforms or scheduling locations for the new civic and historical tests. It is therefore anticipated that anyone submitting their application at this stage may have their request accepted, but the integration verification phase will be dependent on the publication of the new regulation within the legal 90-day deadline.

III. How our firm can support you

The team at Schiappa Cabral & Associados offers specialised legal and procedural support for executives and senior managers of the companies we work with, also supporting private training entities interested in training foreigners for nationality acquisition purposes.

To avoid delays or rejections of applications, or to advise on the structuring of the new required courses, our services include:

- **Prior Audit:** We analyse your course or certificate before submitting applications to public entities;
- **Eligibility Mapping:** We identify the best training offer and recommended partners;
- **Entity Advisory:** We support private schools in transitioning to area 223, in entering into protocols and in public tenders for integration in the Qualifica Centres network;
- **Litigation and Appeals:** We defend your rights against refusals or undue requirements from the IRN/AIMA or other public entities involved.

How to proceed

An informed choice can save you time and costs. If you have any doubts about how to proceed, do not hesitate to seek our support.

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