

ACOLHER PROGRAM



ACOLHER

Um programa para migrantes e refugiados

SOCIEDADE PORTUGUESA
DE LITERACIA EM SAÚDE

Apoiar Cuidar Ouvir Ligar Humanizar Empoderar

Coordination: Prof. Cristina Vaz de Almeida



ISBN 978-989-35724-5-0; [Title: Acolher, a program for health literacy and empowerment of vulnerable populations (migrants and refugees)]; [Author: Portuguese Society for Health Literacy]; [Co-author(s):]; [Support: Electronic]; [Format: PDF / PDF/A]

Partners:



*Bartholomäus-Broderschaft
der Deutschen in Lissabon*





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1. Portuguese Society for Health Literacy

1.1. About the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy

The Portuguese Society for Health Literacy is a non-profit scientific and training association, established in January 2022, which asserts itself as a national and international reference in the promotion and development of health literacy. Its mission is based on strengthening the person, professionals and health systems, acting at the individual, organizational, community and public levels. Through action research, innovative training programs, strategic partnerships and community interventions, the institution contributes to improving knowledge, skills and practices in health, promoting more informed, resilient, participatory and equitable societies. The Portuguese Society for Health Literacy thus consolidates health literacy as a fundamental pillar of citizenship and well-being.



1.2. Concept of Health Literacy



The best level of health literacy allows leveraging the skills (knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes) of the various audiences for greater motivation that leads to access, understanding, evaluation and use of health resources and correct navigation in the system, which aim at more responsible, improved, reflected and correct health decisions, whether of individuals, groups, organizations, and the integrated health, social, educational, cultural, and political system itself, and that promote and improve health and well-being outcomes. Health literacy is embodied in an individual, group, community, organizational and public approach. The strategy of investing in the highest level of health literacy of the various audiences allows, through the development and reinforcement of humanizing, relational and communicational skills, to influence, involve, train, support and activate individuals, as well as groups, organizations, communities for better care, disease prevention and health promotion. Health literacy is of interest to everyone in the life cycle and, in particular, in addition to the citizen, professionals in the various areas of health, social, education, cultural and others, such as the media, policy makers, legislators, within their respective social contexts and throughout the life cycle. Health literacy is operationalized through evidence-based research and good practices, theories, and models related to behavioral science, plans, programs, actions, face-to-face, digital and other interventions, and uses the tools and instruments of measurement. Health literacy is the essential basis of the various literacies (financial, cultural, scientific, information and others) because it is the structuring basis for the best experiences of the individual in the reinforcement and search for integral health and well-being in a biopsychosocial, integral and holistic perspective.



Literacy is good for health, it is the wealth of a nation and it saves lives. (SPLS, 2024)



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1. General framework of the ACOLHER Program President of the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy Mentor and Coordinator of the ACOLHER program, Prof. Cristina Vaz de Almeida

The ACOLHER Program is developed by the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy and aims to strengthen equitable access to health, support integration and promote health literacy among migrants, refugees and other vulnerable populations.

Portugal surpassed 1.54 million foreign citizens with a residence permit on December 31, 2024, according to the most recent report by the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA, 2024).¹

This evolution represents a very significant increase in the foreign population in the country and highlights the need for adequate responses in terms of inclusion and access to public services.

Despite this growth, significant health inequalities persist that affect and are related to social inequalities, including legal and administrative barriers, language difficulties, and inequalities in access to a family doctor. These barriers are documented in the literature and are directly reflected in the experience of many migrants in primary health care, health literacy and obtaining reliable information and adequate support. This context justifies structured, culturally

¹ AIMA. (2025). Migration and Asylum Report 2024. <https://aima.gov.pt/media/pages/documents/fec4d6a712-1760603125/relatorio-migracoes-e-asilo-2024.pdf>



sensitive and multidisciplinary community interventions such as those promoted by the ACOLHER Program.

1.1. Objectives of the ACOLHER Program

The ACOLHER Program operates with four central objectives:

- **Identify risk situations and promote early detection of priority health problems**
- **Reduce inequalities in access to the health system through mediation, referral and clarification actions**
- **Strengthen health literacy by empowering participants for informed decision-making**
- **Promote inclusion, dignity and respect for cultural diversity**

1.2. Intervention model

The ACOLHER Program **focuses on proximity to communities**, using **multidisciplinary teams** from different areas of **health and social support**, organized by health and social professionals focused on the specific needs of the populations covered. **It is a tailor-made, multi-domain, multifactorial and multi-professional program and, therefore, a health literacy program that aims at training compensated by motivation for the continuity of behaviors.**

Each action begins with informed consent and sociodemographic registration, then advances to a route consisting of several clinical and educational stations according to the interest and needs of each participant.

Physical health, mental health, sexual health, pelvic health, oral health, functional fitness, nutrition, capillary glucose, blood pressure and clinical counseling are integrated into this program.



Also included are clarification sessions on immigration rights, formal referrals to health services, health literacy actions, psychological support, collective consultations (oncology area) and cultural integration and well-being initiatives.

It is no coincidence that in one of the most recent articles by public health expert, Michael Marmot, the recommendation of linguistic mediation as an essential prerequisite for effective communication in mental health care is evident. "Health systems should provide effective language services to all users who are proficient in the language of the host country in mental health settings, as a way of concretely committing to mitigating health inequalities (Marmot et al, 2025).

1.3. Areas of intervention

- **The program encompasses a broad response, including:**

- Adherence and pharmacological surveillance
- Art as a form of well-being
- Physical activity that promotes well-being (paddle tennis and other recreational sports activities)
- Body self-care
- Self-care in chronic diseases
- First aid and basic life support training
- Wellbeing, movement and cultural integration activities
- Immigration and rights clarification sessions
- Skills to recognize and act on domestic violence
- Group consultations in the various areas (oncology and general and family medicine)
- Human rights, inclusion and integration
- Health literacy about tuberculosis
- Health mini-assemblies
- Healthy nutrition and empowerment of children and educators (fun eating)
- Psychological first aid



- Educational programs for children, young people and families (storytelling, interventions in schools)
- Community clinical screenings
- Women's Health & Pelvic Health
- Mental health and emotional support
- Oral health
- Sexual health and infection prevention
- Basic Life Support
- Non-pharmacological solutions

Next steps

The continuity of the ACOLHER Program is an imperative for the health of vulnerable populations and their training.

Seeking to reinforce funding is the most evident step, since the appropriate teams and interventions are already set up and have had a very positive result. For potential funders there is a commitment to reinforce this valuable contribution and highlight their social, individual and group responsibility. The financing of the program is urgent for its effective continuity.

The level of satisfaction of the recipients and those responsible for implementing the actions was evident in the results of the reports presented.

We will try to join forces with other partners to implement the actions in more regions of Portugal.

I deeply thank everyone for this ability to implement and move these people who are so vulnerable and who only have this support through these initiatives.

Cristina Vaz de Almeida

President of the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy



2. ACOLHER Program Consultant Alexander Kptatueh, Dirigente do Forum Refugio

Public institutions often face operational challenges related to resource constraints that prevent them from fully meeting the diverse and growing needs of all populations that depend on their services.

As a result, pilot initiatives and complementary programmes play **a key role in identifying gaps**, testing innovative approaches and supporting public systems to reach underserved groups.

In Portugal, these challenges are particularly evident in the health sector, where migrant communities, refugees, and other vulnerable populations often face barriers to access.

These barriers are often related to a lack of familiarity with Portuguese administrative procedures, bureaucratic complexity, language barriers and, most importantly, limited information on health-related issues and legal rights to health services.

In response to this context, the ACOLHER Programme was designed as a targeted and structured intervention aimed at addressing these persistent gaps.

The SHELTER program is built around four core objectives that respond directly to the growing health care needs of vulnerable individuals and families who face limited access to basic health information and services.



ACOLHER aims to improve **access to integrated health literacy, culturally sensitive guidance** and **personalized support**, all based on the core values of solidarity, dignity, equity and shared responsibility.

By prioritizing **informed access and empowerment**, the program seeks not only to respond to immediate needs, but also to promote resilience, autonomy, and long-term social inclusion.

Through close collaboration with local communities, civil society organizations, health professionals, and committed volunteers, the SHELTER Program focuses on **early identification of health risks**, facilitating access to essential health care and basic needs, and **providing ongoing guidance** throughout the care-seeking process.

These actions are complemented by **mediation efforts** that help to reduce inequalities, **navigate institutional systems** and close communication gaps between service providers and beneficiaries.

At the same time, the programme **strengthens health literacy** by equipping individuals with the knowledge and confidence needed to make informed decisions about their health and well-being, thereby promoting sustainable pathways to stability and self-sufficiency.

The ACOLHER program recognizes that lasting and meaningful impact can only be achieved through **cooperation, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the realities** experienced by the populations it serves.

The program is designed to remain **flexible and responsive**, allowing it to evolve in line with emerging needs, policy changes, and community feedback. This approach ensures that interventions remain relevant, effective, and aligned with broader public health and social inclusion objectives.



This report presents the vision, objectives, methodology, and organizational structure of the ACOLHER Project, **highlighting its commitment to compassionate actions, ethical practices, and responsible partnerships.**

It also recognizes the essential contributions of all stakeholders who supported the initiative with their time, expertise, resources and trust.

As the program progresses, ACOLHER remains committed to strengthening these collaborations and continuing to support communities in need through inclusive, informed, and sustainable health interventions.

Alexander Kpatue Kweh

Refuge Forum Portugal



3. ACOLHER Program Consultant **Prof. Miguel Telo Arriaga, Psychologist**

Health promotion and disease prevention today require increasingly integrated, humanized approaches based on scientific evidence, especially when aimed at populations in situations of greater social, economic and cultural vulnerability.

In a context marked by the significant increase in the migrant population in Portugal and the persistence of inequalities in access to health care, **health literacy is an essential determinant of equity, dignity and citizenship in health.**

It is in this context that the ACOLHER Program, developed by the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy, stands out as a structured, consistent and innovative response.

Throughout 2025, ACOLHER demonstrated that health literacy, when operationalized through close, culturally sensitive and multidisciplinary community interventions, has a real impact on people's lives, improving access to health services, preventing disease and strengthening self-care and autonomy.

As a consultant in the area of disease prevention, health promotion and health literacy, I followed the implementation of this program with particular attention, recognizing it as a good national practice.



ACOLHER is not limited to the transmission of information; promotes skills, builds bridges between communities and services, reduces language and cultural barriers, and strengthens trust in the health system.

Its integrated performance — which articulates screening, health education, mediation, psychosocial support and community empowerment — reflects a modern vision aligned with the principles of Public Health, community health and the social determinants of health.

The results presented in this report show high levels of participation, satisfaction and knowledge gains, as well as the early detection of health needs that are often invisible.

More than numbers, this document reveals stories of approximation, inclusion and empowerment, showing that investing in health literacy is investing in prevention, social cohesion and the sustainability of health systems.

It is also important to highlight the role of multidisciplinary teams, institutional partners and the communities involved, whose collaboration was decisive for the success of the actions.

The diversity of territories, audiences and areas of intervention demonstrates the ability of the ACOLHER Programme to adapt to different contexts, maintaining a common matrix based on ethics, respect for cultural diversity and the centrality of the person.

This report is therefore not only a balance of activities, but a clear testimony of the value of health literacy as a tool for social transformation.



The data and evidence gathered here reinforce the need to ensure the continuity and expansion of the ACOLHER Program, as well as its recognition as a replicable model of community health intervention.

May this work inspire decision-makers, practitioners, organizations, and funders to strengthen commitment to policies and practices that promote fairer, more accessible, and inclusive health for all.

Miguel Telo de Arriaga

Psychologist

ACOLHER Program Consultant



MMR

"People from other worlds that merge in our lives, bringing meaningful emotions about life and humanity"

Artist





1.3. A health program with social impact

- The ACOLHER Project responds to an urgent need: to ensure that people in contexts of extreme fragility have real opportunities for early diagnosis, counseling and referral to appropriate care in the biopsychosocial domains.
- Operating at a national level, the program integrates a group of specialists and adapts to the requests of local entities, adjusting resources and staff to reach those who need it most.
- This program is mainly aimed at migrants and refugees, although it may cover other very vulnerable groups such as the homeless population and others.

1.4. Framework

Culture has been defined as the thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups (Bjarnason, Mick, Thompson & Cloyd, 2009).

To understand and act on the unique and diverse needs of patients, it is essential that professionals understand the importance of cultural differences, valuing, embedding, and examining their own health-related values and beliefs and those of their health care organizations, in order to be able to effectively support the principle of respect for persons and the ideal of cross-cultural care (adapted from Bjarnason et al, 2009).

Cultural competence has become an important concern for the delivery of contemporary health care, with ethical and legal implications.

Engebretson et al, 2008, consider that in order to make cultural competence relevant to clinical practice, a continuum of cultural competence is needed that identifies the levels of cultural competence (from cultural destructiveness, cultural disability, cultural blindness, cultural precompetence to cultural proficiency) with well-established values in health care. The authors (Engebretson et al, 2008) situate cultural competence and proficiency in alignment with patient-centered care in a model that integrates the continuum of cultural competence with the components of evidence-



based care (i.e., best research practices, clinical experience, and patient values and circumstances) is presented.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 65.6 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide (2018)

Several factors have a major influence on the health of asylum seekers; therefore, their health profile is markedly different from that of the population of the country of asylum (Miler, et al 2017).

According to Miler et al (2017), the main factors impacting the health of refugees are linked to experiences and exposure in the country of origin, in refugee camps and on the way to Europe and in the immigration process to the host country and in life in European asylum centers.

The refugees' health is also affected by psychological problems and infectious diseases. In addition, chronic diseases that result in polymorbidity, cancer, and neurological diseases are easy to overlook and require special attention. Neurological injuries/diseases can be traumatic (e.g., spinal cord injuries), post-traumatic (e.g., chronic pain syndromes), a result of brain infections, or consequences of starvation (e.g., epilepsy, ataxia, and paresthesia).

The main challenges for professionals according to Muller et al (2018) are the lack of awareness about the specific health problems of these refugees, language problems and intercultural communication, as well as access and integration into the health system.

In a cross-sectional study of 360 adult refugees speaking Arabic, Dari, Somali or English on refugees' experiences with the health screening for asylum seekers (Wångdahl et al, 2015), health literacy was measured using the Swedish Functional Health Literacy Scale and the short European Health Literacy Questionnaire and communication experiences and the usefulness of the health screening were measured on several questions.

Among the results, it was observed that in the health examination for asylum seekers, 36% had poor quality communication, 55% received little information about health care and 41% received little new knowledge and/or help 26%.



Having inadequate comprehensive health literacy compared to sufficient was associated with experiencing poorer communication quality and experiencing unvaluable health care information. In addition, the authors (Wångdahl et al, 2015) confirm that having inadequate comprehensive health literacy compared to sufficient health literacy was associated with the experience of not receiving new knowledge or receiving help with health problems

The study by Wångdahl et al, (2015) states that refugees' experiences indicate that a low level of comprehensive health literacy can act as a barrier to fulfilling the purposes of the health screening for asylum seekers. Comprehensive health literacy seems to be of greater importance in this context and more than functional health literacy.

For Blackmore, Boyle, Fazel et al (2020), previous research on refugee mental health has reported wide variation in mental illness prevalence data and this comprehensive systematic review has generated current prevalence estimates not only for post-traumatic illness (PTSD) but also for depression, anxiety, and psychosis. Refugees and asylum seekers have persistently high rates of PTSD and depression, and the results of this review highlight the need for continuing, long-term mental health care beyond the initial resettlement period.

We believe in the Portuguese Society of Health Literacy, and in the face of evidence, that knowledge of these conditions is mandatory to ensure good clinical practice for this patient population, which has a huge burden of chronic, infectious, mental and neurological diseases (Muller et al, 2018).

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2. Multidisciplinary team

ACOLHER has a highly qualified and multidisciplinary team. These specialists have extensive knowledge of their areas and are used to dealing with and intervening with very vulnerable and at-risk populations.

Message from the coordinator, Professor Cristina Vaz de Almeida, president of SPLS:



"The ACOLHER Project integrates clinical assessment and the promotion of health skills, articulating screenings with health education and understanding of the system. The goal is not only to treat, but also to empower people to take care of themselves, with respect for cultural diversity and life"

The Acolher program also includes the following specialists:

- **Alexandre Kpatue** – Consultant, Refúgio Forum
- **Prof. Doctor Miguel Arriaga** – Consultant
- **Enf. Anabela Serra** — Nurse
- **Dr. Ana Justo** — Clinical and health psychologist
- **Master Ana Veiga** — Nurse
- **Dr. Anastasiia Zapotichna** — Physician
- **Dr. André Silva** — Audiologist
- **Nurse. Catarina Esteves Santos** — HIV AIDS Nurse
- **Dr. Coralie Alves** — Physician
- **Enf. Cristiana Roque** — Nurse
- **Dr. Dulce do O** – Nurse researcher
- **Master Eliana Rocha** — Nurse
- **Dr. Filipe Serralva** – Medical Assistant



- **Dr. Gabriel Ribeiro** – communication, update of the SPLS website
- **Master Hélder Carreira** — Nurse
- **Prof. Hélio Bragança da Silva** — Physiotherapist
- **Dr. Isabel Fernandes**
- **Dra. Laetitia** — GAT
- **Dr. Lídia Veludo** — Oral hygienist
- **Master Mariana Fonseca** – Physiotherapist
- **Dr. Mariia Melnikova** — Medical
- **Ridhi Maugi** — Hindu dancer
- **Mestre Noelia Delicado** — Nurse
- **Nurse. Patrícia Nunes** — Nurse
- **Prital Ashvin** — Hindu dancer
- **Prof Raphael Baptista** – Communication Director of SPLS
- **Master Sandra Laia Esteves** — Nurse
- **Dr. Sandra Lucia Rodriguez** — Dental doctor
- **Dr. Sandra Santos** — Special Education and Rehabilitation Technician
- **Dr. Sara Sousa Freitas** — Physician
- **Prof. Teresa Kraus** — Instituto Politécnico de Leiria
- **Dr. Tiago Cardoso** — Jurist pursuing a PhD in international relations in the area of asylum and migration
- **Dr. Vânia Costa** — Nutritionist
- **Dr. Vitalina Silva** — President of APJAS
- **Dr. Willian Gomes** — Sociologist and responsible for the area of Migration at GAT
- **Raphaël Baptista** – SPLS Communications Director



3. Calendar and Places of Multidisciplinary

The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team of the ACOLHER program contributed in an integrated way to the design, implementation and evaluation of ACOLHER's actions, ensuring that each intervention was supported by technical knowledge, cultural sensitivity and practical experience with migrant populations.

The project's execution period took place between September and December 2025, during which several activities were carried out in multiple territories of the country. The intervention covered regions with different population profiles, namely Alentejo, Algarve, Almada, Alpiarça, Braga, Caldas da Rainha, Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Golegã, Leiria, Lisbon, Penafiel, Ponte de Lima and Viana do Castelo. This geographical distribution has made it possible to reach migrant communities in urban, semi-urban and rural contexts, ensuring a comprehensive response to the needs of information and training in health literacy.



4. Activities of the ACOLHER program

The sessions developed had a variable duration between one and three hours, being adjusted according to the number of participants and the complexity of the themes worked. This operational flexibility ensured that each action was appropriate to the pace, availability and characteristics of the groups involved, promoting a more effective and participatory learning environment.

Date	Action	Type of activity	Responsible
11 July 2025	Intervention in NIALP	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Teacher Sandra Laia Esteves
1 August 2025	Intervention in NIALP	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Teacher Sandra Laia Esteves
22 September 2025	Session for Russian and Ukrainian migrant population	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Dra. Mariia Melnikova
11 October 2025	Basic Life Support for Adolescents	Movement, well-being and integration	Dra. Anastasiia Zapotichna Prof Cristina Vaz de Almeida
14 October 2025	Intervention in the Happy World Association	Cultural, community and educational session	Master Ana Veiga
15 October 2025	Empathetic communication	Scientific representation	Nurse. Catarina Esteves Santos



	on HIV at the European Forum		
16 October 2025	Basic Hindu Life and Dance Support	Movement, well-being and integration	Dr. Filipe Serralva Nurse. Jorge Brandão. Dr. Anastasiia Zapotichna and Ridhi Maugi
16 October 2025	Fun Eating Alto do Moinho School, Corroios	Cultural and educational session for the consumption of fruits and vegetables	Dr. Vânia Costa Prof Cristina Vaz de Almeida Nutrition Interns
21 October 2025	Meeting at the Happy World Association	Various screenings with enino and training of participants for self-care	Master Ana Veiga
22 October 2025	SPLS Training	Cultural, community and educational session with women with cancer	Prof. Doutora Cristina Vaz de Almeida with Cecília Minas Curta
25 October 2025	Multidisciplinary action with Egas Moniz and Câmara de Almada	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Physiotherapist Hélio Bragança da Silva



12 November 2025	Session with migrant women for child health	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Enf. Eliana Rocha
14 November 2025	Health literacy session at ETEO – Escola Técnica Empresarial do Oeste	Intervention to train young people from technical and professional courses	Professor Cristina Vaz de Almeida Master Ana Veiga Dra. Dulce Do O
14 November 2025	Collective consultation for women with breast cancer with doctor and nurse	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Dr. Vasco Fonseca Nurse Maria do Céu Oliveira Martins
18 November 2025	Child health literacy action for women	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Enf. Eliana Rocha
18 and 19 November 2025	Paddle for the well-being of migrants and refugees	Movement, well-being and integration	Dr. Sandra Santos
21 November 2025	Session on mental health at NIALP	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Dr. Ana Justo
22 November 2025	Round of Tales at NIALP	Cultural, community and educational session	Dr. Isabel Fernandes



November 22, 2025	Community action in Monte da Caparica, Almada	Cultural, community and educational session, various screenings	Physiotherapist Hélio Bragança da Silva
28 November 2025	Session in Ponte de Lima	Cultural, community and educational session	Dra. Coralie Alves
28 November 2025	Community action in Leiria	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Prof. Hélio Bragança Da Silva Prof. Hélder Carreira
29 November 2025	In-person movement session in Castelo Branco	Movement, well-being and integration	Master Mariana Fonseca
5 December 2025	Session on mental health at NIALP	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Dr. Ana Justo
10 December 2025	Session on Healthy Eating	Cultural, community and educational session	Enf. Anabela Serra
10 and 11 December 2025	Session on basic life support in Gondomar	Clinical interventions and capacity building	Dr. Filipe Serralva, <i>doctor and team</i>
21 dec 2025	Oral health	Capacity building of social professionals from AJPAS	<i>Dr^a Lidia Veludo, Oral hygienist</i>



5. Detailed description of activities

5.1. ACOLHER Program intervenes in NIALP

July 11 and August 1, 2025

The intervention aims to empower migrant citizens through clear, accessible and simple information, allowing them to access NHS health resources with confidence, safety and autonomy, reinforcing their inclusion and health literacy.

Main points of the intervention

The session focused on raising awareness of access to the NHS, with materials and explanations adapted to migrant citizens from South Asia, namely Nepal and Bangladesh. Participatory dynamics based on practical cases on the organization of health services in Portugal, procedures in urgent and emergency situations, appointment scheduling, registration in the NHS, immigrants' rights and services available in primary health care and hospitals were used. The activity took place in a welcoming environment, had linguistic support and integrated multidisciplinary teams from SPS and NIALP.

Benefits of NIALP intervention

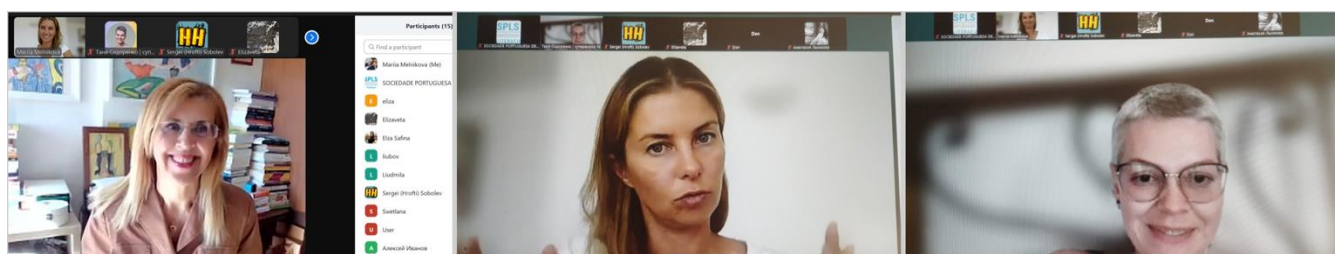
The initiative contributed to reducing inequalities in access to health, improving communication and trust between migrant citizens and health professionals, promoting self-care and the appropriate use of NHS services, and strengthening health literacy in multicultural contexts.

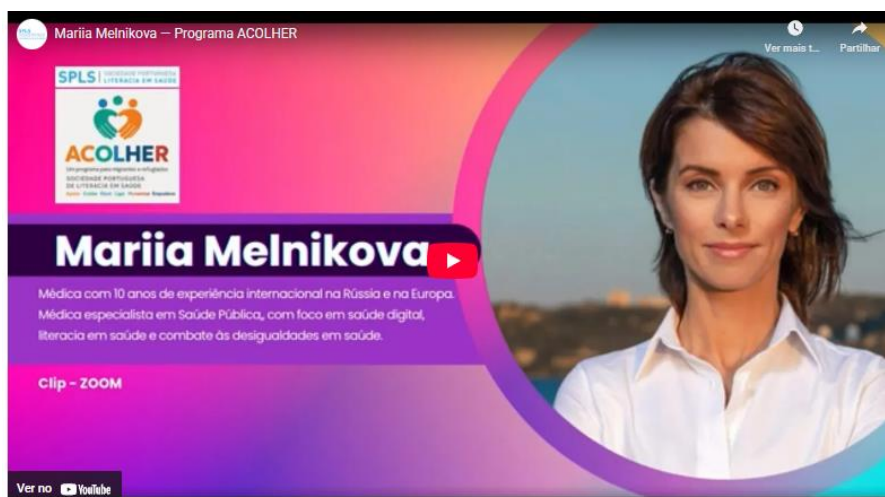


5.2. Session for the Russian and Ukrainian migrant population

September 22, 2025

The intervention was part of a webinar aimed at refugees and migrants from Eastern Europe, focused on access to the National Health Service (SNS) in Portugal. Three sessions were held, which involved more than a hundred participants, mostly women between 30 and 45 years old, from Russia and Ukraine. The initial questionnaire identified three main difficulties in accessing health care: language barriers, lack of information about services and long waiting times. These results reinforce the need to promote multicultural and multilingual health literacy to ensure equitable access to and adequate use of public resources. The session was conducted in Russian and Ukrainian, contributing to bringing the NHS closer to people who have recently arrived in the country.





5.3. ACOLHER Program brings basic life support to 25 adolescents

Pedro Santarém School October 11, 2025

The session of the Shelter Program held at the Pedro Santarém School involved 25 adolescents between 13 and 16 years old and was promoted by doctor Anastasiia Zapotichna. The initiative focused on Basic Life Support, with training in practical skills such as the recognition of a cardiorespiratory arrest, the activation of emergency services and the execution of effective chest compressions. The activity was well received by the school community and the participants gave the maximum score to the trainer, valuing the clarity, dynamics and usefulness of the contents. The initiative contributed to strengthening health literacy and empowering young people to act safely in emergencies.





5.4. ACOLHER Program intervenes in the Mundo Feliz Association

October 14, 2025

The intervention of the Shelter Program held at the Mundo Feliz Association, on October 14, 2025, was coordinated by Mestre Ana Veiga and aimed at refugees and adult migrants in vulnerable situations. The action included community screenings in priority areas such as blood pressure, capillary glucose, cardiorespiratory health and psychological well-being. Brief counseling and health education were also promoted, with a focus on self-care and access to formal care, as well as referrals to health and social support services whenever specific needs were identified.





5.5. ACOLHER Program highlights empathetic communication in HIV

European Forum of Nurses and Pharmacists October 15, 2025

Nurse Catarina Esteves Santos' participation in the 8th Nurses & Pharmacists HIV Clinical Forum 2025 was part of one of the aspects of the Acolher Program dedicated to the promotion of multicultural and equitable practices among vulnerable audiences. The session addressed the importance of multidisciplinary teams in providing HIV care focused on empathy, effective communication and health literacy. The speaker highlighted the impact of these principles on the quality of care and their relevance to other areas of community health, underlining the contribution of the Acolhida Programme in the dissemination of good practices among health professionals from different European contexts.





5.6. ACOLHER Program brings basic life support and Hindu dance

Alto do Moinho Elementary School October 16th, 2025

The session of the Shelter Program held on October 16 at the Alto do Moinho Elementary School brought together about two hundred children between 5 and 7 years old for an initiative that combined science, art and citizenship. The activities included a practical demonstration of Basic Life Support guided by health professionals, complemented by a cultural component promoted through a Hindu dance. The school welcomed the initiative very positively, contributing to an inclusive, participatory and well-being-promoting learning environment from childhood.





5.7 Fun Eating, to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables in children

October 16, 2025

Escola Alto do Moinho dedicated October 16, 2025 to health promotion, involving students and the educational community in practical and participatory activities. The morning included a Hindu dance performance and a Basic Life Support session guided by health professionals, culminating in the delivery of certificates. During the afternoon, the Fun Food initiative brought together institutional representatives and allowed children to explore healthy eating practices through the preparation of creative dishes with fruits and vegetables. The day highlighted the importance of involving young people in experiences that reinforce positive health behaviors and stimulate their well-being.





5.8. Session in the Master's class of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria

October 17, 2025

ACOLHER: SPLS training program brings together experts to strengthen migration responses

SPLS promoted another session of ACOLHER, bringing together experts and academic partners to strengthen skills in the ABO multiculturalism and populations in vulnerable situations.

Throughout the meeting, Dr. Tiago F. Cardoso shared practical guidelines for a more informed and humanized intervention with migrant people, underlining the importance of cultural skills, sensitive communication and inter-institutional articulation.

The initiative had the partnership of the Polytechnic of Leiria and the Master's Degree in Nursing, coordinated by Prof. Teresa Kraus, highlighting the connection between practice and academia in the construction of integrated and evidence-based responses.

Also present were Master Hélder Carreira, vice-president of the SPLS Ethics Committee, who highlighted principles of equity and confidentiality in the intervention, and Professor Cristina Vaz de Almeida, President of SPLS, reinforcing the Firm's commitment to continuous training and cooperation with partner entities.

<https://splsportugal.com/events/spls-lanca-projeto-acolher-intervencoes-de-saude-e-rastreios-comunitarios-a-refugiados-e-migrantes/>



 **Cristina Vaz de Almeida – Programa ACOLHER**  Copiar link



Cristina Vaz de Almeida

Presidente da Sociedade Portuguesa de Literacia em Saúde
Professora Doutora em Ciências da Comunicação
Membro do Conselho Científico do CAPPP – ISCSP

[sessão completa - ZOOM](#)

MAIS VÍDEOS

▶ 🔊 0:00 / 1:01  



Dr. Tiago Cardoso 

Jurista doutorando em relações internacionais na área de migrações população migrante

[sessão completa - ZOOM](#)



Hélder Carreira 

Pós-graduação em Gestão e Administração em Saúde pelo I
Superior de Linguas e Administração de Leiria
Curso de Mestrado em Enfermagem Comunitária pela Escola Superior
de Saúde de Santarém

[sessão completa - ZOOM](#)



5.9. Meeting at the Happy World Association

October 21, 2025

A community meeting focused on the promotion of mental health, food literacy, prevention of chronic diseases and family integration. The session included moments of dialogue, educational activities and individual referrals. The event was coordinated by Professor Cristina Vaz de Almeida with the President of the Mundo Feliz Association, Cecília Minas Curta with a group of women with cancer.





5.10. ACOLHIDA Program with Egas Moniz School of Health & Science and Almada City Council

October 25, 2025

Ninety-two people participated, aged between seven and seventy-three years, with a mean age of thirty-six point seven years. Most were female, representing seventy-two point eight percent of the participants. Eight different countries of origin were represented, with emphasis on São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde and Angola.

Most lived in rented housing and a relevant proportion were in temporary or institutional accommodation. Half of the population had a professional occupation, but only about a third had their own income, illustrating a significant socioeconomic vulnerability.

The participants circulated through the clinical stations voluntarily. The nursing team evaluated body mass index, capillary glucose and blood pressure. The psychology team promoted mental health screening and educational actions on well-being, violence prevention and emotional literacy. The physiotherapy team assessed pelvic health and cardiorespiratory functional fitness using validated tests such as sit-to-stand, step test and handgrip strength.

The GAT carried out screening for sexually transmitted infections, and one positive case for hepatitis B was identified.

AD SUMUS provided clarification on regularization processes and immigration rights.

The action registered a very high participation in the services provided and extremely positive levels of satisfaction. The data underline clinical needs not previously monitored and confirm the relevance of multidisciplinary actions in territories with great cultural diversity.



5.11. Session with migrant women, with the support of the GAT

November 12, 2025

The Acolher Program, developed by the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy, aims to facilitate access to health care and promote the prevention of the disease among refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations. In partnership with the Clips do Coração project, represented by nurse Eliana Rocha, the first intervention was carried out with a group of migrant women at the City of Lisbon Foundation. The session addressed the most frequent diseases in childhood and the essential care to be taken, with high participation and sharing of experiences. The activity also included an information component promoted by the GAT, which clarified in an accessible way the functioning and access to health services in Portugal.





5.12. Health literacy session

Western Business Technical School with courses for health technicians¹⁴

November 2025

The session held on November 14 at the Escola Técnica Empresarial do Oeste was part of the Welcoming Program and focused on promoting health literacy among young students, with a focus on diabetes, a condition of high prevalence. The initiative aimed to strengthen knowledge about prevention, warning signs and healthy lifestyle habits, using a participatory approach conducted by SPS representatives. The activity took place in conjunction with the school's coordination and contributed to bringing health literacy closer to the communities, reinforcing the importance of knowledge for informed decisions and for improving quality of life.





5.13. Collective consultation for women with breast cancer

November 14, 2025

Psychosocial support action, clinical clarification and sharing of experiences among migrant women with a history of breast cancer. It addressed late effects, surveillance, therapeutic adherence and health rights. The sessions were developed by the oncologist Dr Vasco Fonseca and Nurse Maria do Céu Oliveira Martins





5.14. Paddle for the well-being of migrants and refugees

Algarve 18 and 19 November 2025

An innovative activity that associated physical exercise, relaxation and contact with nature, creating an environment of integration, confidence and positive mental health. Held in partnership with EOLIS and Dr. Sandra Santos. Strategic good and environmental interaction and protection were promoted. The sessions (5) went smoothly, and were very contributive to the improvement of the physical and psychosocial well-being of these migrants in the Algarve





5.15. Briefing on child health, symptoms and warnings

Alges, Enf Eliana Rocha

November 18, 2025

Activity to raise awareness of women to the warning symptoms in children, organized by Nurse Eliana Rocha at the Mundo Feliz Association. Several topics were addressed about what should be considered an alert (fever, diarrhea, falls and other cases)





5.16. Session on mental health at NIALP

November 21, 2025

Session focused on promoting emotional health, identifying warning signs, wellness strategies and accessing psychological support. Dr. Ana Justo led the sessions, promoting an openness to intercultural dialogue, supporting the psychological well-being and concerns of Nepalese and Bangladeshi women. The session took place with the support of NIALP and Dr. Constança Turquin (in addition to the support of FEM and the Lisbon City Hall)





5.17. Round of Tales at NIALP - Storytelling

November 22, 2025

The Storytelling Round session held on November 29 at NIALP brought together children and mothers from Bangladesh and Nepal in reading, dance, music and choral singing activities, promoting cultural sharing and community strengthening. The participation of psychologist Isabel Maria Fernandes brought a reflective and motivating dimension, highlighted by her dedication to personal empowerment. The initiative also had the collaboration of several stakeholders who contributed to enrich the meeting. The activity reaffirmed the importance of capacity building and active solidarity in supporting vulnerable communities, maintaining SPLS's commitment to networking to promote well-being and inclusion.





5.18. Community action in Monte da Caparica, Almada with the support of the GAT and the Municipality of Almada

November 22, 2025

Eighty-seven people participated, aged between five and eighty-four years, with an average of thirty-four point nine years. Sixty-two point one percent were women. Seven countries and six participants of Portuguese nationality who sought the action on their own initiative were represented. Socioeconomic vulnerability was evident in several indicators: thirty-one percent of the participants were unemployed and forty-four point eight percent had no source of income. There were also situations of precarious housing, including tents and informal accommodation.

The action integrated several clinical and educational stations.

AD SUMUS clarified doubts from twenty-seven people about regularization, access to the NHS and documentation.

The GAT performed fifty-seven screenings, identifying one positive case for hepatitis B and referring one participant for HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis and specialist consultation

. The psychology, nursing, physiotherapy and oral health teams developed complete screenings and educational actions. The nursing team evaluated capillary glucose, blood pressure and body mass index. The physiotherapy team assessed pelvic health and functional fitness with international instruments, with individual explanation of results. The psychology team carried out actions to promote emotional well-being and prevent violence. Information materials were distributed and clarifications on oncological diseases were carried out by the Portuguese League Against Cancer.

Satisfaction levels were very high, with the absolute majority of participants rating the program with the maximum score in all dimensions evaluated. The data reveal



that the action identified previously unassessed health needs and strengthened participants' literacy on essential aspects of self-care, the functioning of the health system and immigration rights.





5.19. Session on the health and integration of migrants

Ponte de Lima November 28, 2025

CONVERSAS INCLUSIVAS
SOCIEDADE PORTUGUESA DE LITERACIA EM SAÚDE

Oradoras
Dr.ª Coralie Alves, Médica de Família
Dr.ª Dália Lima, Especialista em Diversidade e Inclusão

28/11/2025
14H30-16H00

Junta de Freguesia de Arca e Ponte de Lima
Inscrição obrigatória

- Estilos de vida saudáveis
- Rastreamentos de saúde
- Empregabilidade

Público-Alvo: Imigrantes e familiares

SPLS
SOCIEDADE PORTUGUESA
LITERACIA EM SAÚDE

ACOLHER
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

The Inclusive Conversations session, part of the Acolher Program, took place at the Parish Council of Arca and Ponte de Lima and was aimed at immigrants and their families. The initiative addressed essential themes for integration and well-being, namely healthy lifestyles, health screenings and employability. It had the participation of professionals from the areas of health and inclusion and sought to clarify doubts, strengthen skills and promote autonomy and informed participation in community life.





5.20. Community action in Leiria

November 28, 2025

Eight people participated, all male, aged between eighteen and fifty-seven years, with an average age of twenty-eight point eight years. Five were refugees, two were migrants and one was a national citizen. Most lived in institutional housing. None had a professional occupation and all had access to public health services.

The action included clinical screening by nursing, physiotherapy, dietetics and nutrition and cardiopneumology teams. Body mass index, waist circumference, capillary glucose, blood pressure, and pulmonary function were evaluated with spirometry. Seven participants had high blood pressure values and one had



values compatible with hypertension. Blood glucose values ranged from ninety to one hundred and forty-one milligrams per deciliter. The analysis of the body mass index revealed cases of excessive thinness, overweight and

obesity.

The physiotherapy team assessed muscle strength, aerobic capacity and grip strength, identifying values below international references in most participants. Also noteworthy was the holding of a bilingual tuberculosis literacy session, which addressed symptoms, prevention, stigma, transmission and available care. The session had active participation, with several questions related to prejudice and the social impact of the disease.

Satisfaction levels were overwhelmingly positive, with all participants rating the action as satisfactory or very satisfactory. The data show marked social vulnerability and the importance of community intervention for early detection of health problems and to strengthen the literacy of newly arrived populations.



5.21. In-person movement session (postponed to 2026)

Castelo Branco November 29, 2025*** postponed

The initiative aimed at international students identified time management, financial constraints and lack of motivation as the main barriers to the regular practice of physical activity. Specific difficulties related to cultural adaptation, integration into the academic community, understanding of guidelines and absence of support networks were also highlighted. The intervention consisted of a face-to-face movement session promoted by Mariana Fonseca at the headquarters of the Erasmus Student Network in Castelo Branco, with the aim of promoting health literacy in English, reinforcing knowledge about the benefits of physical activity and providing a sensory experience through a personalized sequence of Clinical Pilates. The activity also included the collaborative recording of movement sequences for digital dissemination. The evaluation was based on questionnaires before and after the session and sought to measure knowledge, usefulness and clarity of information. The intervention worked as a pilot project aimed at overcoming language and cultural barriers, encouraging the adoption of healthy lifestyles among international students.





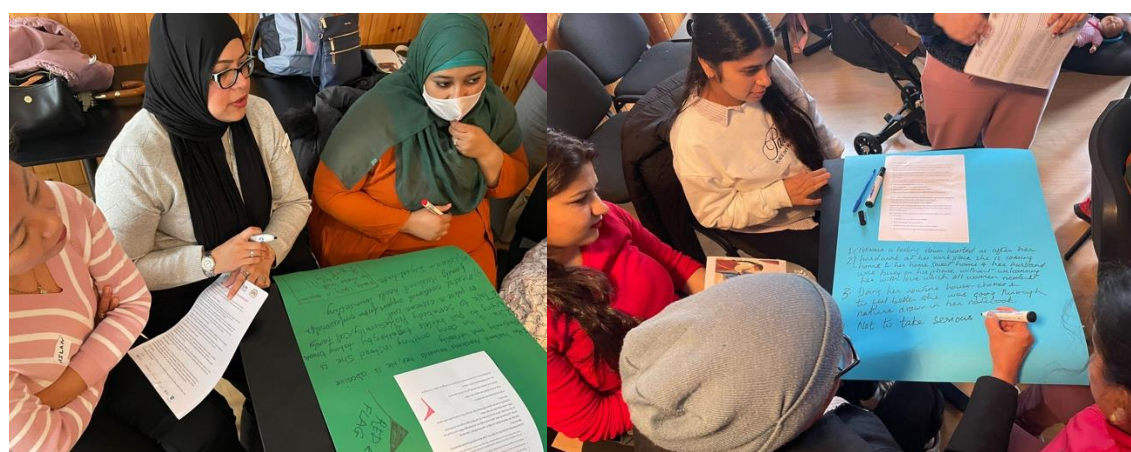
5.22. Session on mental health at NIALP

December 5, 2025



On December 5, a session was held at NIALP aimed at Nepalese and Indian migrant women, focused on strengthening well-being, developing self-care and emotional regulation skills, and identifying risk factors

and warning signs of suffering. The meeting created a safe environment for the analysis of situations of domestic violence and for raising awareness about ways of recognition, seeking help and access to specialized services. The session was conducted by Dr. Ana Justo, from the Portuguese Society for Health Literacy, in conjunction with Elisabete Brasil, a specialist in gender and domestic violence from the FEM-CML team. Nine women participated who committed to disseminating the knowledge acquired, and it is also planned to disseminate short videos on social networks to expand the impact of the initiative.





5.23. Session on Healthy Eating

December 10, 2025

The last two sessions of the year of the SPLS Acolher project were held today, involving 42 migrants from various countries, mostly from Nepal. The sessions focused on healthy eating to prevent hypertension and diabetes, topics identified as priorities by the company's Occupational Medicine. The initiative had the collaboration of several local entities and the company Lusiaves. Participant satisfaction was high, with 97 percent between very satisfied and satisfied, and there was a gain in knowledge of 26 percent.





5.24. Session on basic life support

Gondomar

December 10 and 11, 2025

On December 10, a session of the SPLS Acolher project was held, in collaboration with ANESC, involving seven Ukrainian participants between the ages of 16 and 57. The training focused on Basic Life Support, an area in which only one participant had previous experience, and sought to train the group to act in emergencies, reinforcing the importance of rapid intervention in cases of cardiorespiratory arrest. The participants showed progress in the practical maneuvers, despite the difficulties in simulating the call to 112 due to the language barrier. The session was very well received and increased the group's confidence to act in real situations. The meeting was warmly welcomed by Bishop Nataliya, who contributed to a safe and motivating environment.





6. Impacts of the ACOLHER program

6.1. Geographical Impact

ACOLHER assumes a growing presence in the national territory and has developed initiatives throughout mainland Portugal.

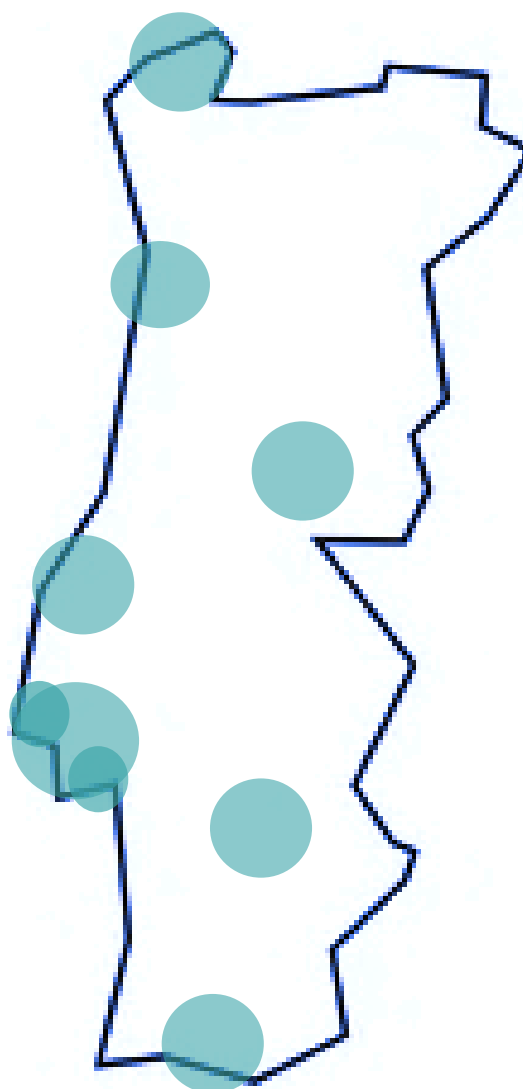
15 locations nationwide

3000 people intervened

+ 40 health and social

professionals

10+ partners





6.2. Media Impact

Medium	Link
MedJournal	https://medjournal.pt/2025/08/29/projeto-acolher-promove-competencias-de-acesso-a-cuidados-essenciais-para-populacoes-refugiadas-e-migrantes-vulneraveis/
AdSummus	https://ad-sumus.pt/2025/11/21/rastreio-de-saude-comunitaria-para-refugiados-e-migrantes-adultos-em-situacoes-vulneraveis/
Egas Moniz	https://www.egasmoniz.com.pt/articles/programa-acolher-rastreio-comunitario-em-almada
Frog	https://sapo.pt/artigo/acolher-e-cuidar-um-manifesto-pela-saude-que-nos-une-69147c038540a08f9139ec6c



7. Conclusions

The ACOLHER Program demonstrated, throughout 2025, the relevance and impact of structured, culturally sensitive community interventions based on health literacy principles. The actions developed made it possible to reach migrant and refugee populations in different regions of the country, responding to the identified needs and promoting conditions for a more informed, autonomous and active participation in the health system.

Proximity to communities, associated with the performance of experienced multidisciplinary teams, proved essential to reduce barriers in access to health, clarify rights, strengthen self-care skills and support social integration processes.

The data collected in the various sessions show high levels of participation, high participant satisfaction and concrete gains in knowledge and capacity for action, particularly in areas such as basic life support, mental health, healthy eating, prevention of chronic diseases and navigation in the NHS.

The testimonies of institutional partners and community members reinforce that ACOLHER is a good practice in the national context, contributing to more collaborative relationships between health services, civil society organizations and vulnerable populations.

The presence of the program in different territories and the involvement of dozens of health professionals, technicians and specialists allowed to diversify responses and adapt methodologies to different age groups, cultural origins and social challenges.



Consistently, the program confirmed that investing in health literacy is investing in dignity, inclusion and equity. By empowering individuals and communities to better understand their health, make informed decisions, and seek appropriate support, ACOLHER has contributed to reducing inequalities, preventing health problems, and strengthening the social fabric.

In summary, ACOLHER has consolidated itself as an initiative with significant and sustainable impact. The evidence gathered throughout the year recommends the continuity and expansion of the programme, as well as the strengthening of institutional partnerships that ensure its effectiveness. The path taken demonstrates that health literacy, when promoted in an integrated, participatory and humanized way, transforms lives and strengthens communities.