CWPF and CWPR Consultation Report

ESN Portugal National Projects: Christmas with Portuguese Families (CWPF) & Christmas with Portuguese Retailers (CWPR)

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Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the feedback from several consultations conducted by the Projects Department of ESN Portugal on two important National Projects: **Christmas with Portuguese Families (CWPF) and Christmas with Portuguese Retailers (CWPR)**. The aim was to gather key insights, ideas and suggestions to implement **future improvements**, **promote engagement** and ensure **effective involvement** of our ESN volunteers in these initiatives.

It is important to note that many valuable suggestions and points will not be repeated in each section as they have already been addressed in previous consultations. This report prioritizes new or emphasized feedback to avoid redundancy and highlights recurring themes and innovations throughout the consultation process.

Consultations 2024/2025

During the 2024/2025 mandate, **six consultations** were made to gather the feedback from ESN volunteers on the two mentioned National Projects.

The questions used in each consultation varied depending on the target audience, in this case the consultations targeted different **Communities of ESN Portugal.**

To conclude the consultation process, a final GoogleForm was sent to the **National Platform** to gather any possible missing feedback.

Community Meetings Minho / S&P Community

The first consultation consisted in a face to face session with the **Secretaries & Projects Community** during **Community Meetings Minho**. This event took place in Braga, between the 29th of November and the 1st of December 2024, and the consultation lasted approximately 90 minutes and had 20 participants.

In this consultation the following **questions** were made to the participants, for **both National Projects:**

- What are your biggest wishes for this national project?
- What would you change or improve from last year?
- What's your ideal structure for this project?
- How can we improve the matching process?
- What kind of support do you expect from the National Board?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- There is a need for a stronger matching and better personal connection between International Students and Portuguese Families - suggestions to ask more specific questions for both groups.
- Create a video explaining the Papaya app.
- Give more guidance to cities where an ESN section is not present.
- Provide more guidance to Portuguese Families and clearer expectations.
- More engagement and promotion to reach more Portuguese Families - for example. use the connections the local ESN section has with their institutional partners.
- Promote more interaction between the International Students and Portuguese Families beforehand.

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- More visibility, long-lasting and meaningful retailers for the International Students.
- Sharing the partnerships in ESN Portugal.
- Create more acknowledgment of the retailer's story and work.

HR Community

The second consultation consisted of an online session during a monthly ESN Portugal **Human Resources Community Call** on the 19th of February 2025. The session lasted approximately 20 minutes and had 10 participants.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project:

- How can we better motivate and involve ESN volunteers in these projects?
- What can we do to better the engagement between the international students and families?

- How can we better motivate and involve ESN volunteers in this project?

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- How can we better motivate and involve ESN volunteers in this project?
- What new strategies can we use to encourage International Students and the Local community to "buy local" during the holidays?
- What strategies can help volunteers successfully approach and collaborate with local retailers?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Share impactful stories, videos, photos and testimonials from previous editions.
- Make registration simpler, especially for older people.
- Make the process feel more meaningful, not so transactional.
- Give more information about the project to the Portuguese Families.
- Create a guide with icebreakers and activities for the Portuguese Families to make it easier to connect with the International Students, e.g. Survival Guide.
- Promote this project more through radios and journals.

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Start the promotion earlier for the project.
- Create a working group to search for local partnerships.
- Promote the project more in ESN Portugal national events.

Education Community

The third consultation consisted of an online session during a monthly ESN Portugal **Education Community Call** on the 28th of February 2025. The session lasted approximately 15 minutes and had 7 participants.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project:

- How can this project support your advocacy strategy?
- How can we engage more of your Institutional Partners, Stakeholders... in this project?

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- How can we showcase the importance of ESN for local retailers through our institutional partners?
- How can this project help your advocacy strategies?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Promote the project more through social media and create a newsletter to target previous participants.
- Share the project with institutional partners - give more guidelines in the emails and be clear on how they should promote the project.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- Promote the history of the cities through the local retailers.

Communication Community

The fourth consultation consisted of an online session during a monthly ESN Portugal **Communication Community Call** on the 10th of March 2025. The session lasted approximately 20 minutes and had 9 participants.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project:

- What strategies can we use to attract more families and retailers?
- What types of content (videos, testimonials, infographics) would be most effective in promoting the project?
- How can we ensure all ESN sections communicate about this project in a consistent and impactful way?

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- How can we better communicate the benefits of this project to local businesses?
- How can we make the "buy local" message more appealing to international students?
- What types of online campaigns or content could increase awareness and participation?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Unified toolkit with templates and examples
- Bigger “humanisation” of the communication of the project.
- Use communication channels that can better reach the oldest generations.
- Paid announcements.

- Video interviews.
- Short and concise videos.
- Create specific contents and templates for each section.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- Make content in Portuguese directed and adapted to the local businesses.
- Create stickers to identify the partner stores.
- Create interviews with the owners of the retailers.
- Create a post on "benefits of buying local" and a video recording the process of producing a product.
- Create a local market with the partners.

BF Community

The fifth consultation consisted of an online session during a monthly ESN Portugal **Business and Finance Community Call** on the 10th of March 2025. The session lasted approximately 20 minutes and had 9 participants.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project:

- What strategies can we use to secure sponsorships for the project, and which types of companies would be most likely to support us?
- What strategies can we implement to cover the international students' transportation costs?
- What new strategies could help us find and engage more Portuguese families?

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- How can we create a beneficial financial partnership model with retailers, encouraging their involvement while also supporting the project's goals?
- How can we ensure the discounts are applied by the retailers?
- How can we ensure the tracking of the purchases under this project?
- What incentives can we offer retailers to get involved in the "Christmas with Portuguese Retailers" project?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Ensure discounts with Rede Expressos and Flixbus for this project, for International Students who need to go to a different district for this project.
- Local sections should share this in HEIs podcasts and with student associations.
- Better promote the Partnerships booklet.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- Use the ESNcard to redeem vouchers, however, it might be hard to apply.
- Approach local businesses as cultural ambassadors for this project.
- Talk in-person with the local store owners.
- Put the partnerships in the section's website.
- Negotiate a better price or deal for the retailer's products.

Activities Community Call

The sixth consultation consisted of an online session during a monthly ESN Portugal **Activities Community Call** on the 7th of April 2025. The session lasted approximately 20 minutes and had 5 participants.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project:

- What types of activities do you think would make the "CWPF" experience more engaging for the participants?
- How can we improve the communication between volunteers, students, and host families during the matching process and throughout the event?
- What new strategies could help us find and engage more Portuguese families?

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- What new event ideas or activities could be implemented in partnership with local retailers to make the project more exciting?
- What new strategies can we use to encourage International Students and the Local community to "buy local" during the holidays?
- How can we increase participation and collaboration with more local retailers in this project?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- Create more content for participants that include ideas for games or ice-breaking activities related to culture, food, music, etc. The goal is to support the connection between Portuguese Families and International Students.

- Go back to using Google Forms instead of Papaya.
- Promote this project in the events related to Christmas, Welcome Days, Erasmus in Schools and senior associations.

In this consultation the following questions were made to the participants, for the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project:

- Create Christmas markets to promote the project at a local level.
- Show through social media the products from the retailers that have a discount with the ESNcard.

National Platform Feedback

On the 28th of May 2025, a final form was sent to the National Platform to gather feedback from all volunteers who had not had the chance to participate in the consultation process thus far. Two responses were gathered.

In this form the following questions were made, for both National Projects:

- What are your biggest wishes for this national project?
- What do you believe needs to change, be kept, and improved from the current reality of this National Project?
- What do you believe are the current needs/wants of International Students that this project can address?
- What do you believe are the current needs/wants of the Local Community that this project can address?

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project the following questions were also asked:

- How can we better promote this project to our target audiences? How can we provide more visibility?

- What improvements can be made to the matching process between Students and Families?

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project the following questions were also asked:

- What new strategies can we use to attract more Retailers and better promote them?
- What new strategies can we use to encourage International Students and the Local community to "buy local" during the holidays?

Key Points

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Families** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- More and better digitalisation of the project.
- More TV presence.
- Sharing the experiences of participants of previous editions.
- Create giveaways.
- More video based content.
- More target questions to create better matchings.

For the **Christmas with Portuguese Retailers** National Project these were the key take aways from the consultation:

- More diversity in retailers.
- Better retailers tracking process .
- More content about the personal history of the retailers.
- Ensure a long-term partnership with the retailers and not just a temporary one.
- Use printed vouchers instead of the ESNcard.

Summary of Recommendations

Ideas to Keep

Christmas with Portuguese Families

- In general, there is a preference to keep the Papaya matching, praising its simpler process in comparison to the previous process (GoogleForm).
- The onboarding sessions, prior to the Christmas lunch or dinner, for the participants proved to be a great improvement and helped Portuguese Families and International Students feeling safer. Despite this, improvements must be made on the participation.
- Asking participants for photos and consent to post them.

Both National Projects

- The detailed reporting of the national projects and the sharing of non-confidential data with local ESN sections.
- The partnerships booklets are a good idea and should be kept and improved on.

Ideas to Stop

Both National Projects

- Relying solely on social media for outreach, more efforts need to be made on the communication aspect.
- Remove the feeling of the project being transactional, emphasizing emotional and cultural values.

New Ideas

Christmas with Portuguese Families

- Promoting intercultural exchange in a Portuguese Family setting through a survival guide or an activities guide

- Matching based on personal interests
- Create a national storytelling campaign (e.g., "My CWPF Experience")
- Provide digital templates for communication and sponsorship
- Incorporate feedback collection during and after the project
- Provide support to families and sections in cities without ESN sections
- Develop an user-friendly registration system for students and families
- Use multiple communication channels, including journals and radios
- Create human-centered storytelling content, such as testimonials and interviews, to create an emotional impact
- Encourage pre-event interactions between families and students to foster promotion of the project

Christmas with Portuguese Retailers

- Develop local partnerships and shared platforms to showcase retailer involvement and their community impact.

Personal Considerations from the Projects Coordinator

By analysing the inputs, contributions and suggestions regarding these two National Projects, I truly believe ESN Portugal created a positive cultural impact in the international and the Portuguese communities. We bond people from different cultures and backgrounds so that, together, we can all celebrate the holidays as a celebration of unity and multiculturalism. Therefore, to improve in the next edition, we need to focus on visibility and engagement.

- Christmas with Portuguese Families

For the International Students, we should promote the project in the Welcome Days, through the university websites and social media, and share experience stories. We also ought to create a smoother and more dynamic matching system so participants feel more connected with each other. We can create toolkits of icebreakers to be implemented, survival guides, explain more personally what is the concept of the project, etc.

For the Portuguese Families, we must promote the project in Erasmus in Schools sessions (young people are one of the best ways to initiate this type of contact), local journals, municipalities, radios, interviews, students associations, youth associations and organisations, youth centers, among others.

Our main focus should be increasing the participation of families in this project since we don't reach the same levels of people interested in different areas and the sufficient number to include all the students interested in the project.

- Christmas with Portuguese Retailers

This project brings a lot of susceptibilities regarding the lack of impact tracking. This means, we can not see the results of the project. Is it working? Did someone use it? Were the partnerships useful and had more customers? We don't know.

It is essential, if we want its continuity, to redesign it to reach both the International Students as the Local Retailers. For that reason, we should implement a way to recognise the local stores that participate in the project (e.g. with a sticker on the door, promotion of their work in social media, campaigns, story telling…).

For the International Students, the discounts need to be useful and worth buying. Nowadays, fast fashion has been the substitute of the identity of local stores and traditions. We want to promote our values of environmental sustainability and culture integration within the international community.

Lastly, we need to have a good tracking system to understand how many discounts were given. Some ideas appointed were the addition of the local retailers partnership to esncard.org, offering vouchers or registering the ESNcard of the local student and, later, being given by the retailer to the ESN partnership responsible.

With these improvements, ESN Portugal can strengthen the emotional value and logistical sustainability of CWPF and CWPR, ensuring that participants (international students, families, retailers, and volunteers) feel connected and supported.