Reduced Ads Experience

Read The Portugal News with fewer ads for 1.99€ per month or 19.99€ per year. Sign up here

Nine in ten Portuguese environmental conflicts are still unresolved

A Coimbra research project is asking people caught up in environmental disputes to describe them.

By João R. Neves , in Science · 15 Nov 2026 · 0 Comments



edits: Unsplash;

Portugal Handbook

Candlelight Porto
Sonha acordado. . Deixa-te levar pela magia de Candl
Candlelight

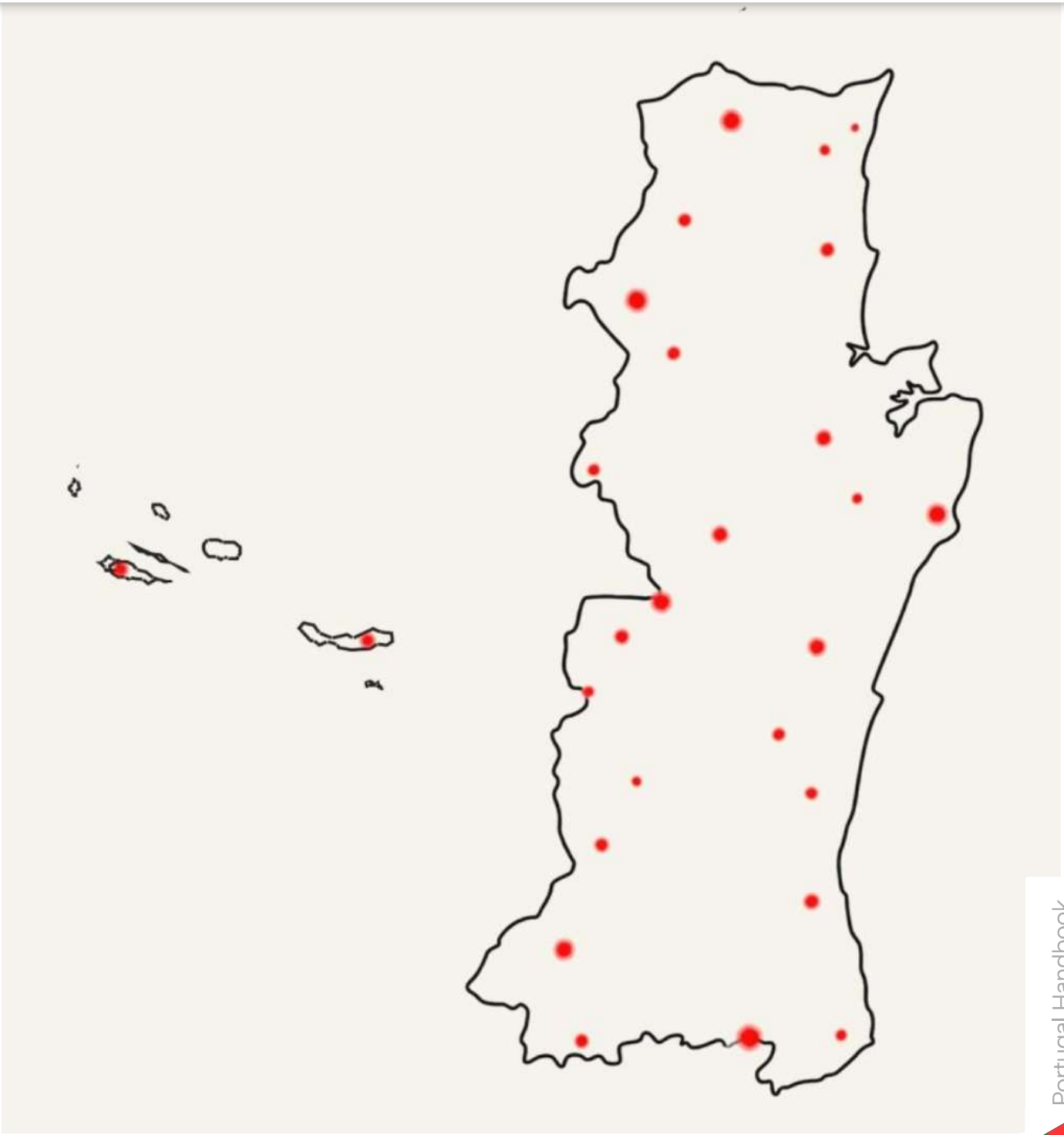
in his neighbourhood: illegal construction, and a nursery was affecting the people living nearby. He described it as a latent conflict, one that has not yet led to organised expressions. People there are gradually feeling worse about what is happening, García-López recounts, but it has not yet "made it to the news".

Cases like this are what EJMapping set out to capture. The project, based at the University of Coimbra's Centre for Social Studies (CES), is building a national map of environmental conflicts in Portugal, drawn from the accounts of the people who live them.

Maps that give people a voice

García-López, the project's principal investigator, says most maps show things like population trends or soil degradation. "Social injustice issues are rarely included in mapping exercises," he says. "That's why we call it counter-mapping."

Portugal Handbook



Author: 3. EJMapping ;

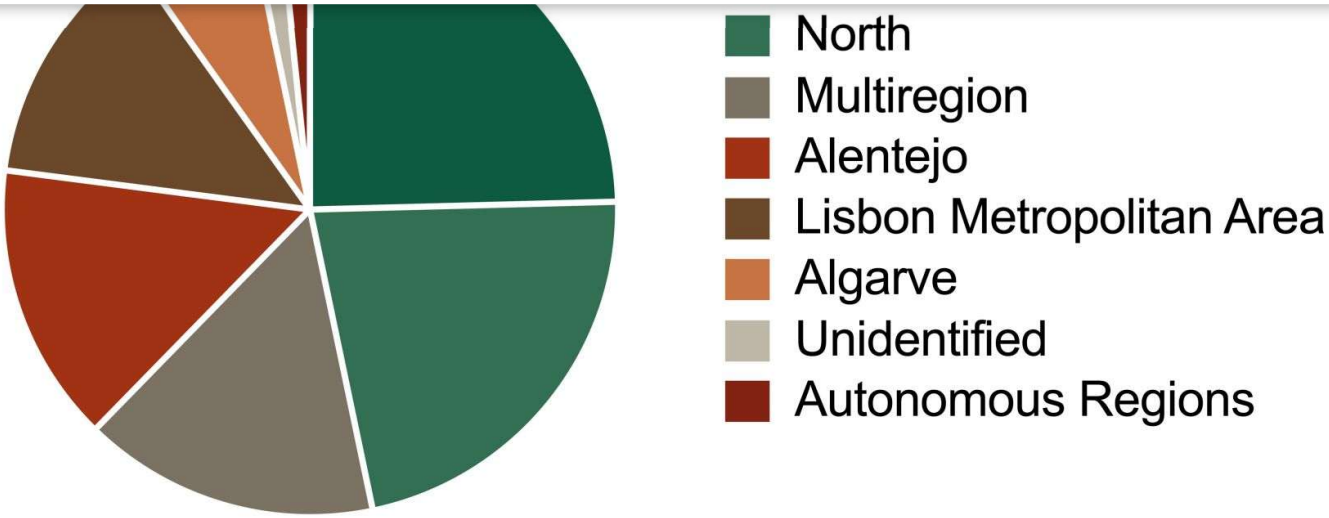
for Science and Technology (FCT) and the European Regional Development Fund. It builds on an earlier project, “Portugal: Ambiente em Movimento”, which documented 62 conflicts in a 2019 book.

Who answers

The national survey, sent to more than 800 contacts, is open until the end of the year. Since September, it has collected 408 responses, 122 of them valid, but the target is 200.

Most respondents know their cases first-hand. According to the project’s report, 83% say they are directly involved, and a third say they are directly affected. The survey relies on self-reported accounts, prioritising the firsthand perspectives of those involved over independent verification of conflicts.

Reaching people outside the contact lists is a challenge. The team is phoning those who have not responded, though so far “people prefer to be sent an email”, and it is also running interviews, attending events and asking people to take photographs of their surroundings to discuss with their associations.



Author: Preliminary Report;

What the first results show

The conflicts named most often are the ones that already make headlines. The Covas do Barroso lithium mine was named by one third of the respondents, and mining and lithium overall by more than half. Solar farms came up for more than a third, and eucalyptus plantations and forest fires for about 3 in 10.

Across the more than 260 conflicts described, luxury tourism and coastal property development, solar energy, mining, and river and water pollution each account for roughly 1 in 10.

Most of the most serious conflicts are still going on. People reported that more benefits go to large economic groups and that public participation is insufficie Farmers are the most affected group, ahead of people in economic vulnerabilit and older people.

“We are seeing a significant increase in conflicts in renewable energy and in tourism,” García-López says. “That suggests policies in those sectors need to change.”

The project, he adds, started from a doubt: “There is a discourse of Portugal as an environmental leader, more than in practice.” The energy transition, in his

Portugal Handbook

Results on the ground are scarce. Only one third of respondents report any change, most often a delay or suspension, and only 10% a cancelled project.

“Effectiveness in stopping projects or resolving conflicts so far seems low,” García-López says. “The vast majority have no resolution, and there is very little cancellation of projects. This worries us. However, we should recognise that there are ways in which movements can be effective beyond the cancellation of the project.”

The survey points to some of them. Asked what positive consequences the conflicts had, almost half of respondents mention increased environmental knowledge, greater public visibility for local demands, and around 40% mention the creation or strengthening of community organisations. Even so, around one third say no positive result came out of the conflict they described, a reminder that the benefits are uneven.



Author: EJMapping;

Portugal Handbook

space for collective planning between movements, where there is room to share resources, information and strategies," García-López says. After a year and a half, the project has held two gatherings of movements: a hybrid meeting in Coimbra in December 2025, which launched the project and opened its goals and methods for discussion, and an online session in June 2026, which presented the preliminary survey results and mapped additional cases collectively. Since June, it has also run a series of training workshops on counter-cartography, the third of which, this month, focused on community water mapping.

The limits of the numbers

The report carries its own warnings. The sample is not statistically representative: it depends on who received the survey and chose to answer. The Centre region is over-represented, partly because the project is based in Coimbra, and the Azores and Madeira barely appear. And because most conflicts are recent, it is unsurprising that few have been resolved.

There is also the question of what counts as a conflict. The project uses a broad definition, so in principle someone with a purely personal grievance could report one. García-López says that is unlikely in practice, since most respondents belong to associations that see problems collectively. These results, in short, show what an engaged network reports.

Portugal Handbook



Author: Start Campus;

What comes next

A national map is expected, though its public date has not been confirmed. The team is also planning a documentary on the overall context of environmental conflicts in Portugal, drawing on the survey, a literature review and interviews with leaders of national environmental organisations, plus the three case studies: Faro in the Algarve, Sines in the Alentejo and Coimbra in the Centre. In its fieldwork, it will run photo-voice workshops with school students and other groups, who are invited to photograph environmental conflicts in their communities and then discuss what the images mean to them.

The Algarve is one of the three study regions, with a focus on water. The confli there, García-López says, includes a planned desalination plant, but “the desalination plant is just a manifestation” of something larger, tied to intensive farming, tourism and property pressure. It is also delicate: “agriculture is also a way of life, a way for people to produce food and make a living.”

Readers who know of a conflict can add it through the survey on the project’s website, ejmapping.ces.uc.pt, until the end of the year.

Portugal Handbook

TV providers are furious: this gadget gives you access to all channels

Techno Mag | Sponsored

Learn More

Is this legal? Access all TV channels without a subscription!

Techno Mag | Sponsored

Learn More

The First Trillionaire's Reading List: 5 Books He Says Everyone Should Know

He follows the 5 Hour Rule: an hour of learning a day. This is the list he recommends, and there's a faster way to absorb every idea on it without clearing your calendar.

Blinkist Magazine | Sponsored

The Secret Habit of the World's Richest Person – I Tried It for a Month

It's not a morning routine, a cold shower, or a meditation app. The one thing the world's wealthiest person does every single day is far simpler — and far more powerful — than that.

Blinkist Magazine | Sponsored

Explore the Future of Finance: New AI Money Apps You Need to Know

quantofnews.com | Sponsored

Learn More

New AI Money Apps Have Launched: What They Do and What to Check

quantofnews.com | Sponsored

Learn More

I Threw Away My Chopping Board When I Realised This

Top Barometer | Sponsored

Portugal Handbook

Plumber Reveals: Stop Scrubbing the Toilet. Do This Instead

Trending Boom | Sponsored

30 Hilarious Beach Photos Caught On Camera

Vetob | Sponsored

The Simple 2-Minute Bedtime Knee Routine (It's Genius!)

Kinzeno | Sponsored

These SUVs are Rated the Highest in Style Alone (Take A Look)

Uncover Premium SUV Models That Redefine Style And Performance For Discerning Drivers.

SearchInfoHub | Search Ads | Sponsored

Learn More

Cardiologist: This is what causes belly fat (and it is not about calories!)

Akusoli | Sponsored



The best method for a flat stomach after age 50 (it’s genius!)
Akusoli | Sponsored

João R. Neves is a PhD candidate in Experimental Biology and Biomedicine at the University of Coimbra, investigating how neuroimmune interactions shape the sexual differentiation of the brain. He is passionate about science communication and open science.

Portugal Handbook

Our dedicated team supports the local community, foreign residents and visitors of all nationalities through our newspaper, website, social media and our newsletter.

We appreciate that not everyone can afford to pay for our services but if you are able to, we ask you to **support The Portugal News by making a contribution – no matter how small**.

Single	Monthly	Annual
€2.50 / month	€5.00 / month	€15.00 / month

You can change how much you give or cancel your contributions at any time.

Continue →

Comments

Be the first to comment on this article

Send us your comments or opinion on this article.

© 2026 The Portugal News – Established 1977
All content and design is copyright Anglopress Lda and The News Group of Newspapers

Portugal Handbook