

## Hosting and Integrating Refugees in Portugal: Recovering the Voices of the Actors

### La acogida y la integración de refugiados en Portugal: recuperando las voces de los actores

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes, in an articulated way, the trajectories experienced by a group of Syrian refugees hosted in Portugal, within the framework of the European relocation program (2015-2017), and the policies adopted, as well as the programs implemented, to host and integrate them in the country. From the development of an ethnographic methodology, the perspectives of the actors themselves of these processes were recovered. Through the analysis of their narratives, it was possible to detect a series of deficits, shortcomings, and development needs not covered in terms of refugee-hosting programs and integration policies, which can be synthesized into three main ones: language (lack of effective teaching of the Portuguese language), work (lack of support tools for its search and job placement) and training (lack of training). A fourth element to consider in the analysis is that of structural obstacles, fundamentally those of bureaucratic-clientele order.

*Keywords:* 1. hosting, 2. refugees, 3. integration, 4. Portugal, 5. Lisbon.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza de forma articulada las trayectorias experimentadas por un grupo de refugiados sirios acogidos en Portugal, en el marco del programa europeo de recolocación (2015-2017), y las políticas adoptadas, así como los programas ejecutados, para acogerlos e integrarlos en el país. A partir del desarrollo de una metodología etnográfica, se recuperaron las perspectivas de los propios sujetos actores de esos procesos. Por medio del análisis de sus narrativas fue posible detectar una serie de déficits, falencias y necesidades de desarrollo no cubiertas, en términos de programas de acogida y políticas de integración, los cuales pueden sintetizarse en tres principales: lenguaje (falta de enseñanza eficaz del idioma portugués), trabajo (falta de herramientas de apoyo para su búsqueda e inserción laboral) y capacitación (falta de formación). Un cuarto elemento a considerar en el análisis es el de los obstáculos estructurales, fundamentalmente aquellos de orden burocrático-clientelar.

*Palabras clave:* 1. acogida, 2. refugiados, 3. integración, 4. Portugal, 5. Lisboa.

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## INTRODUCTION

The latest data made available by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, for its acronym in Portuguese) shows that there are 272 million international migrants in the world, representing 3.5% of the world's population. Of these, 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes around the world, as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, ecological disasters, or human rights violations; 25.9 million reside outside their countries of origin; 41.3 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million refugee seekers (UNHCR, 2019). This same source specifies that 82% of the world's total (16.6 million) refugees or asylum seekers come from ten countries, in the following order: Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Myanmar, Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Burundi (UNHCR, 2019), in which the intensification and prolongation of war conflicts continue to aggravate one of the most pressing global humanitarian crises in recent history.

According to the IOM, these statistics make Syria the only country in which forced displacement affects most of the population, and the country with the highest number of displaced people in the world, approximately 12 million people: 5.5 million of refugees in other countries; 6.3 million internally displaced persons and 185,000 asylum seekers (IOM, 2019). The countries close to the main sources of violent conflict, mentioned above, are home to the most populated refugee camps. Thus, Turkey is the country with the highest number of refugees within its borders, mostly Syrian, followed by Pakistan; while Lebanon has the highest concentration of refugees in its territory in relation to the total population (IOM, 2019).

Contrary to the belief intended to be imposed by means xenophobic political speeches and manipulations of certain media in Europe, the data allows us to verify that European countries concentrate only 17% of the refugee population in the world, Germany being the only country that stands out in quantity (IOM, 2019).

The foregoing, even though the coasts of southern Italy and Greece experienced an increase in the arrivals of vessels with African people from Libya, in the first case, and mainly Syrians from Turkey, in the second. The aforementioned scenario, which peaked in 2014 and was designated as a "refugee crisis," forced the European Union (EU) to adopt measures to control and manage these flows (Padilla & Goldberg, 2017). As a result, the European Agenda on Migration was created in May 2015, with the aim of implementing coordinated responses at the EU level regarding the challenges of the problem posed.

Among the actions defined, the transfer (relocation) of asylum seekers who arrived at the main ports of destination on the continent, Italy and Greece, was established, as well as the resettlement of refugees who were in countries outside the EU (as in Article 78/3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU), although no measure was taken until today in order to

protect people crossing the Mediterranean Sea, a route that from 2014 to 2019 had claimed the lives of 15,000 people (UNHCR, 2019).

Reality shows a European policy that enhances the security axiom—to the detriment of the human rights paradigm—based on the notion of “Fortress Europe” (Goldberg, 2007; Sassen, 2013) and the externalization of its borders, this way contributing to the global reproduction of criminal necropolitics (Mbembe, 2011), directed by the capitalist West, which executes a systematic and selective extermination plan against certain sociocultural migrant and displaced populations of African and Middle Eastern origin (Caminando Fronteras, 2019). And the law of persecution is implemented on those European citizens who oppose this state of injustice and dehumanization, who organize to help these people, who stand in solidarity with them.

Thus, through Decision 2015/1601 of the Council (EU), dated on September 22, 2015, which approved the quotas by countries to relocate refugees from the hot spots in Italy and Greece, a contingent of 1,642 people was established that Portugal was to receive: 388 from Italy and 1,254 from Greece. Thus, between December 17, 2015 and November 29, 2017, 1,520 people were welcomed under the European Relocation Program (hereinafter PER, for its acronym in Spanish), mostly young men (18 to 35 years old) from Syria, Iraq, and Eritrea, in that order, which were distributed in 89 municipalities of the country, being the city of Lisbon the one that received the largest amount. It is worth highlighting that 51% of the refugees welcomed by Portugal under the PER, had left the country before the program expired. Of the remaining 49% in Portugal, 50% were working or studying (ACM, 2018).

Historically, Portugal has been a country of emigration, until in the last decade of the 20th century, when its entry into the European Union (1986) granted it greater attraction as a destination, thus also becoming a country of immigration, even if to a lesser extent compared to other southern European countries, such as Spain and Italy, and with a population of foreigners (including those from the EU, which are almost half of the total) that does not represent even 9% of the country’s population, 11 million (INE, 2018).

It was so that in 1996 a centralized political-administrative structure was created, which would allow the administration to organize the processes of hosting and integration of immigrants: The High Commission for Migration (ACM, for its acronym in Portuguese). The ACM, depending on the context, assumed new roles: in the first place, that of reincorporating Portuguese emigrants who returned to the country (emigrants who, until 2018, were still more, in absolute numbers, abroad, than immigrants residing in the Portugal) (INE, 2018); secondly and subsequently, the ACM took over the hosting and integration of the refugees who had been left aside the intervention of this organism. It was precisely the demands of the PER that pushed and led to this change that would finally result in its involvement in the matter, so as to take advantage of the existing structures for the integration processes.

The hosting structure set up by the Portuguese State began with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MNE, for its acronym in Portuguese), through its General Directorate for Consular Affairs and Portuguese Communities (DGACCP, for its acronym in Portuguese). Once in national territory, it is the Ministry of Internal Administration (MAI, for its acronym in Portuguese), through the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF, for its acronym in Portuguese), which assumes the responsibility of enforcing the asylum law and the bureaucratic-administrative management of the bylaw, including the residence permit, with the complementary intervention of officials of the International Organization for Migration, who provide information assistance to refugees arriving at the airport.

While at the level of the organization and coordination of the hosting and integration processes, the supervisory and centralized governmental entity is the High Commission for Migration (ACM, for its acronym in Portuguese), for this making use of the integrated local services of proximity through the National Support Centre for the Integration of Migrants (CNAIM, for its acronym in Portuguese), with headquarters in Lisbon, Porto and Faro, and so becoming the Support Unit for the Integration of Refugees (NAIR, for its acronym in Portuguese).

The ACM articulates the work, in turn, with the different host entities, among which two stand out: 1) the Portuguese Council for Refugees (CPR, for its acronym in Portuguese), an NGO representing UNHCR in Portugal; and 2) the Refugee Support Platform (PAR, for its acronym in Portuguese), made up of local civil society organizations, including the CPR itself, UNICEF, and a number of Catholic entities.

For their part, these two supra-entities, CPR and PAR, outsourced the management of the PER refugee reception processes to smaller organizations<sup>2</sup> through collaboration agreements, as well as with the municipal governments of the country (Sacramento and Silva, 2018). It is worth noting that in Portugal the PER was normatively supposed to guarantee for the beneficiaries and, where appropriate, their relatives, the rights of access housing, health and education, aid for food and clothing, Portuguese language teaching, support in work insertion and training, as well as a monthly allowance of 150 euros per adult for a period of 18 months, as indeed happened with the refugee subjects selected for this article.

Despite the fact that rights are guaranteed by the current asylum law, when exploring the realities experienced in practice by refugees welcomed in Portugal, facts and data appear that contrast with the legislation. According to Costa and Sousa (2017), the Portuguese hosting context was marked from the beginning by limited experience in working with this specific group, the small number of organizations that intervene in the area, and the lack of public sector programs. In the opinion of the aforementioned authors, despite the political

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<sup>2</sup> These are some of the entities that undertook hosting refugees in Portugal: the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Crescer na Maior, INATEL, and others.

availability manifested at all times by Portugal, in reality there were no adequate and sufficient structures to effectively host the refugees relocated in the country.

This work is presented as following this line of critical analysis, which contributes to evaluating the execution and results of the reception actions implemented in Portugal. The result of an ethnographic investigation carried out between 2017 and 2019, it aims to contribute to the phenomenon studied, emphasizing the need of voicing the point of view and own experience of the refugee subjects, the main protagonists of the processes addressed.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

A certain tendency can be identified that seeks to develop macrostructural visions of the reality of refugees, based solely on the hegemonic official discourse, mass media and the dominant institutional perspective. The aforementioned scheme was applied, specifically, when analyzing the so-called “refugee crisis,” approached from a Eurocentric logic (management/governance/control, and hosting/destination/reception/integration of refugees), which almost completely ignores the actor-protagonists (and victims) of these processes from its heterogeneity, with an even greater deficit when applying a gender approach (Padilla, Ribas, & Goldberg, 2019).

The new scenarios marked by “current immigration patterns: the unprecedented number of migrants and refugees who have recently entered Europe; the largely unregulated nature of this new immigration” (Baubock & Tripkovic, 2017, p. 1), allow us to identify gray areas where systematic interpretations on the matter have not yet been provided. Among the exceptions we can mention: a work on labor integration (Adecco, 2017); a broader study carried out by Cheung and Phillimore (2017) in the United Kingdom in different areas of integration (social networks, language, health, education, employment and housing) with a gender perspective; the mapping carried out by Martin et al. (2016) on measures to support integration into the labor market for asylum seekers and refugees in nine EU countries; and the generic analysis carried out by Guild, Costello, Garlick, and Moreno-Lax (2015) on the trajectories of refugees and hosting programs in European countries, which revealed the various weaknesses in the attempt to guarantee access to dignified conditions of housing, food, health care and opportunities for integration in host societies. Finally, two studies stand out that represent a novel contribution to the problem addressed: that of Niemann and Zaun (2018), on the one hand, and that of Scholten et al. (2017), in European comparative key, on the other.

In the specific case of Portugal, there practically is no academic literature that analyzes the integration processes of refugees from a sociocultural point of view, especially from the perspective of the refugees themselves. Recently, the works by Costa and Teles (2017), Costa and Sousa (2017), as well as the master’s dissertations by Coelho (2016), Ribeiro

(2017), Carvalho (2017), Gonçalves Souza (2017), and Hermann-Jung (2017), described the performance of Portuguese hosting organizations, yet without considering the point of view of refugees, the main recipients of such hosting actions. While Santinho (2016) focused on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers in Portugal, taking as a starting point the political conditions that regulate their hosting, stay and mobility, focusing on the field of access to Health.

In this regard, Coelho (2016) argues that although there is a great diversity of international studies on refugee issues, there is still a lack of research that incorporates the experiences of refugees as a focus of analysis, voicing their perspectives and experiences. Along the same lines, Triandafyllidou (2017) highlighted the need to take into account the explanatory main role that each refugee individual assumes as an active agent in the migration process. Based on the foregoing, it is essential to consider migrations as phenomena configured by people on the move, with particular subjectivities determined, in many cases, by situations of extreme violence and danger of life, because of which they have been forced to flee from their homes in search of protection and asylum. In this sense, a central initial assumption to take into account, whether at the level of the academic approach or that of sectoral policies and practices, is that the refugee population does not constitute an undifferentiated mass or a single and homogeneous group, but rather people of different kinds of origins, trajectories, needs and particularities, which must be interpreted within their concrete specificities. Not understanding this, and not acting according to it, can lead to a set of different material and symbolic oppressions towards these people (Faist, 2018).

Therefore, it is necessary, first of all, to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the analyzed context, granting, at the same time, an essential place to individuals, their trajectory, and their subjectivity in the face of the process under study. Additionally, it is essential to assume these subjects as actors-protagonists of these processes (flight, journey, hosting/refuge, insertion/integration into the host society), bearers of experiences, knowledge, and practices, unique and indivisible. Hence the urgent need to deconstruct the stereotypes of victimhood to which they are frequently subjected, listening to their opinions, their points of view, knowing their representations and evaluations, their dreams and illusions, contributing to their empowerment, strengthening their agency capacity. As part of this approach, the idea of Agier (2006) is taken up in the sense that refugees find meaning in their experience, from the moment in which their testimonies are acknowledged as voices and not only as suffering; when they come to be understood as actors, historical subjects, with their multiple potentialities and capacities.

Approaching the problem and the study subjects came from my performance, during the biennium March 2017 to March 2019, as a researcher in the project *Refugium: building*

*shelter cities and a new welcoming culture. Links between European universities and schools in Human Rights* (2016-1-ESO1-KA203-025000).<sup>3</sup>

The research methodology adopted in the analysis hereby presented is ethnographic, as a privileged research strategy to address social processes and the daily experience of social agents (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) who, as in the case of refugees, are often invisible and their voices silenced. Within the framework of the aforementioned project, I carried out field work (participant observations, focus groups, semi-structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations) with refugees living in Lisbon, hosted by different programs, articulated with the processing and analysis of data from secondary sources (statistics, reports, specific bibliography, official documents, etc.).

Particularly for this work, and based on the analysis proposed, as well as due to the limitations of space, five semi-structured in-depth interviews with male Syrian refugees have been selected, hosted in Lisbon under the same program: the PER. These selected interviewees (Table 1), with whom I followed up and monitored from May 2017 to June 2019, are part of the contingent of Syrian refugees (the majority, among those who arrived within the framework of the PER), who have already complied with the 18 months of the program guaranteeing them, through the intermediation of different hosting entities, an aid of 150 euros per month, housing (a shared room) and meals included. From the moment their contract with the program expired, they began to collect 180 euros from social security (the same as an unemployed Portuguese citizen), that amount not covering housing or meals (or transportation or other expenses). The interviews were organized according to three main thematic blocks, previously defined, in turn corresponding to three identifiable moments in the life trajectories of the study subjects: 1) the world they lived in in their places of origin; 2) migratory/refugee itineraries and trajectories; and 3) hosting and insertion processes the host society.

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<sup>3</sup> Erasmus + KA2 project integrated by the University of Murcia (Spain, coordination), the University of Salerno (Italy), the University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal) and the University of Lund (Sweden). The purpose of the project was developing innovative educational initiatives and practices aimed at strengthening the role of higher education institutions in the field of refugees as agents of social change in each country.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Syrian Refugees Interviewed in Lisbon, Selected for this Article

<i>Research strategy</i>	<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Year of arrival/country</i>	<i>Type of bylaw/program</i>	<i>Work/educational situation</i>
II	D	27	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied law in the place of origin (interrupted). Studies human resources at a public university in Lisbon (scholarship by the institution)
II	L	39	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied interior design in the place of origin (completed). Studies architecture at a public university in Lisbon (scholarship by the institution)
II	N	27	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied teacher training in electronics in the place of origin (interrupted). Will begin studies in electronics at a university in Lisbon (scholarship by the institution) in the coming 2019/20 course
II	S	26	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied informatics in the place of origin (interrupted). Wishes to work and/or study (with a scholarship)
II	Q	25	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied law in the place of origin (interrupted). Wishes to work and/or study (with a scholarship)
II	A	27	2016, Syria	European Relocation Program	Studied economics in the place of origin (interrupted). Studies economics at a public university in Lisbon (no scholarship, works)

Source: Own elaboration.



## RESULTS

From voicing the perspective of the actors, it was possible to collect different realities experienced by the refugees, as well as different ways of conceptualizing the assessments, representations and points of view on the processes experienced. However, it is remarkable how narratives match each other, in relation to certain interacting elements in them, namely:

- The five Syrian refugees selected for this article were relocated from Greece, where they arrived by crossing the Mediterranean from Turkey, following itineraries that, in some cases, lasted up to two years. Unlike the emigrants from southern Europe -Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese people from the mid and late nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century bound for different countries in South America- current non-European migrants arriving on the continent are not the poorest in their countries of origin (Goldberg, 2007).

Neither do the refugees, even if, as in the case of the Syrians, having fled their country they did so without any material resources: on the contrary, many have higher education and job qualifications. In the case of the five Syrian refugees selected for this article, one had finished his university studies in his country of origin, while the remaining four had to pause them to escape the war. Most of them look forward to being able to resume them or to, given the case, continue with postgraduate education.

- All of them highlighted the problem of information (or the lack thereof) in refugee camps, which they described as insufficient, unclear and misleading. In fact, none of them, at the time in the Greek refugee camp, chose Portugal among the 8 countries to choose as the country option to be relocated to under the PER. They were informed that they would go to Portugal, without prior notice. Regarding their experiences with the information received in the host country (Portugal), they believed that it tends to be confusing and superficial, not constituting an important help for their insertion in their new context of life and within the framework of their integration processes to the host society.

- In all cases, the opinion of the mismatch between what was promised in the hosting program and what was provided in practice by the entities involved was revealed. All agreed in negatively assessing the lack of commitment and participation of the responsible institutions and intermediary entities. In the same way, they highlighted the lack of sensitivity, empathy and spirit of intercultural coexistence on the part of the Portuguese people who work in them, including lack of knowledge and disregard for the eating habits and religious practices of the refugees.

- The shortcomings in the program regarding the procedures for support and walk-through in the search for work, as an important part of their insertion and integration processes into the host society, were highlighted. The same, in terms of psychological support, taking into account that many of the subjects suffered violence of different kinds that need to be treated professionally, as well as in terms of their future life plans in Portugal. In this sense, it is

important to note that many of the refugees experience a series of losses, grief and deep stress. Different studies have shown that mental disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety (Palic & Elklit, 2011; Stenmark, Catani, Neuner, Elbert, & Holen, 2013) are caused by the situation of origin of the refugees, the reasons why they were forced to flee and the harsh migratory trajectories they endured until reaching their host society. This reality can be noticed in their narratives, in which marked emotional suffering is identified and multiple episodes of violence are recorded.

- All interviewees highlighted the ineffectiveness in the teaching of the Portuguese language, pointing out the lack of classes, which, according to their assessment, constitutes a major obstacle in their integration processes into the new society (highlighting the way that the above influences at the time of developing interpersonal relationships, getting a job or resuming their education).

This last aspect will be further analyzed in this work, after a global critical inquiry on the Portuguese hosting structure.

*The (Lack of) Experience of Portugal (Government, Institutions, Entities, Personnel) in Matters of Hosting. The Lack of a Strategic Policy Regarding the Integration of Refugees. Structural Problems (Bureaucracy, Patronage, Corruption) as Obstacles*

The inexperience and the structural bureaucracy of the Portuguese institutional system often make the refugee person subject to obstacles of different order, type and hierarchy, making their insertion process dependent on the different areas of integration (work, health, university-educational) to informal arrangements, the personal availability of private individuals and/or the possession of previous contacts with Portuguese people (technicians of hosting entities, religious organizations, etc.), obtained from the social interactions developed since their arrival. This lack of experience, collected in the testimonies of the refugee subjects themselves, the main actors-protagonists, and recipients of the hosting actions, is not questioned at the government level or that of the institutions involved (perhaps, since they do not care to listen to the opinions and assessments of the refugees themselves).

At the same time, a part of the hosting entities did an institutional recycling from the money that came to Portugal from the EU to finance the quotas assumed in the PER. Thus, entities that once worked with a target audience, for example, injection drug users in the center of Lisbon, homeless people, etc., took advantage of the funds available to switch to work with refugees, choosing to recycle themselves in order to serve this new demographic. Said recycling or *aggiornamento* allowed them to for a time endure the crisis of financial resources, applying a mechanical gesture by means of which they only had to change population groups, superficially altering the approach somewhat and adapting the practices, yet with no substantial transformations.

Omitting the name in order to protect its anonymity, it is worth mentioning one of the paradigmatic cases that exemplifies what has been described: it is an organization that historically concentrated its tasks on assisting “homeless” people in Lisbon, especially intravenous drug users, and that from the so-called “refugee crisis,” and like many other entities of this type, taking advantage of the situation, expanded the field from which it attracts financial resources to include the management of the hosting processes of new refugees arriving in Portugal under the PER. In this regard, Y, an African refugee and member of a Portuguese refugee organization, stated:

The people who assumed responsibility for the National Refugee Program had no knowledge or experience of any kind with refugees. So, when the refugee crisis came and as everything is always used to their advantage by politicians, out of sudden about 150 organizations were created that wanted to “help” refugees, almost all of them disappeared by now... One can tell that they appeared at the time because of the European funding... This was also a problem. And there was a discrimination problem inside of that too, between the organizations that did have previous experience working with refugees, and those that did not. The first ones were somewhat isolated by Portuguese bureaucracy (because in Portugal everything works among friends, not among professionals... So, if I am the director of a program and you are my friend, and your organizations gives Portuguese courses, even without much experience, I am still going to run the protocol with you). This was and is wrong, but that is how everything works in Portugal... (Y, personal communication, March 16, 2019).

Beyond the positive self-propaganda, the rhetoric and the boastful publicity of the Portuguese government regarding the reception and integration of refugees, and regardless of their good intentions (which, in any case, I do not intend to judge, rather looking to identify “good practices” and evaluate the results of the programs), it is considered essential to take into account the opinion of the refugees themselves, the main recipients of these actions. In a way, the purpose is to account for the gap between the declarative, the beginning of the mechanism (in terms of the law and the financing), and what happens inside the mechanism at the time of its implementations, its results, and the positive impacts that, if applicable, it generates.

One of the main working hypotheses of the study was that the problems surrounding the reception and integration processes of refugees in Portugal are not determined, essentially, by the lack of funds (in the case of the PER, it was a question of European funds), but, in any case, due to poor use and little transparency in their management. In this regard, a report from the Portuguese Court of Auditors (2019), which analyzed the management and use of European funds to welcome refugees and asylum seekers in their integration processes during the period 2014 -2018, determined there to be a 75% under-execution of said funds. The aforementioned report detailed that only 11.6 million euros were spent out of the more than 45 million that the State had in funds approved by the European Commission for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI, for its acronym in Portuguese). This fact

led to a public declaration of rejection by various associations, entities, and organizations of the Portuguese civil society, expressed in the declaration of a public manifesto of denunciation entitled “*Portugal Irresponsável nas Políticas de Inclusão Social e Migrações*” (Portugal’s Unreliable Politics of Social Inclusion and Migration).

The problems are not exhausted at the economic-financial level; there are also great shortcomings at the organizational and human resources level, that act as obstacles for the refugees, as pointed out by several of the interviewees for the study in the which this article is based on.

L, a 39-year-old Syrian refugee citizen, born in Aleppo, arrived in Portugal also in 2016 through the PER. During the 18 months of the program, the Portuguese entity that assumed and managed his reception provided him with an allowance of 150 euros per month, accommodation at its headquarters in Oeiras (municipality of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area) in a room shared with another Syrian refugee, and right to three meals a day. L has previous training in interior design at the University of Aleppo, as well as ten years of work experience in that field at the Syrian State Railways Company. He fled from war through Turkey, then crossed by boat to Greece, and from there he was relocated to Portugal through the aforementioned program.

One of his main objectives was, from the beginning, to get a scholarship to study at the university. He took a Portuguese course at a public university in Lisbon, and another refugee he knows told him that there was a teacher there who helped refugees who wanted to study. It was through this teacher that he managed to enroll in the Architecture school for free, although he did not manage to get a scholarship by the institution until the second year there. Regarding the processes of hosting, insertion, and integration, he reflected:

As a refugee, I do not want any money, I want help to be able to study or work. It is the same as the Buddha said: do not give the fish, rather show how to fish myself (L, personal communication, May 21, 2017).

In turn, A made the following analysis:

When you watch the TV channels, they look for successful refugees to show them there, but how many of those are there? The ones that obtained good jobs are few, the ones that enrolled in the university, they do not show the reality of most of us... And this is in Lisbon, just imagine how it is in other towns in Portugal where no one knows about history or that there are refugees there. The other day I saw the news, a Syrian family living in one of such towns, their contract with the program was over after two years, and they cannot pay the rent for a house, nor have money to eat, so they have to leave... And to think that Portugal wants to host more refugees! It is as if you wanted to invite someone for dinner. First you must be able to provide dinner for everyone, so that the guests do not leave hungry (A, personal communication, March 25, 2018).

D, born in Damascus, Syria, 27 years ago, divorced, with a son (his ex-wife and son live in Damascus), studied law in that city for three years, fled because of the war and arrived in

Portugal in 2016 (just like as A) through the PER, whose term expired in 2018. In 2017 he began studying Management at a public university in Lisbon, but in the following year he changed to Human Resources, at the same institution. In addition, he teaches Arabic at the same school and other courses managed by the Lisbon City Hall and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), the religious entity that also managed his hosting process. He also participated as a volunteer in the refugee organization Family of Refugees (FOR), created in 2018 in Lisbon.

Based on his own experience, D gave his opinion on the Portuguese welcome entities and the people who work in them. His criticism focused on the lack of experience and of interest on the part of the people who work in such entities, the bureaucratic-administrative obstacles that they present, among other dimensions of the issue: “They have no experience. This is a big problem. They have no experience, and we only receive help for a year and a half, which is how long the program lasts” (D, personal communication, May 14, 2017). A specific problem that the interviewee remarked was that some of these associations and organizations:

Are not really interested in refugees, they just look at it as their job, their task. They work with us as they would with anyone else, they do not believe in the crisis situation. They only do their job; they do not intend to help or do any “extra” work. They do not feel as us refugees feel, they do not know what we need, they do not know our situation for real (D, personal communication, May 14, 2017).

S is also a Syrian refugee who arrived in Portugal in 2016 through the PER. At the age of 26, after interrupting his studies in informatics at a Syrian university that closed because of the war, he confessed that his dream was:

To lead a new life and to be able to continue with my studies. I did some jobs in Lisbon, changing jobs every month, but I have the problem that I do not speak Portuguese well, I need to learn it better. I also went through the issue of rooms for rent. If I manage to study, my life in the future will be better, because I will be able to work in my area, in what I like, I will have more confidence in myself. I want to find a job to make a living and help my family in Syria (S, personal communication, April 20, 2018).

Whereas Q, who at the time of the interview was not working or studying, but who managed to finally attend hospitality school in the 2019/2020 academic year, said the following:

A refugee needs someone to help him get a job, some studies, a scholarship, some money to survive, and the minimum is that someone listen to us! I have been looking for work for more than a month. I will go to the ACM work office to see if they can help me get a job. Most of the refugees who arrived here, and their contract ended, they are doing nothing, neither study nor work. My opinion is that the entities that work in the hosting of refugees in Portugal do not have much idea of opportunities to offer us, both work and study, simply because they do not know our needs. Just

imagine, they cannot even provide us with a professional language learning school! (Q, personal communication, April 28, 2018).

*Ineffectiveness in the Teaching of the Portuguese Language and its Negative Impact on Refugees*

Learning the language of the destination country is a determining factor in any migration process, in terms of socio-labor-educational integration to the new society (Turtiainen, 2012; Valtonen, 2015). In the case analyzed, one of the main barriers that refugees experience when planning their insertion in Portuguese universities (as well as at the work level), is the difficulty they have, above all, in accessing a Portuguese course, something promised since the beginning of their contract with the asylum program.

As a consequence of the abovementioned deficiency, they find themselves with the serious problem of understanding the language in which the classes are taught (Portuguese) in the study centers. Therefore, the limited supply of courses, the lack of teaching and the incomplete learning that the refugees experienced during the hosting/integration process (for example, in the framework of the 18-month PER: only one to three months of Portuguese language courses are provided, which were also offered late) ends up being, in some cases, an obstacle to entry; while, in the case of those who are beginning to study, it is a weighty difficulty that they must overcome as best they can.

Consequently, for a good proportion of refugees hosted in Portugal, language learning was practically reduced to the resources made available on the Internet by the ACM through the *Portugués En Línea* platform,<sup>4</sup> an interactive website designed to provide migrants with a general introduction to the Portuguese language, yet not considering the heterogeneity and variety in terms of origin and condition.

D recounted his own assessment of this flaw, and how close it relates to labor insertion:

We know very well what our problems and needs are: for one, the language... I had my first official course in Portuguese only a year after arriving. It lasted six months, four times a week, as organized by the Lisbon City Hall... How can I learn Portuguese, get experience and work like that? In six months, I do not think so! In Germany they have the language school that is seven or eight hours. If they offered a six months course that was seven or eight hours a day, I would surely be speaking and writing Portuguese after eight months. Non to mention the situation of many refugees who live in small towns, which I visited, towns around Porto, Coímbra... towns with fifty houses, no schools... they do not have any Portuguese courses there, volunteers go there once a month for two hours... Just thinking about them you can tell that the program is not working very well. Then, associations guide refugees to look for work online (employment websites). How are we going to find it, if not even Portuguese people who are looking for work through these means find it? And the refugees, who

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<sup>4</sup> <http://pptonline.acm.gov.pt>

do not speak Portuguese, many do not even speak English, they have no experience with anything, it is not useful that we just put together a CV. They could give technical courses, for example, manual work: how to fix a water pipe, a cup of coffee, you do not need to know the language for that, because, perhaps, they think that our level of education, our age, 40-45 years out there, that you can no longer study forever, you have to work, so then provide us with training in a manual profession... But then, I cannot find a job for you! At least give us tools to work, in addition to the language, education, and really help us finding work (D, personal communication, May 14, 2017).

The experiences lived and narrated by L and N, respectively, are similar:

They told us that we would start studying Portuguese right away, but it was only eight months after arriving, in February 2017, that we began the three-month course at INATEL, taught by the employment center. We were a total of 18 people in the Portuguese course (L, personal communication, May 21, 2017).

A colleague from L's welcoming and housing entity, when he had to flee from Syria, N was studying teacher training in electronics. Since his contract with the PER ended in 2018, his daily life involves the intense search for a scholarship in order to be able to resume his studies in electronics at a Portuguese university (so far, unsuccessful). Regarding the language teaching courses, he highlighted: "the Portuguese course of the Social Security only lasted for a month, they gave us a certificate and they never offered us a second course" (N, personal communication, May 21, 2017).

Q, a 25-year-old Syrian refugee from the same contingent and program, pointed out in his narrative the difficulty of not knowing the Portuguese language when resuming or starting university studies in Portugal:

It is difficult to study with a different language... If it were in Arabic, it would be very easy for me, I would surely study again. It is the main problem! In Germany, I know refugees who are there, and they studied the language for three years! The first two years they study the language in general, and the third they learn it specifically oriented to the sector in which they are going to study. It is more organized and easier to study than here. Here it is also difficult to work without knowing the language, with only 4 months of Portuguese classes in two years! I finished level B1, I think it is not enough to enroll in university... (Q, personal communication, April 28, 2018).

Finally, A conveyed the following opinion:

I think the first key to open the door is the language. First, at least, give us your language, then ask us why we do not work, why we do not study, why we do not assimilate... but give us that tool. They have problems teaching the language due to bureaucratic issues, there are no courses, because of this or that (A, personal communication, March 25, 2018).

## FINAL REFLECTIONS: FROM THE WELFARE ASSISTANCE OF THE WELCOMING TO THE COMPLEXITY OF THE INCLUSIVE INTEGRATION PROCESS

Through the recovery and analysis of the actors' narratives, in this work it was possible to detect a series of deficits, shortcomings and unmet development needs, in terms of refugee hosting and integration policies in Portugal. The Syrian refugees interviewed and selected for analysis in this article focused their criticism on the Portuguese bodies (civil society organizations) responsible for their welcome processes, highlighting their limited experience, the lack of interest, of empathy and of training/skills of the personnel who work in them, as well as in the bureaucratic-institutional obstacles of the Portuguese system, which do not contribute at all in easing their daily life at the destination, providing them with few options to face the challenges that their integration processes imply.

Specifically, they considered that the different entities responsible for managing their hosting processes and their staff do not feel what they feel as refugees, they do not know what they need, they do not know their real situation or the traumatic experiences suffered (lack of empathy, lack of a real connection with an interest in knowing them, in placing themselves in the position and place of the other to any extent): "they work with refugees but they do not work for refugees." At the same time, the subjects identified, in all cases, the main problems and needs at the level of their insertion and integration processes, representing them as deficits in the implementation of the hosting program by the entities, which can be synthesized in three main issues: language (lack of effective Portuguese language teaching), work (lack of support tools for their job search and placement) and training (lack of education).

Until now, the Portuguese government has kept to an official discourse that promotes the wide openness and willingness of the country to welcome refugees, on the one hand; and yet, as if it were a cause per se of the foregoing, it also publicizes the supposed effectiveness of the Portuguese hosting mechanisms developed. These are two completely different dimensions, attesting to the irrefutable fact that objective results or rigorous data have never been presented to corroborate such public claims. Although the setting in motion of the mechanism (in terms of law and financing) is unobjectionable, it is, however, within the mechanism, in terms of its implementation and its results, where there are no empirically verifiable positive impacts.

In other words, it is not a question of lack of will, nor is the aim of this article to pass judgement on intentions. This is not important in the analysis of processes, in the evaluation of policies or in the measurement of results. What is being assessed is the application of the programs, the (in)capacity of those who pass sector policies and the agreements with the organizations —through patronage, cronyism, etc.— that oversee the management of the hosting process and integration of refugees. In Y's opinion, the result of the process is "negative":



There is no development strategy in the country because it is likely that the refugees that will become the new Portuguese citizens in five years will again be homeless as when they were welcomed as refugees. It is something like this: you invest in something just for the sake of reputation and everyone saying, “you are so good in hosting and integrating refugees,” but in ten years people will forget the ten years that have passed; yet refugees have been here for ten years, and when you see them again it is under very poor conditions. This allows to know what should be done. But the workers in organizations, the social assistants, they never meet these people again, for them refugees are somewhere happy... The government has no feedback from reality. Let us be practical: if Portugal invested 100 million euros in 1000 or 2000 refugees, when five years have passed, if none of them worked, had social security, and paid contributions, for some ten million, then I think those 100 million went to waste. Reality is that the money available ended up being for the institutions and those working in them, those who work with refugees and not refugees themselves. Then, the refugee, when coming out of the machine, comes out just the way he entered it, as there was no progress. If the person did not generate anything physically, financially, or intellectually, then I do not know what kind of gain the government is obtaining from that (Y, personal communication, March 16, 2019).

One of the questions that emerge is whether the Portuguese government is really interested in the feedback that Y refers to as coming from the refugee subjects-actors, since, in practice, it seems to be more concerned with advertising and marketing than in the content and results of the policies implemented. The contradiction is: based on what real data can we speak of success or positive results in the hosting and integration of refugees in Portugal, and considering which temporal dimension? Additionally, the voice, opinion, and assessments of the subjects-actors in the process are not listened to or taken into account.

Therefore, a determining element to underpin the improvement of the processes analyzed, lies in the conviction, on the part of the public administration, of the need to know these people who make up the refugee population in the country (the recipients, supposed beneficiaries); listening to their opinions, assess them, in order to, from there, think about policies and implement actions that are effective and relevant, that satisfy their immediate and medium/long-term demands. In itself, the matter is complying with the provisions of the asylum law and official regulations -as well as with the commitments acquired- in this regard, materializing a true and effective hosting, promoting their integration processes to the new society, in order to avoid that these people end up frustrated, at the expense of suffering new situations of social vulnerability, exclusion, precariousness and subalternity in their integration processes into Portuguese society.

The latter is of utmost importance, even more so if one takes into account that, as I have been able to reveal in the interviews carried out, if it were not for the problem of the context of labor scarcity and precariousness prevailing in Portugal, added to the lack of recognition of the pre-qualifications and the fact that this country has the lowest minimum wage in Western Europe, a good part of these refugees would like to stay and live in Portugal/Lisbon

(probably not unlike as the large number of young Portuguese people who, even today, must emigrate for the same structural causes).

This is because they value the positive social-relational dimensions of the Portuguese people and, in the case of some Syrians, even the cultural closeness, as opposed to the information they have about racism and xenophobia against immigrants and refugees in countries from Northern Europe: “Portuguese people are kind, they don’t hate us like in other countries that hate refugees. It is like: Welcome to Portugal. OK, you can live with us, but it is up to you” (D, personal communication, May 14, 2017).

This way, refugees face a wide range of challenges. For the most part, they have previous trajectories of suffering and surviving wars and violence of different types and intensity, ranging from their place of origin, through the itineraries they have traveled, to the refugee camps in Italy and Greece. These situations generate cumulative stressors that can have negative psychological, physical and emotional consequences on health, which must be addressed in a particular way. Likewise, in terms of universal human rights, there are challenges for States in terms of access to public health services, education and in the field of labor insertion, without forgetting the linguistic and cultural barriers (Kanstroom, 2017) that were already identified in the study.

On the other hand, as previously pointed out, refugees and asylum seekers -as well as immigrants- do not represent a homogeneous group, but are rather characterized by a diversity of ethnic groups (predominantly Africans, and Middle Eastern Asians), very different on the sociocultural level too. These differences are often reflected in the types of problems faced at the level of “integration” in host societies, in the framework of which the social interactions of these groups in relation to “natives” can oftentimes be conflictive.

However, despite the heterogeneity pointed out, these subjects experience shared difficulties and obstacles of different kinds in their insertion and integration processes in these societies. Note that when the problem of “integration” is approached here, the traditional hegemonic Eurocentric notion is being discussed, which practically equates integration with integrationism, with a mechanical incorporation, a submissive, passive, obedient and uniform assimilation of foreigners to the national society and culture that welcomes them, because in one way or another it needs them as cheap labor, as contributors to social security to sustain the pensions —and the birth rate— of a population that is getting collectively older each year. Such an approach often paternalistically conceives of refugees as “poor” and “desperate,” who are simply “asked” (requires, compelled?) to “adapt” and “fit in” in the context of the host society, that they simply introject their dominant values, regardless of their origins, cultures, traditions, lifestyles or value and belief systems.

Nor are the previous qualifications and skills that refugees bring with them, as part of their knowledge and experiences accumulated in the course of their life trajectories, taken into account, often being devalued or directly denied. Thus, there is a profound process of

underestimation and/or depersonalization of the refugee, closely related to the reproduction of a stereotyped biocultural bias, built around language, religion, ethnicity, and other stigmatizing variables.

In this sense, one might wonder how many politicians, officials and other decision-makers in matters of migration in Portugal and other European countries were questioned about the positive aspects that benefited society as a whole, of social, artistic and cultural enrichment, professional-economic-labor, among other dimensions, which involves the integration of these refugees and other migrants into their own societies.

On the contrary, the integration perspective adopted in this work harmonizes philosophically, ontologically and personally -the latter based on my own experience and trajectory as a historical subject- with a constructionist approach, in which a process of adaptation takes place on the part of the subject to the new context, in which social interactions, exchanges of knowledge and experiences, relationships of respect, mutual help and support and cooperation take place, where fusions and different types of syncretism are generated, that develop into a future inexorable cultural and genetic mix, in pursuit of the birth of a new society, one richer and more just in its heterogeneity and variability.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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