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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expectations and disappointments on the part of institutions in the process of reception and integration of refugees in Portugal

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ABSTRACT: Portugal joined the European movement to welcome refugees in 2015, and there was an unprecedented phenomenon of civil society mobilization to provide shelter to refugees, overlapping at times the State. The model adopted for hosting refugees was related to the involvement of civil society, which meant that the relocation program assumed two structuring characteristics: the geographical dispersion of refugees throughout the country and the institutional diversity of the structures that carried out their placement. To know the practices developed by the host institutions and the circumstances of the interaction between their staff and refugees allows us to understand the role of local agency aimed at the reception of refugees and its impacts. Attitudes and feelings of disillusionment and disappointment can clash with the expectations of welcoming initiatives, which are often based on a constructed image of refugees as grateful, innocent victims and deserving of help. The aim of this article focuses on the practices and perceptions of representatives of local institutions regarding their relocation experiences. Thus, results obtained on the relocation process from the point of view of the institutions and on opportunities and challenges faced for the integration of refugees relocated in Portugal, as well as feelings, expectations and disappointments, are presented.

KEYWORDS: integration, refugees, relocation, solidarity, welcome

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1. Introduction

This article aims to reflect on solidarity concept in Portuguese society during the process of relocation of refugees experienced in Portugal, by examining the expectations and disenchantments of representatives of the host institutions involved, in particular concerning the early leaving of the programme. The term solidarity has, in the literature on migration and refugees, multiple meanings (Bauder & Juffs, 2020). The perspective adopted in this text is close to the idea proposed by Cantat & Feischmidt of "situated practices of solidarity" (2019: 380). In the typology proposed by Bauder & Juffs (2019) we can say that we observe in Portugal, following the 2015 "refugee crisis", the expressive emergence of several types of "solidarity". On the one hand, we observe "Self-centred" solidarity, especially, on the part of political actors, who claimed a European solidarity, a negotiated solidarity, as Agustín & Jørgensen (2019:8) refer. This is a humanitarian political stance, but, equally, a legitimation of an internal and external political action in the context of the European Union (Sousa et al, 2022).

In fact, Portugal is, in the European context, and in particular of the 2015 'crisis', a peripheral country, far from the epicentre of the emergency centred on the Greek and Italian coasts and the European central pathways. Before the arrival of the refugees, the way the issue was publicised, especially by the media, was fundamental (Carapeto, 2017; Santos, Sousa & Vieira, 2020). We can say that, using Bauder & Juffs' (2019) terminology, the first waves of solidarity from civil society had an "Emotional reflexive" character, leading individuals to act singularly, travelling to Greece and Italy with consumer goods for support, and proposing, some, the direct transport of refugees to Portugal (Sousa et al., 2021; Sousa et al., 2022). This "emotional" dimension had its most pivotal point at the time of Alan Kurdi's death on 3 September 2015, followed by Pope Francis' call for Catholics, and in particular parishes, to welcome refugee families. This solidarity is succeeded by that of a "Reflective Rational" nature, based on ideas of human dignity and equity, manifested above all in the organisation of civil society in the reception of refugees, as was the case of the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR) and, new in the solidarity arena, the Platform for Refugee Support (PAR), which brought together hundreds of institutions and which not only followed the national 18-month reception plan, but added, at the expense of the institutions involved, a further 6 months. We can speculate that, especially in the case of NGOs working with migrants and refugees, many of them also have the dimension of "Recognized Solidarity" proposed by the authors.

In the concrete framework of daily action, solidarity with relocated refugees was marked by emotion, but also by rationality. On the one hand, towards the refugees themselves, and on the other hand, between the communities and organizations involved. In fact, one of the central issues identified is that solidarity between local institutions, the constitution of support and mutual aid networks, were central for the entities involved to overcome the distance from the State institutions and, above all, the apparent absence of the State, after the refugees were delivered at the airport (Sousa et al., 2022). These local entities promoted a "generative and inventive" solidarity, delimited in space, but in articulation with the territory where they are inserted, or the neighbouring territories. At their scale, they resulted and promoted a specific context, which can be associated with what Agustín & Jørgensen state: "solidarity is contentious; emerges strongly in moments or conjunctures; is generative of political subjectivities and collective identities; entails alliance building among diverse actors; is inventive of new imaginaries; is situated in space and time and organized in multi-scalar relations; and it is linked in different ways to institutions" (2019:25). In this way they were able to overcome the difficulties and turn generic policies into effective local solidarity actions, in the sense that Cantat & Feischmidt (2019) give them. These are micro actions of "bottom-up" solidarity, which claim a concrete operational governmentality

associated with this cycle of pro-migrant solidarity (Kousis, Chatzidaki & Kafetsios, 2022:12), although, contrary to what the latter authors set out, without the contestatory and public protest dimension. This "civic solidarity" (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019), of small institutions, was determinant in the Portuguese context and it is important to ascertain whether this action results in more consequent and persistent practices over time. Alongside the CPR work, we can see now organizations like the Jesuit Refugee Service, a main backbone of PAR, publishing since 2019, the "White book on immigrants and refugees in Portugal", critically compiling data on immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees social and economic conditions in Portugal. The supporting data arise from a research project conducted between 2018 and 2019, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), on the integration of refugees relocated under the European reception programme. This study was based on the combined use of quantitative (survey by questionnaire applied to the institutions involved in the reception of refugees) and qualitative (in-depth interviews with stakeholders and representatives of host institutions) methods. The main findings enable an immersion in the complexity of the organisational process of the institutions and civil society in the drive towards welcoming refugees, but also reveal the inexperience of institutions and professionals. The narratives of the participants point to a duplicity of feelings: on the one hand, the sharing of gratifying experiences of receiving refugees, but, on the other hand, their disappointment with the early leaving of refugees from reception programmes, leading many to express reservations as to their willingness to continue hosting.

The article is structured in the following sections: i) Background, this section provides a framework of the Portuguese context with regard to policies and the refugee reception programme, as well as the theoretical foundation; ii) Methodology, this section presents the mixed methodology mobilised to carry out the study; iii) Results, section in which the main results are presented, especially with regard to the management of expectations and disappointments experienced by those involved in the direct process of refugee reception and also the difficulties experienced by institutions in managing to provide adequate response and the strong personal involvement and emotional impact caused in situations of early abandonment of refugees from the country; iv) Discussion, in this section the results are analysed in a reflective way crossing with the available knowledge on the main research questions. The article ends with v) conclusion and vi) bibliographical references.

2. Background

Although the integration process may be structured by national and European norms and policies, it results, to a substantial extent, from concrete actions that are developed at the local level, within the framework of everyday sociability (Penninx, 2009: 5) or, as we mentioned, "situated practices of solidarity" (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019: 380). For this reason, knowing the practices developed by the host institutions and the circumstances of the interaction between their employees and refugees allows us to understand the role of local actions aimed at the reception of refugees and their impacts.

In order to meet the growing number of migrants flowing into Europe, the European Union (EU) implemented a refugees¹ reception approach, referred to as "hotspot" in 2015, entailing of the creation of

¹ According to Papataxiarchis (2022), this time saw a kind of displacement of the concept from "migrants" to "refugees" and which consists, above all, in the formal recognition of a new status, which implies the acceptance of a new identity attributed to irregular travellers who are now treated as vulnerable human beings. In this text, we have also opted for the use of the concept of "refugee".

registration centres in Greece and Italy, for the identification, registration and collection of fingerprints of the refugees. Alongside this, a programme for the relocation of these refugees was approved, with a view to their redistribution throughout the remaining Member States (European Parliament, 2016). The European Agenda on Migration established the criteria that would serve as a guideline to determine the quota of people each Member State should receive, with the allocation based on the following weighting factors: population size (40%); total gross domestic product (40%); number of spontaneous applications/million inhabitants in 2010-2014 (10%); and unemployment rate (10%). In 2015, by Council Decision (EU) No. 2015/1601 of 22 September, and considering that Portuguese population is around 10 million people, Portugal was allocated a quota of 3.89%, with the transfer of 120,000 applicants for international protection to other Member States having been approved.

Regarding the more “structural” proposals included in the European Agenda on Migration (2015), which were not immediate responses to the emergency situation, the European Commission advocated: further harmonisation of standards and practices among Member States, namely the creation of a single asylum procedure in the EU; the strengthening of the operational role of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), especially in determining the Member State responsible for analysing applications and in the process of transferring refugees between Member States, and the creation of a European Border and Coast Guard to control the EU’s external borders (European Commission, 2015: 12, 17; European Commission, 2016: 10, 12).

In Portugal, the reception process was approached at an inter-ministerial level, through the creation of a Working Group for the European Agenda on Migration (GTAEM)². This group was composed of various State bodies: Directorate General for European Affairs/Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF); Social Security Institute; Employment and Vocational Training Institute (IEFP); Directorate General for Health; Directorate General for Education; High Commissioner for Migration (ACM). It was established that the Working Group could also include representatives of local government structures and non-governmental organisations³. Following the activities of these bodies, a manual was drafted with procedural guidelines for the host entities (GTAEM, 2016: 5). The reception strategy was based on five principles (ACM, 2015: 27): i) institutional, prioritising the reception by institutions, rather than by individuals; ii) decentralised, focusing on the potential for reception in medium and low density territories, preventing major concentrations of people; iii) in consortium, mobilising local consortia of institutions which would act together to meet the different requirements for the refugees’ full integration; iv) integrated, by considering all the items covered in the reception form (accommodation, food, employment, education, health, Portuguese language training); v) autonomous, in presenting solutions to foster the refugees’ gradual autonomy, especially concerning accommodation.

At the Portuguese State level, two institutions performed a central role: 1) SEF, vested with powers and duties as to border control, which was entrusted with the management of EU funds and allocation of funds to the institutions, with which it signed cooperation protocols; and 2) ACM, which was given responsibilities in the monitoring and follow-up of the reception process. As the ACM had no prior experience of working with refugees, it was necessary to implement two internal organizational measures, one of an adaptive nature and the other cumulative (Sousa et al., 2021). The submission of expressions of interest in participating in the

² Instituted by Order No. 10041-A/2015

³ This group’s mission was to ascertain the installed capacity and prepare an action and response plan for the reinstallation, relocation and integration of the immigrants, and submit a report indicating the activities developed, their conclusions, proposals and recommendations. In turn, the ACM was tasked with raising public awareness on the plight of the refugees and articulating with civil society and local government for the collection of hosting proposals (ACM, 2017: 11).

reception process, which formed the basis for the perception of the “installed capacity”, could be done in different ways, according to the type of institution⁴.

Despite not having a strong tradition of welcoming refugees, there were expressions of interest in receiving refugees in Portugal from the very beginning, which went beyond the quota established by the EU. In this context, two important civil movements appeared from non-governmental entities: one of them conducted by the CPR and the other by the PAR (created at the end of 2015). Accordingly, the main civil society agent to emerge and congregate efforts together was PAR, composed of numerous civil society institutions aimed at “Promoting a culture of welcoming and integration of refugee families in Portuguese society, based on a strong and well-informed Civil Society” (PAR, s.d.: 4). PAR’s action is coordinated with the participants by its office upstream, with the host institutions being in the middle, referred to as “hosts”, and the community at the base, embodying the process of reception and integration. Its actions are distributed over awareness-raising, training and specific action, along two lines: the “front line”, with missions to countries with refugee camps to provide local support, and “PAR families”, aimed at the direct reception of relocated refugees, prioritising families. The PAR is differentiated in the reception process, as it develops an established reception programme, with a timeline of 24 months (rather than the 18 months developed by all the other institutions, pursuant to the government programme), under the condition that the host institutions ensure the extra six months, at their own expense.

In sum, on the one hand, Portuguese civil society has shown a strong interest and active role in welcoming refugees, which enabled the ACM (a State entity) to list the five principles established in its reception strategy arising from the foresight, expectation that the community would engage. Here, we have non-governmental and civil society participation in the delineation of the organisational strategy and structure of refugee reception, operationalising a new form of conceiving reception. On the other hand, inexperience was found on the part of the governmental and non-governmental entities, revealing weaknesses in preparation, training, design and expectations, sometimes, “imagined” as to the expected relations forged by the refugees in view of the solidarity and “generosity” demonstrated by the Portuguese, frequently referred to as receiving them with “open arms” (Sousa et al., 2022).

However, the lack of preparation and means meant that there were often improvisations to solve problems, supported by the Portuguese people’s solidarity, in the sense given by Bauder & Juffs (2019), with an “emotional reflexive” character, leading individuals to act singularly or mobilized by social and humanitarian support institutions. According to Araújo (2013), this specificity of the Portuguese population may be due to the fact that, since the 1990s, Portugal has simultaneously been a country of emigration and immigration (Góis & Marques, 2018) which has enhanced the willingness to welcome and show solidarity with people from different cultures and geographies. The Portuguese State took some time to organise a structure of support and guidance for local entities and civil actors. In fact, it was found that the two major civil society structures (Refugee Support Platform (PAR) and Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR)) organised and structured themselves much faster than the State.

There is a public financial programme, but from the very first moment, it was the private institutions that shouldered the organisational dynamics of the reception process. It could perhaps be thought that the private

⁴ Hence, citizens expressed their willingness to the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, while “3rd sector” institutions would do so through the Refugee Support Platform (PAR), the Union of Portuguese Misericórdias, the Union of Mutualities or the National Confederation of Solidarity Institutions. After formalisation of the proposal at the ACM, its “response capacity” would be assessed by SEF (Observatório das Migrações, s.d.).

programme would have more advantages over the public one, in which monitoring is done by “overworked” public officials (Beiser, 2003: 206), which implies greater distance and less involvement in the process of relocation vis-à-vis private entities and their most socially and politically committed activists and volunteers. However, empirical studies (e.g. Verschraegen & Vandevordt, 2019) show that this does not always happen and there even seems to be a preference among refugees for the public programme, given that, for example, the willingness to help sometimes interferes with the right to privacy of the people welcomed, who are placed at risk due to living close to sponsors and away from their ethnic groups. Close connection with sponsors can lead to dependency and exploitation, for example (Beiser, 2003). Very often, it is not sufficient to be a “good Samaritan” (Dronkers, 2022), underlying the concept of “rescuing” refugees, as training and planning is necessary. At the civil society level, the rescue perspective makes it easier for civil society organisations to moderate the intensity of their engagement, but by taking on responsibility for the refugees, citizens may simultaneously strengthen their position of privileged responsibility.

Another important aspect is related to the imaged ideal of a “good refugee” (Hetz, 2021; Clark, Haw & Mackenzie, 2022), generating expectations of gratitude and “meekness” among those welcomed, permeated with the desire for a “good integration”, meaning “good incorporation” (Ager & Strang, 2008) in the host society, but leaving little room for the exercise of agency (Giddens, 2004), with limited opportunity for the political voice of the welcomed refugees (Hetz, 2021: 877).

The reception organisations, the technical staff involved in the process and volunteers develop expectations in relation to the refugees and delineate programmes and plans, very often not considering the particularities of their cultural origins and specific sociodemographic features (Harrel-Bond, 2002; Omata, 2023)

The negotiation of their integration and feeling of belonging is also a long-drawn-out process, which implies relations of power, representations, marginalisation and exclusion, especially when involving refugees from cultures that are profoundly different from the host culture (Hetz, 2021: 878).

3. Methodology

This article is based on the data collected within the framework of a project Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund that took place between 2017 and 2019 (Sousa et al., 2021). This project focuses on the practices and perceptions of representatives of local institutions regarding their relocation experiences, analysing the organisation and process of relocation, meaning that refugees were not directly included in the investigation. This is an unprecedented approach in the Portuguese academic context and was the first study developed under this prism. Knowing the point of view of institutional leaders and volunteers involved in hosting provides insights into institutional strategies and designs of linking experience and outcomes to public debates and public policymaking, through the 'transferability' effect of each institution's particular approaches to policy-making and forms of governance (Ruhs, Tamas, Palme, 2019). The obtained results are presented on the relocation process from the point of view of the institutions, the opportunities and challenges encountered in the integration of refugees relocated in Portugal, and their feelings and disappointments. The supporting data were collected between 2018-2019 from the exploratory interviews with stakeholders; the application of an online questionnaire survey to 97 representatives of entities that welcomed refugees, at national level, with regard to several dimensions: motivation for institutional involvement; how they are organised; the supporting structures and networks created; how the integration paths of the relocated refugees took place, the concrete measures applied, the way in which they involved the refugees in the management of the measures that were destined for them, and their assessment or recapitulation of the whole reception and integration process.

Finally, based on the results of the survey and the main emerging insights, 20 in-depth interviews were carried out with technical staff and heads of institutions, selected according to the type of institution and geographical dispersion. In the 20 interviews, 24 interviewees took part, carried out in the various districts of Portugal, 17 women and 7 men, aged between 29 and 74 years old, 4 of whom are religious who work in the institutions, 4 volunteers and 16 professionals (technicians and heads of institutions). This article focuses especially on the findings of the interviews with technical staff and heads of institutions welcoming refugees. The excerpts from the interviews presented are marked by the letter E, followed by the interview number, the type of institution and the relationship with the institution.

4. Results Analysis

In this section, we present some of the findings of our study of the process of integration of welcomed refugees, through the perspective of representatives of host institutions concerning expectations, experiences and disappointments emerging during along this path. These perceptions depend on various factors, such as the type of person or family welcomed, the origin of the refugees, their religion, the host institutions, communication difficulties due to not knowing the Portuguese or English languages, and the places where they were hosted. However, perceptions also depend on the type of hosting institution, on the person who hosts refugees and their beliefs and institutional culture. It is important to highlight that the experiences reported by these institutions refer to the first relocated refugees who arrived in Portugal, back in 2015 and especially in 2016.

Expectations experienced about welcoming refugees: mismatch between the imagined and the real

The preparation of welcoming refugees raised great commotion and energetic mobilisation of civil society, driven by the desire to show solidarity and expectations of a warm welcome, as illustrated by the following testimonials.

We had no experience, but right from the start when that first sign of welcoming someone appeared, (...) we immediately put ourselves in welcome mode and, therefore, we knew from the very beginning that we would welcome a family. (...) Consequently, from the very first moment, we wanted to help resolve a problem for these people. (E02, voluntary, religious institution, 75 years old, male).

(...) following the appearance of those incredible images of that child who died on the beach, he was one in the midst of I don't know how many others, but, really, those images shocked everyone (...). (...) this was something that emerged spontaneously within my family (...). Yes, I mean, that feeling of impotence, but we have to do something, right?! It doesn't make sense not to do so. (E03, religious, religious institution, 54 years old, male).

Nevertheless, the reception process is complex and reveals the interdependence and need for management of expectations, both of the refugees as to the conditions they will find, and of the institutions about the individuals they will receive. The interviewees expressed expectations around their hosting, concerning the management of expectations, both personal and mutual, namely because these people are different from the ones they usually engage with. On the one hand, the joy of welcoming and performing solidarity, on the other hand, the challenges posed by the daily work, as this interviewee noted:

And you could see it, the people who went to work with that, " ah, wonderful, I am going to have the opportunity to do good for the world, I am going to help in this problem...". Everyone wants to help! Ah... but then facing that on a daily basis is very complicated." (E06, technician, IPSS, male, 35 years old).

However, on the other hand, *"there are also some frustrations here, but what we have to do is ensure management of our expectations and their expectations, find a middle ground, make it work.* (E13, technician local authority, town hall, woman, 63 years old).

The host institutions are not all the same, nor do they have the same economic and asset capacity. For that reason, different forms were organised but securing the housing offer was an activity that strongly mobilised the institutions and volunteers. Some institutions have housing assets which were provided to this end, others rented housing and paid the rents while the families lived there, and others used the housing assets of volunteers, private persons who joined the reception process.

Initially, we had a project which was to settle ... So, if whole families came, to settle those families in the city, in the Municipality of [name]. For that, we also already had partnerships with some Civil Parish Councils, which provided houses in the villages. That, at a later stage ... not right at the integration stage, but subsequently, they could go there they could have a means of subsistence, cultivating their vegetable garden, this and that. In terms of immediate integration, they were hosted at an institution of the Santa Casa; therefore, we had a house where they were installed, with rooms prepared for babies, with everything. The city's citizens also engaged in providing furniture, kitchen equipment, materials to adapt the house. (E14, Technician, Santa Casa de Misericórdia, woman, 42 years old)

However, this process also led to the systematisation of a concerted action, in some institutions generating new forms of action. For example, by some local government entities, which joined together with non-governmental institutions to create support networks, so as to contribute to meeting all the needs, giving rise to the creation of a local action plan for reception of refugees, in some cases, as indicated by the following testimonial:

(...) we constructed a database, so as to understand what their needs would be, (...) availability of accommodation, human resources, material resources, equipment (...) And then we gave them some time to answer, they answered and based on that survey we organised (...) all the stages that we considered essential in this process which was the issue of reception, the preparation of that reception, the reception and its monitoring, training and capacity-building, and information, which is transversal to these three stages; we constructed that plan and formalised the action plan through a protocol. (...) where (...) the interviewee states "I can offer four accommodations", another offers three, "I can provide a psychologist", "I can offer x", and that was how we did it. (E13, technician, town hall, woman, 63 years old)

Personal involvement was absolutely crucial for facing the daily problems, for unblocking and speeding up procedures. In other words, the voluntarism of those engaged often worked better than the technical skills that would need to be mobilised to resolve the more problematic situations.

Difficulties experienced by local institutions in the integration process

Despite their inexperience, the institutions mention their sensitivity for intervening with refugees considering their work with other vulnerable groups, for example the homeless, immigrants and Roma people (known as Ciganos in Portugal) as credentials to work/ act in refugee reception. However, in the daily business of the intervention, it is necessary to adjust the responses as the specific issues and situations arise, of each

community and of each individual and family hosted. Accordingly, it was found that the social intervention protocol directed at vulnerable groups, with which the institution has experience, cannot be fully replicated in the intervention with refugees. The need to adapt to new situations, faced by the technical staff, managers and volunteers, is present in the operationalisation of the process on a daily basis, forcing an ongoing emotional management in the concrete work with refugees. For example, in the case of refugees who were unable to choose the destination country and came to Portugal reluctantly, against their wishes, or due to cultural differences.

We understood that this is a very difficult thing, we are welcoming people who are culturally very different, who do not want to be hosted in Portugal. This was something that we had not really understood, today I have a rather better understanding of how things work with the Syrians (...). So, culturally it's very difficult, it's very different (...). In that regard, I think that we were very unprepared, we didn't really understand that concept. (E03, religious, Religious Institution, 54, male).

Other interviewees highlight that the reception implementation process was much more than just the application of a programme: it involved huge emotions, concerns and was time-consuming in terms of work and personal life.

(...) it was very anguishing and it was often hard for me to fall asleep. The following day, I would wake up thinking about the refugees. My family actually thought they had entered into our family as well, the topic of refugees was always present, when they arrived. Until they arrived, so, it was anguish, but it was not exactly... But on the day they arrived, I was so anguished, I felt so much anxiety. (...) now, the preparation is something else, each family is a family, and it's the same for us here, they are not really so different from us, fingers are pointed at them more because they are outsiders, because their failings are exactly the same as the failings of our families, because people don't do exactly as we want them to do, they do what they want. If they asked me to change, I wouldn't change either, it would depend, right?! (E10, Technician, IPSS, Female, 50 years old)

The welcoming of the refugees was considered very consuming and implied being in a state of alert, with respect to healthcare and wellbeing, which entered into the personal life of technical staff and volunteers.

It's an experience that always remains with us, on a daily basis, even during weekends, and sometimes at night too, in which we are permanently living the situation of those people, thinking about their needs, what needed to be done. We are almost like a mother, we have to remember that they have a medical appointment on day x, that they have to go here, that they have to go there, safeguard everything, today you are going to do some medical tests, remember... (...) the things that don't go so well, the moments of despondency, the frustrations, what can manage to be achieved, why can't it be achieved, trying to think about how to find a way around things so that the person is able to integrate better, so that the person feels more included, all these processes are very ... they are challenging, it's beautiful work, but it's emotionally exhausting. (E13, technician, town hall, woman, 63 years old).

The difficulties required the mobilisation of skills, namely by the lack of knowledge of the language and the difficulty in the field of emotional competencies, due to the lack of experience in dealing with traumatic situations inherent to the specificity of the paths of the refugees hosted, influence the whole intervention process which are not used on a daily basis with the other groups with which the institution acts, and this gave rise to learning that was used in the following intervention, with other individuals or groups that were successively received.

Emotional impact of the refugees' early leaving of the programme

The Portuguese relocating refugees process were made with the support of the state and local hosts (ACM, s.d). The supports that are granted to refugees aim at covering the 18 months of hosting them and their initial integration, and refugees are entitled to a temporary residence permit, issued by the Portuguese Foreigners and Borders Service, which allows them access to all rights and duties, namely regarding access to health, education and the labor market as determined by the Asylum Law. Following the issuance of their temporary residence permit, which occurs approximately one month after the applicants arrival to Portugal, the said rights are added the right of access to the labor market, to professional training and financial aid. When they have refugee or subsidiary protection status, they can travel but only for tourism. In the case of applicants with refugee status, you should request the issuance of a travel document for refugees to the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) (ACM,s.d.:6). Nevertheless the commitment assumed with the country and with the host institutions, some refugee families left Portugal before completing the programme and without authorisation from Portuguese authorities and with lack of knowledge of host institutions. Their leaving the country generated many concerns and feelings of impotence among the technical staff and institutional managers when faced with the fleeing of refugees, sometimes of families with young children.

(...) it creates disappointment here [the early leaving]. What it is especially produces is a human disillusionment. That's it! But we have to think about that. We can't just sink in the disappointment. The motive for which we integrate them is for humanitarian reasons. They, in their freedom, decide to go away, but we continue doing what we have to do. The principle is correct. And I think that it's to be continued. For me, it's to be continued. With more adjustments, the language issue. And maybe ... Sometimes, I think, "they didn't understand? They didn't want to understand?" They were so desperate in a refugee camp that they accepted going anywhere, except staying there? It's also necessary to understand the framework, right? And then, when they arrive, that's when they start rationalising. (E05, Psychiatrist, health clinic, female, 55-60 years old)

The relational closeness that is experienced is abruptly severed when they leave the country, without having given prior notice. That generates immense pain and concern, but, deep down there is an understanding of the choice taken by these families considering their desire for family reunification.

The first family ... was painful. [laughter] It was difficult, because ... although we knew that this country did not live up to their expectations, it was very small for them, we created a strong relationship, of closeness with that family. Especially because the woman was pregnant and we went to the medical appointments. We were the ones who went with her to her first ultrasound scan, who told him the news that he would have a boy, after having had a girl! So, there was enormous closeness here. A very, very family relationship, almost! (...) For us, it was a shock! (E07, technical director, IPSS, female, 45 years old).

Another interviewee stresses the investment, not only professional but also the emotional proximity created due to the need to accompany people in their most basic daily tasks, and shows her disappointment following the early leaving of the families.

But this is very personally demanding. And ... I confess that I was rather disappointed! Disillusioned, even! Because I understand their expectations and because they left. I understand perfectly. But that doesn't mean I'm not rather hurt with this all. So, there we are. I am not hurt with them, in any manner, but at the moment I don't think I could give of myself so wholeheartedly as I did with those families. (E07, technical director, IPSS, female, 45 years old).

The difficulty in understanding the motivations for leaving, or the way that it was done, leads some of the interviewees to speak of a feeling of ungratefulness, which in some cases became widespread among the population of the host locations, as there had been a strong mobilisation towards receiving the refugees.

They [the hosts], sometimes, even say "ungratefulness, so, we made such a huge investment, we were willing to receive them and then they walk out on us like this?" We try to explain that it's not ungratefulness, it's not about devaluing our work, but simply because they have other ambitions, they have other expectations of life, other life plans. But, it's not always easy to explain this to the communities ... or to the institutions. (...). They have gone through so much to get to where they are and this is just a small step. It's such a tiny risk they are now running, which is getting into another European country! (E20, Technician, IPSS, female, 45 years old).

The local intervention required close engagement, in dialogue attentive to the refugees' needs and experiences, based on ongoing learning of the social intervention relationship which embodied particularities different from those usual in interventions with other groups. The narratives especially indicate that it was these dimensions – empathy, listening, dialogue, attention, negotiation – that enabled overcoming the novelty of the process and the inherent difficulties (related to bureaucracy, communication via the language difference, management of expectations between the refugees' aspirations to reunite with their family and the conditions offered for their residence in Portugal, etc.). However, this required much more emotional involvement of the technical staff, managers and volunteers than that in the standard social intervention protocol.

Nevertheless, despite the disappointment and attempts to understand the process experienced, there is a persistent desire to continue welcoming refugees. According to Sousa et al., (2021) 52% of surveyed host institutions state that, at the time, they no longer intended to receive refugees again. Even so, a considerable part (48%) maintains their desire to receive them, as demonstrated by the discourse of this interviewee.

What I most learnt was understanding the difference, right?! Because it's one thing for us to theoretically know that there is a different culture, that there's a different religion (...). For me, that was the hardest thing I learnt, but I can say that I also grew humanely with these people. (...). (E17, Religious, Religious Institution, 56 years old, Female)

This implies having access in advance to the profiles of the refugees who will be received, so as to achieve more suitable hosting conditions, and the refugees having prior information about the country and living conditions and knowing that they may be hosted in different geographic areas (more rural or more urban), as they do not all stay in large cities.

According to OECD (2019: 39-41), individual migration pathways usually involve passing through several transit and destination countries. This is unique to asylum seekers and refugees, with an estimated one in five permanent migrants in OECD countries leaving their host country within five years. While some return to their country of origin, others choose to migrate to another host country. In the specific case of migration of asylum seekers and refugees to other countries, it can pose a challenge to the host country in several dimensions 1) it represents a waste of scarce resources made available for the integration of individuals who do not remain in the country. This is perhaps even more challenging in a decentralised environment, such as Portugal; as there is no economy of scale and private hosting entities bear most of the cost. 2) in the European context, asylum seekers leaving Portugal for another country may be sent back when they apply for asylum in another EU country. The return of asylum seekers brings added difficulties as they must restart the integration programme, having lost months of potential integration time. In this scenario, institutions may no longer be available to take back departing refugees, which may hinder the integration process. 3) this process of entry and exit of refugees, represents a challenge for public opinion, and is often interpreted as a flaw in the proposed integration

system. As in relation to other countries, few statistics are known about these migration flows between EU countries by refugees in Portugal, hosted under the European programme (OECD, 2019: 39). According to statistics made available by SEF we are witnessing a significant migration of asylum seekers arriving in Portugal, and the percentage of asylum seekers, under EU schemes, who at some point left Portugal was 54% by the end of 2017. This rate varies according to the country of citizenship. It is 70% for Iraqis, 56% for Eritreans and 50% for Syrians (OECD, 2019:40). The reasons why refugees decide to leave one host country for another are disparate. While some decisions are made prior to arrival (the host country is seen as transitional rather than a destination country). One can understand this mobility strategy, given that almost half of the asylum seekers who leave, do so within one month of arrival in Portugal, and about 70% within the first three months in the country (OECD, 2019: 40). The high rate of migration shortly after arrival suggests that this is not specifically a failure of the integration programme in place but because Portugal is not the desired country: on the one hand, it does not have immigrant communities from the countries of origin and also because they are unaware of information about Portugal and the reception process (a situation that has changed since 2018, with the holding of prior interviews with refugees to be received in Portugal that allow to make known the country and the socio-demographic profiles to better adjust the offers and expectations). Moreover, the reception process is not experienced in the same way by the institutions and refugees. Sometimes, life goals and interests were not considered, as if the refugees had no mind of their own or did not have their own life plans, beyond the current time, generating feelings of disillusionment and disappointment among the hosts.

Our first shock was with the lack of interest of most families in remaining here. (...) It was a major problem. It was one of the major problems. Especially with the minors. [silence]. And so, we understood that for the majority of the families (...), they made this their transit point. Which is a phenomenon that happens all over the country. We were not really expecting this. (...). (E06, Technician, IPSS, Male, 35 years old).

The issue of abandonment and return, as already mentioned, is not a specifically Portuguese issue, nor is it exclusive to the 2015 EU relocation programme. According to Oliveira (2022; 120) in recent years, Portugal, recorded secondary movements out of the country of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection who arrived in the country between 2015 and 2021 under European support mechanisms, i.e. in recent years asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. However, it appears that withdrawals were more frequent in the relocation mechanism (with arrivals between December 2015 and April 2018), for which of the 1,550 persons received in the national territory, 1,013 had a secondary movement out of Portugal (65.4% rate). Also according to the same author, the rate was not the same throughout the years of implementation of the relocation programme (arrivals between December 2015 and April 2018): people who arrived in the national territory in 2017 (total of 739 among the total of 1. 550 arrivals under the relocation programme) showed a higher proportion of secondary outbound movements out of the country (rate of 74%, or 547 exits out of the 739 arrivals in that year), compared to people arriving in 2016 (total of 757 arrivals, out of which 451 people exited, inducing a secondary outbound movement rate of 59.6% of those accepted in 2016) and in 2018 (10 exits out of the 30 people arriving between January and April 2018) (Oliveira, 2022: 121-122).

Discussion

Notwithstanding the willingness shown by civil society, the solidarity and voluntarism of the Portuguese, we found that the institutions that participated in the reception process are diverse in relation to their size, with

the great majority having no prior experience of receiving refugees, some with greater capacity to mobilise human and financial resources, although that, in itself, is not sufficient (Nygård, 2006). Theoretical knowledge and technical support are fundamental to face the challenges in the various dimensions of the life of the people who are received. In practice, the reception of refugees was a process experienced with great closeness and emotional engagement (Santinho, 2016), but it also left deep scars with respect to feelings of impotence to resolve the complexity of the situation confronting them and despondency due to unfulfilled expectations, especially in cases of the refugees' early leaving of the programme, with their departure to other countries, placing in question the image created about the "good refugees" ideal (Clark, Haw & Mackenzie, 2022), who should be docile and grateful, and obtain the approval of the hosts (Harrel-Bond, 2002; Hetz, 2021). Feelings of disillusion and disappointment may clash with the expectations of the voluntary welcoming initiatives, frequently based on a constructed image of refugees as victims who are supposedly grateful, innocent and deserving of aid (ECRE, 1999; Youkhana & Sutter, 2017: 2). Along these lines, the European Council on Refugees & Exiles [ECRE] believes that the process of integration should begin immediately at the time of reception, as this, added to the quality and duration of the process of analysis of asylum applications, has a significant impact on the refugees (ECRE, 1999: 29). However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the refugees' willingness to remain in the host society arises from the impossibility of returning to their countries of origin (Baubock & Tripkovic, 2017: 9). Now, in the Portuguese case, concerning the first refugees who arrived in 2016, there was an enormous lack of experience in reception processes on the part of the governmental and non-governmental entities, exacerbated by the fact that their destination had very often not been chosen, but rather imposed (and was unknown) (Sousa et al., 2021), despite the existence of refugee welcome prior to 2016 (Santinho, 2016). The expectation of receiving "good refugees" and providing them with a "good integration" was not always met in the actual reception processes, as there were difficulties in recognising the profiles of those people and giving value to their academic and professional qualifications of origin. The first wave of reception of relocated refugees allowed, however, for some procedures to be changed, starting with the screening of interests in coming to Portugal, with missions of Portuguese entities for the selection and transfer of refugees, for knowledge of profiles but also to make known the country and the contours of the integration processes (Oliveira, 2022; OEDC, 2019).

According to Omata (2023), host institutions expect refugees to perform the defined aid programmes properly. However, the aid system normally offers little or no room for improvisation or flexibility of the established aid, and evaluation of the processes are based on the expectations and suppositions underlying the planned programme. Along this path, ensuring logical causality between the planned interventions and the outcomes is essential for the professionals as a sign of delivery of "good aid" (Omata, 2023: 14). Nevertheless, in planning, "logical frameworks" can be transformed into "blockage frameworks" due to their inflexibility to changing contexts and to the refugees' agency capability.

From the perspective to Bygnes & Mette (2022), sometimes, the social imaginary of "promise of inclusion" of refugees is supported by ideas of equality and reciprocity in social relations between the hosts and the refugees, but, in practice, inequality practices are revealed, which are based on power inequality. The ideal tends to fail in practice, being often unattainable, in a country that is one of the most unequal in Europe, based on structural inequality, where more than one fifth of the population is poor (Carmo et al., 2018; Farinha, 2022).

Sometimes, when the responses and behaviours of the refugees went beyond the host institutions' expectations, this generated embarrassment or even words of reprimand expressed by the "aid providers", by the hosts. Frequently, neither the profile of the refugees nor their living conditions prior to the current situation

were not considered, with the intervention's design being more or less homogeneous, which occasionally led to forms of discontent among some refugees received in Portugal. Following Etzel (2022), based on his study of refugees received in Germany, sometimes attempts have been made to deconstruct their identities and cultures of origin, seeking a reconciliation with the normative framework of the host society. For this author, the refugee integration programme was not constructed in an independent manner, but was built within existing structures of the welfare state which (re)define "good" or "deserving" refugees based on their fulfilment of an ostensibly universal standard of compliance, in which the refugees must prove their value by trying to learn languages, through cultural and economic integration.

Conclusion

The main findings demonstrate that the process of relocating refugees in Portugal would not have been possible without the key role of civil society, in particular the host institutions that, in each specific location, received refugees. The mobilisation of these institutions was, above all, an initiative of civil society, which found expression in the entities that traditionally develop activity in the area of forced migrations, and in the emergence of a new focal organisation, the Refugee Support Platform. The main reasons given by the institutions for being willing to participate in the reception process were solidarity, a sense of mission and a humanitarian attitude. However, these principles of solidarity created expectations and emotions regarding the people to be welcomed and the circumstances in which this would occur, which, in many cases, were not fully met, generating feelings of disappointment among the people involved in the process.

Despite the various situations that Portugal has faced throughout the 20th century in receiving refugees, the country has never systematically accumulated the experience, either at the political or at the social level. Only since 1974, with the establishment of democracy, has a consistent asylum regime been implemented, with social actors called ad hoc, according to circumstances and needs. It was only in 2007 that Portugal adopted a refugee resettlement policy. It is therefore not surprising that there is no accumulated experience and that most of the institutions involved have never worked with refugees. Nevertheless the Portuguese inexperience in receiving refugees in a structured and organized way and the undergoing of a very complex process without well-defined guidelines and practices, the fact is that a multi-situated reception pathway was constructed, dispersed over various geographic areas. This led to the building of a body of knowledge by various institutions, irrespective of their mission, by technical staff and citizens in general which, in turn, enabled improving performance through their endorsement of a more flexible and open "middle ground" approach, the creation of networks of institutions, the acquisition of situated learning, which acted as drivers for local dynamics. This experience was recently revived with Portugal's very active participation in the reception of Ukrainian refugees during 2022. In fact, it was found that the Portuguese and their institutions are, generally speaking, highly amenable to receiving refugees, materialised in the continuation of refugees, both relocation and settlement since 2015-2018 and until 2021, supported by better preparation of institutions, notably in the mobilisation for reception of Ukrainian refugees in 2022.

However, this reception "model" is sometimes idealised and based on expected images of some passivity and gratitude on the part of those received, embodied in the concept of "good refugees". Acquired experience can be a pathway towards understanding this social reality, the desires and life goals of the refugees, thus turning those receiving refugees into "better hosts".

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