THE REFUGEES' "INTEGRATION" IN PORTUGAL AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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To all those who believe and struggle for

collective horizons of freedom justice and hope.

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ABSTRACT

In an era marked by heightened border control and securitization of migration, war, genocide, and Land devastation, this thesis sits alongside the critical scholars' increasing call for migration research that can help build communities rooted in solidarity with refugees. The present dissertation, titled "The refugees' 'integration' in Portugal: an exploratory study," consists of an exploratory research project that seeks to contribute to the knowledge production in migration studies.

The exploratory objectives of the research project presented in this thesis unfold on two primary levels: using the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic to explore structural problems, disparities, and pre-existing barriers within the Portuguese asylum system; and understanding the experiences of refugees and Civil society actors (CSAs) in the urban context of Lisbon, considering refugees not as the sole unit of analysis; to understand the experiences of refugees, based on a combination of existing literature and empirical evidence. To explore the supra-local *nexus* and transnational value of research outcomes, and to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role played by CSAs in migration governance.

To engage with these goals, and consistent with Community Psychology's pluralism and triangulation methodological perspective, a multi-qualitative case study was implemented.

The main body of the thesis was organized according to the following sections: an Introduction, which presents an overview of the entire research project, rationales, theoretical perspective; State of the Art in the field of migration Studies, the research project-based theoretical framework, as well as a descriptive overview of the Portuguese asylum reception context. The second section will present the research project's method, phases, questions, and design. The third section comprises four studies, which represent the empirical evidence supporting this thesis. The fourth session concludes with a detailed presentation of the main evidence encompassing three different levels: methodological, theoretical, and practical. Additionally, it addresses limitations of the research project, ethical challenges**,** and outlines future research lines. Finally, the last session provides appendices with supplementary materials and field images.

Keywords: Civil Society Actors; refugees; Lisbon; solidarity; community psychology

RIASSUNTO

In un'epoca segnata da un crescente controllo delle frontiere e dalla securitizzazione della migrazione, dalla guerra, dal genocidio e dalla devastazione dei territori, questa tesi si inserisce nel crescente appello degli studiosi critici per una ricerca sulla migrazione che possa contribuire alla costruzione di comunità radicate nella solidarietà con i rifugiati. La presente tesi, intitolata *"L'"integrazione" dei rifugiati in Portogallo: uno studio esplorativo"*, consiste in un progetto di ricerca esplorativa che mira a contribuire alla produzione di conoscenza nel campo degli studi sulla migrazione.

Gli obiettivi esplorativi del progetto di ricerca presentato in questa tesi si articolano su due livelli principali: utilizzare la lente della pandemia di COVID-19 per esplorare problemi strutturali, disparità e barriere preesistenti all'interno del sistema di asilo portoghese; e comprendere le esperienze dei rifugiati e degli attori della società civile (ASC) nel contesto urbano di Lisbona, considerando i rifugiati non come unica unità di analisi, ma con l'obiettivo di comprendere le loro esperienze sulla base di una combinazione tra letteratura esistente ed evidenze empiriche. Il fine ultimo è esplorare il nesso sovra-locale e il valore transnazionale dei risultati della ricerca, contribuendo a una comprensione più profonda del ruolo svolto dagli attori della società civile nella governance delle migrazioni.

Per affrontare questi obiettivi, e in coerenza con il pluralismo e la prospettiva metodologica della Psicologia di Comunità, è stato implementato uno studio di caso multi-qualitativo.

Il corpo principale della tesi è organizzato secondo le seguenti sezioni: un'Introduzione**,** che presenta una panoramica dell'intero progetto di ricerca, le motivazioni e la prospettiva teorica; lo Stato dell'Arte nel campo degli studi migratori, il quadro teorico su cui si basa il progetto di ricerca, nonché una panoramica descrittiva del contesto portoghese di accoglienza dei richiedenti asilo. La seconda sezione presenta il metodo del progetto di ricerca, le sue fasi, le domande e il disegno metodologico. La terza sezione comprende quattro studi, che rappresentano le evidenze empiriche su cui si fonda la tesi. La quarta sezione si conclude con una presentazione dettagliata delle principali evidenze emerse, articolate su tre livelli distinti: metodologico, teorico e pratico. Inoltre, affronta i limiti del progetto di ricerca, le sfide etiche riscontrate e delinea le future linee di ricerca. Infine, l'ultima sezione include le appendici con materiali supplementari e immagini raccolte sul campo.

Parola chiave: Società Civile; rifugiati; Lisbona; solidarietà; psicologia comunitaria

RESUMO

Numa era marcada pelo aumento do controlo das fronteiras e pela securitização da migração, pela guerra, genocídio e devastação de territórios, esta tese insere-se no crescente apelo de académicos críticos por uma investigação em migrações que possa contribuir para a construção de comunidades baseadas na solidariedade com pessoas refugiadas. A presente tese, intitulada *"A 'integração' dos refugiados em Portugal: um estudo exploratório"*, consiste num projeto de investigação exploratório que procura contribuir para a produção de conhecimento no campo dos estudos migratórios.

Os objetivos exploratórios do projeto de investigação apresentado nesta tese desdobram-se em dois níveis principais: utilizar a pandemia da COVID-19 como lente para explorar problemas estruturais, desigualdades e barreiras pré-existentes no sistema de asilo português; e compreender as experiências de pessoas refugiadas e de atores da sociedade civil (ASCs) no contexto urbano de Lisboa, considerando os refugiados não como unidade de análise única, mas visando compreender as suas experiências com base numa combinação entre literatura existente e evidência empírica. O objetivo final é explorar o nexo supralocal e o valor transnacional dos resultados da investigação, contribuindo para uma compreensão mais profunda do papel desempenhado pelos ASCs na governação das migrações.

Para alcançar estes objetivos e em consonância com o pluralismo e a perspetiva metodológica da Psicologia Comunitária, foi implementado um estudo de caso multimétodo qualitativo.

O corpo principal da tese está organizado nas seguintes secções: uma introdução, que apresenta uma visão geral de todo o projeto de investigação, as motivações e a perspetiva teórica; o estado da arte no campo dos estudos migratórios, o enquadramento teórico do projeto de investigação, bem como uma visão descritiva do contexto português de receção de requerentes de asilo. A segunda secção apresenta o método do projeto de investigação, as suas fases, questões e desenho metodológico. A terceira secção é composta por quatro estudos, que representam a evidência empírica que sustenta esta tese. A quarta secção conclui-se com uma apresentação detalhada das principais evidências, abrangendo três níveis distintos: metodológico, teórico e prático. Adicionalmente, aborda as limitações do projeto de investigação, os desafios éticos e delineia linhas de investigação futura. Por fim, a última secção apresenta os anexos com materiais suplementares e uma seleção de imagens de campo.

List of core Publications and empirical evidence

This thesis is based on the three core articles and a preliminary analysis listed below:

Briozzo, E., Ornelas, J., & Vargas Moniz, M. J. (2021). The asylum system and the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Lisbon: Existing disparities, structural problems, and new insights. Community Psychology in Global Perspective, *7*(1), 127-145. https://doi.org/10.1285/i24212113v7i1p127.

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Briozzo, E., Vargas-Moniz, M., & Ornelas, J. (2025). Civil society actors' experiences and practices in pre-employment phases to secure the job citizenship right

Within the Portuguese migration governance. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*. (Under review, see Annex-VIII)

Preliminary analysis of Study IV **Briozzo, E.,** Ornelas, J., & Vargas Moniz, M. J. (n.d).

Other related publications and submissions

Maria Gabriela Uribe Guajardo[1]*, Jasmin Lilian Diab[2], Gwenetta Curry[3], Muriel Lamarque[4], Jose Mazariego[5], **Erica Briozzo[6]**, Kristefer Stojanovski[7], Nazmy Villarroel[4], Ozge Karadag[8], Shameran Slewa-Younan[9, 10], Kathleen Cravero[5]. Advancing Participatory Approaches in Global Migrant Research: A Roundtable Discussion. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health.* (minor revision)

Esposito, F., Di Napoli, I., Ornelas, J., **Briozzo, E.**, & Arcidiacono, C. (2022). Examining life in detention: a process of survey translation and adaptation through an ecological and collaborative approach. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, *50*(3), 302-316. https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2021.1918827

Esposito, F., Di Martino, S., **Briozzo, E**., Arcidiacono, C., & Ornelas, J. (2022). Women's experiences of immigration detention in Italy: examining immigration procedural fairness, human dignity, and health. Frontiers in psychology, 13, 798629. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.798629

Rochira, A., Verbena, S., **Briozzo, E**., De Simone, E., Esposito, F., Garrido, R., Ramírez, M. G., Paloma, V., Vargas-Moniz, M., & Mannarini, T. (2024). Multiculturalism in dominant ethnic populations: A transnational profile analysis. International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 103 (May 2023), 102051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2024.102051

Esposito, F., de Lellis, F., De Cordova, F., & **Briozzo, E.** (2025). "Who's breaking the law… not us, them!" Inside immigration detention in Portugal. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12784

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PART 1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents an exploratory research project that aims to explore the asylum experiences of refugees[1] and the Civil Society Actors (CSAs) who mobilize in solidarity with them in the urban area of Lisbon, from a community psychology (CP) perspective. It addresses the lack of CP research on refugees in Portugal (see Rebelo et al., in press)—a field primarily dominated by anthropological approaches (see, among *others,* Santinho, 2013; Santinho & Rebelo, 2024; Vacchiano, 2018).

Although CP has significantly contributed to migration (Birman & Bray, 2017; Lykes, 2013; Lykes & Hershberg, 2015; Esposito et al., 2015; Esposito et al.,2019; Paloma et al., 2016; Esposito & Kellezi, 2020; Dutta, 2018; Ciofalo, 2022), much migration research in psychology, remains rooted in individualist-oriented research (Dafermos, 2015; Esposito & Kellezi, 2020; Sládková & Bond, 2011), reflecting the broader methodological and theoretical hegemony within the discipline (see Bhatia, 2020).

Differences in the well-being of people on the move have often been attributed to individual-level variables, typically at the expense of multilevel and more context-sensitive analyses (Esposito et al., 2015; Kelly, 2006; Thurston & Verhoef, 2003; Tseng & Yoshikawa, 2008). Psychology has historically relied on a "therapeutic paradigm" and "trauma discourse" (Ingamells & Westoby, 2008), portraying people on the move as inherently deviant or " other" (Junuzi, 2019) to dominant, normative values (Marston, 2004). Such a Mental Health focus reflected biomedical, hegemonic models that define migrants' problems and, in turn, shape policies and services that regulate their lives (Fennig & Denov, 2019). This body of literature, aligned with a Euro-Western identity and notions of mental illness and well-being (Watters, 2001), often functions, as Junuzi (2019) observes, as a 'balm for host citizens' when confronted with the marginal and defenseless 'other'(2019, p. 128). Nevertheless, as Esposito and Kellezi (2020) note, such research still provides valuable insight into the harmful effects of systems of oppression. Trauma-focused research on refugees' mental health often reflects a tendency

[1] The term "refugees" is used here in accordance with Martina Tazzioli's thinking; indeed, the term "refugee" claims the right of all people to be protected, regardless of their migratory status. This term allows us to counteract the *dichotomous* characterization of legitimacy pervading the discourse on asylum seekers, dividing them into legitimate or illegitimate humanitarian refugees (see (Rowe & O'Brien, 2014)

to medicalize, dehistoricize, decontextualize, and depoliticize the lived experiences (Esposito & Kellezi, 2020; Kia-Keating & Juang, 2022; Pinelli, 2019). Obscuring people's positionality and agency, as well as the contexts they navigate.

From a CP standpoint (see Kloos et al., 2014; Prilleltensky, 2012), justice, well-being, and surrounding conditions are intertwined. This thesis, consistent with CP and the social sciences more broadly (see for example Watters, 2001), embrace this stance, seeking to challenge dominant trauma and individual and other vulnerability-centered paradigms (McPherson, 2010), by situating experiences within a higher-level of analysis (Orford, 2008; Tseng & Yoshikawa, 2008), including individual, relational, organizational, community, and institutional contexts (see Esposito et al., 2019; 2024; Sládková & Bond, 2011).

In line with CP, it calls for the need to reintroduce context, recognizing that although psychological dimensions are manifested through individuals, their roots lie within the broader social structure (Martín-Baró, 1983).

Grounded in CP principles, this thesis responds to the growing call for justice-oriented methodologies (Jacquez et al., 2021), such as participatory approaches that bridge science and society, prioritize social justice, and envision collective well-being (Fine, 2012; Hammack, 2018; Montero, 2012; Prilleltensky, 2001; Vasquez, 2012). Adopting a CP lens contributes to the expanding field of migration research, which has seen significant growth in recent decades (Perkins et al., 2011). In doing so, it critically interrogates systems that cause suffering (Birman & Bray, 2017; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023; Togral Koca, 2019), by contributing to a broader scholarly shift toward migration research that embraces critical border perspectives (Ambrosini, 2021; Esposito et al., 2025).

Furthermore, it seeks to understand the experiences of both refugees and their allies, shifting the focus from deficit-oriented views to one that emphasizes opportunities and strength-contextual factors through empowerment (see Esposito & Kellezi, 2020). Rather than focusing solely on the "axis of violence"—while acknowledging its importance—it emphasizes alternative strength-oriented concepts, such as solidarity[2]. In this vein, the thesis demonstrates

[2] The term "solidarity" originates from ancient Roman law, where it referred to the responsibility of each member of a family or community to collectively respond for the payment of common debts, defined as *obligatio in solidum* (Karageorgiou & Noll, 2022; Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2022). It was only later, in the 18th and 19th centuries, that solidarity became linked to a broader understanding of the social pact and the issue of

the potential of CP as a critical and transformative lens for knowledge production in migration research. It critically moves away from frameworks that reinforce and legitimize migration governance and integration policies rooted in dominant state and power discourses (Amelina, 2022).

> In pursuit of this goal, we drew inspiration and guidance from the Capability approach, which served as the analytical tool throughout different stages of the research project. The contribution of the Capability approach lies in its ability to reverse the methodological perspective, offering a new evaluative framework to explore the lived experiences of actors across the entire "migration arena," not only of refugees in a strict sense. From this outlook, the Capability Approach aligns with what authors (see Amelina, 2022) describe as the need 'to move away from treating the migrant population as the unit of analysis and investigation and instead direct the focus on all the actors of the migration arena, including migrants' (Dahinden, 2016, p. 2217).

To engage with the thesis's exploratory goals, we look at the capabilities, which are the freedoms people have in order to participate in activities and social roles they value— basically, what people can do and be, depending both on their personal abilities and on the opportunities and constraints provided by their environment (Shinn, 2015). Since the Capability Approach is an approach rather than a fixed model, it can be adapted to various contexts and needs. Indeed, the Capability approach served both for data collection (see Annex IV: Capability semi-structured interview guidelines and probes) and for data analysis.

Data collection and analysis were conducted in solidarity with the people encountered and in alliance with civil society actors (CSAs) to produce alternative knowledge production (Amelina, 2022) and to highlight the critical aspects of the asylum regime (see *inter alia* Fassin, 2012). As Picozza did in her study, solidarity here is understood as a 'method' by adopting it as an 'epistemological viewpoint' (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 18, as cited in Picozza, 2021).

The ethnographic field work thus assumed a political significance (see Sandri, 2018) and became a counter-practice on multiple levels: politically, as it emerged as an act of de-bordering solidarity (see Dimitradis & Ambrosini, 2022); and academically, as a means of

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social cohesion (Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2022). This theorization was supported by utopian philosophers such as Charles Fourier as well as by sociologists like Émile Durkheim (Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2022). It was also during this period that solidarity was employed as a foundation for democratic revolutions and political struggles (Brunkhorst, 2005;Featherstone, 2012; Scholz, 2008; Stjernø, 2005).

resisting research opportunism and extractivism by fostering connections grounded in commitment, trust, care, and, at times, friendship (Picozza, 2021). Amid calls for alternative knowledge-production strategies (see Amelina, 2022; Raghuram et al., 2024), the ethnographic method, underpinned the entire exploratory research project, was situated in a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which emphasises engaging community members through mutual respect and co-learning, thereby striving to balance research with action (Israel et al., 1998) see for example (**Annex- I)** picturing me during a neighborhood -based festival, presenting the primary outcomes of the research project**.**

Solidarity enabled us to provide, in return for the information obtained from the people we encountered, critical-based academic knowledge production to community mediators and other stakeholders, as well as practical support to the refugees involved (see Blank, 2019).

Solidarity here, too, has represented an attempt to overcome the divisions and contradictions temporarily, and a way to 'envisage connection across differences' (Hunt-Hendrix, 2018), opposing the dynamics of ‘othering’ and creating opportunities for new relationships, bonds, and social alliances among subjectivities that would otherwise be divided.

Practices of solidarity within this research project have unfolded within a space of inclusion-exclusion, a gap created by mechanisms such as racial profiling, deportations, nationalism, or a ‘politics of fear’ (Feischmidt, 2020; Kirchhoff, 2020; Schilliger, 2020), which underpins the boundaries of solidarity.

The solidarity that guided us throughout the exploratory research project was both material and symbolic (Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2022), embedded in the representation intended for refugees. Therefore, an effort was made not to reinforce and reproduce the "essentializing' discourses of 'violence, victimhood, and tragedy' (Cabot, 2019, p. 268) or of otherness (Ticktin, 2017) around refugees and migrants. As Picozza (2021) reflects, conducting ethnographic research within the asylum system—where the researcher is both a participant and part of the process—is by no means unique to this research project (for examples of this kind, see, among others: De Genova 2005; Kasparek and Speer 2013; Fontanari, 2018; Heller et al. 2017). This exploratory research project aims to produce knowledge in support of the struggles of refugees and civil society, or, more implicitly, to contribute to a critical knowledge production about the entire internal and external border regime (Amelina, 2022; Papadopoulos et al., 2008; Tsianos et al., 2009).

Solidarity, therefore, has been a tool that has accompanied the entire research process, from participant observation to data collection and analysis. Adopting it as an 'epistemological point of view' (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 18, as cited inPicozza, 2021), and asking what observation and involvement in practices of support for refugees and migrants can tell us about producing critical knowledge on the asylum regime and its governance.

Ultimately, we hope that this thesis aspires to contribute to future research that aligns with an envisioned CP "committed to the empowerment, liberation, and well-being of our communities" (Fernández, 2022, p. 29), particularly those exposed to social, political, economic, and institutional marginalization (2022).

1. Migration Studies: State of the Art

In this section, an overview of the state of the art in migration studies, including its trends, evolutions, gaps, and overlaps with psychology, is provided to gain an understanding of how this thesis fits within the state of the art.

Migration studies have undergone rapid evolution as a research field over the past few decades (Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). Migration represents a topic of critical importance for research in psychology, which explores the associated challenges and scenarios from diverse perspectives and across various geographical contexts (Sládková & Bond, 2011). In recent years, migration has become one of the most politically controversial issues on a global scale and "one of the biggest social challenges in contemporary communities" (Procentese & Migliorini, 2022, p. 217). It is therefore not surprising that psychological science has also been associated with migration studies (Palmary, 2018). Although this field is less explicitly aligned with psychology (and much of the literature is more oriented toward political science, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, or criminology), there are clear overlaps between migration studies and psychological literature (2018). An example of this overlap is the present thesis, which represents a contribution from psychology to the field of migration studies.

A primary theme that intersects psychology and migration studies is the psychological well-being of people on the move and refugees (Palmary, 2018). In this sense, most of the mental health research (see Tahir et al., 2022) amongst migration has been influenced by a trauma-based psychiatric epidemiological perspective (Niemann & Zaun, 2018), focusing primarily on assessing the prevalence of psychiatric symptomatology, specifically, PTSD, and

other mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety (Drozdek & Wilson, 2007; Miller et al., 2006; Schweitzer et al., 2006; Steel et al., 2002).

The migration experience has been linked to factors that impact individual mental health and well-being, as well as the relationships between migrants and their families and communities (Tahir et al., 2022). In the case of forced displacement, the greater likelihood of traumatic social events such as war, economic hardship, and experiences of domestic violence preceding the migration process can exacerbate the stressors to which refugees are exposed (Hou et al., 2020; Mwanri et al., 2021). Additionally, experiences of forced migration are often associated with multiple layers of social trauma, ranging from the abrupt rupture with one's cultural and emotional environment before departure to the challenges encountered during

displacement, which are shaped in part by whether the migration occurs through regular or alternative channels (Gleeson et al., 2020).

Furthermore, studies that have been conducted in different geographic areas have focused on the difference between the dominant population and the refugee population, highlighting how the latter have higher rates of mental health problems than non-refugees (Fazel et al., 2005; Heeren et al., 2012).

When it comes to risk and protector factors, the reference framework is trauma-centered and mental health-oriented. The following are considered risk factors: pre-migration phase (see, for example, Pham & Vu, 2024), migration process-related factors, and socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., gender) (Acarturk et al., 2018; Jurado et al., 2017). These perspectives ultimately risk reducing people on the move and refugees to an essentialist representation.

Other risk factors are also identified, including exposure to potentially traumatic experiences before and during migration (e.g., war; political persecution; torture; imprisonment, and domestic violence) (Song et al., 2015). Among risk factors, research over the past 20 years has demonstrated the profound impact of postmigration daily stressors on refugee well-being (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Nickerson et al., 2010; Soller et al., 2018). Also referred to as post-migration living difficulties (PMLD) (see Brunnet et al., 2020). Studies indeed show that post-migration stressors, such as discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, limited access to resources, and social isolation, are often stronger predictors of

refugees' emotional distress than exposure to trauma before or during the migration process (Björn et al., 2013; Mwanri et al., 2021; Wilson, 2013). Post-migration trauma is thought to be determined by the arrival in the new socio-cultural context (Gleeson et al., 2020). Characterised by differences and ruptures from the context of belonging, often accompanied by a language barrier, illegalization or uncertainty of migration status, and weak social networks (Mwanri et al., 2021; Wilson, 2013).

Interestingly, there are instead studies that highlight the intersectional relationships between the violence that affects people in their countries of origin and contemporary immigration laws and policies (see Esposito et al., 2019). Studies like the latter tell us about the continuity and structural nature of exposure to intersectional forms of violence (including the enduring proliferation of brutal and violent border control practices and measures) to which people are exposed and must resist (Palmary, 2018).

In addition to pre-migration and post-migration stress factors, a growing body of literature

has also explored themes of strength and well-being in the lived experiences of refugees (see Birman & Bray, 2017). Paradigmatic is the post-traumatic growth studies, which offer a more complex comprehension of the response to traumatic experiences, where people are active agents in their own lives (Gangamma, 2018; Rasmussen et al., 2010). Within this perspective, protective factors such as resilience and posttraumatic growth (Arnetz et al., 2013; Birman & Bray, 2017; Lepore & Revenson, 2006) are also considered. As has been mentioned above, the well-being and mental health spectrum has been the mainstream construct with which migration within psychology has been approached. The well-being theory was also combined with acculturation psychology (PA) - supporting the existence of universal factors that explain the psychological adaptation and well-being of people on the move and refugees (Paloma et al., 2016). Factors such as age, gender, education, and variables related to the acculturation process alike (e.g., length of stay in the host country; reasons for migration; similarities between the country of origin and the host country; willingness to migrate) are thought to influence the well-being levels of migrants (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010). PA links the success of cultural adaptation of migrants to the new context with their well-being, due to the relationship established between socio-cultural and psychological adaptation (Paloma et al., 2016). La Fromboise and colleagues (1993) argue that "the key to psychological well-being may be the ability to develop and maintain competence in both cultures" (p. 402). Acculturation

psychology has also focused on factors such as language, which is related to a higher level of well-being (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). Another approach within PA focuses on acculturative stress and the coping strategies used by migrants as key factors of well-being (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010; Mena et al., 1987; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). Other models related to the well-being construct also exist, such as the bi-dimensional acculturation model (Berry, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001). According to this model, the factors deemed determinant are (1) ethnic identity, sense of belonging, shared values, and commitment to one's ethnic group; and (2) national identity, which involves a sense of belonging and positive attitudes toward the host country's population. The combination of these factors gives rise to different acculturation strategies (see Paloma et al., 2016). Among these, the bicultural acculturation strategy is deemed the most related to well-being (Yoon et al., 2008). Additionally, factors such as identification with one's ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and bicultural identity (Berry, 2005, 2008; Zlobina et al., 2008) also play a role.

However, Phinney and colleagues (2001) state that the type of identity developed does not depend solely on the individual level, but also on public policies, the attitudes of the dominant society, and local circumstances. Similarly, Berry (2005; 2008) argues that a bicultural identity can be freely chosen by migrant groups only when the dominant society is open and inclusive toward cultural diversity.

Thus, while this thesis acknowledges the contributions of this body of research—from which it also originates—it deliberately departs from it. First, it does not examine individuals' experiences starting from the pre-migration phase, but instead focuses on what are commonly referred to as settlement experiences. Furthermore, it does not rely on constructs such as *stressors* to understand asylum experiences. Instead, it draws on constructs and frameworks aligned with the principles of CP, which avoid limiting analysis to the individual level or relying on trauma paradigms to interpret the experiences of both refugees and those who engage in acts of solidarity with them. Nor does this thesis rely on concepts such as *culture*; in fact, it does not support the notion that refugees' experiences are primarily a cultural issue. While cultural factors undoubtedly play a significant role in settlement experiences (see, for example, Procentese & Migliorini, 2022), they are not considered sufficient to explain the complexity of asylum experiences fully.

Related to acculturation, assimilation, and sense of belonging, more recently, dominant research in the field of mobility has adopted the integration paradigm (Ager & Strang, 2004;

Phillips & Berman, 2003). Integration has been represented as a central concept when it comes to people on the move (Strang & Ager, 2010). Ager and Strang (2008) developed a framework that describes key aspects of integration, including access to education, employment, housing, and health services, in settlement settings. Ten core indicators underpin integration across four main domains: education, employment, housing, and Health, through markers and means, as outlined in Social Connections, Facilitators, and Foundation (2008).

To ensure accountability to the host community, integration has been considered a two-way process, involving a combination of willingness to adapt on the part of institutions, the social fabric, and individuals (Klarenbeek, 2021).

The concept of integration has evolved, both as a key political goal related to the settlement of refugees and people on the move in general, and as a significant subject of public debate (Ager & Strang, 2008). Issues related to the integration of refugees and migrants have been a central concern in policy discussions in the Global North (Olcese et al., 2024).

Given the political relevance of this construct, there is a threat that it may be used with very different meanings (Phillimore, 2012). In the literature, many attempts have been made to define the term (Ager & Strang, 2008). Ultimately, this results in a concept that is still under construction rather than a well-defined construct. Some define integration as a "chaotic concept" (Robinson, 1998), while others state that there is "no single, generally accepted definition, theory, or model of migrant and refugee integration. The concept has continued to be controversial and “widely debated" (Castles et al., 2001).

Nonetheless, the integration theoretical framework represents an attempt to shift away from the trauma framework focus, and its multidimensionality has been showcased (Ager & Strang, 2008; Lomba, 2010; Zetter et al., 2002); it still has significant shortcomings. The integration model can be problematic due to its “normative and theoretical misconceptions” (Bertossi, 2011, p. abstract). Christophe Bertossi argues, in fact, that the national model of integration on which the integration framework is based cannot fully explain the situation of people on the move and refugees, since the model “is highly distorted and unfounded” (2011).

According to Christophe Bertossi, it is a model based on a predefined idea rather than an analytical framework (2011), drawing on a historically institutionalized migration apparatus within the nation-state that serves the interests of this “apparatus of power,” rather than addressing the demands for social justice from those who are exposed to an institutionalised

violence (Amelina, 2022; Dahinden, 2016). Although still a controversial topic, with no unanimous agreement (see Robinson, 1998), the concept of integration emerged as the foundational theoretical framework at the beginning of this thesis.

Nevertheless, according to some authors (see, for example, Lentin, 2014), mainstream European migration studies and it's frameworks, such as integration, may even be critically viewed as "epistemically racist," (De Noronha, 2020, p. 3), reflecting bias, framing refugees as a minority expected to adapt to the "host" society, its language, and its interethnic social norms (e.g., Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011). Considering the evidence from migration studies so far, this thesis fosters interdisciplinary dialogue within CP, thereby contributing to broader knowledge production (e.g., Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). Therefore, the integration framework gradually assumed a more lateral, guiding role, drawing inspiration from other frameworks (see the Capability section below), which were better equipped to accommodate the methodological and conceptual plurality within the migration studies field. Following scholars like Amelina and Faist (2012), this process involved a denaturalization of migration research concepts, particularly those of the integration spectrum framework.

2. Capability approach and community psychology

This section examines the *Capability Approach* and its relation to CP's ecological and multidimensional perspective. The *Capability Approach*, developed by Amartya Sen and later expanded by Martha Nussbaum, offers a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing the interaction between individuals and their environment, particularly within marginalized populations. Originally formulated within welfare economics, Sen (1992; 1999, as cited in Sacchetto, 2020) defines capabilities as substantial freedoms — that is, the real opportunities to act and to be what one considers critical (Sen, 2004). This perspective shifts the debate from a purely resource-based evaluation to one that focuses on inequalities in access to resources and opportunity (Sacchetto, 2020). Sen's work on the Human Development Index (HDI), adopted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), represents a concrete application of this approach, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1998.

Building on Sen's theoretical foundations, Nussbaum (2000; 2011) developed a detailed list of ten central capabilities, emphasizing that while these apply universally, they can be adapted to different cultural and social contexts. According to Nussbaum, capabilities are innate potentialities that every human being should have the opportunity to develop and

actualize. It is essential to emphasize that capabilities are not merely individual attributes, but rather "combined capabilities," which arise from the interplay between personal characteristics and the social, political, and economic structures within which individuals operate (Sacchetto, 2020).

The *Capability Approach* enables us to reevaluate people's needs and the standards used to assess their quality of life (Sacchetto, 2020). The central focus lies in each individual's ability to freely choose among the "beings" and "doings" they value. When these possibilities are realized, they become what are called "functionings," representing the activities and states of being that individuals enact, which give meaning to their lives. Capability is not to be understood as a purely intra-individual trait but as the result of "combined capabilities" arising from the interplay between personal abilities and contextual opportunities (Nussbaum, 2011; Sacchetto et al., 2018) In this perspective, the approach encourages looking beyond material deprivation to consider social and political inequalities, shifting the focus from resources to what people are able to do or be (Nussbaum, 2011).

As Sacchetto (2020) also emphasizes, this multidimensional view strongly resonates with the ecological perspective in CP, which highlights the interdependence between individuals and environments (Kelly, 2006; Sen, 2009). Both approaches propose a multilevel analysis of people's lives that includes interpersonal, institutional, and political factors. Such a comprehensive perspective is particularly crucial for populations exposed to systemic marginalization, such as refugees and individuals with mental health challenges, whose capabilities are often limited by concepts such as social exclusion, discrimination, and restrictive policies.

The *Capability Approach* represents the alternative theory we need in an era of urgent human problems and unjustifiable inequalities (Nussbaum, 2011). It asks to what extent each person can do and be what they deem important, viewing the individual as the ultimate end, rather than focusing solely on total or average wellbeing, by assessing the actual opportunities available to each person (2011). The *Capability Approach* centers on choice and freedom, arguing that what societies should promote for their citizens is a set of opportunities, or substantial freedoms, that people can choose to exercise or not: the final choice lies with them (2011).

According to Nussbaum (2011), the *Capability Approach* addresses deeply rooted injustices and social inequalities: capability failures are indeed the result of discrimination and marginalization. In doing so, the approach avoids placing responsibility on individuals, thereby rejecting a neoliberal view. Instead, it assigns an urgent role to governments and public policies: to improve the quality of life for all people, defined through their capabilities. The *Capability Approach* is not a theory about human nature, nor does it derive norms from it; from the outset, it is evaluative and ethical in nature, as it asks what the truly valuable things are that a minimally just society should cultivate and support (2011).

Unlike deficit-based models, the *Capability Approach* offers a critical alternative to psychiatric or trauma-focused paradigms, which tend to interpret refugees predominantly through a pathological lens (see Dahinden, 2016; Niemann & Zaun, 2018). In this way, the *Capability Approach* rejects neoliberal tendencies that assign responsibility solely to individuals, and instead assigns to governments,public institutions, and services the task of creating conditions that foster human flourishing and civic participation (Nussbaum, 2002; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1993).

Another essential concept in the *Capability Approach* is *agency* (Sen, 2004), which aligns with the present exploratory research project's rationales. Individuals are considered the primary actors in their own lives (Sen, 2004). In the context of forced migration, concepts such as agency and resistance are crucial in avoiding the crystallization of narratives about refugees within a single "axis of violence." The *Capability Approach,* therefore, aligns with the rejection of universalist approaches to the lived experiences of oppressed or marginalized groups, instead offering one of the approaches best suited to the specificities of experiences across communities, contexts and trajectories alike (see Bard Wigdor & Artazo, 2017).

With its focus on agency and individual choice (Nussbaum, 2011), the *Capability Approach* can represent an attempt to strengthen the decision-making power of refugees and generate counter-narratives to hegemonic imaginaries about them. The *Capability Approach* has indeed proven to be a valuable theoretical framework also within the so-called refugee studies (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017; Andrade & Doolin, 2016), offering a valuable perspective from refugees themselves (Pavlish, 2005), which remains underrepresented in the extensive existing literature (Castles et al., 2002).

In line with Beatrice Sacchetto's (2020) work, the *Capability Approach* is also proposed here as a theoretical framework that promotes a "paradigm shift," restoring autonomy and self-determination to refugees and people on the move. In this sense, this thesis, from a CP's perspective, proposes the application of the *Capability Approach* (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993), both empirically and theoretically, as an inspiring approach to knowledge production.

Ultimately, the *Capability Approach* has the potential to provide a sustainable and comprehensive understanding of refugees and their allies' experiences (e.g., CSAs). It can contribute to producing knowledge that supports CSAs and refugees' struggles and to stimulating public debate by drawing attention to them (Nussbaum, 2002; Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 1993). The *Capability Approach* can also be used proactively (see Kimhur, 2020) to identify priority areas for public policy interventions and concrete actions.

Once again, this approach aligns with the paradigm of CP, which utilizes research as a tool for transformative change, identifying intervention areas while considering the sociopolitical and structural dimensions involved.

A list of ten dimensions is presented here (see **Table 1**), reflecting context-specific factors shaped by a multidisciplinary literature, critical literature on migration, and an iterative redefinition throughout the fieldwork.

Table 1

Capabilities' dimensions

Capabilitie's dimension	Description
Life	Living a worthy life with general health, happiness, life circumstances, and desire to live to old age
Health	Having access to healthcare services and being able to exercise the "health citizenship right" (Padilla et al., 2024).
Bodily integrity	Concept applies to people on the move at all stages of their journey where they are exposed to a series of challenges that undermine the integrity of their body (Del Re, 2018). Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction, the right to parent children in safe and secure environments. (reproductive injustice (Messing, Fabi & Rosen, 2020). physical transformation, reshaping of life trajectories (Giuliani, 2022).

Sense, Imagination, & Thought	Understanding of what is going on in the community, in the country, and in the world. Being able to plan one's education and training or family's education.
Affiliation, and Social connections	Having the opportunities to create connections with the dominant community and the immediate community social connections, transnational connections. Being able to maintain the connections they had before and create new meaningful relationships where people can experience basic emotions. Social links (connections with institutions associations) connection to services and society structures. Isolation and marginalization (Carolan and Cassar, 2010; Kennedy and Murphy- Lawless, 2003; Murray et al., 2010; Niner et al., 2013, 2014).
Emotions Thoughts, belonging	This capability helps to theorize people's emotional relationships. Feeling of being treated as a normal person and not as a refugee or asylum seeker. Engaging in symmetrical relationships underpinned by reciprocity trust, self-confidence. feelings of belonging and identity. Maintain a strong cultural identity from their country of origin while simultaneously adapting to their new context and country (Pangas et al., 2019). Developing positive emotional attachments, rootedness in a broader ethnic or religious community (Wood, P. B., McGrath, S., & Young, J. (2012). Conversely, sensing precarity and the deprivation of their subjectivity (Giuliani, 2022), sense of dependence. See the extent to which people are informed about what is going on in their community, in the country, and in the world. Take part in activities, initiatives in accordance with what constitutes the people (religion, culture, desire, politics). People's perception of : cultural sensitivity Assistentialism Infantilization Paternalism. The sense of thought and imagination lead to products and works that must be in accordance with what the person is and wants. Education: develop his/her own intellectual capacity to access further education or training. Being able to plan your education or your family's education? Job: meet jobs reflecting the person's background and qualifications . Explore women's attitudes towards services activities provided. maintain a strong cultural identity from their country of origin while simultaneously adapting to their new context and country (Pangas et al., 2019). Overall, this Capability helps to explore what kind of emotions people can afford and what role emotions play. Ultimately, how emotions change in navigating systems and communities.
Practical Reason	Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life the liberty to change the status quo. (the liberty of aspire)
Other species	Being free to connect with natural environment nature and other beings
Joy	Having the opportunities to engage in recreational activities, celebrations, hobbies, and enjoyment in a safe manner, both in private and public spaces.
Control over own environment	Material: Having a reception accommodation conditions, housing, legal assistance full participation in the formal labour market. Being able to pay bill, rent and alleged livelihood without resorting to a lifestyle of austerity Political: Being part of the inclusion process having the opportunity to express one's opinion on asylum policy. The capacity to take political action (e.g., activism, potential to change the status quo)

Note. Adapted from Nussbaum (2000).

3. Capabilities dimension and relevance in understanding the experiences of refugees

In this section, the ten dimensions of the *Capability Approach* are described, along with their relevance to create knowledge production in refugee and migration studies.

The *Capabilities approach* comprehends ten dimensions. The first capability is *'life'*, that is, living to the end of a normal human life, and not dying prematurely (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 78), while the second one is *'Bodily Health'* and is about "Being able to have good health, including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter" (Nussbaum 2000, p. 78). Health disparities are a common concern for socially excluded groups. Refugees tend to have a higher prevalence of mental distress compared to non-refugees in Europe (Lebano et al., 2020). Structural violence occurring through institutions and social structures that keep people from meeting their basic needs, with resulting harm, has detrimental effects on marginalized people such as refugees (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). Systemic and institutional racism (Pattillo et al., 2023; Pimentel et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2024), being illegalized[3] (Agboli et al., 2019; Castañeda, 2009; Chase, 2019; Larchanché, 2012; Mendola et al., 2025; Phillimore & Cheung, 2021), are all social determinants that shape the health of refugees (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012). Therefore, physical well-being and access to healthcare services are pivotal for refugees. Nussbaum's (2000) third capability is "*Bodily integrity*", including freedom of movement, security against assault, and having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and reproductive choice. It is a concept that applies to people on the move and refugees across all their trajectories (MIGRANTS & DEL RE, 2018). Securitized migration regimes[4] and the "Hypergovernance of borders" (Hammerstad, 2014) create unsafe conditions and life-risking conditions for refugees (see, for example, Bigo, 2002; Esposito et al., 2015; 2025). The fourth capability is known as *'Senses, Imagination and Thought'* and is described as "Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason … in a truly human way… informed and cultivated by an adequate education" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 79). This dimension is crucial because refugees and people on the move encounter numerous barriers to exercising their rights as citizens. For example, as education (see, for instance, Cin & Doğna, 202; Molla, 2019; Rizzolatti, 2022). The right to education is often closely tied to an individual's legal status (Nassar, 2024). In principle, refugees and displaced persons in general, are entitled to

[3] The term 'illegalized' highlights the institutional and political mechanisms that classify people as illegal (Bauder, H. (2014).

[4] Securitization serves as a political strategy that frames policy issues in terms of survival, enabling the use of fear-driven politics that structure social relations around distrust (Huysmans, 2006).

access formal educational opportunities in countries that seemingly value the Capability to Education, such as the UK, Australia, Türkiye, and South Africa (Nassar, 2024). However, possessing these rights does not necessarily translate into having the actual Capability to Education (Walker, 2006, as cited in Nassar, 2024). Emotions- the fifth Capability consists in ′ Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves, …to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger′ (Nussbaum 2000, p. 79). As Marybeth Shinn (2015, p. 245) similarly emphasizes that emotions encompass ′the ability to experience emotions and . . . to live in relationship to others′ (Shinn, 2015, p. 245). Forced migration driven by war, conflict, extremism, human rights violations, and climate change has profound and lasting impacts, often weakening the social ties and cohesion within refugee communities. This dimension is especially significant for people refugees, as establishing social networks in the host country is essential for the settlement process (Briozzo et al., 2024). Indeed, research shows the crucial role that social connections play in inclusion and encouraging active participation in new communities (Wen & Hanley, 2016).

The seventh Capability – *′Affiliation′* is defined in two sub-dimensions, namely (a) ′ Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings; ′; (b) ′ Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others′ (Nussbaum 2000, pp. 79–80). This dimension alongside the *′Practical Reason′* the sixth Capability, ‘being able to ... engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life’’ and the political half of control over one’s environment”- is particularly significant as it relates to the ability to safeguard human dignity within the debate on the right to stay and to move, and in the support of refugees’ communities (Perrin, 2025). It enables the adoption of a dignity-centered approach that values not only the material aspects but also the immaterial aspects of human existence (Perrin, 2025).

As Marybeth Shinn (2015) notes, Nussbaum suggests that although all central capabilities are essential to a life worthy of being lived, practical reason and affiliation are especially significant, as they pervade all the other dimensions (Nussbaum, 2000, as cited in Shinn, 2015). To understand these dimensions, Marybeth Shinn (2015) draws on anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s (2004) concept of the “capacity to aspire,” which is compromised for poor and subordinate members of society not because of any intrinsic deficit, but because the “capacity to aspire,” like any complex cultural capacity, ′thrives and survives only through practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture, and refutation. ′ The restriction of

these possibilities, Appadurai suggests, is one way to define poverty; where such opportunities are limited, ′the capacity itself remains relatively underdeveloped′ (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69).

Furthermore, the '*Practical Reason'* dimension is especially crucial when it comes to refugees and other displaced individuals. As many accommodation and reception policies tend to be assistentialistic and paternalistic, reducing people to a condition of victimhood 'passivity' and 'pureness' (Hess & Nagel, 2021; Ticktin, 2011). Humanitarianism as a regime of care is practiced by states as well as NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and international organizations and is closely intertwined with logics of control, paternalism, and victimization (Agier, 2011; Hoffmann, 2015;), according to Sabine Hess and Alexander-Kenneth Nagel (2021):

> (a) relies on a particularistic idea of de-defining and segregating distinct target populations, (b) assumes that the best welfare outcome for these populations can only be achieved through ongoing external monitoring and intervention, and (c) makes use of certain civil society- ty actors (either NGO or well-intentioned volunteers) to put these measures of surveillance and control into practice. On a general level, paternalism points to the dilemmatic relationship between care and dependency, which materializes in institutionalized protection and reception practices (Hess & Nagel, 2021, p. 169).

This dimension calls for the development of reception measures that do not exclude or confine people to a refugee status, but instead recognize individuals on the move and refugees as citizens, thereby ensuring access to the full range of rights that citizens are entitled to.

Other species - ′ Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature′ (Nussbaum 2000, p. 80 as cited in Sacchetto, 2020). This dimension emphasizes the significance of the finding that interaction with nature has a positive impact on the mental health of individuals on the move (Charles-Rodriguez et al., 2023; Lorentzen & Viken, 2020). Finally, the tenth capability identified in Nussbaum's framework is *′ Control over One's Environment'* which includes two key components:

> "(a) Political, referring to the ability to actively engage in the political decisions that shape one's life, including the right to political participation, freedom of speech, and freedom of association; (b) Material, which involves the ability to own property and the right to seek employment on equal terms with others" (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 80).

As has been observed in the existing literature, research on the psychological well-being of refugees and people on the move has predominantly focused on deficits within individuals, in terms of psychiatric symptoms or feelings of distress. This tenth dimension is consistent with the CP principles, as it encourages a more ecological perspective on refugees' life experiences (Ryan et al., 2008).

In summary, the ten capabilities articulated by Nussbaum provide a comprehensive and multidimensional framework for exploring the living conditions of refugees and CSAs, redirecting attention from a deficit-centred paradigm toward one grounded in rights, dignity, and the substantive opportunities that enable full human flourishing.

4. Descriptive overview of the Portuguese reception system for refugees

In this section, we provide an overview of the asylum context, presenting data on the Portuguese asylum system starting from 2015, to provide a glimpse of the local and supra-local context of the research project. The Portuguese reception system for refugees will be described, including its models, actors, and dynamics.

Since the Second World War, asylum has been framed by the 1951 Geneva Convention (Fassin, 2011). However, this framework becomes increasingly outdated for addressing the diverse and looming realities of contemporary and incoming mobility, such as the climate crisis (Biermann & Boas, 2008), and the unfolding war scenarios.

The current so-called 'crisis' should not be understood simply as a crisis of refugee numbers or global protection capacity; rather, it must be seen as a crisis in terms of the institutionalized responses that states have pursued so far (Gammeltoft-Hansen & Tan, 2017).

In 2015, Portugal assumed the commitment of receiving refugees and people on the move (Costa & Teles, 2017). Over 100 NGOs and over 140 national and international official bodies were involved in the reception process (Costa & Teles, 2017). According to data provided by the Foreigners and Borders (Service *Serviço de Estrangeiros* e *Fronteiras*) (SEF) in 2016 and 2017, as part of the European Migration Agenda, Portugal agreed to accept a total of 191 refugees. One hundred seventy-one (N = 171) refugees were welcomed, including 130 Syrian refugees from Turkey and 41 refugees from various nationalities, such as Sudan, Eritrea, Egypt, and Morocco. In September 2018, according to data provided by the Asylum

Information Database (AIDA), Portugal and Germany signed an administrative arrangement under Article 36 of the Dublin Regulation.

In October 2018, the authorities announced a bilateral agreement with Greece to implement a pilot relocation process for 100 asylum seekers from Greece to Portugal, with the possibility of transferring up to 1,000 applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

However, when compared within the European context, the number of asylum seekers in Portugal is a "relatively peripheral phenomenon" (Sousa & Costa, 2018, p. 2). Contrary to common belief, European countries and the Global North “host” a relatively low number of refugees compared to the 85 percent hosted by countries in the Global South (UNHCR, 2017). People currently on the move are internally displaced persons (IDPs)[5], and the countries with the largest refugee populations in relation to their national populations are all non-Western nations (UNHCR, 2019). Moreover, it is not the first time that Europe has received a considerable number of people seeking refuge from wars and persecution. In 1992, when the number of Member States was even smaller than today, the EU received 696,500 asylum applications (Jubilut, 2017). This was a higher number of asylum requests per state on a per capita basis compared to today (2017).

In 2020, Portugal was among the countries with the lowest rates of positive first-instance asylum decisions. However, this improved in 2021, with 60 positive decisions per 100, compared to 23 positive decisions per 100 in 2020. That same year, Portugal ranked twentieth among the 27 EU countries, registering 1,540 asylum seekers and representing only 0.2% of the total applications of the EU27 in 2021 (EUROSTAT). People came to Portugal from countries like the Afghanistan (N = 670), (43, 5 %) of total asylum seekers in 2021), Paquistan (N = 35), (2,3 %), Turkey (N = 25), (1,6 %), Nigeria and Bangladesh (N = 20), (1,3%) and Siria, Iraq, and Venezuela (N = 15), (1,0%). As of the end of 2019, Portugal had hosted approximately 1,700 refugees.

According to the Relatório de Migrações e Asilo by AIMA (2023), the number of International Protection applications increased by 35.3% in 2023 compared to the previous

[5] IDPs are not considered refugees, with whom they are often confused and incorrectly labeled (Betts, et al., 2012). IDPs have not crossed international borders to seek refuge or find sanctuary. They are individuals who are displaced within their own country, due to war, human rights violations, or country-wide violence, even if the violations and violence are a result of their own government (Regasa & Lietaert, 2022).

year, reaching 2,693 applications. The most representative continents were Africa (N = 1382); Asia (N = 824); America (N = 408); Europe (N = 78%); and others (N = 1). Compared to 2022, when the number of refugees granted status was higher (N = 593), in 2024, there was a decrease (N = 293).

Regarding resettlement, 277 refugees were resettled in 2023. Under international humanitarian commitments, including the Relocation Program[6], Portugal welcomed 96 individuals in 2023, of whom fourteen (N = 40) were relocated as part of an ad-hoc initiative to rescue refugees from humanitarian ships in the Mediterranean Sea (AIMA, 2023).

Portugal joined the European Economic Community under Law No. 70/93, along with the principles of the Dublin Convention and the Schengen Agreement (de Sousa, 1999). In 1998, Law No. 15/98 regulated the 'admissibility procedure for asylum applications' (Sousa & Costa, 2016, as cited in Muniz, 2023), with an emphasis on social dignity through the delegation of tasks to non-governmental organizations, decentralizing the actions of the UNHCR and the state (Muniz, 2023). At the supranational level, the UNHCR, EU, and IOM play key roles (Muniz, 2023; Oliveira, 2022), but decision-making power and action remain at the local level (Caponio & Ponzo, 2022; Oliveira, 2022).

In 2019, according to MIPEX, Portugal's integration policies ranked among the strongest in Europe for facilitating a two-way process of integration (see https://www.mipex.eu/portugal). However, despite its ostensibly progressive stance on migration, critical scholars describe Portugal as a country where good intentions do not necessarily align with policy implementation (Santinho, 2013; Casquilho-Martins & Ferreira, 2022; Costantino & Minas, 2022; Pires et al., 2020; Raposo & Violante, 2021; Santinho & Rebelo, 2024; Vacchiano, 2018).

Portugal has a long history of immigration, stemming from its diaspora resulting from its colonial past (Rochira et al., 2024), as well as its more recent experience with immigration (Meneses & Gomes, 2013). It is generally understood that Portugal lacks substantial expertise in the reception of refugees, as evidenced by other studies (Santinho, 2013; Sousa & Costa, 2018; Sousa et al., 2021). Although the inclusion process may be grounded on national and European norms and policies, concrete actions that are developed at the local level, within the

[6] The Portuguese refugee relocation program consists of an 18-month 'integration programme'.

framework of 'everyday sociability' (Penninx, 2009, p. 5) or, 'situated practices of solidarity' (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019, p. 380) underpin reception concrete initiatives. Reception policies continue to be marked by significant shortcomings (Rochira et al., 2024). Consistent with this alleged inexperience, Portugal has witnessed a considerable number of refugees leaving the country, and many who remained — especially illegalized migrants — experienced precarious and exploitative situations (Ambrosetti & Paparusso, 2021; Costa et al., 2020; Sacramento & Silva, 2018.

Despite the commitment shown by state and isntitutions in the reception and inclusion process, a research project conducted between 2018 and 2019, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), focused on the integration of refugees relocated under the European reception programme, offers insight into the complexity of the organisational processes of institutions and civil society in their 'good intentions' to welcome refugees, as reported by Magano and colleagues (2023) though, it also reveals the inexperience of institutions and professionals**.**

The inexperience of both governmental and non-governmental entities emerged, revealing weaknesses in terms of preparation, training, planning, and expectations— expectations that were sometimes "imagined" regarding the relationships refugees were expected to build in gratitude for the solidarity and "generosity" shown by the Portuguese, who are often described as welcoming with "open arms" (Sousa et al., 2022). This lack of preparation and resources (Magano et al., 2023) often led to improvised solutions to address problems, relying on the solidarity of the Portuguese people, where individuals were driven to act either independently or through the mobilization of social and humanitarian support institutions (Bauder & Juffs, 2019).

Before 2015, the involvement of civil society organizations, families, and individuals in refugee integration had not been a central focus in Portugal (Vieira et al., 2017). The initiatives undertaken by these actors to assist and welcome refugees represent a new development in the country (Vieira et al., 2017).

In 2015, during the so-called “refugee crisis”, the Portuguese State lacked the capacity and structures to manage reception (Sousa et al., 2022), focusing primarily on security and legal dimension— namely the asylum process and decisions on refugee status and international protection (Sousa et al., 2022). In 2015, Portugal witnessed a strong mobilization of civil

society, at times overlapping with the actions of the State (Magano et al., 2023). Delegating refugee reception to civil society shaped the model around two key features: the geographic dispersal of refugees across the country and the institutional diversity of the organizations responsible for their integration (Magano et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the scantness and inadequacies of reception facilities were compensated for by the involvement of Portuguese civil society, from which new social actors emerged (Boletim Municipal, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa). Vieira and colleagues (2017) describe the Portuguese civil society as a "pioneer" in reception practices. Various actors at different scales, operating within a multilevel governance model (Muniz, 2023), were on the front line in the reception of refugees.

Portuguese civil society established the Refugee Support Platform PAR[7]. It receives the refugees and, since it does not have a physical site, relies on Conselho Portugues para os refugiados (CPR), *Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados* (JRS), *CRESCER,* and other organizations that are part of the *União de Refugiados Em Portugal* (UREP)[8], all working under the Programa Municipal de Acolhimento aos Refugiados (PMAR LX)[9]. PAR[10] oversees the formal groups involved in the resettlement and relocation program, creating partnerships and distributing responsibilities among local actors " (field notes, 2020).

At the State level, the reception process was coordinated by the Unified Operational Group (Grupo Operativo Único) established on 3 September 2015 by Ordinance No. 10041-A/2015, as part of the European Agenda for Migration. The group included representatives

[7] Refugee Support Platform" or "Plataforma de Apoio aos Refugiados" (PAR) is a national initiative, a network of civil society organizations working to support refugees.

[8] Union of Refugees in Portugal – UREP was created on May 10, 2013, and officially recognized on October 31, 2016. It is made up of the refugee community in Portugal, with the aim of promoting and integrating refugees into Portuguese society (https://www.urep.pt/)

[9] For more info see https://www.am-lisboa.pt/documentos/1444307049B9bHL8dw2Fm66PP9.pdf

[10] As reported by Magano and colleagues (2023), PAR came to life at the end of 2015. It represents the main civil society actor to emerge and coordinate efforts. It is composed of numerous civil society entities with the aim of "promoting a culture of welcoming and integration of refugee families into Portuguese society, based on a strong and well-informed civil society" (PAR, n.d.: 4). PAR's actions follow a hierarchical structure: an office at the top, host institutions in the middle—referred to as "hosts"—and the community at the base, which carries out the reception and inclusion process. Its activities include awareness-raising, training, and targeted actions, developed along two lines of intervention: the "front line," with missions to countries with refugee camps to provide local support, and "PAR Families," focused on the direct reception of relocated refugees, with a priority on families. PAR stands apart from the mainstream reception model, as it implements a structured reception program lasting 24 months (as opposed to the 18 months provided by all other institutions under the government program), on the condition that host institutions cover the additional six months at their own expense**.**

from local authorities and non-governmental organizations[11], working both as a restricted formation focused on coordination (with the ACM, the Foreigners and Borders Service - SEF, and the Institute of Social Security) and a technical-operational formation to address specific issues across different sectors (Oliveira, 2022). Within the state, two institutions played central roles: the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF)[12] and the *Alto Comissariado para as Migrações* High Commission for Migration (ACM)[13]. At the time of this doctoral project, SEF (Serviços Estrangeiros e Fronteiras)[14] was given responsibility for border control and the management of EU funds, as well as the allocation of funds to institutions with which it had signed cooperation protocols. ACM was tasked with developing a national reception and integration model and mapping local actors capable of hosting asylum seekers and refugees (Goldberg, 2021). Reflecting a general tendency to delegate administrative and management tasks to civil society identity-based groups or actors within the territory. Reception and integration functions were entrusted to non-governmental organizations, such as the Portuguese Council for Refugees (CPR), which held a contract with the state to provide assistance to asylum seekers and manage refugee resettlement, a program initiated only in 2007 (Sousa et al., 2022).

The reception strategy is grounded on five principles (ACM, 2015, p. 27, Translated by the Authors [TbA]):

[11] Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES), Directorate-General for School Establishments (DGEstE), Portuguese Institute for Sports and Youth (IPDJ), Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education (ANQEP), Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (SCML), Central Administration of the Health System (ACSS), Directorate-General of Health (DGS), and the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU)

[12] The administrative responsibilities concerning migration and asylum previously held by the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) have been transferred to (AIMA, I.P.), as well as those of the High Commission for Migration (ACM, I.P.)

[13] The ACM was assigned responsibilities in monitoring the reception process, implementation and execution of policies for the reception and integration of refugees and beneficiaries of international protection

[14]The reform of the national asylum authority was finalized in 2023 with the establishment of the Agency for Integration, Migration, and Asylum (AIMA), which officially began operations on October 29. Until that date, the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) continued to serve as the national authority responsible for asylum matters. From October 29, 2023, AIMA's National Center for Asylum and Refugees (CNAR) became the specialized authority for asylum decisions. This institutional reform also meant that general police forces assumed responsibility for border control and expulsion orders. According to CPR's assessment, although the transition process was relatively lengthy, it lacked both a gradual implementation and meaningful participation. Notably, it did not involve a sustained strategy of cooperation with other key public bodies or civil society organizations.

> 1) institutional, prioritising the reception by institutions, rather than by individuals; 2) decentralised, focusing on the potential for reception in medium and low density territories, preventing msignificant.concentrations of people; 3) in consortium, mobilising local consortia of institutions which would act together to meet the different requirements for the refugees' full integration; 4) integrated, by considering all the items covered in the reception form (accommodation, food, employment, education, health, Portuguese language training); 5) autonomous, in presenting solutions to foster the refugees' gradual autonomy, especially concerning accommodation.

Nevertheless, the Portuguese case, as civil society organizations, has been at the forefront of addressing the gaps in institutional support (Rebelo et al., 2020).

Under these circumstances, municipalities have turned their attention to CSAs as "collaborative partners and co-producers of public services" (Fehsenfeld et al., 2019, p. 422).

Taking a close look at the urban area of Lisbon, known as the metropolitan area of Lisboa, which at the time was hosting approximately 800 asylum seekers.

> "Civil society is an open arena of participation (...) in which different types of individuals, groups, and organizations cooperate or compete for visibility and relevance, in the pursuit of collective (though not necessarily shared) political and social goals and animated by a variety of values and interests" (Fioramonti & Thümler, 2013, p. 120 as cited in Simsa et al., 2021).

By pursuing different approaches, an alliance emerged among several entities and civil society organizations that support people across key areas of inclusion, including housing, health, education, and employment. Drawing on their grounded experience, support organisations have highlighted various shortcomings in the implementation of reception programs.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, people in refugee situations found themselves in even more vulnerable situations (see Briozzo et al., 2021), and civil society — especially Refugee Community Organizations (RCOs) — proved instrumental in responding to unforeseen challenges that institutions were ill-equipped to handle.

At the same time, anti-immigration discourse and intolerance have been fueled by the far right, exploiting public discontent. In this context, the practical solidarity enacted by civil

society involved nuanced practices to navigate the migration landscape and to challenge or disrupt both internal and external borders (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023).

While this section provides a contextualization of the research project by analyzing the evolution, dynamics, and key actors of the national asylum context, the next part will present the methodology implemented in the research project, including the research phases, questions, and design.

PART 2 METHOD

The method outlines the key components of the research process. First, an introduction to the research project's phases and the research questions that informed the thesis is presented. This is followed by a description of the research design and methods employed to address the research questions. The context in which the fieldwork was conducted is then detailed, highlighting both the physical and relational aspects of the research setting. Subsequently, the procedures for data collection and data analysis are explained, providing a comprehensive overview of how the empirical material was gathered and interpreted throughout the study.

1. Research phases, questions, design, and methods

Based on 18 months of fieldwork, this thesis presents an exploratory research project that unfolded into three phases. The I phase was conducted remotely, during which the researcher established contact with the Refugee Community Organization (RCO) and supported the organization of a webinar, which also served as the material for secondary data analysis in **Study I**. This phase took place during the height of the pandemic. The II phase, beginning in February, involved an in-person meeting with the RCO representative. During this meeting, the researcher outlined the thesis's purpose and methodology, engaging in a discussion with the RCO representative to explore how the exploratory research project, from a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) perspective, could align with the needs of the community supported by the RCO. Thanks to the RCO, the researcher was able to reach out to a civil society collective and learn about its community-based Project, wherein the entire research project took place. In this phase, the researcher prioritized proximity, participant observation, familiarization with the context, and the people who inhabited and navigated it.

The third phase was dedicated to collecting qualitative data, including interviews and field observations (**Study IV**), as well as observation field notes and informal open conversations (**Studies III** and **IV**). The fieldwork started on March 23rd, 2021, and lasted for 1 and a half years. The research employed an ethnographic method, widely recognized as valuable in the realm of migration studies (see, among others, De Genova 2005; Fontanari 2018; Heller et al. 2017; Hess & Tsianos 2010; Kasparek & Speer 2013) Participant observation was employed to enable the researcher to understand local realities from the perspective of those involved and engage directly with daily life (Müller, 2013). As a key ethnographic technique, participant observation facilitated the researcher's attempt to adopt a perspective on the people encountered during the fieldwork (Boccagni & Schrooten, 2018).

The researcher was also able to engage with the field and reflect on her multiple positionalities (see, for example, Clarke, 2005). Therefore, the present thesis aims to expand the mainstream perspective (Amelina, 2022) through a situated research approach (Berger, 2015) in which the researcher remains always engaged with her multiple aspects (e.g., gender; age; race; immigration status), as well as personal experiences and political beliefs, in the collection and analysis of data. By committing to reflexivity (see Pillow, 2003), the exploratory research project is positioned as non-exploitative and compassionate toward the people encountered, ultimately seeking to address concerns regarding the potentially harmful effects of power imbalance in researcher-researched relationships (Picozza, 2021).

This also facilitated the building of trust relations between CSAs and refugees (Hugman et al., 2011; Picozza, 2021). A collaboration protocol with the RCO was established to provide their partnership with selected data collected during the fieldwork — specifically, those relevant to the case management task — ultimately informing the inclusion project led by the CSAs. The Research goals (RQ), funded by a doctoral scholarship provided by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, (2020.08419.BD), at the APPsyCI – Applied Psychology Research Center Capabilities & Inclusion, are:

a) How did the COVID-19 pandemic operate as a critical juncture for revealing, reproducing, and intensifying pre-existing structural inequalities, institutional fragilities, and systemic barriers within the Portuguese asylum system? (**Studies I**; **IV**);

b) How can the experiences of refugees within the urban context of Lisbon be understood by shifting the analytical focus beyond refugees as the sole unit of analysis? **(Studies I**, **II**, **III,** and **IV)**

c) What is the role of social connections in shaping refugees' lived experiences, and how are these connections conceptualized and explained in the existing literature and empirical evidence? **(Studies II; III);**

d) To what extent do the CSAs act in solidarity with refugees, mitigate and counteract migration policies, explore CSAs' practices and interventions, and related challenges in the migration governance? (**Studies I**; **III**);

e) What are the supra-local *nexus* and transnational value of the research outcomes to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role played by CSAs in migration governance? (**Studies, III**; **IV**, and ongoing comparative Study).

To accomplish the RQ, based on the reflections undertaken in the previous sessions, this thesis comprises four studies and one ongoing comparative Study.

Study I: The first Study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when fieldwork could not yet be initiated. Therefore, **Study I** consists of a thematic analysis of a multimedia data set. This study, rather than reproducing the so-called 'reification of the crisis' (see Albahari, 2015; Cabot, 2019) and overlooking pre-existing challenges to the emergence of asylum in the Portuguese context, uplifts pre-existing structural challenges in the context of asylum and migration during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Study I** is designed to address RQ **(a)** because, in its exploratory aim, it examines COVID-19 not as a means to legitimize the discourse of exceptionality and crisis brought about by the pandemic, but rather as a lens through which to reveal pre-existing disparities and structural problems. In doing so, this Study addresses RQ **(b)**, as it investigates the structural issues that create knowledge about the challenges refugees face within migration governance. Furthermore, it answers RQ **(d)** by providing a detailed explanation of the role of CSAs in responding to the challenges of migration governance. In the ecology of the exploratory research project, **Study I** was pivotal for establishing contact and setting up a relationship with a Refugee Community Organization (RCO).

Study II: The second study, conducted after the fieldwork had begun, took the form of a scoping review on social connections in resettlement contexts. This review was informed by empirical evidence from the fieldwork experience, highlighting the crucial role of social connections. Theoretically, the study was prompted by the relatively scant attention paid to the topic of social connections in migration studies, and specifically in the resettlement context.

This Study addresses RQ **(b)** by examining the meaning of social connections in resettlement contexts, thereby exploring refugees' experiences and grounding itself in existing literature. It also addresses research goal **(c)** by helping to fill a gap in the current literature**,** specifically through its focus on the topic of social connections. It also answers RQ **(d)** because social connections emerge as one of the key practices implemented by CSAs to mitigate the restrictive effects of migration policies, and it highlights the significance that social connections with civil society can have for refugees.

Study III: The third Study is grounded on some gaps identified in the scoping review study (**Study II**), namely the government-funded programmes and established welfare services centered focus, and disregarding the "informal," "unofficial," and "quasi" groups led by members of the local community and refugees themselves. In pursuit of this objective, and consistent with the rationales of this thesis, this Study provides empirical evidence on how CSA's practices during the pre-employment phase can facilitate refugees' participation in the formal labor market. Furthermore, it entangles the multiple and nuanced political meanings these practices may embody within the broader framework of migration governance. **Study III** addresses RQ **(b)** because, through the analysis of the CSAs ' practices in integrating refugees into the formal labor market, it helps us understand the experiences of both refugees and CSAs within the urban context of Lisbon. It does so by not treating refugees as the sole unit of analysis, but rather by adopting a multi-level analysis within the context of migration governance. It addresses RQ **(d)** by focusing on CSA's interventions in the pre-employment phase, exploring CSAs' practices and interventions, and related challenges in migration governance.

Study IV: The fourth Study presents a preliminary analysis of fifteen interviews (N = 15) out of a total of twenty-three (N = 23) in-depth interviews collected during the research fieldwork. This preliminary analysis involves the quantification of qualitative data through a stratified analysis based on six demographic characteristics (gender, employment situation, relationship status, health condition, time spent in Portugal, and refugee status). It addresses RQ **(b)** through a stratified analysis of capabilities, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the refugees' experiences. Ultimately, it contributes to achieving RQ **(e)**, as the findings from this preliminary analysis provide a foundation for the final analysis that will inform the comparative study.

Following the publication of **Study I**, which addressed the pandemic in the context of asylum, the researcher was contacted by the CUNY SPH Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health in Harlem, New York (see Annex II, Fieldwork pictures). This led to the opportunity to be part of the MBC Network, a Global Research Network on Migrants in Big City Life, and the possibility of a 6-month-long scientific visit to implement a comparative study designated:

Title of Ongoing Comparative Research Study: *A comparative study of the nature, network, and governance of Civil Society Organizations in Lisbon and New York City*

Principal Investigator: *Kathleen Cravero, PhD, MPH, Distinguished Lecturer, Department of Health Policy and Management, Director, Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health*

Research Sponsor: *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*

Study summary:

Current research focuses primarily on well-established and legally defined nonprofit organizations (Gonzalez Benson, 2020), underlying a "need to unpack the urban character of asylum" (Darling, 2017) to capture the complexities and unique characteristics of Civil Society Organizations (CSO). These may include small, newly-established, informal, and "quasi-organizations" with limited financial resources and/or without legal 501c3 nonprofit status, to expand on the "established models" of migrant organizations. Therefore, to widen the scope of analysis empirically and theoretically, the research aims to identify the role of CSOs in the migration/asylum governance in New York City (NYC), with a particular focus on the solidarity practices and practical modalities, with the final aim of comparing the case of New York with that of Lisbon.

The research questions guiding this study were:

- How do civil society organizations in NYC mitigate, reflect, or exacerbate public policy?
- Do CSOs engage in advocacy or attempt to influence policy?
- How do CSOs position themselves vis-à-vis government policy and the political process?

The research had three objectives to answer these questions:

1. Compare whether or not the service and governance gaps that Civil Society Actors (CSOs) have to fill in NYC are similar to those faced by CSOs in Lisbon;
2. Explore CSOs' strategies to fill gaps, to understand the role of CSOs in NYC in migration and asylum governance, and compare it with that of CSOs in Lisbon; and
3. Assess the socio-political factors that underpin the actions of CSOs in urban settings, such as those in NYC and Lisbon.

We expected the urban setting where the NYC-based CSOs operate to be more complex than in Lisbon. However, we hypothesize that the NYC CSOs face the same structural factors that challenge the Portuguese CSOs, mirroring the challenges faced by the general population. Challenges may include a devalued work environment, the liberalization of the housing market, the privatization and dismantling of the welfare state (Ali Bhagat, 2021), lack of a national asylum plan, lack of language skills required to meet demand, lack of institutional uniformity in procedures and services, and sustainability difficulties in creating long-lasting solutions.

Project outcomes will contribute to the debate on the role of CSOs and social outcomes in contemporary migration/asylum governance, exploring how city-level practices can be scaled up and used to create trans-local solidarities and intercity networks. The project also seeks to strengthen partnerships and collaboration between academic centers and CSOs for future studies. The study results will be published in appropriate peer-reviewed journals and shared widely with relevant stakeholders, including policymakers in NYC and Lisbon, leaders of RCOs/CSOs/MSOs, and community members.

The research in NYC was based on a scoping review and qualitative data collected through a series of one-hour-long key-informant interviews (KIIs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). To gather basic demographic information, a demographics form will be administered to the respondents. Interviews took place virtually via Zoom. Where possible, field notes will be taken through non-participant observation. Participants fall into the following categories:

1. Key-Informants (KIIs): Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), small, newly established, informal, and "quasi-organizations" with limited financial resources and/or without legal 501c3 nonprofit status. (4-5 KIIs); Migrant-serving organizations (MSO): Organizations run and led by people with diverse migrant backgrounds (e.g.,

undocumented; TPS; DACA[15]; and visa-holders, etc.) (4-5 KIIs); Refugee-led Organizations (RCOs), Collectives run, led by, and serving people with refugee backgrounds. (4-5 KIIs)

2. Community Members (IDIs): Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees (MARs) served by the above organizations.

A repository of potential key informants was established using existing resources and contacts, such as the migrant service provider database hosted by the CUNY SPH Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health (see **Annex-VIII; IX)**. We used criteria to identify relevant organizations and generate an initial list for possible recruitment such as: (1) term immigrant, migrant, refugee, asylum seeker, newcomer, or some variations in the organization's name; (2) organization's name referred to another country or region of the world; (3) organization's name mentioned an ethnic/pan-ethnic group (e.g., Asian or Latino); and/or (4) organization's name include term-related to social issues. We screened the websites of each organization to verify that they included services for our target population: migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (MARs). After determining that all potential sources for additional contacts had been exhausted, we reviewed the database and identified an initial subset of approximately 18 potential interviewees—six from each occupational category. This selection allows for approximately one non-respondent or refusal per CSO category. Selection criteria were established a priori to ensure variation in participation across a range of characteristics, including but not limited to: Level of position (supervisory/administrative vs. staff/client-engaged), experience/occupational longevity, interviewee gender, and other possible relevant personal characteristics. We conducted recruitment via email invitations to participate in the study, which included video conference interviews (Zoom or other similar platforms). [Following the initial collection of KIIs, a snowball sample will then be developed for our IDIs participant pool by first asking KIIs to identify MRAs who are interested in participating, and then asking participants to introduce us to other interested MRAs.]

Informed consent forms were accompanied by the email confirmation of the scheduled interview date, and signed informed consent forms will be obtained before data collection. Participants were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and unrelated to any service agency. Their participation—or lack of it—did not influence the services they received from community organizations. All KIIs [and IDIs] respondents were informed that: All

[15] DACA, which stands for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, is a U.S. immigration policy that allows some individuals who were brought to the U.S. as children without legal permission to temporarily avoid deportation and obtain work permits.

information shared was confidential; the data were securely stored; they could decline to answer any question; and they could end the interview at any time. Any quotes from the interview will only be made public anonymously, with results reported in the aggregate to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

For the refugee participants, a snowball effect was employed to develop our participant pool. Initially, we asked service providers to identify asylum seekers and refugees, and then had participants introduce us to other refugees.

The Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted using a semi-structured guide featuring open-ended questions. This format allowed participants to share detailed responses and facilitated the emergence of unexpected insights. To ensure comprehensive data collection on core topics, the guide also incorporated probing and follow-up questions (see Annex - VI). The questions were grouped into seven main thematic areas:

1. Information, categorization, and characteristics of CSOs;
2. CSO services;
3. Advocacy activities;
4. Governance gaps;
5. Socio-political factors driving CSO actions in urban settings;
6. Experiences with social assistance; and
7. Networking experiences.

Audio files from recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, quality checked, and uploaded into data analysis software.

For the In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), participants were recruited through various outreach methods. A flyer was created and distributed in key areas where migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers gather (e.gs; community organizations; bus and subway stations). The flyer was also shared electronically via email with community organizations that had been interviewed or were listed in the key informant database, as well as through social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

Flyers were created in English and translated into Spanish and Urdu (**Annex- XVI** Flyers English, Spanish, and Urdu). for distribution. Interested participants were asked to email, scan a QR code, or send a WhatsApp message to a designated number. Once participants

contacted the research team, they were sent an email with more information about the study. This included an eligibility questionnaire requesting basic demographic information (see Annex - VI) and a consent form.

The basic demographic/pre-interview questionnaire asked about participants' socio-demographic characteristics, health information, and place of residence. Before the interviews began, participants were informed about the confidentiality of the interview and assured that their responses would not affect their ability to receive services from organizations or their immigration status. They were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could choose not to answer specific questions.

Participants were informed that they would receive a $50 incentive as a token of appreciation for their time. They were also asked to choose a pseudonym for the recording to maintain the confidentiality of their identity and responses. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted via Zoom or WhatsApp to facilitate recording and transcription.

The individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide with open-ended questions for detailed responses. The guide included both probing and supplementary questions to ensure comprehensive information was gathered on key issues. The questions were categorized according to the ten dimensions of the Capability Approach (see **Annex-XIII** Capability semi-structured interview guidelines and probes): Life; Physical Health; Emotions and Thoughts; Senses and Imagination; Control over one's environment (material and political); Practical Reasoning; Safety; Affiliation, social and community interaction; Other Species; Play.The interview guide was also translated into Urdu and Spanish.

After completing the KIIs, the research team began. One researcher oversaw the cleaning and transcription of the interviews. This researcher downloaded the Zoom-generated transcripts into a Word document and reviewed the recordings while making necessary corrections. These edits included providing full descriptions for any acronyms, marking sections with inaudible audio, replacing interviewer names with "Interviewer 1" or "Interviewer 2," and so on.

Once cleaned and anonymized, the transcribed interviews were uploaded into Dedoose**,** a qualitative data analysis software. Three researchers were involved in coding. The team

employed a double-blind coding process in Dedoose, meaning each of the three coders coded the interviews independently without seeing the other coders ' coding. Coders created primary and secondary codes by highlighting relevant excerpts from the interviews.

After each interview was coded by the team, who met to review the codes created, define them, and assess their relevance to the research questions. All codes added to Dedoose (version 10.0.25) [16] were also compiled into a code list to develop a codebook. Double-blind coding was conducted three times to help researchers become familiar with the Dedoose coding process. The code list was revised five times with input from all team members.

Both the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and the In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) have been completed. A codebook has also been created to serve as a guide for coding the IDIs. As a researcher, I supervised a total of eleven interviews (N = 11).

Twelve KIIs (N=12) were conducted with civil society organizations in New York City (NYC), transcribed, and coded. Six (N=6) IDIs were transcribed, and four were coded so far (N = 4).

These are the levels of comparison that have been set up:

a) Create a list of capabilities tailored to the NYC context and compare it with the Capabilities list from the Portuguese context.
b) Investigate the similarities and discrepancies between the two urban contexts, grounded in the findings from **Studies I**, **III**, and **IV**. Such as the practices implemented by CSAs and the challenges they face in helping people navigate migration governance, as well as the challenges and forms of resistance enacted by individuals with firsthand experience of asylum.

1. **KIIs phase**: In the first phase of the study with the KIIs, we identified 102 codes and 247 excerpts, along with a preliminary codebook.
2. **IDIs phase**: The study is now in the second phase, where the IDIs still need to be fully transcribed, cleaned, and coded.

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[16] A web-based software platform designed for mixed methods research, applied through a specific case study. Media format: Media formats: jpgs, gifts .mpeg1, .mpeg2, .avi, .mp3, . wav audio. https://www.dedoose.com/

Within the broader ecology of the research project, this opportunity is regarded as highly significant for assessing whether the findings of this study can be extended to the New York context, and for reflecting on and addressing possible transnational *nexus*.

Such an extension would confer transnational value to the research outcomes and contribute to a deeper understanding of the role played by CSAs in migration governance. Moreover, this comparative analysis would demonstrate the replicability of the research protocol, potentially enabling its implementation in other urban contexts.

2. Fieldwork context

This section describes the physical setting where most of the fieldwork took place. Drawing on the ecological metaphor and its emphasis on 'a spirit of commitment and reciprocity'toward the community in which the research takes place (Trickett et al., 1985, pp. 283–284). We consider it important to describe both the physical logistics and political dimensions of the research context. The physical space of the fieldwork provided a platform for commitment to the community and grounded the research in the community (see Ryerson Espino & Trickett, 2008) and, ultimately, for collaboratively selecting research topics, methods, and interpretations of the findings (Kelly, 2003; Ryerson Espino & Trickett, 2008).

This reflection on the fieldwork context also addresses the limited attention given to community entry as a relational process (Trimble & Mohatt, 2006; Trimble et al., 2010), as well as to ecological assessment as a process through which the gradual understanding of the community ecosystem contributes to the broader development of an eco-identity (Kelly, 1971, as cited in Ryerson Espino & Trickett, 2008), shaped through commitment and immersion in relational contexts (2008). The physical and relational setting of the fieldwork allowed us to access the ecological levels of analysis within the community context (Ryerson Espino & Trickett, 2008). As Kelly (1966, 1968, 1986, 2006, as cited in Ryerson Espino & Trickett, 2008) highlights, this involves recognizing the importance of the research relationship, the community's involvement in the formulation of research questions, and in the interpretation and meaning-making of grounded data—shaped, informed, and embedded in the encounters, emotions, and embodied field experiences (Hokkanen, 2017)

The fieldwork was carried out in the midst of the pandemic at *Largo do Intendente*, spanning approximately 1,500 hr. The fieldwork took place as part of a pilot project in which three organizations from civil society were the main protagonists: A collective operating in the arts and culture sector, a grassroots organization led by individuals who have experienced

asylum, and an NGO. The research was primarily conducted in Intendente Square, situated in the city center. This space is not neutral; it has been a site of marginalization for the past 30 years, characterized by activities such as drug trafficking and sex work. The square had a bad reputation, and many people avoided going there due to concerns about crime. Since the 1980s, a neighboring area, Mouraria, has attracted immigrants from various countries (mainly former Portuguese colonies in Africa, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China) (Estevens et al., 2020). Immigrant entrepreneurs thus became a key aspect of the modern life of the neighborhood, where, in 2011, around 16% of the population was foreign-born (as of 2020). The study was conducted in a context marked by strong ethnic and cultural plurality, which, however, has contributed to reinforcing the stigma surrounding the neighbourhood. This once-neglected neighborhood underwent a cultural revitalization process, transforming it into an attractive area for visitors, middle-class residents, and investors. However, the neighborhood has also experienced gentrification, displacement of disadvantaged classes, commodification, and securitization of urban spaces (Zukin 1995). On the one hand, local governments typically tend to follow neoliberal principles and implement urban policies anchored in a culture of attracting tourism and the creative class (Estevens et al., 2020). Artistic and cultural creativity is essential for urban policies and a means to stimulate competition and economic growth (Estevens et al., 2020). On the other hand, artists and social movements often utilize the arts and culture as a tool for resistance, change, and transformation of social relations, implementing a critique of the neoliberal city (2020). The PhD project was carried out in collaboration with a civil society Collective that was part of the BIP-ZIP program (Bairros e Zonas de Intervenção Prioritária, [Priority Intervention Neighborhoods and Zones])[17], a project aimed at strengthening the social fabric through art and culture (see **Annex- II)**.

> While we focus a lot on culture, what we do at an artistic level has value not only for those who create it, but also for the general public. These people on the move already bring certain experiences with them, so it's now important to meet other

[17] The BIP/ZIP Programme – was created in 2011 by the city council as a municipal public policy tool aimed at promoting partnerships and small-scale local improvements in the targeted "habitats". It does so by supporting projects carried out by parish councils, local associations, community groups, and non-governmental organizations, contributing to the strengthening of socio-territorial cohesion within the municipality. The aim of this programme is to promote projects that are designed for and by local communities, addressing their needs at various levels and mobilizing local resources and the community itself. These initiatives have direct impacts in areas such as employability, training, health, education, and support for the elderly, unemployed youth, and other vulnerable groups https://bipzip.lisboa.pt/conhece-os-bipzip/programa-bipzip/index.htm.

people. Therefore, we attempt to address the issue of inclusion through cultural activities, while also creating opportunities"(field notes, 2021).

The Collective with which the research project was carried out has been engaged in a continuous struggle on the ground for 10 years. The geographical positioning of the project's collective in the Largo de Intendente is no accident, but rather a reflection of its political identity and sense of belonging to the space. Intendente's Largo is thus a square in the center of Lisbon, a multicultural neighborhood where connections endure, despite the steady advance of gentrification.

Encounters with people used to take place in the *Espaço Estar*. In this space, many activities took place, one of which was an example of practical solidarity (e.g., the clothes pick-up).

Many people visited throughout the day. To systematize the process and coordinate with other agencies in responding to individuals' needs, forms were used for various services that visitors were required to complete. The form for clothing collection (visit form, Portuguese course form, job-search service support program form). When clothing donations, provided by residents of the Arrojos municipality and surrounding areas, were distributed, a cultural mediator met with the women on the designated "clothing pick-up day." The maximum time allowed for individuals to remain in the space and collect their clothing was 30 min, with priority given to women with children. This moment also offered women a safe space to interact with the community facilitator, where they could seek support or request information on various issues (e.g., health;employment, and documentation).

Another key setting of the project was the co-working space located at CNAIM (see **Annex-VII)**, where, each day from 2:30 p.m., the RLO (Refugee Led Organizations) met with individuals through a person-centered intervention approach.

Another identity space of the project was the co-working space located in the CNAIM, where the RLO used to attend to people in person-centered interventions every day from 2:30 pm. The main areas of intervention were food, employment, and documentation. In addition to these, CSAs also provided assistance in specific matters; for example, they supported individuals with social security procedures, applications for residence, and appointments with the SEF. Every 10 days, depending also on the availability of the partners, a regular partners' meeting (*Reunião Regular de Parceiros*) was held to review the current situation, coordinate activities and interventions among partners, share the schedule, and discuss the next steps.

During the pandemic, one of the main challenges was obtaining accurate information, so the CSAs created flyers with details on cultural activities (such as arts and crafts, music activities, theater, and workshops for children) as well as contact information for support lines (see **Annex III)**. [18]

3. Data collection

To address the proposed research questions, a qualitative case study using multi methods was adopted. The choice to implement a pluralism and triangulation methodological perspective, associated with our multi-qualitative case study, is consistent with the CP commitment (see Orford, 2018). Underpinned by an interdisciplinary research approach (Olsen, 2004), the triangulation implementation was intended to deepen and broaden the understanding of the case study, ultimately leading to more confident results (Vivek et al., 2023). Hence, a *within* triangulation (see Vivek et al., 2023), was employed using the following methodological techniques: **Study I**: secondary qualitative data collection; **Study II**: qualitative literature review method; **Study III**: participant observation; Ethnographic method; in-depth interviews; Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR); **Study IV**: participant observation; Ethnographic method; in-depth interviews; Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Methodological triangulation combined with data triangulation, which can be divided into the following strands:

Study I: secondary data (multimedia data set); **Study II**: secondary data (pre-existing literature on social connections in resettlement contexts); **Study III**: field notes; firsthand qualitative data; **Study IV**: field notes; firsthand qualitative data. A more comprehensive picture of the nuanced unit of analysis was obtained by collecting various types of data from multiple sources using different approaches (Esteves & Pastor, 2003). The evidence presented here was strengthened by gathering data through diverse methods encompassing different times, spaces, and people. Involving a range of events (face to face encounters; meetings, CV-workshop sessions, in-depth conversations, webinars, in presence, online meetings, public events), timeframes (the study includes one and a half year of fieldwork), locations (various

[18] There were several lines (e.g., coworking space line; asylum seeker line; Arabic women and family line, which was specifically for providing information to families; Bambara, Tigrinya, French, and Somali lines).

settings where in-depth conversations were conducted (see **Annex-V; VI)**, including key fieldwork sites such as " Largo" and the "Co-Work" space), circumstances (e.g., the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related mitigation measures), and people (social workers and people with diverse lived experiences of displacement and mobility). This plurality of data sources allowed for the collection of unique insights and the identification of potentially comparable patterns, thereby increasing confidence in the research outcomes (Thurmond, 2001). The understanding of the case study at different levels, considering its complexity, allows for the apprehension of a given reality from several angles, enabling the confrontation of information to minimize bias resulting from a single analytical perspective (Vivek et al., 2023).

A multi-method approach was implemented to enhance the research process and results (Vivek et al., 2023). The multi-method research approach enabled an expansion, specifically by extending the study's scope to include contextual aspects of the situation. Furthermore, given the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, this approach enabled the four studies to be conducted with creativity, aiming to validate data and results through the combination of various data sources and collection methods (Esteves & Pastor, 2003), via both data and methodological triangulation. This section describes how data are collected throughout the research project**.**

Study I*:* A multimedia data set was collected between May and July 2020. Using Google as the primary search engine, data were gathered through keyword searches in Portuguese (e.g., COVID-19, refugiados, hostel, Lisboa) across multiple sources.

Study II: Data were collected using a search strategy based on the population (P), the concept (C), and the context (C) of interest (PCC) model (Aromataris & Munn, 2020), focusing on key concepts related to refugees and integration. Searches were conducted across two main databases, MEDLINE and PsycINFO, using keywords like "refugees", "integration", and "resettlement". Additional terms were incorporated based on relevant articles found. Boolean search strategies and controlled vocabularies (e.g., MESH, PsycINFO Thesaurus) were used, and Google Scholar was also searched. After applying filters to select peer-reviewed, English-language articles published between 2011 and 2022, 332 articles were retrieved. Reference lists were also checked to ensure comprehensive coverage, resulting in 349 articles. The process followed the PRISMA flowchart (see Fig. 1 PRISMA flowchart) for systematic selection (see **Study II** for a detailed description of the data collection phase).

Study III: The empirical data collection for the third study is based on emancipatory and transformative, community-based participatory action research (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). The flexibility of CSAs enabled the implementation of a personalized, community-centered process that addresses critical gaps left by traditional, government-led reception practices (Numerato et al., 2019). The participatory action research process unfolded in two main phases and incorporated three core strategies (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020): a) meaningful conversations; b) leveraging community strengths and assets; c) promoting culturally relevant interventions.

Study III Phase I: Community meeting

The first phase involved a collaborative meeting to facilitate *meaningful conversations that matter* and mobilize community assets and strengths. The meeting with CSA representatives and stakeholders was organized in a community setting, with a general presentation of the job-oriented workshops' aims, the proposed content, registration procedures, timeline, dissemination, and definition of outcomes, with a total of eleven participants, aged from 24 to 50 years and from different educational backgrounds (secondary, higher education) and migratory paths. Among the attendees were three community mediators who all held refugee status, as well as three women from two different CSOs, two from a refugee community organization, and three women from civil society. The purpose was to draft the goals of the job-oriented intervention. In keeping with the principles of CBR, our intervention focused on the community's strengths and the common, shared goal of "to improve what works so far" and introducing needed changes. One mediator, with a more job-first task orientation, suggested speeding up the process and thus focusing on creating personalized CVs and referring people with CVs to partners in direct contact with companies. The same community mediator also suggested that the workshop would be an opportunity to review other CV templates created by another community partner. Furthermore, one of the representatives present from RLOemphasized that there is a distinction between "having a CV" and "finding a job (…) to teach how to write a CV and share job offers, help with writing a motivation letter and preparation for interviews" (community mediator, field observations). Therefore, stemming from this community-informed differentiation, the intervention was implemented.

Phase II: Job-Oriented Intervention

The second phase involved implementing job-oriented interventions with a focus on promoting culturally relevant approaches. Grounded in CP principles, the intervention was designed to align with the cultural and contextually relevant, community-based intervention

(Keys et al., 2004), particularly important when working with racialized and marginalized people (see Halilovich, 2013; Karasz et al., 2013). The intervention totalled 21 hr of engagement, resulting in 25 CVs generated—12 revised and 13 created anew. Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, sessions were capped at 10 participants. Community mediators helped identify 56 people who were looking for work and required CV support; from this pool, 25 individuals (from Syria, Cameroon, Angola, Iraq, and Sudan) were recruited through a combination of flyer distribution (in collaboration with the local council of Arroios) and online registration on the CSA website accessible to other community agencies. Seven CV workshop sessions were held in the study field work, named "Espaço Estar," situated in a historic neighborhood. Sessions ran from June 4 th to June 25 th and lasted approximately 3 hr, including a 10– to 15–min informal discussion period at the outset and scheduled breaks for refreshments. Participants received hands-on support during the CV-writing process and advice tailored to their job-seeking needs. Follow-up support was provided via WhatsApp or email to assess participants' progress and satisfaction. Community mediators' deep cultural knowledge and geographic proximity enabled the team to offer a culturally responsive intervention that built familiarity, trust, and solidarity among the group (Wilson et al., 2018), while also cultivating an environment of cultural humility (Hook et al., 2013). Although the intervention focused on equipping participants with fundamental tools for entering the labor market (e.g., CV writing, drafting emails, and motivation letters), it also critically resisted reproducing Eurocentric recruiting practices, which often disadvantage racialized and marginalized individuals (Steinmetz, 2021). These conventional practices overlook people's diverse cultural backgrounds and their sociopolitical and economic positions (Schultheiss et al., 2011), making it difficult for them to effectively showcase their competencies, knowledge, skills, and education within conventional Western models (Schultheiss et al., 2011).

To address these limitations, alternative models were promoted, emphasizing cultural relevance over one-size-fits-all solutions (e.g., eschewing the standard Europass template and generic online job portals, which tend to foster unrealistic expectations (van Riemsdijk & Axelsson, 2021). Therefore, online platforms were replaced with a contact strategy, resulting in an informal network for finding jobs (see Del Percio, 2018). As one activist commented: 'Creating a self-help group (...), the CV workshop will also represent a support group with a network of connections, much better than going on the net, which only leads to frustration (…), the process will be (…) from the bottom-up.' To ensure cultural relevance, tools were adapted for use in settings with non-Western populations (Abunaib, 2019), and sessions were designed

to provide opportunities for meaning-making through culture and relationships (Datu & Salanga, 2018). To ensure cultural relevance, a space that makes people feel at home (e.g., bringing culturally valued objects or welcoming people of Arab culture with the tea they usually drink), and creating a less institutional context, rather than enforcing inflexible and rigid programs (Egdell & McQuaid, 2016), generates a safe environment. Tables and chairs were arranged in a circle to facilitate interaction during the sessions. To promote a culturally relevant intervention, a time and space for sharing were created, where people could self-reflect on the skills and experiences they could include in their CV, underpinned by the sessions (Del Percio, 2018). This approach challenges the traditional understanding of what a job entails, as it recognizes that refugees may experience feelings of non-recognition or devaluation during periods of unemployment or underemployment (Schultheiss et al. 2011). The aim of the entire intervention was to contribute to recent research advocating the need to mobilize refugee agencies and empower them to buffer the risks of a possible reiteration of passivity and disempowerment (Halilovich, 2013; Hugman et al., 2011; Mackenzie et al., 2007).

Study IV

A snowball sampling strategy was employed for **Study IV**, utilizing various points of access within the communities to recruit as heterogeneous a range of participants as possible, who in turn facilitated additional contacts and helped minimize selection bias (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011). Furthermore, this non-probability sampling method was chosen to avoid reproducing restrictive immigration categories and to ensure that forms of "epistemic borderwork"[19] (Davies et al., 2023)— which this research aims neither to reproduce nor leave unquestioned (see Cabot, 2019) — are not perpetuated.

Based on these premises, participants were recruited between April 2021 and November 2024 in the metropolitan area of Lisbon through a community-based project led by a civil society collective, in collaboration with an RLO. To reduce any perceived coercion to participate, participants were initially contacted by the researcher or contacted the researcher themselves, who was overseeing the activities of the community mediators within the

[19] Epistemic borderwork is a concept proposed by Davies and colleagues (2023), and it refers to a form of epistemic violence used by state authorities to silence unwanted voices, undermine insurgent perspectives, and stifle the capacity of refugees to draw attention to their own mistreatment.

collaboration protocol established with the RLO. The interested participants were then contacted by the researcher and provided with information about the study. Both the participants and the mediators were also asked if they knew other people who might be interested in participating and if they could involve them, passing on the contact details if they agreed.

Participants were purposively selected to include individuals with as diverse experiences as possible, aiming to reflect a diversity of viewpoints rather than provide a statistical representation of the population. The minimum number of interviews on a subject needed to identify major themes on an issue is generally agreed to be 15–20 (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the reasons outlined above, in-depth interviews and conversations were primarily conducted with individuals with whom personal and political bonds had been established over time. However, there were some episodes (n = 4) in which people were interviewed without prior engagement. Before participating, all participants received written information about the study and signed a consent form, which was provided in two languages: English and Portuguese. The ISPA-Instituto Universitário Ethics Committee approved this research project (see Annex V). The Capability approach guided several stages of the study: the collection of qualitative data and the primary qualitative data analysis (**Study V**). The ten dimensions of capability: life; bodily autonomy; Practical reason; Control environment (Material); Emotions, Thoughts, and Relationships; Affiliation, Social, and Community Interaction; Other Species; Play; Control over environment: material and political, within an interview script used in every interview (see **Annex-VI)** guided the interviews carried out with people encountered.

A total of twenty-five (N = 25) interviews were conducted. Twenty-four (N = 24) on a face-to-face basis, which improved the trustworthiness perceived by the participants (Müller-Funk, 2021), and one (N = 1) online. Twenty-three (N = 23) participants were recruited to explore the diversity of experiences of refugees as well as social workers (N = 2). The interviews lasted from 11 min to 110 min and 21 sec.

Eligibility criteria were a) service beneficiaries, b) adults (18 years old or older), c) recently settled refugees in Portugal (time length less than 6 years), and d) migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

An “upfront work” approach enabled connecting with community members long before initiating the research study, allowing for the implementation of recruitment approaches tailored to participants' perspectives. These relationships served as an important informational

base for culturally relevant multiple recruitment strategies, including non-convenience sampling (e.g., tailored messaging, deep relational dynamics among community organizations and members, email-outs, and phone calls to participants). Similarly, this information was further extended to identify and develop strategies for addressing potential barriers to recruitment. In two cases, participants did not handle the English language or Portuguese language; both the informed consent phase and the qualitative data collection were moderated by a community mediator who, on a voluntary basis, and based on the relationship built with the researcher, helped out as interpreter during two interviews with two women, carried out in Arabic. The selected participants were informed about the study's aims and asked to provide their informed consent. Written consent was provided by all eligible participants. When gaining informed consent, participants were assured of anonymity, and the information would have no impact on services provided to the beneficiaries. The identity of all participants was withheld. Strict ethical standards for the protection of participants were adopted. The participants were given a written invitation that clearly stated they could withdraw from the study at any time. Extraordinary attention to the initial interview protocol, to make sure that it is focused on the research question(s) was also paid (see Gioia et al., 2013), and to gather basic socio-demographic information, a protocol was administered to the respondents, see annex-V).

Table 2

Main socio-demographic characteristics

Age	Range 18 – 41	Mean (SD) ,
Time spent in Portugal	6months– 60 months	(-) months
	N	%
Gender self-identification		
Cis Woman	12	52%
Men	11	48%
Country of citizenship		
Northeast Africa	1	4%
North Africa	1	4%
Southern Africa	4	17%
West Africa	5	22%
Central Africa	2	9%
Asia	5	22%
Middle East	5	22%

Special needs		
Pregnant at the arrival	2	9%
In need of health care assistance	4	17%
Parental condition		
with children in the host country	4	17%
With Children back home	3	13%
Housing situation		
18-months program	5	23%
Center	2	9%
Hostel	4	18%
Shared house	6	27%
Independent housing	2	9%
Rent bedroom	3	14%
Previous institutionalization experience	8	35%
Employement situation		
Employed	5	26%
Unemployed	14	74%
Migration situation		
refugee	12	52%
Asylum seeker	8	35%
International protection	1	4%
Manifest of interest	2	9%

Table 3

Characteristics of the participants in the CV workshop

Age	Range	Mean (SD)
(years)	19–56	37.5 (26.16)
Time spent in Portugal		
(months)	3–72	37.5 (48.79)
	N	%
Gender		
Man	16	56%
Woman	9	44%
Country of citizenship		
Cameroon	3	12%

Syria	4	16%
Angola	3	12%
Togo	1	4%
Somalia	2	8%
Gambia	1	4%
Guinea Bissau	1	4%
Senegal	1	4%
Bangladesh	1	4%
Guinea Conakry	1	4%
Iraq	3	12%
Sudan	3	12%
Afghanistan	1	4%
Migration situation		
Asylum seeker	14	56%
Refugee status	11	44%
N	25	100%

Table 4

Civil Society Actors'

	N
CSA's Charges	
Community Technician for Employability	3
Coordinator	1
Community mediator	1
Volunteer	1
Partnership Coordinator / Territorial Manager	1
Project manager	2
Gender	
Women	6
Man	2
Citizenship	
Português citizens	6
Migrant	1
Refugee status	1
N	8

4. Data analysis

Study I: A secondary data analysis was performed using a multimedia dataset collected between May and July 2020. Using Google as the primary search engine, data were gathered

through keyword searches in Portuguese (e.g., COVID-19, refugiados, hostel, Lisboa) across multiple sources.

Study II: A secondary data analysis was conducted through a thematic analysis of mixed-method studies (qualitative and quantitative) (N = 41). Social connections were treated as an outcome variable, diverging from the predominant research trend that typically considers them as background or contextual elements. The analysis examined how the selected studies conceptualized and addressed social connections, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing research landscape and identify potential knowledge gaps.

Study III and **IV**: A primary data analysis, conducted through a mixed theory-driven and data-driven thematic analysis, was performed. Field observations, in-depth conversations, and informal conversations were manually transcribed. Data were then cleaned and analyzed using the software Dedoose (version 10.0.25), a web-based qualitative content analysis software. Transcripts were read and re-read to ensure an understanding of the content within the context of one's narrative. The empirical material was analyzed using Dedoose, applying a mixed inductive-deductive coding process (MacQueen et al., 1998). The data were coded line by line to generate initial codes, which were then organized into broader themes (Cascio et al., 2019). In both studies, the coding process was guided by relevant literature in migration studies, and a theory-driven and data-driven approach was combined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For S**tudy III**, the analysis focused on empirical material collected through field observations and in-depth interviews (N = 2). In **Study IV**, a preliminary analysis was conducted on 15 interviews (N = 15).

The thesis is organized into four articles—published and/or submitted—which are presented as empirical evidence in this thesis report.

PART 3. STRUCTURE: THE EMPIRICAL OUTCOMES IN THE ECOLOGY OF THE DOCTORAL PROJECT

Study I

Community Psychology in Global Perspective
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THE ASYLUM SYSTEM AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE CITY OF LISBON: EXISTING DISPARITIES, STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS AND NEW INSIGHTS

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Existing vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The present case study from the city of Lisbon explores the existing disparities and structural problems within the asylum system based on analysis of multimedia data. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes findings suggesting the importance of different forms of solidarity and activism both newly found and existing, such as the meaningful and substantive participation of refugees and civil society, engaged in the front line to deal with the crisis. This study provides insights for transformative change of asylum policies, stressing a more holistic and systematic perspective and fostering the involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in government planning and policy processes to build back better policies.

***Keywords**: COVID-19, refugees, asylum seekers, civil society, pre-existing disparities*

Introduction

From 1975 to 2015, Portugal received 17,769 asylum applications (including families) to which a total of 1,605 were attributed refugee and humanitarian protection status (Costa & Sousa, 2017). Notably, international protection requests in Portugal were particularly evident

in the last five years: the 275 orders in 2011 increased to 1,820 orders in 2019 (almost seven-fold increase) – the highest value ever recorded in the country (De Oliveira, 2020).

In 2015, migratory flows became more substantive, giving rise to the so-called "refugee crisis", a phenomenon that has had a massive impact in Europe in general, as well as in Portugal. As part of the European Agenda on Migration, promoted by the European Commission to share responsibility among Member States, specific measures have been developed for the relocation of asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other European countries Rebelo, Abdullah & Hussein, 2020; Vacchiano, 2018). Portugal thus set up a reception programme through the establishment of a national coordination group chaired by the Immigration and Border Service and the appointment of several organisations as new service providers, and proposed hosting 10,000 refugees (Vacchiano, 2018). By the end of the relocation programme in 2018, Portugal continued to host refugees under the Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados (ACNUR) resettlement programme in Egypt and Turkey. Indeed, starting from 2016, Portugal made new resettlement agreements (Acordo UE/Turquia 1x1 e Reinstalação Esquema 50.000) with the Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados (ACNUR). The EU / Turquia 1x1 Portugal Agreement carried out 71% of the resettlements to which it had committed by the end of 2017 (142 people out of 200 reached Portugal: 7 in 2016 and 135 in 2017). For the Reinstalação Esquema 50,000 (€50 mil), with a commitment to resettle 1,010 people (606 people from Turkey and 404 people from Egypt), by the end of 2019, Portugal has resettled only 40.5%: 409 people, 223 from Egypt and 186 from Turkey, of which 33 arrived in 2018 and 376 in 2019 (De Oliveira, 2020). During 2018, Portugal also agreed to participate in the relocation of immigrants entering European countries via Mediterranean routes. Through this framework, 184 people reached Portugal.

Here, Portugal's position contrasted to those of other European countries such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic or Bulgaria, which showed an attitude of opposition to the so-called refugee crisis (Rebelo et al., 2020). Years of field research have, however, revealed a discrepancy between the representations by the Portuguese institutions (of a generous society, solidarity, well-being and a set of best practices*)* and the lived experiences of refugees (Santinho, Rebelo, & Cardoso, 2020; Vacchiano, 2018). Despite the commitment shown by Portuguese institutions to set up a national reception plan, the unusual dimensions of the refugee phenomenon and the lack of experience of many of the new service providers have produced a gap between intentions and results, which has led to asylum seekers experiencing precarious living conditions during the period in which they joined the national reception

programmes. Indeed, during the 18 months of support granted by the Portuguese government to the new refugees to integrate into the country, several practical barriers were found to the access of basic rights. Many beneficiaries highlighted the shortage of fundamental services (e.g. health and education); difficulties in accessing suitable housing; scarce provisions for daily needs; lack of information about the asylum process and bureaucratic slowness and minimum prospects for employment (see Vacchiano, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, this discrepancy remained at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus arrived, leaving refugees and asylum seekers – already in precarious living conditions – highly vulnerable to infection. On 20 April, Lisbon newspapers published the news that 138 asylum seekers hosted in a hostel[3] had tested positive for COVID-19 (Santinho et al., 2020).

As stated by the coordinator of the Fórum Refúgio, the refugees in the hostels were extremely diverse in terms of background (e.g. Chinese Ukrainian and African) and were mostly single men aged between 17 and 30; most were spontaneous asylum seekers, in the asylum process (Coordinator, Fórum Refúgio, interview). On the following Monday, the asylum seekers were accompanied by the army into Ota, a military base and technical training centre for the Air Force, which was transformed into a reception centre for patients, which was without Air Force students at the time, due to remote instruction because of the pandemic (Pereirinha, Ferreira, Correia, & Agência Lusa, 2020). A group of 58 asylum seekers left the Ota military base. This group was further subdivided into three groups corresponding to the different stages of the asylum requests processes: (a) a group of 20 people, whose admissibility process was underway, left under the responsibility of the Conselho Portugues para os Refugiados (CPR) and was re-housed in a metropolitan area of Lisbon; (b) a group of 2 people, who had completed the asylum request process, left under the responsibility of the Social Security (Instituto de Segurança Social); and (c) a group of 36 people, who had received a negative response, left under the responsibility of the Santa Casa da Misericordia de Lisboa[4] (Claudino, 2020).

Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa also relocated five asylum seekers to a house in the municipality of Loures, who were “the most problematic, that is, those who remained the longest in the military base because they tested positive and began to express their discontent” (Santinho, et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, most scholars who have analysed the clinical consequences of the pandemic on refugees (Júnior et al., 2020; Sieffien, Law, & Andermann,

2020) have primarily assessed the mental health outcomes of this global health emergency. Other studies, giving a holistic point of view, have also revealed the social consequences that COVID-19 has brought to refugees (Mangrio, Paul-Satyaseela, & Strange, 2020). Overcrowded conditions, coupled with a low level of literacy; lack of basic sanitation facilities, face masks and gloves; and limited communication have emerged as the major problems faced by people in refugee camps (Barua & Karia, 2020). Furthermore, other authors (Lozet & Easton-Calabria, 2020) have highlighted evidence of the exacerbation of the challenges facing urban refugees during a pandemic, such as access to health care services (Salmani, Seddighi, & Nikfard, 2020). In Sweden, Mangrio et al. (2020) found that whilst many COVID-19 related problems experienced by refugees are felt by the host society in general, due to existing disparities, it is often refugees who experience these challenges first and to a greater extent. This included widespread loss of livelihood; increase in poverty, xenophobia, unemployment, economic vulnerability and gender-based violence; and food insecurity and limited access to the social safety nest. Indeed, a study by Dempster et al. (2020) highlighted that the impacts of the pandemic are compounded for refugees. Interestingly, studies on the topic have shed light on the important role of refugee-led associations (Alio et al., 2020; Betts, Easton-Calabria, & Pincock, 2020). In our study on the city of Lisbon, similar findings were identified. The aim of the present case study was, through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, to shed light on pre-existing structural problems, disparities and barriers within the Portuguese asylum system that were perpetuated and amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Method

This case study builds upon a heterogeneous dataset (Table 1) concerning the events caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Lisbon. All data were gathered from May to July 2020. The favoured search engine was Google, and the data collection method was organised as follows. We searched and considered a set of keywords in Portuguese regarding COVID-19 (e.g. COVID-19, *refugiados*, hostel and *Lisboa*). The news on COVID-19 was collected from different data sources (Table 1). To downscale the data for thematic analysis, all of the collected data were listed in a table. Two videos were deleted from the data corpus. Although both dealt with the issue of COVID-19 and refugees, one focused particularly on the question of housing and the other focused on future recommendations (for after the pandemic), without delving into the issues under investigation here. We thus became aware of the public session –

Refúgio em Tempo de Emergência; Que Resposta? – available on YouTube, through social media (Table 2). A blog post was selected from the social network, Facebook. A total number of 10 daily national newspaper articles were selected. From these, six were deleted, three were redundant because they repeated the same information, one reported information on migrants and non-refugees during the pandemic and two supported a refugee narrative that did not match ours. The remaining four daily national newspaper articles constitute the material corpus of the analysis that will be discussed here. A focus topic interview was conducted with the coordinator of the *Fórum Refúgio*.

1.1 Multimedia data set

The whole world is going through uncertain times. Indeed, reaching refugees and asylum seekers in the pandemic during lockdown – including via the internet, e-mail or social media – was challenging at best and impossible in most cases. Still, the ability to implement effective qualitative research online is crucial (Dodds & Hess, 2020). It has been shown that there are significant broad disciplinary differences in citing online videos (Kousha, Thelwall, & Abdoli, 2012). During the quarantine (lockdown), researchers, participants, institutions and civil society discussed COVID-19 related issues and shared their experiences using online platforms. Data such as images and videos produced during pandemic have potential value in helping researchers reach an understanding of the social experience of these difficult times. Further, re-shaping research during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to new insights about qualitative research approaches and methodologies (Dodds & Hess, 2020).

1.2 Participants

To understand the models of argumentation and the different positions and interventions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we selected from the public session the spokespersons of the main government organisations: one from the *Alto Comissariado pelas Migrações* (ACM; the High Commissioner for Migration) and one from CPR. Also selected was one spokesperson from the NGO CRESCER which has been involved in the reception of refugees in Lisbon since March 2016. We also selected a spokesperson from the local municipality of Arroios (LMA), for its support to asylum seekers during the pandemic. To amplify the voices coming from civil society –specifically from refugee-led organisations – and to have a counter-narrative to the

institutional one, all the spokespersons from the Forúm Refúgio association were selected: two coordinators of the Forúm Refúgio, one ambassador and one Secretary General (Table 2). From civil society, three researchers with extensive experience in the field who have played a very active role during the pandemic were selected as participants. Finally to have testimony from those who have experienced the challenges of the pandemic first hand, an asylum seeker was selected as spokesperson for civil society (Table 3). Other entities participated in the public session, but the topics addressed in the panels went beyond the research question (i.e. the COVID-19 situation in other countries).

1.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was the privileged method for data analysis. This methodological approach makes it possible to identify, analyse, organise and report themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to address participants' experiences, meanings and realities. The analysis sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of refugees, civil society, official institutions and associations regarding the pandemic. Thematic analysis took five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The public session and the interview were first transcribed so we could easily see the data. After compiling and organising the data, we put the codes together to create themes and subthemes. Themes within the data occurred in an inductive, "bottom up" way (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. Themes were finally shared and discussed by the members of the research team and their personal insights were considered.

2. Findings

Here we highlight three themes which emerged from the thematic analysis: COVID-19 and the asylum system, lockdown issues affecting refugees and existing disparities and structural problems during the pandemic and future recommendations.

Table 1. Characterisation of dataset

Format	*n*
Public session video	1

Digital daily national newspaper	3

Data Source	*n*
Daily Digital News: *O Observador*	1
Daily Digital News: *O Público*	1
Daily Digital News: *Nova Verdade*	1
Facebook	1
Blog Post: Border Criminology	1
Daily Digital News "Tvi24"	1

Table 2. Participants from Fórum Refúgio in the public session: Refúgio em tempo de emergência; que resposta?

Participant	*n*
Coordinators of the forum	2
Refugees from the hostel	6
Fórúm Refúgio ambassador	1
General Secretary	1

Table 3. Civil society speakers in the Session: Refúgio em tempo de emergência; que resposta?

Participants	*n*
Civil society	1
Researchers	3

2.1 COVID-19 and Asylum system

The different spokespersons illustrated the action plan implanted to face the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4 shows the themes, sub-themes and codes for the COVID-19 response from different actors.

Table 4. Response to COVID-19 pandemic by different actors

Theme	**Subtheme**	**Code**

Emergency response	Fórum Refúgio response	Support plan in response to COVID-19 Cultural mediation Provide negative certificates to COVID-19. Individual protection equipment Open letter to denounce unworthy situations Material assistance (food and all kinds of basic necessities)
	LMA response	AURA Project Holistic needs Articulation with the different official entities in the reception system Accompaniment of a total of 7 hostels Material assistance Diagnostic visits Providing individual protection equipment
Response of official institutions	CPR response	Starting session with continued care assistance Providing individual protection equipment Measures transversal to other countries Develop information about COVID-19 in different languages
	NAIR response	Provide guidelines about COVID-19 in different spoken languages Implementation of formal and non-formal Portuguese language lessons Distance learning Intervention practice addressing religious sensitivity Addressing mental health
	Civil society and refugees' response	Solidarity Concern from civil society and awareness of the living and housing conditions in which asylum seekers found themselves during pandemic Advocacy Volunteering (conversation; Portuguese classes)

CRESCER response	Contingency plan
	Team rotation
	Provide information
	Using different formats of information (flyers; WhatsApp; vocal messages)
	Provide daily food
	Provide individual equipment
Response of other entities	Responsibility in the action area by military corps

The pandemic was entirely unprecedented, and it may have taken a long time for the Portuguese asylum system to become aware of the severity. As one CPR spokesperson stated: "There are exceptional and new moments in an extremely new challenges for all of us which requires a lot of flexibility and a lot of response in a continuing learning process" (spokesperson, CPR, public session). To respond to the COVID-19 emergency, *Fórum Refúgio* put into practice an emergency plan under the name "Plano de Apoio Refúgio no contexto de emergência" (Emergency Refugee Support Plan).

At the time of the pandemic, refugees – as well as civil society and other associations which were neither accountable nor prepared – had to position themselves at the forefront of coordinating responses to the holistic needs of the population of asylum seekers and refugees, filling important gaps in the institutional support system (see Rebelo et al., 2020). The *Fórum Refúgio* managed to build a relationship of trust and closeness with refugees and asylum seekers in the hostels during the pandemic, and gave support and reassurance to those who were most reluctant to move to the military base. The coordinator of the association also played an important role in terms of cultural mediation with the people transferred to the military base. As the coordinator commented: "This is what I did with the vice president of the ACM: Sunday I left home at 7.00 am to take the transport and arrived home at one in the morning, all weekend, weekdays, Sunday – everything" (Coordinator Fórum Refúgio, interview). Besides providing food (indeed, one of the of hardest challenges refugees were facing in lockdown was access to food; see Lozet & Easton-Calabria, 2020) and all other basic necessities, *Fórum Refúgio* wrote an open letter to denounce the unworthy situations in which refugees found themselves during the pandemic.

To overcome the gap of services left by the responsible institutions, the refugee association received the people who left the Ota. Through interagency cooperation with the ACM, *Fórum Refúgio* provided certificates of negative COVID-19 status. As stated by the coordinator of

Fórum Refúgio, very often people did not know how to ask for these certificates, due to the lack of information or the lack of cultural mediators to provide an adequate translation of the bureaucratic procedures or the bodies which can be consulted to obtain such a certificate. The LMA, one of the lead entities combatting the pandemic outside of the asylum reception system, improvised a support response for refugees and asylum seekers. During the pandemic, the LMA implemented an emergency project known as AURA to respond to the holistic needs of this population. Within this project, the LMA, despite a lack of feedback from official institutions, managed to accompany a total of seven hostels. At the beginning of May, the LMA set up a team committed to staying in the field and providing an emergency response; with this team, various *diagnostic visits* were made. The team undertook to supply *individual protection equipment* as well as food and basic necessities; because there were no dishes in the hostels, there was garbage in the rooms. There were also about four or five people per room, and there were no hygiene products for the home or for personal cleaning. For their part, the institutions responsible for the reception and settlement of refugees (e.g. the CPR) implemented a starting session with continuing care assistance that provided individual protection equipment as well as measures transversal to other countries, such as preparation of documents that gave information on COVID-19 in different languages regarding general health guidelines.At the beginning of their intervention, the ACM provided guidelines about COVID-19 in different spoken languages to ensure a feeling of greater control over their situation among asylum seekers and refugees, as well as to promote healthy behaviours important for this target population, but also for the broader society. The ACM also addressed *formal* and *informal learning* of Portuguese language, provided translations through a *distance learning service* and implemented intervention practices to address *religious sensitivity* such as, during Ramadan, providing information about religious aspects to host entities as well as organising online prayer meetings. In a following intervention phase, the ACM put into practice active measures to address the refugees' and asylum seekers' mental health: "In this area, for example, we disclosed a lot of information [… including] dissemination of a story in various languages about emotional management in the pandemic, such as mentally healthy behaviours in a confinement situation" (spokesperson, NAIR, public session).

In the public session, the significant frontline role of civil society surfaced: "When institutions fail, civil society comes forward" (spokesperson, Civil Society, Researcher, public session). Indeed, the LMA took steps to help asylum seekers, not only because of the

emergency and humanitarian nature of the situation, but also – and in particular – to raise the awareness of the inhabitants of the Arroios about people in the hostels:

> This intervention was also a response to the concern and the approaches we perceived from many of our municipality residents, who showed a very strong awareness and respect for the living and housing conditions in which these people are found. (Spokesperson, LMA, public session)

Asylum seekers and refugees showed great solidarity during the COVID-19 emergency:

> Private individuals […] individually and voluntarily, monitored this situation, so we received more information; we also got the contacts for people who were in these two initial hostels […] so we came to know about the remaining pensions in similar conditions here in the territory of Arroios. (Spokesperson, LMA, public session)

Many volunteers pledged to make the time of refugees and asylum seekers spent more useful, with activities such as Portuguese lessons and conversation. CRESCER, an association that followed approximately 55 refugees, created a contingency plan and rotated the team, so that half remained engaged on the ground, while the other half worked from home. They provided information on COVID-19 to refugees using various information formats, such as flyers and WhatsApp vocal messages. In collaboration with Fórum Refúgio, CRESCER distributed *individual equipment* and daily food to people's homes so that they would not go out to buy food and thus risk being infected.

Not only entities that already had contact with refugees, but other bodies such as the military corps also had great responsibility in the emergency response: "Several organizations and institutions that were not necessarily prepared to deal with such a situation were put at the forefront in coordinating the responses for the refugee and migrant population" (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session). As reported by local media, asylum seekers were transported to a military base to quarantine, on a firefighting bus in an operation overseen by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in partnership with CPR, SEF, ISS and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (Santinho et al., 2020); this included military personnel from the Army, the Guarda Nacional Republicana (GNR), the Instituto Nacional de E*mergência Médica (INEM), the Cruz Vermelha, firemen* and elements of the Civil Protection Force (Azevedo & Honrado, 2020; Pereirinha et al., 2020; Santinho, Rebelo & Cardoso, 2020).

2.2 Pandemic issues affecting refugees

Refugees already had a lot to cope with before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Hebebrand et al., 2016). Table 5 shows which were the challenges and barriers faced by refugees and asylum seekers during pandemic.

Table 5. Exacerbation of a pre-existing vulnerable situation

Theme	Subtheme	Code
Exacerbation of a vulnerable situation pre-existing	Network	Loss of pre-existing social networks Perpetuation of a pre-existing isolation
	Access to services	Suspension or semi-suspension of services Lack of equitable health care access Access to SNS24 service Not able to clarify health situation
	Race-based discrimination	Protest against refugees
	Job	Lose his/her own job
	Distress	Reproduction of traumatic experiences
	Lack of information	Different information provided by different entities People needed ongoing clarification Mistrust
	Language	Local language as barrier

The virus exacerbated the conditions faced by refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom were already enduring precarious living conditions:

> If refugees were already in a vulnerable situation, in the face of a pandemic, I cannot quantify the cost if it doubled or tripled. It is impossible to quantify, but the situation became much worse – the vulnerability became even more open. (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session)

The risk of infection and the consequences of prolonged containment and mitigation efforts are likely to be worse for refugees and asylum seekers. The pandemic has in fact put asylum seekers and refugees' lives into even greater crisis, as some refugees expressed their stress

during the public session. It is a situation that worries refugees – the fact that they tested positive for the virus and compromised their daily lives; because they were stigmatised as infected, they ended up losing their social ties and support network. Pandemic-related social isolation seemed to enhance a pre-existing isolation situation, consequence of an established decentralised reception system that ultimately isolated the refugees and asylum seekers who remain in Portugal in very small and remote towns and villages:

> The question of isolation is not only of social isolation, because if we take a glimpse of what the last five years of welcoming refugees […] in Portugal was like, the issues of decentralization that isolates many refugees, isolates families […] has very serious costs, in my view, in the potential for integration and recovery from trauma and re-signification of life history. [Decentralised placement and isolation in remote locations] delays this process (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session).

Many services during the pandemic have been suspended or semi-suspended, and access to services has been one of the biggest challenges for refugees and asylum seekers. The majority did not have a job before the pandemic or lost their job, and were receiving €150 from the CPR.

Very often they found themselves not having access to services such as the SNS24 network. Even if they had access to a Portuguese-speaking intermediary, the service did not take the information provided by the intermediary seriously, because it is supposed to be the person involved providing the information. Many people have thus not been able to obtain clear health information, and many people ended up not being able to clarify their health situation, despite the fact that this service was available to the whole local population.

Although the Portuguese population showed solidarity during the COVID-19 emergency, openly racist events took place, such as, during lockdown, some inhabitants of Loures gathered to protest against the hosting of five refugees who tested positive for COVID-19 in their neighbourhood (Agência Lusa, 2020). The highly militarised environment also seemed to reproduce past traumatic experiences in military camps in the desert, where refugees often end up, as the coordinator of the *Fórum Refúgio* reported, talking about his own previous camp experience:

> There was a military camp in the desert and they left all the people there [...] more than six thousand people […] I know what these people are going through: people are

> experiencing anxiety about all this confusion that is going through their head […] So I managed to calm them down. (Coordinator, Fórum Refúgio, interview)

Lack of information or conflicting information provided by different entities was one of the primary problems affecting refugees and asylum seekers. Although the responsible institutions reported implementing a series of prior measures to inform this population both in reception centres and hostels, in the public session it emerged that most refugees and asylum seekers did not know what COVID-19 was. Despite the effort from the *Fórum Refúgio*, civil society and other associations, the feeling of mistrust remained during the lockdown, constituting a source of distress for refugees themselves and a challenge for civil society committed to delivering advice. As the Fórum Refúgio coordinator noted: "people needed constant explanations". Due to the presence of the military and the scarce information received, refugees and asylum seekers thought that the Ota was a refugee camp; moreover, it was not clear to them what the quarantine was about. Many wondered why they were not taken to a health facility when they tested positive. There was in fact great distrust on the part of the refugees, concerning the masks, for example: because the masks came from China, some refugees thought that, instead of being helpful, they could be infected by the masks.

Civil society and Fórum Refúgio put into practice strategies to try to create a feeling of trust in refugees, such as the smiles on white PPE to indicate that it was safety equipment to protect themselves from infections. Furthermore, because Portugal did not implement a national plan for refugees to learn the Portuguese language, the *local language* during the pandemic turned out to be a barrier for refugees who encountered serious difficulties in accessing general information about the virus and following information on COVID-19 (Salmani, Seddighi & Nikfard, 2020). Another associated difficulty was making requests; for example, one Chinese man was unable to get in touch with his family in the hostel because he needed a cell phone charger, because he spoke only Chinese, he was unable to communicate his needs. One day Alexander Kpatue Kweh, the coordinator of *Fórum Refúgio*, was charging his cell phone and the man (because he spoke neither English nor the local language), made himself understood with gestures, so Alexander left his charger and the gentleman was able to contact his family.

2.3 Pre-existing disparities and structural problems during the pandemic

This macro-theme includes all the disparities and structural problems that already existed and persisted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 6 shows the related themes, sub-themes and codes arising from the thematic analysis.

Table 6. Pre-existing disparities and structural problems during pandemic

Theme	Subtheme	Civil society's code	Official institutions' code
"Exacerbation of pre-existing disparities and structural problems during pandemic"	Hotels	Over-crowded hostels, not a new reality	
	Lack of inter-agency cooperation	Lack of responsiveness from official institutions	Cooperation among institutions at all levels
		Different information provided different institutions	
	Lack of cultural sensitivity	Lack of cultural mediators	Lack of intercultural skills by professionals in the health care system
	Lack of information	People in hostels did not have information about COVID-19 Civil society and others provided information on COVID-19, not provided by the official institutions	
	Lack of resources		Human and financial resources

The crucial role played by civil society and associations, who filled in the asylum system's gaps during the pandemic emergency and the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers are intertwined aspects of a *structural problem and pre-existing disparities*:

> But I would like to draw your attention to the fact that COVID-19 has also revealed a series of structural problems and disparities that were already present and have been on the ground for a few years. Developing work with the refugee population and asylum seekers, I have to say that they were already known. (Spokesperson, civil society, public session)

The situation of the hostels is a case in point: associations and volunteers have already denounced this phenomenon[5] (Santinho et al., 2020), but the official institutions appear to have encountered barriers in dealing with this situation, as the coordinator of Fórum Refúgio testified:

> For a long time, before this crisis, we denounced the excess number of people in the hostels […] we talked to CPR, who was trying to find solutions, and then COVID arrived […] My duty here is to observe a situation and move on to whoever has the responsibility. (Coordinator, Fórum Refúgio, interview)

Pre-existing structural problems, such as *lack of responsiveness from official institutions* when consulted by other associations, emerged during the pandemic. In times of emergency, it turned out to be even harder to understand the level of support needed and where those in need actually were, so the LMA tried to get in touch with the official institutions in the asylum and reception system, but failed to receive any answers. Strongly underlined during the public session by both civil society and institutions was the *lack of coordination among institutions.* For instance, during the lockdown, the institutions (CPR, Social Security, ACM and Santa Casa) did not show up assiduously at the military base, and once there, they were not generally seen as a credible, trustworthy source, due to the disparate information provided to refugees.

Another example of the lack of interagency coordination was the case of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in quarantine in a mosque, where, despite various reports and interventions by activists and civil society, the institutions did not cooperate to connect

refugees and asylum seekers with outside people (e.g. social workers and activists) who could address their needs:

> The situation of the isolation of asylum seekers in the Lisbon Mosque […]was a decision made […] to manage the emergency, and it was taken as an ideal situation to be culturally appropriate to the reality of asylum seekers and refugees […] It seemed to me a little strange that afterwards, […] these people did not have the opportunity to contact the outside. Several interventions were requested by activists and the people who were concerned with the situation – namely people who could offer mental health care – but access was not allowed and only civil protection was delegated to manage this complex situation. (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session)

Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the local language was an impediment in various aspects of the lives of refugees during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as access to health services (cf. lockdown issues affecting refugees). Although there was agreement on some points concerning facts related to the pandemic, the narratives – particularly between civil society spokespersons and the official – during the public session did not always match. For example, the lack of information:

> Now, we know very well that the community of refugees and asylum seekers requires a complex response that involves […] access to legal information, access to information at the level of housing and protection. How do we explain that, in a situation like this, people's access to this type of information has been neglected? (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session)

Regardless of whether the institutions said they provided adequate information on COVID-19 (see Table 5), civil society reported that the field experience was very different:

> My experience in the field was exactly the opposite, and the reality I found – when we were in the midst of the quarantine – was that people in the hostels had no information […] because effectively, most of the people with whom I spoke, did not have this information did not know, I mean, what COVID-19 was... (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session)

Indeed, the information about COVID-19 which civil society was able to provide, was organised by means of civil society and migrant associations: “It was by using civil society institutions and immigrant institutions, etc., that we were able to access some pamphlets and let’s say, some intercultural mediation” (Spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session). While institutions pointed to pre-existing structural problems, such as the lack of human and financial resources, civil society identified another contributing factor to disparities: the pre-existing problem of *lack of refugee involvement in the planning of activities and interventions*. Interventions put into practice by the responsible institutions seemed to be based mainly on the status of the asylum request of the population, the result of the COVID-19 tests and the conduct at the military base. The asylum seekers needs or desires were not taken into consideration, and they were forced into a situation of dependency on the decisions of “others” who determined their pathways in the asylum society (Santinho, 2013). During the COVID-19 emergency, a notable tendency emerged on the part of institutions to reduce the responses to the holistic needs of refugees and asylum seekers to a mental health issue: “Many times institutions have this idea of putting psychologists to address needs of mental health […] and with that, let’s say, the problem is solved” (Spokesperson, civil society, public session).

3. DISCUSSION

In the city of Lisbon, refugee associations mobilised to provide support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as they did throughout the world (see Alio et al., 2020), providing cultural mediation, essential information and certificates of negative to COVID-19 status, individual protection equipment, material assistance, and denouncing unworthy situations. The official institutions reported provision of care, psychological assistance and information about COVID-19, as well as implementation of measures transversal to other countries addressing language barriers and religious sensitivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light positive aspects of the system in Portugal, such as the solidarity of civil society, which was recognised by all of the spokespersons at the public session. Associations that were already following some refugees, such as CRESCER, tried to continue their activities, adapting their practices to the contingency measures applied. Importantly, not only entities that already had contacts with refugees but others, like the military corps, had a great responsibility in the emergency situation.

While the narrative of the institutions in the public session seemed to follow good practices – aligned with the media portrayal of the Portuguese asylum and reception system as standing out from other countries – once compared with the narratives of civil society and the LMA, a discrepancy was apparent. Obstacles arose during the pandemic which the institutions could not overcome. Nevertheless, *Fórum Refúgio*, civil society and the LMA were committed on the ground to overcome such barriers and raise awareness amongst the community of refugees and asylum seekers in the hostels about COVID-19 – otherwise, the majority of this population would not have become aware of the pandemic situation. The first and foremost challenge was the *lack of equitable access to health care services*. Refugees face barriers accessing health care services (Bowen, 2001), due to language (Morris, Popper, Rodwell, Brodine, & Brouwer, 2009), lack of awareness of the availability of services due to a lack of information (Norredam, Mygind, & Krasnik, 2006) and poor understanding of public services, (Campbell, Klei, Hodges, Fisman, & Kitto, 2014; Worabo, 2017).

Despite Portuguese policies for the inclusion of migrants and asylum seekers, which stand out from those other countries as innovative and progressive (Rebelo et al., 2020), and the good intentions from institutions (Santinho, 2013), which translate into institutional willingness and commitment to implement good practices, the Portuguese asylum system did not escape the challenges and barriers presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in inequitable access to public services, especially for health care (Asanin & Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2001). People from marginalised communities, such as refugees and asylum seekers, are less likely to have access to health care (Guadagno, 2020), and refugees were not able to access information about their health situation.

This could be related to new barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the suspension or semi-suspension of public services, as well as existing structural problems, such as the *lack of interagency coordination* and *lack of cultural mediators in public services* (see Ianni Segatto, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the vulnerable situations in which refugees and asylum seekers already found themselves and created significant stress for refugees who tested positive for the virus. Evidence showed that the pandemic has increased the social stigma and isolation of urban refugees (United Nations, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). In general, refugees were more likely to face societal stigmatisation if they sought medical care and disclosed any potential symptoms (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2020), particularly because COVID-19 was seen as an “imported” virus, carried by foreigners or citizens who

travelled abroad. The general population and authorities have thus harboured suspicion of foreigners, including refugees (Bukuluki, Mwenyango, Katongole, Sidhva, & Palattiyil, 2020), who have ended up losing existing networks due to the heightened stigma and isolation. The misappropriation of the COVID-19 crisis reinforced racial discrimination (Devakumar, Shannon, Bhopal, & Abubakar, 2020) and sometimes led to violence (Turner-Musa, Ajayi, & Kemp, 2020). Indeed, as our study showed, refugees and asylum seekers were portrayed by the media as being different from the Portuguese population, namely, particularly as illegal immigrants, dangerous outsiders or infected subjects; despite a valid commitment from civil society, episodes of racism against refugees and asylum seekers occurred.

The COVID-19 pandemic has perpetuated existing situations of isolation, as the experienced distances, in terms of space and time, which refugees and asylum seekers feel from "others" (Griffiths, 2014) were exacerbated. The social distancing due to COVID-19 containment measures enhanced a pre-existing conditions of isolation and continue to fuel a negative impact on people's lives (Basok & George, 2020; Cerbara et al., 2020). The pandemic has led to mass unemployment, wage reductions, lower productivity and reduced remittances (World Bank, 2020). Unsurprisingly, most refugees and asylum seekers have lost their job.

The emergency measures taken to isolate people found in the hostels also made people relive their past traumatic experiences. The highly militarised environment of Ota seemed to reproduce the past traumatic experiences in refugees camps. Refugees and people with a migrant background in general have already experienced detention (see Esposito et al., 2019) or other conditions of limited freedom of movement (see Esposito & Kellezi, 2020), with the associated physical and psychological violence (see Esposito et al., 2019).

Due to the presence of the military and the scarce information received, refugees and asylum seekers thought that the Ota military base was a refugee camp. Scholars found the presence of the police and army could "be experienced as a threat, rather than as a protective aspect" (Rees & Fisher, 2020, pp., 415). A stressful situation, such as that of quarantine, could be experienced as even more harsh due to the presence of the military, especially as people relive past experiences of military repression (Rees & Fisher, 2020). Quarantine therefore triggered mental distress amongst populations with prior exposure to traumatic situations (Rees & Fisher, 2020).

During the pandemic, refugees found themselves stuck in a situation of mistrust and uncertainty about different aspects of their lives, most of which were suspended.

This case study showed that the COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges and also exacerbated pre-existing problems and related disparities. Civil society and refugee-led associations had to deal with new challenges and emergencies, as well as existing health inequalities that were exacerbated by the pandemic.

Individuals experienced different pre-existing disparities, which interacted and overlapped with different factors of vulnerability and marginalisation, such as migrant/refugee status and other structural conditions, such as precarious housing and employment (Hankivsky et al., 2014; Kapilashrami & Hankivsky, 2018; Quinn & Kumar, 2014). While institutions focused primarily on the exceptional new and emergency nature of the pandemic, refugee associations and civil society highlighted that COVID-19 has only brought out existing problems, such as the *lack of interagency coordination*, which in turn led to a lack of adequate response to refugees and asylum seekers, as well as a lack of refugee involvement in the conception of intervention plans.

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the case study provides important lessons to inform future asylum policies, such as the need for the implementation of *a more holistic and systemic perspective*. While it is certainly true that, for refugee and asylum seekers, mental health needs to be kept in mind and services to address it are needed, psychological support–centred interventions may be too pervasive at the expense of the "socio-political circumstances that might have psychological implications" (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008, p. 91). Furthermore, it is necessary to *think about the reality of refugees and asylum seekers when putting asylum policies into practice*. Refugees and asylum seekers are rarely portrayed as agents with resources and the potential to provide input (McPherson, 2010), but rather are usually portrayed as "passive recipients of humanitarian assistance" (Horstman, 2011), forced by the so-called "humanitarian border" (Kallio, Häkli, & Pascucci, 2019) and "in a state of transience that prevents them from settling in" the host community (Rygiel, 2011, p. 5; see also Verdirame & Harrell-Bond, 2005), as well as identified, or "perceived as needy, helpless and a drain on resources" by who help them (Grove & Zwi, 2006, p. 1935; Kallio et al., 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

A global public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic casts into sharp relief the disparities and multiple barriers faced by migrants and refugees. However, it is necessary to recognise that a pandemic can also be a call for recognition and re-construction of the structural, socio-political ruptures that put specific categories of marginalised groups into a position of vulnerability (Orcutt et al., 2020). Researchers, social workers, activists, civil society and institutions could join the call to address future recommendations framed by a more holistic and systemic perspective, instead of focusing solely on refugees and asylum seekers' mental health through a psychological support–centred intervention.

Civil society, indeed, invites official institutions to consider new approaches in the future: "in the case of refugees and asylum seekers, we have to think in a little more holistic and systemic fashion" (spokesperson, researcher, Civil Society). Within this perspective, the *coordination between the various institutions* is at stake, as it can prevent and solve some refugee-related problems: "Thankfully, we spoke of one of the important issues, like inter-institutional articulation and cooperation between institutions, because it seems that this would solve and prevent some of the mental health problems that I detect on the ground" (spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session). Besides these recommendations, the institutions encouraged the implementation of a well outlined structured plan. In the COVID-19 pandemic, practices did not match asylum policies; indeed, the official bodies did not take the asylum policies into account:

> Portugal is ahead in terms of innovative and progressive policies concerning the inclusion of migrants and refugees; however, we have a problem here in terms of the practical application, and the way we think about the implementation of these practices into the reality of refugees and asylum seekers. (spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session)

In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic represented a wake-up call for the future application of good social inclusion policies focused on refugees and asylum seekers needs; this would include thinking ahead about the reality of refugees and asylum seekers when putting asylum policies into practice by collecting essential group- or person-level data to guide programmes to protect vulnerable populations from social stigma and discrimination. It is also

necessary to improve the cultural competence of providers who serve immigrants and refugees (Truman et al., 2009) and encourage the inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees in government planning to ensure that services are tailored to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Along these lines, an *effort of public policy* appears to be necessary, because there is no broader asylum framework, but generally only local initiatives run by refugees and civil society: "civil society alone cannot solve the problems of integration of refugees and asylum seekers, efforts in public policies are necessary" (spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session). A further future recommendation is to create a national integration plan, where "a series of interconnected needs and corresponding services are best met" […] "under one roof" (Zetter, Griffiths, Sigona, & Hauser, 2002, p. 63) to assess community needs and response capabilities (see Truman et al., 2009), as well as encompassing the complexities of refugee integration and political recognition (Korac, 2003). It is also necessary to overcome some of the inequalities in the provision of services that occurred before and during the pandemic: "We already know all we should do, now we have to put these ideas in a systematic and coordinated way on paper and draft a national plan which can really cover the areas that remain uncovered" (spokesperson, civil society, researcher, public session).

In this fashion, what becomes "visible" with the pandemic (Santinho et al., 2020) can be used for transformative change. Remarkably, the pandemic could be an opening for the promotion of a network strategy, one that recognises the active role of the community of refugees and asylum seekers (see Pincock, Betts & Easton-Calabria, 2020) and brings together refugees, asylum seekers, institutions, professionals, researchers, associations and civil society in government planning to build lasting models of participatory and inclusive humanitarian governance (Betts, Easton-Calabria, & Pincock, 2020, p. 76).

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[3] The hotel accommodates about 200 people in 40 rooms, with an average of 5 people per room; this is not the only instance of the spread of COVID-19 among refugees, but it is the hostel with the most cases.

[4] The Santa Casa da Misericordia is a private non-profit organisation that provides official welfare services in the city of Lisbon.

[5] With the increase in the number of asylum applications in recent years (Vacchiano 2018), the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR), in collaboration with the National Immigration and Borders Service (SEF), has found a temporary solution by placing asylum seekers in inexpensive hostels in 2019; around 800 asylum seekers have been housed in these private hostels, with precarious conditions (e.g. overcrowded rooms, poor hygiene, bed bug infestations, insufficient number of bathrooms and kitchens; Santinho et al., 2020).

Study II

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Critical Insights on Social Connections in the Context of Resettlement for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

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Abstract

Resettlement offers a "safe solution" for people who have experienced displacement. Nevertheless, refugees face additional challenges once resettled, including the erosion of their social fabric and the disruption of refugee communities. Therefore, social connections are crucial in resettlement. So far, the literature on social connections has focused on their functions (e.g., social support) and neglected this concept to the detriment of its meaning and related factors, so an in-depth exploration of social connections is necessary, especially in the problematic context of resettlement. To this end, 41 articles published between 2011 and 2022 and conducted with refugees and asylum seekers in resettlement contexts, were identified through searches in MEDLINE, Scopus, Google Scholar, and PsycINFO. The aim of this scoping review is to identify potentially broad literature on social connections in resettlement to provide an understanding of how refugees engage in social connections during this process. Four main social connections in the resettlement context emerged: (a) connections within the immediate community, (b) transnational connections, (c) connections with the mainstream community, and (d) connections with services. The results confirm the need to better explore how social connections impact refugees' experiences in resettlement and to grasp their political meaning in resettlement contexts.

Keywords Forced migration · Displacement · Related factors · Transnationalism · Service provision · Networks

Introduction

Forced migration due to war, conflict, extremism, human rights violations, and climate change have severe and enduring consequences, including eroding refugee communities' social connections and cohesion. Establishing social connections in a new country of settlement is crucial for refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), given the consequences of forced migration.

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

1. Introduction

Forced migration due to war, conflict, extremism, human rights violations, and climate change have severe and enduring consequences, including eroding refugee communities' social connections and cohesion. Establishing social connections in a new country of settlement is crucial for refugee integration (Ager & Strang, 2008), given the consequences of forced migration.

Empirical studies conducted in recent migration research have focused on concepts related to social connections, such as social capital and social network theory (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Major et al., 2013; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Tutu & Busingye, 2020; Wen & Hanley 2016). Some studies (see Wen & Hanley, 2016) have drawn attention to the value of social networks as making a critical contribution to social inclusion and participation. In particular, it has been underlined that establishing connections with the broader mainstream community is crucial for boosting well-being and gaining insights into services, systems, values, and cultural practices (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013). Social intra- and inter-social connections equate to a sense of belonging, improve well-being (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013) and help resettled refugees to integrate (Hyndman et al., 2014). These connections can prevent separatism and isolation and increase resilience (Major et al., 2013) and are crucial in gaining access to community resources (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Major et al., 2013). A scoping review of these issues in the context of resettlement explores the experiences of resettlement in the Canadian context and points out the lack of support as one of the main challenges faced by resettled refugees (Ghahari et al., 2020). Other scoping reviews focus on social support, the sources of social support (Wachter et al., 2021a), social support intervention (Wachter et al., 2021b), and trust in resettlement (Essex et al., 2022).

While some literature exists on these topics, it only scratches the surface regarding social connections. There is a need to broaden our understanding of social connections, including how people engage in them (Ryan, 2011, Kingsbury et al., 2018) and the perspectives of refugee communities. Rather than social connections being overshadowed by their functions (e.g., social support) and this concept being neglected at the expense of its meaning and related factors, the concept of social connections must be explored more thoroughly, especially in the challenging resettlement context. Therefore, the aim of this scoping review is to map out all relevant literature on social connections in resettlement and to identify: (1) a description of social connections, including general characteristics, concepts, and definitions in the literature on social connections, and their meaning to refugees and asylum seekers; and (2) factors related to social connections in resettlement contexts.

2. Method

2.1 Research design

A scoping review design was employed, consisting of the following steps of the framework set up by Arksey and O'Malley (2005): (1) identifying the area of interest, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting results. In line with Levac and colleagues' (2010) recommendations, the present scoping review a) uses an interactive team approach to selecting and extracting studies, and b) incorporates an essential numerical summary and a qualitative analysis of the contributions extracted.

First, the area of interest was identified partly via empirical evidence stemming from the first author's fieldwork experience as part of her PhD project, which highlighted the crucial role of social connections in refugees' pathways and was partly theoretically prompted by the relatively scant attention paid to the topic of social connections in migration studies and specifically in the resettlement context.

Domains of social bonds, bridges, and links (Strang & Quinn, 2019) were considered to frame the area of interest. Precisely, social bonds – connections which refugees form with individuals in their refugee-background communities and close relationships correspond to the immediate community; social bridges and connections with other communities (resettlement community), which are represented by the mainstream community and the social bridges therein, while connections with state structures are represented by connections with services. Both aims (see introduction) are aligned with some of the most common reasons for conducting a scoping review (see Kraus et al., 2022).

In order to accomplish the objectives proposed, empirical data from qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method design studies, dealing with social connections and related concepts in resettlement was considered. The study team focused on the factors related to social connections during resettlement, treating social connections as an outcome variable, thereby standing in contrast with the research trend on them. A further focus of this review was how studies had tackled social connections in order to obtain a thorough comprehension of the research conducted, as well any gaps in the knowledge or research.

2.2 Sources of literature considered

A scoping review was conducted to map out the body of literature and to identify gaps in the existing literature on social connections in resettlement (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Peer-reviewed articles were collected from the MEDLINE, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar databases.

2.3 Data collection

The search strategy was guided by the PCC model (Aromataris & Munn, 2020), covering the population (P), the concept (C), and the context (C) of interest. Searches were performed, with the best results being examined each time for additional search terms that could be incorporated into the existing string or eliminated.

Two databases (MEDLINE and PsycINFO) were initially searched, using keywords and terms such as "refugees", "integration", and "resettlement". These search terms were used to identify records dealing with key concepts. The term “integration” was first selected because social connections are facilitator factors of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Based on this previous search, the relevant text words in titles and abstracts of pertinent articles were used to develop the following search string: "refugee", "asylum seekers", "integration”, "resettlement", "social connections", "social capital", "social support", and "networks". The search was organised using the Boolean search strategy combined with "AND"/"OR".

A search strategy based on database-specific controlled vocabulary, such as medical subject headings (MESH), the PsycINFO Thesaurus, and text words, was developed for each keyword and database (MEDLINE, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar) (see Appendix 1 in the supplemental material for the complete search strategy tailored to each database). Additionally, free web searching via Google Scholar was performed.

This led to 332 articles being retrieved after applying the predefined filters of each database, to retain only peer-reviewed articles, written in the required language, i.e., English. The databases were searched for studies published between 2011 and 2022 to collect data from the influx of refugees to Europe after the civil turmoil in the Middle East and African countries.

Reference lists of all studies deemed worthy of interest were screened to ensure all relevant material was captured (see Figure. 1), and Google Scholar was searched to retrieve the relevant records from the reference list. The last search was carried out in April 2022. The reference management software Zotero 6.0.22 was utilised to catalogue results and download all resulting citation folders in a group library labelled by database. This process resulted in 349 scientific articles. To systematise the process, the PRISMA flowchart of the search and selection process of the studies (Page et al., 2021) was followed (See Figure. 1).

In accordance with Essex and colleagues (2022), our team followed the Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research (ENTREQ) reporting guidelines to improve transparency in reporting qualitative research (Tong et al., 2012) (see Appendix 2). At the beginning of our review process, the titles and abstracts of articles were read to identify articles that met our inclusion criteria and those that did not were excluded (see Figure 1). The review focused on the results and discussion sections of each study, to achieve heterogeneity throughout the themes. This led to 41 studies being selected.

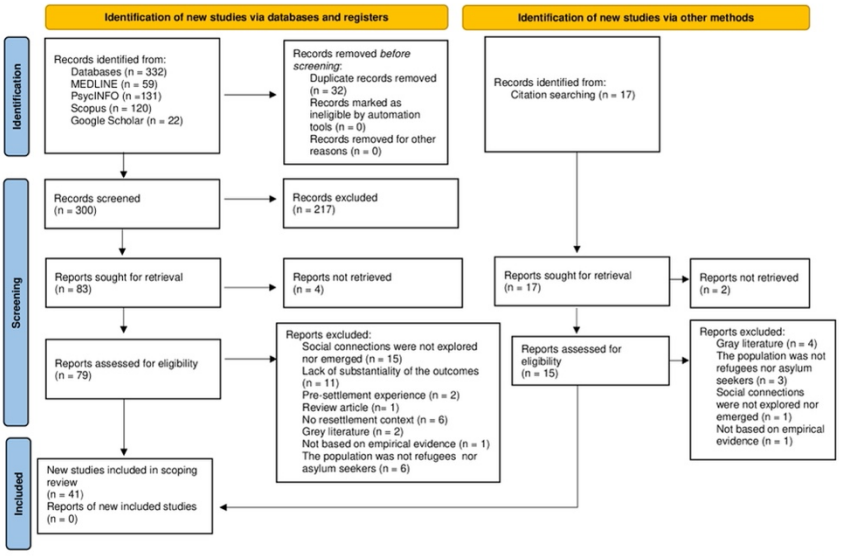

Figure 1. PRISMSA 2020 statement for the systemic literature survey conducted for this manuscript http://www.prisma-statement.org/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

2.4 Detail of articles downloaded and organisation of the manuscript

The data were charted (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), including author, year of publication, country study, methods, and synthesis of the result (see Appendix 2). Most studies used qualitative methods (n = 36), and five used mixed methods. Overall, the selected studies involved a total of 4,130 participants, with a minimum of two and a maximum of 1,921 participants. The participants' countries of origin in the selected studies are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bethan, Bosnia, Burma, Bulgaria, Bhutan, Cambodia, Columbia, the Great Lakes region of Africa (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Vietnam. Out of all the studies conducted, only seven have participants that are exclusively either male (n = 1) or female refugees (N = 6). The remaining studies have refugee participants of mixed gender. As shown in Appendix 2, four of the studies selected for the review were conducted in the United Kingdom (n = 4) (UK), nine investigated social connections in Canada; twelve in the United States (US), six studies in Australia (N = 6), three in Germany, four in New Zealand, one in Scotland, one in Sweden, one in the Netherlands, one in Japan, and one in Norway. As the countries, settings, circumstances, positionalities, and backgrounds of refugees in resettlement vary throughout the selected studies, social connections also prove to be a complex concept. Four main macro-categories of social connections are identified within the resettlement context: connections with the immediate community (IC), transnational connections (TC), connections with the mainstream community (MC) and connections with services (SC) (see Appendix 2). The subheads were organised according to four main macro-categories of social connections identified and two focus areas: description and factors related to each of the four macro-categories of social connections.

3. Results

3.1 Immediate community

3.1.1 Description

The 41 selected studies highlight the importance of social connections in all their facets. However, in the initial phase of resettlement, there is strong evidence of the mobilisation of social connections with immediate community networks, while connections with the mainstream community (Smith, 2013), and services are still evolving (Hanley et al., 2018). One of the characteristics that emerges from most studies

has to do with the make-up of these social connections and two main macro-categories unfold within them: individuals who share similar experiences and individuals from comparable national backgrounds (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011; Curry et al., 2018; Drolet and Moorthi, 2018; Elliott and Yusuf, 2014; Hanley et al., 2018; Hurly, 2019; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Lewis, 2021; Marlowe, 2011; Phillimore, 2012; Phillimore et al., 2021; Pittaway et al., 2016; Smith, 2013; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Strang et al., 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021; Taccolini & Gonzalez Benson, 2019; Wachter et al., 2021c; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Within these last two main macro-categories, however, a series of subsets of connections exist, such as family (Björnberg, 2011; Hanley, et al., 2018; Lewis, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2021; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Pittaway et al., 2016), co-ethnic social connections (Phillimore et al., 2021), strong ties with people in the immediate community (Alencar, 2018; Björnberg, 2011; Greene, 2019; Marlowe, 2011; Phillimore, 2012; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Wessendorf and Phillimore, 2012), bonding networks with fellow refugees and friends from other communities (Hynie et al., 2019), local friendships that feel like family (Smith, 2013; Strang & Quinn, 2019), close networks with other refugees (Sundvall et al., 2021), co-immigrant groups (Smith, 2013, Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019), formal and informal networks (Curry et al., 2018), and cultural brokers (Greene, 2019).

The meanings of social connections reflect this heterogeneity; connections with the immediate community may represent the basis for successful resettlement (Drole and Moorthi, 2018; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019), and Pittaway and colleagues (2016) report that these social connections are “deemed most important” (p. 9). Similarly, Marlowe (2011) finds that connections with the immediate community – in this case, the Sudanese community in the resettlement country – mean "being together", maintaining relations with the past and building "special spaces (both private and public) in a new society where traditional cultural and social practices can be honoured and valued" (p. 109). However, connections with the immediate community can also take on different connotations (Makwarimba, 2013; Morken & Skop, 2017; Basnet, 2016). For example, Morken and Skop (2017) present cases where women refugees living in the same neighbourhood as other refugees report that they do not necessarily know each other. Makwarimba and colleagues (2013) go further and argue that community connections can represent a limitation to learning and integrating with people representing different backgrounds and cultures, thus constituting a potential barrier to essential areas of inclusion.

3.1.2 Factors related to the immediate community

All studies in this scoping review envision the early stages of the resettlement as crucial for setting up social connections, while at the same time being very difficult. More generally, social connections are shaped by a range of factors that unfold on personal, interpersonal, sociocultural, and institutional levels, extending beyond the resettlement context and encompassing elements of the past.

Studies identify several factors related to the creation and maintenance of connections with the immediate community. Some (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Mahoney et al., 2020; Taccolini & Gonzalez Benson, 2019) analyse connections to the immediate community focusing on the shared experiences that create closeness in the resettlement context. These shared aspects can take on various shapes, such as speaking the same language or not knowing the language of the country of resettlement (Makwarimba et al., 2013; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021b), being refugees (Elliott & Yusuf, 2014), or experiencing migration and racial inequality (Mahoney et al., 2020). Particularly, according to the results of the study conducted by Smith (2013), the importance that refugees attach to cultural heritage is related to connections with the immediate community. The author shows that the more important cultural heritage is to refugees, the more ties are created with the immediate community.

However, the sharing aspect underpinning social connections with the immediate community can also be quite complex. For example, sharing the same background with respect to class, ethnicity, region, religion, clan, and social status may have different effects from those observed above (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Mahoney et al., 2020). Almohamed and Vyas (2019) investigated the effects of displacement on refugees' social capital and found that the religious and ethnic dimensions of conflict in the Middle East that refugees share in the resettlement context impact the social fabric between minorities, preventing most refugees from communicating and socialising with each other in the host community. Similarly, Björnberg (2011) focuses on the social integration of asylum-seekers and presents cases where refugees refrain from connecting with people from their home country because of a

political discourse that often leads to mistrust, violence, and feelings of guilt towards those of the immediate community. Likewise, however, not sharing the same background may also shape these connections. In this respect, Mahoney, and colleagues (2020) find that class is a central factor in understanding the challenges of community cohesion of resettled Congolese refugees. The authors find that Congolese refugees "will not get along" in the resettlement context (p. 81) due to the different social classes and numerous ethnic and regional backgrounds.

The way in which social connections unfold during resettlement also depends on the refugee experience itself and its aftermath (Drolet & Moorthi; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Morken & Skop, 2017; Murad & Versey, 2021; Strang, et al., 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021b) (see Appendix 2). In keeping with the previous section, these studies demonstrate that the scarce social connections which result from forced migration cause refugees to fall back on their own community to make connections (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Morken & Skop, 2017; Strang, et al., 2018).

The devastating impacts of the refugee experience, such as the erosion of social ties in the country of origin, are also linked to the consolidation of connections with the immediate community in the resettlement country (Pittaway et al., 2016). In response to the refugee experience, "families and groups of people hold together and support each other" (2016, p. 9).

Social connections, moreover, cannot be understood without taking into consideration the refugee experience and factors related to it, such as trust. Pittaway and colleagues (2016) show that because of what refugees go through in their refugee experience, “people don’t trust each other” (p. 9). Similarly, some studies (Lenette, 2015; Mahoney et al., 2020) argue that social connections with the immediate community are also related to social mistrust, particularly experienced by isolated, single refugee women who report feeling excluded or stigmatised within their own communities due to their marital status (e.g., being unmarried, raising children alone).

What makes this scenario more complex is the fact that, whereas social connections with the immediate community are a crucial aspect in the resettlement context, connections are also related to conflicts and tensions that may arise within it, particularly within families (Basnet, 2016; Betancourt et al., 2015; Makwarimba et al., 2013; McCleary et al., 2019; Murad & Versey, 2021) (see Appendix 2). McCleary and colleagues (2019) report that younger family members may feel a sense of responsibility to help their parents, who instead find it more difficult to adapt to the new resettlement context. In turn, Parajuli and colleagues (2019) find that parents, especially refugee mothers, feel concerned about changed dependencies in their role due to a lack of language skills and subsequent communication difficulties.

In addition, other studies explore connections with family and close networks as related to gender (Basnet, 2016; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Murad & Versey, 2021; Sundvall et al., 2021). There are studies (Basnet, 2016; Makwarimba et al., 2013, Sundvall et al., 2021) which note that patriarchal and heteronormative constructions of gender during resettlement can lead to marital disputes and conflicts, due to changes in gender and family roles. For example, according to a study on resettled refugee women in Canada (Makwarimba et al., 2013), financial factors, language, and dependence on the husband for transportation often lead to conflicts between spouses.

3.2 Transnational connections

3.2.1 Description

In the early phase of resettlement, transnational connections are the only ones that survive in circumstances of changes and disruptions in social connections, due to the separation and death of close ones. Studies reveal the predominantly familial character of these connections, showing family connections to be an important element in the resettlement context (Alencar, 2018; Hurly, 2019; Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015; Wachter et al., 2021c). For example, Wachter and colleagues (2021c) explore how refugee women maintain close transnational connections with loved ones, and report a case where, despite geographical separation, the mother is considered a "best friend" (Wachter et al., 2021c, p. 355). Furthermore, in the study conducted by Hurly (2019), spending time on the telephone with friends and relatives represents a way to express feelings such as love and to maintain bonds, despite the many years and great distances.

Notwithstanding the geographical distance, these connections represent a source of emotional support for refugees (Alencar, 2018; Wachter et al., 2021c). However, studies show a discontinuity in the meaning that these connections can cover in the context of resettlement (Betancourt et al., 2015; Marlowe, 2011; Strang et al., 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c). Transnational connections can, in fact, turn into an emotional burden or a type of connection that should be avoided (Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Strang et al., 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c), a responsibility and a challenge

(Marlowe, 2011) (see Appendix 2), or at times, "a waste of time and an obstacle to integration" (Sundvall et al., 2021, p. 354).

3.2.2 Factors related to transnational connections

Unsurprisingly, some studies analyse transnational connections as being mostly related to technology (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019, Mahoney et al., 2020). Almohamed and Vyas (2019) explain that technology plays a crucial role in maintaining relations between refugees and their relatives back home. In keeping with the notions expressed above, the studies relate transnational connections to the refugee experience and its aftermath.

Several studies (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c) suggest that transnational connections are shaped by a reduction in networks due to loss of beloved ones and forced migration (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c), while other studies underline that the challenges faced in bringing loved ones to the resettlement country due to restrictions imposed by immigration systems seem to challenge these connections (Makwarimba et al., 2013; Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; McCleary et al., 2019; Sundvall et al., 2021). Upon resettlement, other factors such as gender are identified as being crucial in shaping transnational connections. The study by Almohamed and Vyas (2019) helps to clarify this point. The authors find that the role of gender in the Middle East affects the use of social network sites (SNS). Maintaining transnational connections among women can be difficult because few women who remain in their home countries, for example, Iraq, are allowed to use Facebook since these social networks are associated with a sense of shame (2019). In addition to the above factors, there are studies (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011) which identify material and economic aspects that shape transnational connections. For example, not having access to the internet and difficulties due to lack of electricity or access to mobile phones, can also make these kinds of connections a challenge for refugees in the resettlement country (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Björnberg, 2011).

3.3 Mainstream community

3.3.1 Description

In the early resettlement phase, connections within the mainstream community are more likely to be weak (Hanley et al., 2018; Lewis, 2021; Marlow, 2011; Sundvall et al., 2021), small, low in heterogeneity (Smith, 2013), created through sporadic and casual encounters, and relatively unstructured in daily life, but very dependent on the refugee condition (Bernhard, 2021; Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015; Phillimore, 2012; Taccolini & Gonzalez Benson, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

Connections with the mainstream community can also manifest in several ways. Some connections are fleeting encounters (Taccolini & Gonzalez-Benson, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019) and do not always foster a stronger sense of belonging (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019), while others, the so-called crucial acquaintances (Phillimore, 2012, Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019), may be more substantial but still fall short of producing lasting friendships (2019). The acquaintances in general tend to be primarily radial and socially distant (Smith, 2013). Although a broad description of the connections with the mainstream community emerges, these connections can be absorbed into two macro-categories: reaching-in links which are created when refugees are not yet established residents, and reaching-in ties or anchor ties (Bernhard, 2021).

The former is a type of social bond with the mainstream community, anchored primarily in the refugee experience and with an asymmetrical configuration such as cultural links (Mahajan et al., 2021), cultural mentors (Morken & Skop, 2017), and volunteers (Morken & Skop, 2017; Phillimore et al., 2021). The latter, on the other hand, is defined by Bernhard (2021) as meeting “at eye level” (p. 81) and can consist of friendship and close relationships with the local population and have an egalitarian set-up. In addition, Bernhard (2021) points out that there is an unequal distribution between these two main types of connections, as connections that depend on refugee status are more frequent.

Several studies point out that during resettlement, connections with the mainstream community unfold in the context of the neighbourhood (Almohamed, A., & Vyas, 2019; Bernhard, 2021; Betancourt et al., 2015; Elliot & Yusuf, 2014; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Smith, 2013; Taccolini & Gonzalez Benson, 2019; Phillimore, 2012, Seethaler-Wari, 2018) as well as in the workplace (Phillimore et al., 2021; Smith, 2013), where colleagues can be "a type of familial social bond" (Phillimore et al., 2021, p. 10).

Amongst the studies, the perception of the mainstream community also varies. In one study (Haugen, 2019), a participant comments that "people were very nice in his community (...) everyone in the community wants to help" (Haugen, 2019, p. 57). Similarly, Marlowe (2011) finds that connections with the mainstream community represent "a platform for broader social networking" (p. 109).

In contrast, some studies suggest that refugees often feel that the host community is cold and individualistic, even in the private sphere (Slade & Borovnik, 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021; Versey, 2022; Wachter et al., 2021c). Additionally, refugees may view this community as more concerned with material possessions than with intellectual pursuits (Slade & Borovnik, 2018).

When depicting the characteristics of social connections with the mainstream community, there are noteworthy cases where the perception of these in terms of friendships is qualitatively very different from those in the home country (Smith, 2013). According to one participant, friendships in their home country tend to be more profound: "Friendships at home are friends for life … you do everything together" (p. 25). Conversely, in the country of resettlement, "friendships are for that moment" (p. 25). Similarly, connections with neighbours in the resettlement country can also differ significantly from those in the country of origin, where people are used to having close relationships with their neighbours; in contrast, in the resettlement country, this kind of relationship is sometimes limited to good neighbourly rules, such as seeing and greeting each other (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Lenette, 2015; Parajuli et al., 2019; Slade & Borovnik, 2018).

3.3.2 Factors related to the mainstream community

Several studies emphasise the significance of forging connections within the mainstream community, and several aspects are identified as being related to these connections. The first aspect, and one of the most cited, remains trust in the mainstream community (Björnberg, 2011; Lenette, 2015; Phillimore, 2012; Pittaway et al., 2016; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Strang et al., 2018; Wachter et al., 2021c). Lenette (2015) highlights that social mistrust is not just experienced by women in the immediate community, as stressed above, but also in the wider community. Refugee women, in particular, struggle to create relationships outside their immediate communities due to exclusionary behaviour from members of the mainstream community. The results of this study also point to hostility from neighbours (mostly white locals).

As previously discussed, the neighbourhood is a crucial component of social connections within the mainstream community during resettlement. Studies exist (Bernhard, 2021; Blank, 2019; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Mahoney et al., 2020; Seethaler-Wari, 2018) that consistently demonstrate that the characteristics of the neighbourhood shape connections with the mainstream community and in this case with the neighbourhood. Mahoney et al. (2020) analyse social connections with the mainstream community related to the neighbourhood's ethnic composition and cultural differences. Interestingly, the Congolese refugees interviewed by these authors (2020) showed little sympathy for African Americans and identify more with Latinos and other immigrant populations who do not speak the language of the country of resettlement. Mahoney et al. (2020) thus highlight the significance of acknowledging the complex cultural differences present within African American communities and other black immigrant and refugee populations. This recognition is essential to establish authentic connections that go beyond the commonality of being black or people of colour. The authors revealed that such differences are frequently disregarded due to pervasive prejudice and discrimination.

Unsurprisingly, another factor related to connections with the mainstream community is language and knowledge of specific languages (e.g., English, French) as well as knowledge of the language of the country of resettlement (Betancourt et al., 2015; Björnberg, 2011; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Hynie et al., 2019; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015; Mahoney et al., 2020; Murad & Versey, 2021; Sundvall et al., 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c) underpinning the interactions with the mainstream community. As an illustration, in their study on Syrian refugees who have settled in Alberta, Drolet and Moorthi (2018) explain that social networks, social support, and social capital are intertwined with

language and culture. However, they contend that the Syrian refugee population is frequently isolated from both.

In keeping with other social connections, connections to the mainstream community cannot be understood unless the demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, and marital status) of the refugees themselves who engage in these are considered (Bernhard, 2021; Björnberg, 2011; Haugen, 2019; Slade & Borovnik, 2018; Smith, 2013).

For example, Bernhard (2021) and Björnberg (2011) suggest that refugee men with privileged gender positions are more likely to establish connections with the mainstream community. Bernhard (2021) specifies that young adult refugee men without children or household members living with them are keener to establish such connections.

Furthermore, it is important to note that studies indicate that religious bias, not solely religion itself, plays a significant role in these connections (Haugen, 2019; Slade & Borovnik, 2018). According to Haugen (2019), Christian and non-Muslim refugees are typically more readily accepted by host community families, who perceive them as easier to "fit" into the community than Muslim families. If gender is added to the understanding of social connections with the mainstream community, the picture becomes more complex. Middle Eastern refugee women may be exposed to Islamophobia by the host community, feel subjected to control by the mainstream community, and be verbally abused for wearing a veil (Versey, 2022). For Islamic women, making new connections is more challenging (Basnet, 2016). Resettled women are situated in families with patriarchal and heteronormative settings, which is an obstacle for women who want to create and conserve connections in the larger community (Basnet, 2016; Makwarimba et al., 2013). Hence, for young women, going to parties and clubs and participating in group activities can also be a challenge (Basnet, 2016).

Connections to the mainstream community are related also to resettlement contexts (Curry et al., 2018; Murad & Versey, 2021). Curry et al. (2018) refer to the social connections with the mainstream community as related to the non-traditional resettlement context. The authors explain how some refugees, “due to quieter and comparatively smaller geographical contexts” (2018, p. 10), prefer to create connections with the mainstream community in regional areas and not in big cities, as in this case, in Sydney.

Interestingly, some studies draw attention to temporal and material aspects as being related to social connections with the mainstream community (Bernhard, 2020; Blank, 2019; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Murad & Versey, 2021). In the wake of the findings by Blank (2019), on the one hand, welcome initiatives can serve as a platform for new and existing residents. On the other hand, Blank warns against relying solely on such activities, as they can further burden refugees, who are already struggling with the demands of daily life (Blank, 2019). This finding is consistent with the results from the study conducted by Murad and Versey (2021), which talks about a lack of free time. Refugees tend to lack free time and the perceived scarcity of free time seems to erode opportunities for social connection (2021). Similarly, Bernhard (2020) argues that, as stressed above, a key driver of the unequal distribution of connections with the mainstream community is differences in disposable time and energy for investments in new connections. Murad and Versey (2021) distinguish this further and speak of time duality (p. 383), delving into the delicate balance that refugees must strike between “American time” and “Arab time”. As the authors note, these two cultural perspectives on connections represent a further challenge for refugees, who are forced to juggle many different community activities and often to give up those that can create connections with others.

Since refugees mostly find themselves in situations that do not allow them time “to forge egalitarian ties with established residents” (Bernhard, 2021, p. 83), refugees are more likely to connect with the mainstream community through professionals and volunteers from the local integration infrastructure (Almohamed & Vyas; Bernhard, 2021; Blank, 2019; Curry et al., 2018; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Pittaway et al., 2016; Seethaler-Wari 2018; Versey, 2022).

Paradigmatically, Bernhard (2021) reports that the only contacts of one participant, apart from family members and two old childhood friends (all living abroad), were the social worker of his accommodation, a social worker of an external welfare organisation and his psychologist. These represented the only contact with people in mainstream society. Connections with institutional structures “set the scene for attempts to forge new support ties in their host country” (Bernhard, 2021, 78). Connecting the mainstream community with local integration infrastructures makes connections with the mainstream community and is also related to "contingencies as accommodation" (Bernhard, 2021, p. 83). According to Strang et al. (2018), providing settled housing early in the resettlement process allows refugees to maintain their established relationships.

Additionally, some studies find that connections with the mainstream community can be related to specific characteristics of the temporary accommodation, such as a centralised location (Bernhard, 2021;

Blank, 2019; Seethaler-Wari, 2018), access to public transport and the ability to navigate the public space (Versey, 2022), and the presence of a social worker in the reception centre (Bernhard, 2021).

Whereas in the initial phase of resettlement, some studies report specific characteristics of accommodation solutions as being related to social connections with the mainstream community, when refugees are in temporary housing solutions, connections to the mainstream community may prove to be a challenge (Blank, 2019; Björnberg, 2011; Strang et al., 2018).

Other studies explain this point. For example, according to Blank (2019), shelter rules undermine volunteer support within the neighbourhood. In her study, Blank reports that the neighbourhood is perceived as a connector of the social fabric. However, factors such as the constant movement of refugees from one shelter to another and the isolation of these facilities make it difficult for neighbourhood volunteers to maintain lasting ties. As the author clearly resumes: "The spatial separation of refugees from society through accommodation centres thereby reinforces the dominant asylum system that prioritises delineation over inclusion" (p. 12).

Other temporary housing solutions such as hostels, their hyperregulation of life and rules threaten the emerging friendships which new refugees begin to develop while awaiting an asylum decision (Strang et al., 2018). Furthermore, temporary housing solutions like temporary homeless accommodation are strongly associated with racism (2018). Many studies report that refugees experience discrimination, including racism, as a major aspect of their resettlement (Betancourt et al., 2015; Curry et al., 2018; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014; Lenette, 2015; Mahoney et al., 2020; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Slade & Borovnik, 2018; Strang et al., 2018) (see Appendix 2). Drolet & Moorthi (2018) explain how, for example, people feel "used or mistreated because they are seen as outsiders" (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018, p. 115), while Slade and Borovnik (2018) report that older refugees felt they were not respected.

One of the many aspects that are related to connections with the mainstream community (see Appendix 2) is the refugee experience per se and its aftermath. For example, losing a social fabric, due to the forced migration, that would have supported building new and broader connections is a common occurrence in resettlement, according to studies (Drolet & Moorthi 2018; Greene, 2019; Morken & Skop, 2017; Slade & Borovnik, 2018; Sundvall et al., 2021). Drolet and Moorthi (2018) report that participants share how they felt "uprooted from their social life" and "unable to reconcile the new social fabric of the Canadian context" (p. 114).

Björnberg (2011) also suggests that fear related to being refugees and of revealing the severity of the situation, as well as concerns about asymmetrical dependency relationships and the potential risk of exposing the totality of one's problems to others, may cause people to avoid connections with the mainstream community. However, Curry et al. (2018) found that refugees without extended familial and cultural networks persevere and seek to develop friendships and connections in the broader community. Furthermore, the ability to form new relationships can be shaped by one's sociocultural background (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015). Memories of spirituality, family unity, reciprocity, and social support previously experienced in their country of origin can shape refugees' connections with the mainstream community, as evidenced by the work of Almohamed & Vyas (2019), in which nostalgic memories of their country of origin as an environment in which values and norms provided a place of social support and trust can interfere with refugees' understanding of social relations within the host community.

Finally, on a more macro level, studies report that social connections with the mainstream community are related to social media (Almohamed & Vyas, 2019; Bernhard, 2021; Betancourt et al., 2015; McCleary et al., 2019; Pittaway et al., 2016) (see Appendix 2). For example, Almohamed and Vyas (2019) explain how "negative messages and stereotypes about refugees and asylum seekers in social media and news in Australia may hinder efforts" from civil society "to involve refugees in the host community" (p. 15).

3.4 Connections with services

3.4.1 Description

As refugees navigate the early stages of resettlement, they rely on a diverse array of connections to services and institutions, to name a few: statutory support systems (Strang et al., 2018), service staff, migration boards (Bjiomberg, 2011; Greene, 2019; Sundvall, 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c), resettlement agencies (Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Mahoney et al., 2020; Morken & Skop, 2017; Wachter et al.,

2021c), the Private Sponsor of Refugees (PSRS) or Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) programmes (Hynie et al., 2019), host community organisations (Almohamed & Vyas), churches or mosques (Smith, 2013).

Connections with services and institutions encompass different meanings for refugees in the resettlement contest. Pittaway and colleagues (2016) suggest that refugees perceive these connections as one of the few opportunities to build bridges with the broader mainstream and immediate communities.

In the study by Bernhard (2021), these connections are conceived as “pillars of life” in the new resettlement country (2021, p. 80). Interiano-Shiverdecker et al. (2020), referring to the resettlement agency, explain how it is perceived as that which "has to do everything" (p. 60). Similarly, Wachter et al. (2021c) suggest that participants consider resettlement agencies as being "those that receive people" (p. 355) and those that bring them to the resettlement country. Moreover, in specific circumstances, these connections are perceived as substitutes for the lost or faraway family (Bernhard, 2012; Pittaway et al., 2016; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Wachter et al., 2021c), and, at times, are "perceived more as a surrogate family and less in terms of professional roles" (2021b, p. 356).

However, studies such as that by Sundvall and colleagues (2021), who focused on how refugees perceive their social networks and social support, reveal that even though refugees in the resettlement country are highly dependent on migration services, people still perceive these services as dangerous and authoritative and to be avoided. Similarly, most participants in one study (Makwarimba et al., 2011) describe services such as education, health care, childcare, legal aid, translation, community support, employment, recreation, and transportation as challenging to manage.

3.4.2 Factors related to connections with services

Establishing connections with services and institutions is crucial when resettling. Similarly to the other macro-categories of social connections, some studies identify many aspects related to connections with services in the resettlement context (see Appendix 2). At an early stage of access to services, there are studies which find that the possibility of mobility is related to these connections. For example, some studies (Morken & Skop, 2017) show that access to transportation and bus passes enhance access to services and programmes. For refugees who have no possibility of mobility, on the other hand, Versey and colleagues (2022) report that home visits can shape these connections. Also regarding access, other studies draw attention to the gradual orientation to new programmes and social services (Makwarimba, 2013; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020) as well as timely support services (Makwarimba, 2013; Mahoney et al., 2020) for fostering these connections.

Once access is granted, it has been demonstrated that these connections are related to the quality of programmes and services (Haugen, 2019; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Phillimore, 2012; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Mirza & Heinemann, 2012). For example, Björnberg (2011) stresses that long waiting times and lack of transparency in service procedures can lead to feelings of uncertainty and lack of control among refugees. Furthermore, Makwarimba et al. (2013) explore the relationship between connections to services and the generality of their provision. These authors find that some participants in their research are dissatisfied with the standard of services given to all immigrants and refugees, as they feel their unique situations and social contexts are not considered. Indeed, one aspect of the quality of services provided, underpinning connections with services, is cultural sensitivity (Haugen, 2019; Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Mahajan et al., 2013; Makwarimba et al., 2013). For example, Taccolini and Gonzalez Benson (2019) contend that establishing connections with services requires a more robust match between the sociocultural aspects of refugee integration and public resources, and also provides culturally meaningful access to institutional support and services.

Another study (Parajuli et al., 2019) draws attention to the importance of cultural sensitivity in connections with services, as it is linked to “a sense of belonging” (2019, p. 8). Women felt that they could only use health services independently if they could communicate with health care providers without the involvement of others, which fosters “a sense of belonging” (2019, p. 8). Conversely, the lack of cultural sensitivity is also connected to service connections, particularly in the health system.

In Canada, Mahajan et al. (2021) focused on the role of social networks in mental health and found that underlying women's experiences is a lack of understanding of the determinants of refugee mental health compared to the mainstream community. Similarly, Interiano-Shiverdecker et al. (2020) note that refugees are reluctant to access mental health services; part of the challenge is that mental health challenges may be taboo in refugees' culture, and they are often hesitant and distrust providers representing the dominant culture.

The mere presence of services does not guarantee a connection to them (Haugen, 2019). Haugen (2019) suggests that services are embedded in a complex system that makes the service providers themselves

unaware of services and refugee rights, thus making it difficult for refugees to access services. In fact, studies report that refugees are often unaware of the services available (Makwarimba et al., 2013; Strang & Quinn, 2019) (see Appendix 2). In this regard, Phillimore (2012) stresses the importance of successful initiatives, such as training self-represented organisations on housing options and markets, as well as training for service providers on refugee housing needs, underpinning these social connections. However, Taccolini and Gonzalez Benson (2019) warn that limited resources and a lack of cooperation from institutional actors may shape connections with self-representative organisations. Similarly, Mahoney et al. (2020) suggest that connections with services are related to the political climate of the resettlement country. According to the findings of Morken and Skop (2017), connections with services for refugees are shaped by the political climate in the host country. The lack of adequate funds for interpreters could be a possible cause of this situation. Furthermore, the political environment can play a significant role in determining the resettlement of refugees in atypical areas, leading to social exclusion and limited access to essential resources.

Like the other three macro-categories, according to several studies (Interiano-Shiverdecker et al., 2020; Slade & Borovnik, 2018; Strang et al., 2018; Makwarimba et al., 2013; Mahoney et al., 2020; Murad & Versey, 2021; Wachter et al., 2021c) connections with services are related to language. According to Wachter et al. (2021c), language is an important consideration for many women regarding which specific services they choose to attend.

Nevertheless, Strang et al. (2018) observe that navigating unfamiliar systems and terminology can cause confusion, leading to delays and errors in applying for aid and housing, among other services (Strang et al., 2018). Of interest regarding the language barrier, Mahoney et al. (2020) report that refugees may experience language difficulties after resettling due to limited opportunities to learn English in specific locations or refugee camps, such as Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda.

Moreover, use of translation tools to access services may be also a factor related to these connections. For example, the health care system's reliance on “language lines” may not adequately cater to the needs of refugees who speak multiple dialects, as Mahoney et al. (2020) noted.

4. Discussion

The aim of this scoping review is to map out a potentially large and diverse body of literature on social connections in resettlement contexts.

The results thus provide valuable insights into the field of refugee integration, emphasising the importance of recognising the multifaceted nature of integration opportunities (Phillimore, 2021) and gaps, and thereby confirming that integration is not a singular concept but is influenced by various factors. Furthermore, the results also reinforce the idea of two-way integration (Castles et al., 2002), given the importance of the local community in making connections with resettled refugees.

Thus, understanding social connections can be complex, and many nuances seemingly need to be considered to properly understand social connections in resettlement. It is interesting to observe how the descriptions of connections can vary significantly, both within and between macro-categories.

What is more, distinguishing between immediate and mainstream community connections has proven to be a challenging undertaking. The two social connections tend to merge, suggesting a conceptualisation based on a continuum between bonds and bridges. In this fashion, Putnam's simple binary distinction between bonding and bridging relationships may be less useful (Ryan, 2011; Strang & Quinn, 2019). Indeed the results stand in contrast to the resettlement context dominated by the mainstream white community and confirm that the theorisation of the mainstream community needs to be rethought and shifted in an entirely new direction toward a heterogeneous resettlement context (Blank, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). This study revealed how social connections, not only with services but also those with the mainstream community, can be framed in institutional, governmental, and state responses as part of the whole apparatus of resettlement services (Pittaway et al., 2011). Consistent with this result is refugeehood, which emerged as a major theme of the collected contributions. Refugeehood serves as the basis for most social interactions during resettlement and bears significance for the mainstream community and social services, thereby highlighting that individuals' refugee status can shape their identity in a manner that transcends other societal roles (Marlowe, 2011).

Another concept closely related to refugeehood is that of temporalities. Notwithstanding, displacement separates refugees from their past (Feldman, 2018; Lubit, 2022), and they are more likely to be doomed to a stuck present (Lubit, 2022). The results of this study, echoing another study on the temporal experiences of female asylum seekers (see Lubit, 2022), challenge the commonly held belief of the "stuckness" of refugee experiences, and illustrate that people in resettlement contexts face different temporalities that

encompass the past, present, and future. Interestingly, refugees may also not have enough time during resettlement to forge new connections, juggling busy daily schedules and two temporalities that unfold on two different cultural horizons: the country of origin and the resettlement context.

Along with the results, many factors related to social connections emerged; media and political discourse are crucial among the various factors related to social connections in resettlement. Media and political discourse ultimately impact how communities receive and react emotionally to refugees (Phillimore, 2021). However, a knowledge gap still exists when it comes to refugees' awareness of these discourses and how exposure to negative public discourse can affect their integration (2021). To gain a better understanding, it would be valuable to investigate the impact of media on social connections during resettlement.

Gender is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of social connections in the context of resettlement. Resettlement experiences are determined by gender, and the gendered nature of the refugees' experiences (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 200) becomes evident through social connections. Gender defines the maintenance of existing ties, the forging of new ones, and access to services. The results of this study seem to confirm the findings of another study (Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2000) that the burdens to which women are exposed in resettlement contexts are twofold, both within their communities (e.g., patriarchal and heteronormative constructions of gender) and within the larger community (e.g., racism, Islamophobia). Therefore, future research, rather than homogenising refugees' experiences, should delve deeper into social connections in resettlement, specifically emphasising gender and its effects. Additionally, this should include considering the viewpoints of the LGBTQI+ communities and individuals with disabilities. Moreover, based on the evidence of this study, and since available research on how gender and race intersect in the context of refugees is still limited (Taha, 2019), future research should adopt an intersectional perspective, highlighting the role of gender, race, and religion in understanding resettlement experiences.

This study also highlights how the sociopolitical, economic, and environmental context shapes social connections. Research can be carried out on the relationship between social connections and various contexts to investigate how people connect. For example, the area of interest can be broadened by extending the focus from the overrepresented urban area to the rural area, and the differences in social connections between these two contexts can be explored.

Furthermore, given the relation between social connections and prior contexts, such as the location of the refugee camp, it would be interesting to focus on how prior experience in refugee camps can influence connections in the resettlement context.

An important theme which is common to the studies is restoration, which is consistent with the findings of another scoping review (see Essex et al., 2021). The results showed a willingness on the part of people to recreate their former social connections, although in some cases, this was not possible. See, for instance, the challenges in establishing close, deep relationships like people had in their countries of origin (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).

This study also highlights that it is important to stress that refugees are embedded in their sociocultural backgrounds, which inform their social connections. Therefore, in order to better understand social connections in resettlement contexts, future studies should undertake a more detailed exploration not only of the functions but also the meaning of social connections in the context of resettlement, stemming from the representations and experiences of these in the country of origin and how this translates to the country of resettlement.

The importance of social connections in mitigating the effects of the refugee experience also emerges. Refugees recall memories of cultural and historical backgrounds by maintaining transnational connections, thereby affirming their individuality and challenging the idea of immutability, fixity, and universal homogeneity in which refugees are usually framed (Shakhsari, 2014). By forming connections beyond formal and institutional ties, refugees may challenge resettlement management systems that fail to fully understand their unique needs and desires (Rajan, 2019). Furthermore, the scoping review showcases how studies address the concept of social connections. For example, rather than serving as the primary focus of the research, social connections and their related factors were often uncovered through qualitative analysis of the qualitative studies selected. Most of the studies focused on concepts such as networks, social capital, ties, and social support as the primary research focus or outcome variable (Bernhard, 2021; Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Lenette, 2015; Lewis, 2021; Mahajan et al., 2021; Marlowe, 2011; Morken & Skop, 2017; Strang & Quinn, 2019; Sundvall et al., 2021). Only four studies (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Mackenzie & Guntarik, 2015; Murad & Versey, 2021; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019) discuss social connections. Quantitative studies represent social connections as a variable associated with quality of life, emotional distress, well-being, mental health, and labour market outcomes.

Finally, it is crucial to recognise that the studies primarily centre around government-funded programmes and established welfare services, disregarding the "informal", "unofficial", and "quasi" groups led by members of the local community and refugees themselves. These last organisations may not receive the same acknowledgment as their state-supported counterparts. Additionally, while volunteering is acknowledged, the role of activism is frequently overlooked in these studies. Therefore, future research on the resettlement context could go further with the "established models" of migrant organisations, by widening the scope of analysis to include informal entities (Gonzalez Benson, 2020).

5. Conclusion

This study showcases the interplay between social connections and resettlement in a plethora of factors. It demonstrates how resettlement can impact social connections while unveiling them as a form of resistance amid resettlement and, ultimately, a counter-narrative to dominant discourse. Social connections are not merely a means of survival; people re-appropriate the emergency context and re-signify the shared experience of displacement to create connections. This evidence and the research gaps identified in this study are a critical call for ongoing and future research examining the political meaning of resettlement experiences. Thus, an “alternative knowledge production” can be generated, avoiding perpetuating, legitimising, and normalising the discrimination and oppression that refugees encounter and struggle against in the midst of resettlement.

Declarations

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- Conflict of interest/Competing interests: To the best of our knowledge, no conflict of interest, financial or other, is involved.

- Ethics approval: D/030/10/2020 date of October 23, 2020

- Consent to participate: Not applicable

- Consent for publication: Not applicable

- Availability of data and materials: Not applicable

- Code availability: Not applicable

- Authors’ contributions: All authors listed have contributed sufficiently to the project to be included as authors, and all those qualified to be authors are listed in the author by-line

Database	Search string
MEDLINE	(MM "Refugees") OR (MH "Emigrants and Immigrants") OR (MH "Health Disparate, Minority and Vulnerable Populations") AND (“resettled refugees”) AND (“social support or social networks or social relationships or social inclusion or social exclusion or social isolation”)
PsycINFO	DE "Asylum Seeking" OR DE "Family Separation" OR DE "Human Displacement" OR DE "Immigration" OR DE "Political Asylum" OR DE "Human Migration" OR DE "Refugees" OR DE "Inclusion" OR MM "Social Processes" OR DE "Mainstreaming (Educational)" OR DE "Social Inclusion" OR DE "Allyship" OR DE "Cultural Diversity" AND social support or social networks or social relationships or social inclusion or social exclusion or social isolation AND resettlement AND refugees or asylum seekers
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (resettled AND refugees) OR TITLE-ABS (social AND connections) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (social AND capital) AND ALL (integration) AND ALL (resettlement) AND PUBYEAR < 2023 AND PUBYEAR > 2011 AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Article") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Refugees") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Social Interaction") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Resettlement"))
Google scholar	refugee or asylum seekers AND resettlement AND social connections AND social capital or social support or networks

Appendix. 1

Author	Year	Country	Study design/data analysis	Purpose	Outcomes
Almohamed & Vyas	2019	Australia	Qualitative	Understand how the experiences of displacement affected social capital	**Macro-theme** IC; TC; MC; SI **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) technology; b) country-of- origin-related factors **Transnational connections-related factors:** a) role of gender in the Middle East; b) devastating impact of the refugee experience: failed family reunion and concerns with beloved ones; c) monetary remittances; d) technology **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) forms of discrimination; b) barriers related to the resettlement country: language; c) displacement-related stressors: nostalgic recollection ; d) negative public opinion portrayed by the social media; e) cultural differences (values, norms, beliefs and attitudes held by people in that society); f) social media stereotypes
Alencar	2018	Netherlands	Qualitative	Investigate the uses and purposes of social media associated with the different areas of refugee integration in the Netherlands	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** social media **Transnational connections - related factors:** social media
Basnet	2016	New Zeland	Qualitative	Examines the ways in which the lived experiences and the embodied practices of Bhutanese teenage women refugees are entangled with notions of 'homeliness', 'being in place' and discourses around mobility	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC **Immediate community connections-related factors**: a) patriarchal and heteronormative constructions of gender; b) communication gap between young girls and parents; c) mismatch between refugees' cultural practices and local occidental cultural practices: tensions between girls and parents **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) patriarchal and heteronormative constructions of gender
Bernhard	2021	Germany	Qualitative	Investigate bridging ties that *reach in* from recently arrived refugees to more established residents in Germany	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) socio-demographic characteristics: privileged gender position; b) sociocultural background: being academic; c) refugee reception and accommodation: presence of a social worker; the size of the refugee centre; the level of resources in the neighbourhood; d) discourse on the deservingness of refugees in the resettlement country: permanent scrutiny on moral and economic grounds (p. 79); e) differences in disposable time and energy for investments in new ties (p. 83)

Betancourt et al.,	2015	U.S.	Qualitative	Identify and examine strengths and resources utilized by Somali refugee children and families in the Boston area to overcome resettlement and acculturative stressors.	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) changing power dynamics between parents and children; b) dangerous neighbourhood: Resettlement in impoverished neighbourhoods (object loss) lead to parent-child conflict and communication gaps as youth become more integrated into the new culture, often leaving parents behind; c) language: poor English language skills exacerbates both family and acculturative stress **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) depictions of refugees in the popular media; b) discrimination: bullying for wearing *veil (hijab)*; c) language barrier; d) sense of collective obligation to help raise children in the community" (p. 120) **Transnational connections-realted factors:** a) burning need back home (p. 119), Refugee parents often must distribute their sparse resources to loved ones in the country or origin
Björnberg	2011	Sweden	Qualitative	Analyse the social integration of asylum-seekers and how they cope with adversity during their wait for a permit to stay	**Macro-theme** IC;TC;MC;SC **Immediate community connections- related factors:** a) problems with the IC**;** b) the devastating impact of the refugee experience: lack of trust d) displacement's effects: reduction of networks: Families were scattered all over the world **Transnational connections-related factors:** a) emotions and meaning of transnational connections b) material economic factors: not having access to the internet, difficulties due to lack of electricity or access to mobile phones; c) families were spread over the world and within their own countries (p. 106) **Mainstream community connections - related factors:** a) trust towards mainstream community; b) language; c)privileged gender position**;** d) resettlement experience; e) accommodation procedures; f) lack of trust towards local people and toward people from the same country; g) emotion related to political reasons: fear and preservation of one's social image; h) place of resettlement: small town; i) social-position: the social situation of asylum seekers create dynamics of social interactions which can contribute to vicious circles in which socially exposed position can lead to social exclusion

					Connections with services - related factors : a) culture of disbelief; b) emotions related to the treatment to which people are exposed in the institutions: feeling insecure about the people in these associations
Blank	2019	Germany	Qualitative	Investigate municipal and voluntary practices in receiving refugees	**Macro-theme:** MC; CS **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) refugee accommodations; b) neighbourhood **Connections with services - related factors:** a) spatial aspects: establishment of a common space; b) country's wider resettlement systems; c) accommodation procedures: geographic and social isolation location of the accommodation centre
Curry et al.,	2018	Australia	Qualitative	Explore how refugees experienced resettlement in New South Wales, Australia	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; CS **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) church participation; b) networking with other parents; c) formal social events organised by migrant support services and local organizations; d) the lack of an extended familial and cultural networks ; e) rural area; racism
Drolet & Moorthi	2018	Canada	Mixed methods design	Explore the nature of social networks, social support, and social capital among Syrian refugees arriving in Alberta in explore perspectives and a sense of belonging and challenges to the settlement	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC **Immadiate community connections -related factors:** a) immediate community dynamics; b) stressful context of settlement; c) challenges in the resettlement: division between community, different background (rural vs urban) and religious reasons **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) language; b) forms of discrimination; c) resettlement experience; d) barriers related to the resettlement country; cultural differences, individualistic culture of the resettlement country; e) disruptive experience of being a refugee: loss of the social fabric; f) resettlement experience; g) contextual and socioeconomic impediments; h) place of resettlement: small town; i) settlement need

Elliott & Yusuf	2014	New Zealand	Qualitative	Reflect on ways in which social capital provides further insight into the experiences of refugee integration at a local level in New Zealand	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) strong community leadership; b) shared lived experiences **Mainstream community connections related factors:** a) forms of discrimination; b) neighbourhood: friendly neighborhood; c) SC **Services connections-related factors:** a) community leaders, volunteers welcoming newcomers, linking community group members and services; b) time
Greene	2019	U.S.	Mixed method	Examine the meaning and context of types of ties and the associated well-being of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and the Great Lakes region of Africa (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda) who resettled in the southwestern United States.	**Macro-theme:** MC **Mainstream community connections related factors:** a) language; b) lack of strong ties
Hanley et al.	2018	Canada	Mixed methods	Explore both to what extent networks seem to be contributing to people's access to employment and housing and to their sense of belonging in their new communities	**Macro-theme:** IC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) demographic characteristic: being older then 51 years old, education; b) religious institutions
Haugen	2019	Canada	Qualitative	Explore four rural communities across four provinces in an effort to highlight the experiences of smaller and rural communities and the refugees living there.	**Macro-theme:** IM;MC;SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) lack of an Arab and/or Muslim communityin the rural area; b) sponsorship groups and communities **Mainstream community connections related factors:** a) religious bias **Services connections-related factors:** a) lack of newcomer services in rural areas; b) province and the size of the community; c) difficult both form refugees and services providers, to understand how services available work; c) volunteers; d) cold climate, long distances in rural contexts; e) lack of an Arab and/or Muslim community in the rural area; f) language barriers

Hynie et al.	2019	Canada	Mixed Methods	Measure the elements (i.e., social networks) within the broader sociopolitical context	**Macro-theme:** IC;MC;SC **Immediate community connections - related factors:** a) speaking the same language; better fluency in one of the official languages; b) length spent in the country: greater length of stay in the settlement country; having a higher level of education; c) privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR) Program; d) being male **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** language fluency **Connections with services-related factors:** a) age: being young adult without children or cohabiting members of the family; b) sociocultural background: Being academic
Hurly	2019	Canada	Qualitative	Explore the leisure meanings of three African women, former refugees resettled in Canada.	**Macro-theme:** IC;TC;MC **Immediate community connections - related factors:** a) church: Church served as a hub for devotion, socialising, and belonging within the women's ethnocultural communities (p. 6); b) English lessons are an opportunity to be with others
Interiano-Shiverdecker et al.,	2020	U.S.	Qualitative	Explored how access to cultural resources and social networks impacted refugees' mental health during their U.S. resettlement.	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC;SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** discrimination religious-practices based **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) language barriers**;** b) discrimination based on their ethnicity, immigrant status, and even English accent (p. 59) **Connections with services - related factors:** a) language barriers ; b) resettlement agencies; c) culturally-sensitive, taboo of metnhal health issues
Lenette	2015	Australia	Qualitative	Outlines how the presence of mistrust could at times create difficult resettlement circumstances for women, who then needed to negotiate additional obstacles in everyday life.	**Macro-theme**: IM;MC;SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) intre-group mistrust;b) women marital status **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) exclusionary attitudes from broader community; distant and barely civil relationship witht neighbours ; language barrier; cultural differences; mistrust **Connections with services - related factors:** Mainstream community

Mackenzie & Guntarik	2015	Australia	Qualitative	Explore resettled Afghan Hazaras transition (from transience into a moremstable position) experiences in Australia	**Macro-theme**: TC; MC **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) physical and cultural embodiment of belonging: the willing to set up her/his own body to the host culture; b) embracing resettlement country values and actively working to reclaim his/ her own cultural identity; c) language: linguistic signifiers; d) familiarity with local culture, speech, humour and behaviour; e) refugee status
Mahajan et al.	2021	Canada	Qualitative	Understand the social the role of social networks in Canada in women mental health	**Macro-theme:** IC;SC **Connections with services - related factors:** a) lack of cultural sensitivity; b) family and influence women's perception; cultural sensitivity make felt understood, tailoring the mental health care professionals' practices to women values and comforts
Makwarimba et al.	2013	Canada	Qualitative	Identify support needs, current sources of support, available support programmes, barriers to access to support resources, and preferred support interventions	**Macro-theme:** IC;TC;MC;SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) parenting; b) patriarchal family setting; c) do not know the language **Transnational connections - related factors:** a) displacement's effects: loss and separation; b) devastating impact of the refugee experience: failed reunion and worrying about relatives **Mainstream community connections-related factors**: a) forms of discrimination; b) patriarchal setting family: spousal conflicts **Services connections-related factors:** a) gradual orientation and timely provision of information about support programes; cultural sensitivity: understanding and acceptance of diversity within the community; accessibility of information on services; b) lack of cultural sensitivity; c) language and discrimination barriers; d) treatment of institutions; e) lack of information: lack of familiarity with the services; lack of knowledge; lack of knowledge of the resettlement country work culture; lack of awareness of government agencies and services; generic service provision
Mahoney et al.,	2020	U.S.	Qualitative	Reflect on some of experiences working with Refugees from the Congo Wars (RFCWs) and address some of the challenges faced as applied/practicing anthropologists and resettlement support personnel	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) class; b) different religious; c) religious connections; d) refugee women marital status; e) shared experience **Mainstream community connections-related factors**: shared experience of immigration combined with racial inequality;

					complex cultural differences; b) church **Services connections -related factors:** a) political mood in the resettlement Country regarding the welcoming of refugees'; b) trusted interpreters; c) previous refugee camp experience; specific location of refugee camp; refugee women marital status
Marlowe	2011	Australia	Qualitative	Examine acculturation strategies that accompany the experience of resettlement in Australia of Sudanese men	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC **Transnational connections - related factors:** responsibility: the need to balance and maintain transnational relations, and the challenges of reconciling strategies for intercultural contact and cultural maintenance in a new host society (p. 108)
Marlowe	2020	New Zeland	Qualitative	Eexamine transnational practices of social media and its influence on integration and belonging.	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC;SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** social media **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** social media **Transnational connections-related factors:** social media
McCleary et al.,	2019	U.S.	Qualitative	Explore conceptualizations of and communication about mental and emotional distress within and outside of family systems.	**Macro-theme:** IC;TC;SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** family: responsibility to take care of family, intergenerational differences **Transnational connections - related factors:** worry about friends and family left behind **Services connections-related factors:** parents unfamiliar with the Western academic system may struggle to support their children and
Mirza & Heinemann	2012	U.S.	Qualitative	To examine the adequacy of existing service systems in addressing the needs of refugees with disabilities resettled in the USA	**Macro-theme:** SC **Services and institutions connections -related factors:** a) unmet disability-related needs among participants; b) shortcomings within resettlement services in addressing the needs of refugees with disabilities; c) disconnection between disability and refugee service systems
Morken & Skop	2017	U.S.	Qualitative	To explore how resettlement agencies, transportation systems, and social networks interact as social institutions in refugee resettlement in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a nontraditional resettlement destination	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) volunteers; b) Middle Eastern refugee; c) shared ethinicity is not sufficient to create connections **Mainstream community connections-related factors***:* a) not having a variety of strong and weak social networks to draw on; b) volunteers; c) Middle Eastern refugee **Services and institutions connections-related factors:** a) transportation; b) U.S. trend to resettle refugees in nontraditional, automobile-dependent destinations

					that do not have the same density of social institutions
Murad & Versey	2021	U.S.	Qualitative	Examines social participation among a sample of recently resettled refugees	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) time duality; b) differences in the level of connections made with other refugees; lack of mixing in the Iraqi refugee community; c) weak social network connection **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) host community context: "american pace of life" (p. 382); b) language; c) time Duality and Time Scarcity; d) gender and marital status: women, and young singles may be at increased risk for social isolation; e) discrimination aspecially with women "who wore visible signs (e.g., scarf or hijab) of their faith in public spaces" (p. 383); f) time duality and time scarcity **Services connections-related factors:** language
Parajuli et al.,	2019	Australia	Qualitative	Explore the perceptions of Bhutanese refugee women related to their changing identity and their behavioural responses in the use of preventive health services following resettlement.	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** role as mother change: changed dependencies because of lack of language proficiency **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) breaking cultural continuity; b) language barriers; c) difference between the neighbourhood in the country of origin and the neighbourhood in the resettlement context **Services connections -related factors:** a) breaking cultural continuity; b) cultural sensitivity: sense of belonging
Phillimore	2012	UK	Qualitative	Explore the efficacy of integration projects funded by the European Refugee Fund II (ERFII) in facilitating refugee integration	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Mainstream community connections -related factors:** a) trust: trust from community mainstream; neighbourhood-based events; b) place of resettlement: rural area **Services connections -related factors:** a) training: training Refugee Led organization and training services providers; b) the transition to refugee status: sense of abandonment
Phillimore et al.	2021	UK, Japan	Qualitative	Explore refugee integration both in the UK and Japan, separately	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC;SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) familiarity, comfort, shared history, and culture; b) rural area **Mainstream community connections-related factors:**

					feeling related to political reasons: Feeling more secure; b) a place where talk about problems and get advice. **Services conncetions related-factors:** volunteers linked refugees to institutions
Pittaway et al.	2016	Australia	Qualitative	Explore how refugees resettled to Australia define and experience social capital	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC;MC;SC **Immediate community connections -related factors:** a) sense of hope and aspirations, self-confidence and self-esteem, cultural capital; b) devastating impact of the refugee experience; c) media: misrepresentation of the community by media and government. **Transnational connections-related factors:** provision of appropriate and responsive resettlement services **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) SC: Refugee Community Organisation (RCO); b) trust towards mainstream community; c) barriers related to the resettlement country: lack of cultural fluency; d) negative public opinion portraited by the social media **Services connections-related factors:** a) socioeconomic position: Socio-economic status; educational attainment; b) feelings determined by political reasons: sense of freedom and equality, sense of safety and stability; c) cultural sensitivity: the community absence of prejudice and discrimination within the ethnic and wider community; efficacy and responsibility in community leadership; d) lack of cultural sensitivity; e) socioeconomic position: socioeconomic status; f) limited or fractured social networks; g) lack of information: lack of knowledge of the resettlement country work culture; h) limited or fractured social networks; i) strong bonds

Seethaler-Wari	2018	Germany	Qualitative	Explore the influence of institutional arrangements on in the integration processes	**Macro-theme:** TC; MC; SC **Transnational connections-related factors:** services provision of appropriate and responsive resettlement services **Mainstream connections-related factors:** a) Refugee Community Organisation (RCO); b) trust towards mainstream community neighbourhood; c) neighbourhood-based events; d) socio-economic level and socio-political profile of different neighbourhoods and their inhabitants; e) refugee reception and accommodation; f)barriers related to aspects of the resettlement country: lack of cultural fluency; g) technology and social media; h) decentralized accommodations; spatial features of the accomodation **Services connections-related factors:** a) Socio-economic position: socioeconomic status, educational attainment; b) feelings determined by political reasons: sense of freedom and equality, sense of safety and stability; c) cultural sensitivity: the community absence of prejudice and discrimination within the ethnic and wider community; d) efficacy and responsibility in community leadership; e) lack of cultural sensitivity**;** f) Socio-economic position: Socio-economic status g) limited or fractured social networks; h) lack of information**:** lack of knowledge of the resettlement country work culture; i) the size of accommodation
Slade & Borovnik	2018	New Zeland	Qualitative	Examine the resettlement experiences Afghan and Kurdish refugees settled between eight and 20 years in New Zealand and Australia.	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC **Mainstream connections-related factors**: a) loss of traditional support base; b)connections with neighbors in the resettlement country are not so good as in the country of origin; c) lack of respect, discrimination, materialistic society; d) language; e) societal attitudes towards Muslims or refugees.
Smith	2013	U.S.	Mixed Methods	Provides insight into the variability within social architectures for refugee identity and the particular acculturation narratives represented within a socio-structural space of redefinition	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** long hours of work **Mainstream connections-related factors:** a) do not know the cultural norms of the host country; b) connections with mainstream community are based on activity
Strang & Quinn	2019	UK	Qualitative	Examine the social connections of isolated single refugee men from Iran and	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a)

				Afghanistan (highlighted as particularly marginalized) and the implications for their mental health and well-being	isolation; b) shared refugee lived experiences **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** Trust: trust from community mainstream trust towards mainstream community **Services connections relate-factors:** a)the lack of information: lack of understanding (or even the perception of a lack of understanding); Lack of knowledge of the resettlement country work culture; lack of awareness of government agencies and service
Strang et al.	2018	Scotland	Qualitative	Explore the interaction of structure and agency in refugees' lived experience of integration in super-diversity	**Macro-theme:** IC, TC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) frequent moving; b) destitution **Transnational connections-related factors:** a)technology SNSs (Social Networks Sites); b)devastating impact of the refugee experience: failed reunion and worrying about relatives; emotions and meaning of the transnational connections **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) housing: a) settled housing; b) trust towards mainstream community; c) accommodations procedures: destitution creates an acute personal crisis that generates fear, discourages autonomy and trust**;** d) lack of trust towards local people;e) fear: avoiding going out reduces opportunities to meet people **Services connections-related factors:** a) lack of cultural sensitivity; b) hyper-regularization of life in the temporary accommodation hindered work; c) destitution: disempowerment; d) dependence on housing benefits
Sundvall et al.	2021	Sweden	Qualitative	Study how Iraqi refugees' perception of social networks and social support and relate the observed network characteristics and changes to the refugees' mental health and well-being	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** a) do not know the language; b) patriarchal family setting **Transnational connections - related factors:** a) displacement's effects: loss and separation; reduction of networks: Families were scattered all over the world; b) devastating impact of the refugee experience: failed reunion and worrying about relatives; c) TC's emotions and meaning. **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** a) language; b) forms of discrimination; c) barriers related to aspects of the resettlement country; d) ack of cultural fluency;

					e) perception of the resettlement country; f) disruptive experience of being a refugee: shattering of the broader network, and becoming socially inactive (p. 354); g) country - of- origin related factors: cultural conflicts between preservation and development of the culture of origin in the encounter with the culture of resettlement; h) patriarchal setting family; i) Contextual and Socio-economic impediments **Services connections-related factors:** delay of financial support from financial services and a lack of job provision by the employment agency, as well as long waiting times for healthcare, are all concerning issues
Taccolini & Gonzalez-Benson	2019	U.S.	Qualitative	Explore integration at the level of the individual refugee experience	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** shared lived experiences: sharing cultural background **Services connections-related factors:** a) lack of cultural sensitivity; "Country's wider resettlement systems": the country's wider resettlement systems were not willing to help refugees beyond the initial resettlement process; b) limited resources; c) lack of cooperation from institutional actors; d) poor connections between the local and institutional levels
Versey	2022	U.S.	Qualitative	Explore the feasibility and impact of a social participation intervention for a target group of recently resettled refugees	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC; SC **Transnational connections-related factors:** technology SNSs (Social Networks Sites) **Mainstream connections-related factors:** a) being able to navigate the public space: Contact on public transportations; b) technology c) links**:** work, the refugee resettlement agency; d) group meetings, community excursions, and sports/leisure activities; e) forms of discrimination: feeling of exclusion in the workplace; f) perception of the resettlement country; g) time, distance to travel, and cost of transportation **Services connections-related factors:** a) spatial aspects of the accomodations; b) lack of centralization of US resettlement program; c) lack of cultural sensitivity; d) gaps in mental health services
Wachter et al.	2021c	U.S.	Qualitative	Examine how refugees rebuild social support in resettlement from the	**Macro-theme:** IC; TC; MC; SC **Immediate community connections-related factors:** speaking the same language

				perspectives of women who fled the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and ultimately resettled in the US	**Transnational connections-related factors:** a) SNSs (Social Networks Sites); b) emotions and meaning of the transnational connections: sadness **Mainstream connections-related factors:** a) language fluency; b) perception of the resettlement country**;** c) barriers related to aspects of the resettlement; the logistic of life; d) Lack of trust towards local people; Lack of trust towards local people; e) Some contextual and socioeconomic impediments; f) emotions: fear **Services connections-related factors:** trust towards mainstream community
Wessendorf & Phillimore	2019	UK	Qualitative	Explore social relations when settling in the UK, focusing on sense of belonging as well as access to resources that support integration	**Macro-theme:** IC; MC **Mainstream community connections-related factors:** barriers related to aspects of the resettlement country: cultural difference

Appendix. 2

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Study III SUBMITTED-currently under review

The role of civil society actors in pre-employment phase fostering refugees' employment and citizenship rights: A Portuguese case study

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Keywords: labor market; migration governance, civil society actors; practices

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Ethical statement

This study was approved by the Comissão Ética do ISPA - Instituto Universitário with reference D/030/10/2020 as the methods and procedures to be adopted were adequately described and respect human rights and recommendations contained in national and international documents on research ethics.

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Abstract

Freedom, accessibility, and qualified work, understood as the "right to decent employment", is an essential factor in promoting the social and economic participation of refugees in European societies from the moment they arrive. Despite increasing body of literature explores integration programs and its shortcomings in formal labor market inclusion, little is known about the role of Civil Society Actors (CSAs) in greater depth, and even fewer have questioned their role in the employment inclusion of refugees. In this study, we use the Portuguese case to addresses these gaps by examining the underexplored discourse on the role of CSAs in facilitating refugees' entry into the formal labor market. The data collected over two years of fieldwork were analyzed using inductive/deductive qualitative analysis. The theoretical framework of empowerment, guided the analysis. This study examines the practices and challenges faced by CSAs in promoting citizenship rights through employment. The role of CSAs in empowering refugees within the Portuguese labor market and in migration governance, operating in a context full of contradictions and nuances, is explored. Understanding these dynamics and fostering the practices discussed in the present study will be crucial towards the advancement of a more just and equitable future.

Keywords: labor market; migration governance, civil society actors; practices

Introduction

The so called refugee "crisis" from 2015 to 2017 marked the peak of European tensions regarding border management, which began escalating during the Arab Spring in 2011

(Giannetto, 2020). Amid this context, CSAs stepped in to fill the void left by state authorities who failed to protect people on the move (Barreto et al., 2022; Guma et al., 2019; Pries, 2019; Rebelo et al., 2020). During the "syndemic crisis" (Esposito et al., 2023, p., 9), the significance of social welfare initiatives and solidarity has become increasingly apparent (*idem*, 2023). In Greece, grassroots solidarity emerged prominently in public and non-public spaces (Sitrin & Sembrar, 2020). In Turkey, solidarity networks provided food, legal assistance, mutual aid, educational support, and awareness-raising initiatives (Özdemir, 2020). CSAs have been covering several areas of focus, including ensuring access to the host country's labor market, fostering inclusion into society, and contributing to the host state in the long term (e.g., Federico & Baglioni, 2021).

The inclusion of migrant particularly, those workers, varies across political, social, and productive spaces within the EU (see *inter alia* Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Labor markets experiences are often linked to exploitation and precarious conditions (Colic-Peisker &Tilbury, 2006; Romani et al., 2018). Authors report that CSAs play a vital role in promoting labor market inclusion for refugees (Numerato et al., 2019), acting as intermediaries and cultural mediators and providing cultural and linguistic support (Sum, 2023).

While CSAs have the potential to enable peoples' inclusion in the labor market at the local level, this study critically addresses their role in the Portuguese labor market, aiming to present a more "complex and nuanced" (Cuttitta et al., 2023, p.,1) picture of CSAs action spectrum (see also Padilla et al., 2022).

This study is part of a broader PhD study, and it draws upon empirical material collected; field observations, an in-depth conversations with social workers (N=2) and informal conversations. In this study, we broadly define CSAs as entities independent from the

government, encompassing registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as grassroots movements.

This article focuses on the practices through which refugee empowerment processes take place in a pre-employment phase. Drawn on Morgan and colleagues (2024) the emphasis on practices is consistent with an ecological approach to empowerment processes (Maton, 2008), which its interpretation within this study, using it as an analytical tool is described in the following section. We will examine in detail the related challenges and CSAs practices, which are often thought to be opposed to "states and markets" (Cuttitta et al., 2023, p.,4). However, this study sheds light on how CSAs efforts to include refugees in the Portuguese labor market, play a nuanced role (Cuttitta et al., 2023; Padilla et al., 2022; Sinatti et al., 2023), along a *continuum* (Cuttitta et al., 2023), when challenging dominant power structures within the migration governance.

The study concludes with a discussion of the theoretical conceptual and political meaning of the findings by offering practical insights and reflections for professionals (e.g., psychologists and social workers) working in solidarity with refugees in the labor market and beyond. The following section will explore the concept of empowerment and its interpretation within this study, using it as an analytical tool to evaluate practices in labor market interventions.

Empowerment through a critical community psychology lens

In a context of growing disparities and barriers to formal employment, Civil Society Actors (CSA) have emerged as key promoters of democratic processes and social justice-oriented change (Hagelskamp et al., 2022). Research highlights CSAs' role in empowering refugees through initiatives for inclusion, political support, and service provision—such as

job assistance, housing, and education (e.g., Garcés-Mascareñas & Gebhardt, 2020; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023; Raimondi, 2019; Zihnioğlu & Dalkıran, 2022).

Empowerment, broadly defined, involves individuals and communities gaining control over their lives and environments, accessing resources and rights, and achieving significant goals (Rappaport, 1987; Maton, 2008). In community psychology, empowerment is theorized at multiple interrelated levels—psychological, organizational, and community (Christens, 2012). However, critics note that the field has often privileged individual autonomy over structural analysis (Beals et al., 2021), particularly regarding refugees, whose agency is frequently framed in terms of economic self-sufficiency (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018).

This study adopts a critical community psychology approach (Esposito et al., 2023; Tseng et al., 2002), inspired by ecological and power-related construction of empowerment. Drawing on feminist critiques of dominant patriarchal power paradigms (Keysan & Şentürk, 2021; Ette, 2007), we frame empowerment as a praxis for structural transformation, promoting co-construction, collective agency, and systemic change (Cornwall, 2016; Beals et al., 2021).

Tool as Sardenberg's concept of liberating empowerment (2016) guides our analysis of labor market societal inequalities in Portugal. We then engage in the Maton's definition of community empowerment as a participatory process enabling marginalized populations to gain control, rights, and access while reducing marginalization (Maton, 2008). Our focus extends beyond individual socio-demographic factors (Berry, 2006; Yeh et al., 2008) to consider how race, economic status, and migration status, alongside local and transnational dynamics, shape access to employment. By integrating critical border studies (Ambrosini, 2021; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), we explore how CSAs challenge exclusionary governance practices and contribute to "de-bordering solidarity" (Bauder & Juffs, 2019; Ambrosini,

2021). By adopting a de-migrantization perspective (Amelina, 2022) and a data/theory-informed thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019), CSAs' empowerment across two macro-themes: CSA's practices and practices-related challenges, were analyzed.

The present study addresses a research gap by examining how CSAs promote labor inclusion as a form of social justice, offering insights relevant to policymakers, scholars, and community practitionners (Fulton et al., 2016).

Method

Study context

In Portugal, foreign workers often face labor market segmentation, relegated to low-skilled, precarious jobs with lower wages and higher reported accident rates (Oliveira & Pires, 2010; de Oliveira & Gomes, 2014). Refugees are more likely to be unemployed, hold temporary jobs, and earn lower incomes (Bevelander, 2011). The 2023 Annual Statistical Report of the Observatory for Migration (OM) indicates that "migrants" contribute significantly to state taxes while facing precarious employment and lower social security benefits despite higher unemployment rates (Oliveira, 2023).

The Portuguese case is noteworthy as Portuguese CSAs have been crucial in addressing gaps in the institutional support system for people on the move (see Rebelo et al., 2020, Anonymized authors for review). Their involvement in reception and inclusion activities dates back to the democratic transition in 1974, which promoted a welcoming environment and shaped the country's democratic trajectory (Fernandes & Branco, 2017). Portuguese civil society has a history of addressing social issues, such as HIV prevention in the 1980s (Maia & Rodrigues, 2014), drug decriminalization in the 1990s (Hughes & Stevens, 2007), and

implementing one of the first community-based housing first programs for the homeless in the 2000s (Anonymized authors for review). However, according to Goldberg (2022) and Mazzilli (2022), significant shortcomings persist in migration governance particularly in the labor market participation.

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Data collection

Consistent with these theoretical premises we transitioned our theoritical framework to practical application (Louder et al., 2023). We decided to collect data in an alternative way, given the extraordinary situation of the pandemic – by the implementation of (CBPR) Community-Based Participatory Research (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020), focused on the

community's strengths and aimed to "improve what works so far" (RCO[20], Representant, field observations).

The first author engaged in practical solidarity throughout the fieldwork, collecting data through active participant observation (with a total of approximately 1,250 hours of fieldwork over the course of two years) and open informal conversations (ICs) with different actors from civil society. Additionally, two qualitative in deph interviews (IDIs) were conducted. Detailed field observations (FOs), were maintained, documenting interactions with social workers, observations from eleven team meetings, and discussions at two job-oriented public events. For information on the characteristics of the CSAs see Table 1 and appendix 1 .

The empirical material was collected in predominantly in portuguese and transcribed by the Authors (TbA). The data were subsequently analyzed qualitatively using a inductive/deductive thematic analysis.

Table 1

Civil Society Actors'

	N
CSA's Charges	
Community Technician for Employability	2
Coordinator	1
Community mediator	1
Volunteer	1
Partnership Coordinator / Territorial Manager	1
Project manager	2
Gender	
Women	6
Man	2
Citizenship	

[20] Refugee Community Organization

Portuguese citizens	5
Refugee background	1
Migrant	1
Refugee status	1
N	8

Data analysis

Field observations and in-depth conversations were analyzed in Dedoose by the first author, using a mixed inductive/deductive coding process (MacQueen et al., 1998). An initial line-by-line open coding of the material led to the creation of a codebook (see Appendix 2). Codes were first generated from CSAs' narratives (e.g., single words), then grouped into axial codes (Cascio et al., 2019), drawing on interdisciplinary literature.

The authors met regularly to refine the code structure and reach consensus (Fulton et al., 2016). The final codebook was developed after four team meetings, during which thematic saturation was discussed and agreed upon (Cascio et al., 2019).

The results section focuses on the most theoretically significant codes for understanding CSAs experiences within migration governance.

Results

A total of 2,213 codes were applied. This section presents the results, which have been divided into two macro-themes: *CSAs' practices* and *practices-related challenges.*

CSA's interventions and practices

CSAs' interventions and practices emerged as the most frequently mentioned theme (N=507), these practices combined with fourteen (N=14) subcathegories reached a total of (N=1298) excerpts, underscoring the strong agency and response capacity in supporting labor market access and navigating migration governance (see Appendix 2 and Figure 1).

These practices unfold in close interaction with an hierarchized system of public services where CSAs must constantly assert the legitimacy of their actions (Beetham, 2013). For some participants legitimation became a daily-based practice (N = 3) (see appendix and Figure 1), where CSAs must constantly justify their role and existence (Gnes & Vermeulen, 2018; Sum et al., 2023).

Community empowerment efforts face significant barriers, as the limited institutional recognition granted to CSAs often remains symbolic (Numerato et al., 2019), making legitimation a central concern. To gain credibility, CSAs are often pushed to produce quantifiable outcomes, which can obscure the broader impact of their work. As one social worker noted: “so many outstanding projects, very few producing number-driven outcomes, this weakens the potential to inform public policy, even if we adopt a diversity and adaptability approach, but have we ever [been able to] demonstrate the whole picture?” (SW_FO_TbA_27/04/2021).

CSAs often face a dilemma where numerical metrics take precedence over the qualitative aspects of their intervention (Numerato et al., 2019). Emphasizing quantitative outcomes can overshadow the intrinsic goals of their activities, potentially undermining community empowerment initiatives and long-term community engagement (Sum et al., 2023). This approach may lead CSAs to function more like extensions of state agencies following a “work-first” strategy (Egdell & McQuaid, 2016).

Some CSAs were concerned with no to be providers of the “solution” (SW_FO_TbA_26/03/2021). Nevertheless, another consistently mentioned practice was job insertion (N=201). Despite these tensions, CSAs operated along a *continuum* from task-oriented to process-oriented strategies (Itzhaky & Bustin, 2018). To be noted to pursue job insertion a key process-oriented practice is legalization (N=29) (see Appendix 2, Figure 1).

Migration status is not merely a socio-demographic trait, but the outcome of State-nation authority related processes that may classify, exclude, and segregate (de Noronha, 2019). Undocumented migrants, who are not recognized as legal residents, are excluded from many rights and from public participation that is usually guaranteed to citizens (Swerts & Oosterlynck, 2021). Migration status leaves a deep mark, making it impossible for people—or even erasing any of their merit or efforts—to participate into society (Gonzales, 2016). However, people still manage to participate in community life through alternative forms of citizenship (Swerts, & Oosterlynck, 2021; Sassen, 2005). It is within this gap, and amid alternative and informal forms of citizenship (de Noronha 2019; Brysk & Shafir, 2010) that CSAs intervene through what might be conceptualized as informal practices facilitating citizenship.

In the Portuguese context, residence permits could be granted for up to five years via employment contracts. This "legalization through work" (Corkill, 2001, p., 839) associated legal status to labor, dependency relationships and even exploitative relationship with employers, as Corkill (p., 839) terms "legalized slavery".

CSAs within bureaucratic capacitystrive to legalize refugees. A common pathway to legalization involved having a work contract or a promise of employment, as one social worker explained:

"What happens is that if the person has a contract or a promise of contract, **[**is qualified to**]** submit their expression of interest, but this must be done immediately. Companies can, in fact, hire people if they have submitted the documentation **[**expression of interest**]** . . . we had a case like that. . .here in our project — the person had a passport, and we hired. . . with . . . **[**a formal**]** contract and the support of the case manager. Our colleague helped submit the expression of interest on the SEF website [for the person's legalization process]**;** With this

document, we were able to **[**legally**]** able to secure a contract for the person**”** (SW _TbA_3/06/2022).

However, a “state of limbo” (Hartonen et al., 2022) often arised due to companies requiring a residence permit to hire, despite this not being a legal obligation, as noted by a professional:

*“*The documentation issue is a challenge because you have companies that say it [be employed] can only be with a residence permit” (SW_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

There were different views among CSAs regarding Articles 88 and 89 of Law No. 23/2007, dated July 4, which allowed for the issuance of residence permits for employed and self-employed professional activities:

“But Article 88 and 89 do not allow integrating people without having the minimum documents [NIF (tax identification number) and an NISS (social security number)] . What [Article 88 and 89] you will make a promise of employment contract to that person, and that document [promise of employment contract] goes into the person's legalization process, but they must have a NIF [tax identification number] and a NISS (social security number)”. (SW_FO_TbA_25/01/2022).

Another social worker added that companies should issue the NISS themselves (SO_FO_25/01/2022). CSAs often navigate these bureaucratic complexities to support legalization. In this selected quote a social worker illustrates the complexity and precariousness of the legalization process through work:

The person had the passport, we were able to secure a contract for the person . . .well, what often happens is that these processes take a long time. After a long time . . . when the person submits the expression of interest . . . [when] they are called by the SEF . . . have to present the job contract, then [you] may have the right to a residence permit. If a person

starts working with a declaration of interest and . . . due to some misfortune, stops working and is called by SEF. . . have no way to prove that they are employed, so the whole process has to start over." (SW_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

The legalization process is often managed through case management (N=29), which includes several interlinked practices (see Appendix 2, Figure 1). One of the most relevant is relationship-building, as described by a social worker:

"The structure of the project is designed with this in mind, and that's what we want. Then, I mean, [if] we don't even know who the person . . . we [are] referring to the company, and afterwards we have no connection at all with the person . . . that doesn't make sense to us. That's why we need to have a moment of follow-up. Ideally, we always schedule additional meetings to get to know people better. This way, we can understand the person — like. . . [if] they're motivated, they're moving forward ". (SW_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

Overall, the practice of case management (N=130) (see Appendix 2, Figure 1) emerged as a personalized intervention, centered on the individual and their aspirations, which makes case management a strength-based praxis. Two distinct levels of intervention emerged. The first entails an individualized approach, characterized by a genuine commitment to addressing the complex challenges individuals encounter, while also recognizing and valuing their aspirations for autonomy (Gateley, 2014).

Rather than adopting a merely *ad hoc* "individualistic service delivery" approach (see Maturi, 2024) this level of intervention, is combined with a second level grounded in sectorial services response (N=51) (see appendix. 2 and Figure .1). CSAs' practices involve the provision of sector-specific services, which at times can consist of collaborations, as a social worker commented:

"When we are carrying out our intervention, we, as a team, work in groups, but then, as part of the intervention, we work with all the sectorial areas... to work with the entire sectorial intervention. . .health, education, housing, training, but this sectorial approach is [not specific to a target population] [is] for the entire population." (SO_IDI_ TbA_20/11/2024)

CSAs ensured that people connect to services regardless their migration status. As resonated with other studies (Dimitriadis, 2023), the non-reproduction of the categories of the power apparatus even its application is not very significance (N = 2), when mentioned, was considered as one of CSAs' best practices. As noted in existing literature (Ambrosini, 2021), at the European level, CSAs claim the heterogeneity of their collaborative networks and the diversity in the groups they support as part of their best practices.

Another point of strength of CSAs is that of Experts by experience (N=17) (see appendix. 2, Figure. 1), a role which involves supporting people culturally and linguistically (Numerato et al., 2019): "people want to contribute to society, but they cannot . . . because there is no one to guide them!" (CM_ IC_TbA_14/06/21). Therefore, these experts had an important role in filling the gaps in the migration governance, fostering the development of close professional trust relationships—crucial in an initial outreach task with people, consistent with pre-existing literature (Strokosch & Osborne, 2016). The unexpected turnout of participants contacted outside the official circuits, at an employment recruitment event, showcases a high level of trust in community experts, and a significant networking capacity as stated in the words of a social worker:

I felt that there are two cities in Lisbon, . . .the one in the professional circuit, where 32 participants are invited and only 13 turn out, and another world where an event becomes popular and is moving forward . . . people who are not professionals [community

> mediators] manage better how to mobilize people with a speed and flexibility of action that we do not have . . . [the mediators] are a better bridge with this other world (SO_FO_TbA_04/06/2021)

Trust (see Appendix 2, Figure 1) is a key factor underpinning the relationship between CSAs and the people who want to enter in the labor market. A social worker provides a thorough reflection about the importance of people in establishing a liaison with CSAs, given their precarious conditions: "We have to approach people as a civil society, because they trust us and do not go to talk to the official institutions . . . they are afraid [have no documents or a temporary residence permission] so we give the information to people" (SW_IC_TbA_11/06/2021).

Labor market here, standed for formal employment as CSAs preferred to integrate people in the formal labor market, as a social worker explained: "the system is not perfect, we try to get around it though . . . .a person without a contract is paid less, [the person], is not protected [by welfare system] and can find themselves unemployed and without access to the asylum seekers-specific state-funded subsidy of 150 euros (SW_IC_ TbA_11_/06/2021).

The above quote also clarifies CSAs' position concerning the informal market. While people may initially resort to the informal labor market to secure income (see for example Lintner & Elsen, 2020). CSAs advocate for the benefits of formal employment. This advocacy is rooted in the protective measures provided by formal employment, which are absent in informal work model (Vosko, 2000), and underscores the importance of formal employment in the legalization process-oriented practice.

While CSAs are often seen as counterforces to the dominant logics of "states and markets" (Cuttitta et al., 2023), this study reveals their more nuanced positioning. CSAs do not merely oppose market structures but actively work within and around them, often seeking to mitigate

the effects of discriminatory or exclusionary practices through collaboration. CSAs tended to assume a position of people allies rather than merely services providers for a vulnerable population (Sampson, 2016), conversely, corporate sectors were more likely to reproduce a narrative lean on a paternalism and racialized portrayals of refugees as needy and passive recipients of help (Sampson, 2016).

The analysis reveals that the community empowerment efforts of the CSAs were not significantly intertwined only with governmental actors and policies, as other studies suggest (Fleishmann, 2020). Migration governance, which informs CSAs' practices, extends beyond the state to include both civil society and private sector actors (United Nations, 2019). Within this "stakeholder arena" (Cekerevac et al., 2018, p., 164) a "whole-of-society" approach (Cázarez-Grageda, 2018) is evident, where CSAs engage with employers corporate sectors, and institutions to facilitate access to the labor market for refugees.

Drawing from the theme collaboration with corporate sector, which was mentioned several times (N= 60) (Appendix 2, Figure 1), our findings support the view that despite these advances, resistance persists. A typical response from corporate actors, as reported by a CSAs professional, is: *"*We don't want to welcome migrant citizens," and the social worker keeps going saying: " because there is a lot of racism [on the part of the corporate sector]"(SW_ IDI_TbA_3/06/2022). These statements reflect deep-seated biases. As research has shown (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008), this study also reveals that employers often display an unawareness of—or a denial about—the discriminatory nature of their hiring practices.

This was evident during a public event, where a corporate representative remarked: *"*People who contract migrants must be individuals with sensitivity" (corporate representant_ FO_TbA_13/06/2021). Rather than acknowledging systemic discrimination, such statements reinforce a paternalistic narrative that treats migrants and refugees as fragile and inherently different — this narrative mirrors a prevalent outlook within corporate circles, where "illegal

migrants and refugees" are viewed as vulnerable and dependent (Sampson, 2016), often relegating them to a non-citizen status (Fleischmann, & Steinhilper, 2017). Such depictions of the challenging process of hiring "migrants", resonate with a paternalistic and infantilizing perspective (Dimitriadis &Ambrosini, 2023), reinforcing an emergent discourse that pathologizes the refugee and migrant status, in a hierarchical racial framework (Kangas-Müller et al., 2024).

Corporate entities often perpetuate the "othering" of marginalized groups within their daily operational paradigms (Ghorashi & Ponzoni, 2014). This is particularly evident in the initial recruitment phase, as one professional remarked regarding Article 88, No. 2, which grants people the right to stay and engage in professional activities: "sometimes it is tough for the company to understand that people can work with Article 88—the answer is always the same: I have to speak with the legal department, and then there is no answer." (SW_FO_ TbA_13/06/2021)

Discrimination by corporate sector unfolds in various forms, mostly during the recruitment process. Social workers described how companies impose higher standards on applicants compared to local employees (see Lundborg & Skedinger, 2016). These criteria include, but are not limited to, completion of middle or high school education, prior work experience, or fluency in Portuguese — requirements that are often unattainable for recently arrived refugees (FO_25/01/2022).

To counteract these barriers, CSAs' practices aim to increase inclusivity in recruitment by negotiating and normalize more flexible hiring criteria (see appendix. 2). They work directly with companies to reassess the relevance of job requirements and adjust them when they are not essential for the role. This collaboration practice unfolds working closely with companies

and employers throughout the application process, with the goal of minimizing discrimination as much as possible (FO_12/07/21).

These practice - which includes promote sensibilization among the corporation sector, ended up being a method to rebalancing of power with companies. The CSAs believe it is important to "restore companies' [their] ideas" so that there is no unilateral and vertical process in which companies hold all the knowledge (SW_FO_TbA_25/01/2022).

Through ongoing awareness-raising efforts, CSAs attempt to shift employer mindsets. Interestingly, some companies rebeginning to proactively seek collaboration with CSAs, acknowledging their own limitations and the need for support in adapting recruitment strategies. However, this process is neither linear nor universally accepted. As one social worker explained, “"is not linear and will continue not to be... [the companies] are all aligned, but some are skeptical” (SW_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

CSAs’ challenges

In the narratives of the CSAs, the practice-related challenges (see description caption in appendix. 1) were mentioned many times (N =257).

This result, consistent with sectoral practices where CSAs interventions go beyond the labor market and unfold across multiple levels in a patchwork-like approach, suggests the multifaceted nature of the chellenges CSAs aim to address in the pre-employment phase.

Furthermore, this code aligns with the polysemic nature (Balibar, 2002) of the borders that CSAs must navigate. In other words, while CSAs may hold different positions regarding refugees, borders exert influence over civil society as well (Salter, 2011, as cited inHess & Kasparek, 2017).

Under the practice-related challenges migration governance is the most mentioned (see description captured in appendix. 2) (N=453). This study also unveils the ambivalence of the role that CSAs must adopt in relation to migration governance: on one hand, they support Portuguese migration governance, but on the other, they are tasked with protecting individuals from government migration policies (Cutitta et al., 2023). Indeed, the migration governance, where CSAs operate, is a context permeated by a fragmentation of rights (see Sales, 2002), driven by the gradual disintegration and inadequacy of asylum policies—often relying on voluntary initiatives (see Sales, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, policies are factors influencing the CSAs' empowerment efforts (Fleishmann, 2020). At the level of public policies, CSAs observe that the shortcomings in these policies also impact their ability to effectively empower the community within the Portuguese labor market. However, in their interventions on day to day, rather than the European policies and their implementation at the local level (Fleishmann, 2020), crucial for CSAs is the scarcity or slightly absence of necessary funds for effective policies implementation (see funds code in appendix. 2, Figure .1 Figure .2): "If there are no resources to implement laws. . .laws remain documents; while changing public policies is important, resources are equally necessary for their implementation."(SW_FO_TbA_13/06/2021)

Rather than policy change, CSAs focus on solving concrete day-to-day problems and managing scarce resources.

A theme that emerged, which suggests that CSAs in their interventions must, in some way, protect refugees from migration governance, is the deliberate lack of state intervention and disinvestment (see appendix. 2, Figure 2) – a mode of control (Hyndman & Mountz, 2008), and a way of governance (Espinoza Garrido et al., 2021). As a result, CSAs' empowerment

actions unfold in a state of exception. By "state of exception," we mean that people are included within the nation-state framework only through their exclusion (Agamben, 1998), which relegates them to a position of 'inclusive exclusion' (1998). People face legal, political, and economic form of exception, as well as the symbolic states of exception that such forms of "inclusive exclusion" imply.

This exclusion-inclusion can take different forms; for example, see the description of migration governance, where the lack of information is paradigmatic (see appendix. 2, Figure 2). For instance, CSAs provided the information that individuals do not receive during the asylum process or when they enter the migration governance system, such as detailed and specific information on the Portuguese labor market (e.g., on professional associations, qualification recognition processes, and the job fiscal system), or even on recruitment procedures (e.g., how to perform in an interview, how to write a resume) (see for example Wagner & Childs,2006). This lack of information and the bureaucratic procedures lead to a condition of underemployment.

Especially when it comes to high qualified individuals (FO_25/01/2022). In fact, the CSAs spoke about the challenges of integrating people into the Portuguese job market, underpinned by racializing and exclusionary institutional system. Together with the lack of information, a major barrier to securing employment was the systemic "devaluation and denigration of prior education and work experiences" (Lee et al., 2020, p., 199), relating to the non-recognition of qualifications and previous work experience (Brown et al., 2015; Krahn et al. 2000). Many people are thought to produce proof of previous qualifications and even when they could, employers may not recognize them. In this pre-employment phase, CSAs must confront a 'systemic discrimination' (Lamba, 2003, p., 47), where "people's past qualifications,

experience and educational backgrounds are denied, restricting entry to the job market" (Lee et al., 2020, p., 1999).

Consequently, under-employment is a common factor in the experience of people in the labor market (Krahn et al., 2000). A social worker noted that supporting people with higher qualifications is more challenging to insert in the labor market, as most have at least a bachelor's or master's degree (FO).

CSAs universally agree that recognizing qualifications, especially higher education, is "difficult and expensive" (FO). Job seekers with higher qualifications often need help with verifying, translating, and validating their diplomas and work experience. The processes of translation and recognition can be costly and bureaucratic, with 500-600 euros required for higher education recognition (FO). Ultimately, the failure to recognize qualifications is a significant systemic barrier (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). As a social worker noted, "people do not escape this cycle" (SW_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

Practices-related challenges that CSAs must confront, as recognition of qualification, are underpinned by with what Bhatia describes as a system's formal operations, which are largely based on laws and regulations, that do not necessarily evoke "any racist rhetoric" (2020, p. 280), but are embedded in racializing and exclusionary logics (Kalir, 2019). Within this system, the economic and social self-sufficiency of the people (Jackson & Bauder 2014; Hainmueller et al., 2016) was undermined.

Furthermore, the status quo is compounded by a perception of a background general desire for self-regulation of the labor market. As one social worker put it: We [the migration governance] almost hope. . . and we hope that mobility will regulate itself, don't we? Let mobility arrive and let the market regulate itself (SW_IDI_ TbA_27/10/2024).

Within an institutionalized, mainly reactive, emergency-based responses, first reception practices (DeBono, 2018), and short-term solutions a no linearity in the practices of CSAs unfolded. On the one hand, they are engaged in addressing immediate needs on daily basis, through work-first solution. On the other must confront the inadequacies and shortcomings of migration governance and its policies. By stepping into these gaps CSAs' work exposes the limitations of the mainstream integration procedures where the labor market area of intervention itself represents an area of exception, as a social workers explained:

The intention was to create an agency dedicated to the target groups that the [different] organizations support. Here, we work exclusively on employability, and the goal was and is to assist partners who are already addressing other areas with people: housing, health, documentation, and often employability, this area wasn't one of the primary areas being addressed, right? So, the objective here was also to bring employability as a key aspect in people's lives because that is what guarantees autonomy." (SW_IDI_TbA_ 3/06/2022).

People's needs often exceeded emergency-based responses, first reception practices (DeBono, 2018), and short-term solutions, and sometimes did not align with the responses CSAs provide. As a social worker reports, people who want to engage in activities do not find answers in employment initiatives targeted at those unable to work due to mental health issues experiences or substance use. "Therefore, undocumented [people] do not fit into these types of employment activities" (FO_2/11/2024). Goldberg (2021) attributes these shortcomings to a lack of experience within social intervention organizations, which struggle to transition from working with populations like those with mental health or substance use issues to meeting the specific needs of refugees and migrants. This leads CSAs to apply pre-targeted procedures to a new, distinct target population.

During fieldwork, refugees were once merged with other marginalized groups in job-focused interventions, creating additional stigma and undermining the effectiveness of the intervention. This "lack of experience" may be seen as an effort to adapt pre-existing social interventions to address gaps in migration governance. However, what appears as a shortcoming is rooted in the vulnerability paradigm underlying migration governance (Savaş & Dutt, 2023), which, combined with the crisis framework, fosters racialization and stigmatization of refugees as social deviants (Tazzioli et al., 2018).

CSAs, navigating these models, are often trapped in a paternalistic approach: “We are still very assistentialistic in our intervention; we provide a house, give money at the end of the month, and then leave the people” (SW_IDI_TbA_20/11/2024).

This trend, rooted in the vulnerability paradigm, reinforces dependency (Gilodi et al., 2024) and undermines efforts to empower refugees in the labor market and promote citizenship’s rights.

Consistent with the matrix of colonial power shaping migration governance (see, among others, Arce & Suárez-Krabbe, 2018; Carver, 2019; Picozza, 2021), another recurring practice-related challenge was discrimination based on race and nationality (N=16) (see appendix. 2, Figure 2). This issue, closely linked to labor market integration, highlights how racism functions as a central dispositif for the maintenance of a disenfranchised labor force.

Based on these considerations, CSAs’ community empowerment efforts—and the challenges they face—must be understood in light of 20th-century migration policies, which connected productivity to race. These policies favored white European workers and restricted the recruitment of Black, Brown, and “Yellow” migrants (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018).

In Portugal, a clear double standard emerged in the differential treatment of displaced Ukrainians versus refugees from the Middle East. This reflects broader Islamophobic trends across Europe (Narkowicz, 2018) and a continuity with colonial patterns. As a woman with refugee experience pointedly asked: “We open a lot of doors for Ukrainian, why doors are shut for Afghan refugees. Why there is the difference, we must work on that”(FO_12/10_2021).

Studies confirm that race, religion, and ethnic origin significantly impact employment outcomes (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007). Challenges reported by CSAs—unemployment, underemployment, dequalification—are often symptoms of institutional or systemic discrimination (Rydgren, 2004). Thus, community empowerment must be framed within the socio-political construction of race and its deep colonial roots. In Portugal, people from former colonies historically faced barriers to formal employment, relegated to low-wage sectors such as construction and domestic work (Marques, 2012; Lintner & Elsen, 2020)—sectors that continue to employ many refugees today. These persistent inequalities reflect colonial legacies that continue to shape inclusion, qualified labor access, and justice (Dutt et al., 2022). A community expert encapsulated this reality:

> Construction does not require residence, only a fiscal number; we already know that only Africans want to work on construction sites; we are not interested in making many choices . . . if there is no work, there is no house.” (CM_ IC _TbA_ 12/10/2021).

Similar to race, language operates as a device produced within the broader context of migration governance, informed by colonial logics of difference and inferiority (Arce Zelada, 2024; Picozza, 2021). It emerged as one of the most cited practice-related challenges (N = 117). In pre-employment phases, CSAs navigate a linguistic hierarchy that privileges European languages over non-European ones (Veronelli, 2015).

The dominant logic in the host country emphasizes assimilation, requiring people to adopt the prevailing culture and language (Migliarini & Cioè-Peña, 2024). Thus, language functions not only as a marker of exclusion but also as an assimilatory tool (2024). Its role as a barrier is intensified by the state's lack of investment in structured reception policies, such as the absence of a national Portuguese language plan (Goldberg, 2021)—a theme frequently observed in the field.

While CSAs offer information on available language courses and job orientation, language remains a significant obstacle, especially in relation to labor market access. As a social worker explained: “It is always complicated because if other workers are not English-speaking in job settings, companies advance speaking Portuguese as a minimum hiring requirement” (SO_IDI_TbA_3/06/2022).

Mainstream language services are often inadequate. A representative of an RCO observed: “The . . . course is a course for Portuguese speakers . . . I'm afraid that if people go there, they lose confidence” (RCO_FO_TbA_14/06/2021).

Available courses are frequently not adapted to beginners. Another RCO representative explained:

The courses that [our organization] offers start as intensive courses. These individuals require basics and need to learn to pronounce words, making it difficult for them to keep up with the language. Therefore, [our organization] will conduct an informal course to assist people in learning the basic language."(RCO_FO_TbA_14/06/2021).

CSAs often reported refugees' dissatisfaction with these services, which failed to meet their learning needs. As one RCO representative noted: “Our goal is to build an appropriate response through observation” (RCO_ FO_TbA_14/06/2021).

Conclusions

Our results encapsulate the nuanced role (see Cuttitta et al., 2023; Padilla et al., 2024; Sinatti et al., 2023) of CSAs in the Portuguese migration governance.

Moving beyond a normative or purely humanitarian approach (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018; Padilla et al., 2024), CSAs' daily practices can be interpreted as forms of de-bordering solidarity (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2021, 2022) and acts of citizenship (Stock, 2019; Padilla et al., 2024). These practices both mitigate and challenge restrictive migration policies, while addressing systemic inequalities underpinned by migration governance (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2022). This study highlights multiple barriers within the Portuguese labour market (Baranik et al., 2018; Campion, 2018), pointing to the need for a broader understanding of refugee inclusion that goes beyond employment integration (Lintner & Elsen, 2018). While CSAs aim to build a more just system for marginalized and racialized groups (Witkowski et al., 2019), they often function as complementary actors within EU policies at the local level (Lavenex, 2015), despite national governments retaining decision-making power (Muniz, 2023). CSAs' practical knowledge is frequently overlooked (Silver, 2018), reflecting challenges such as limited funding and the need for legitimacy. A disconnect remains between formal governance and CSAs' grassroots actions, which often occur in informal or exceptional spaces (Silver, 2018).

The findings align with prior research on the importance of bottom-up approaches and recognizing CSAs as key partners (Cuttitta et al., 2023). Still, as Hansen (2020) notes, addressing root causes of marginalization requires more than CSAs efforts alone. Following Dimitriadis & Ambrosini (2022), this raises the question of whether CSAs should complement, compete with, or even replace state functions

While a definitive answer to this question remains elusive, this study offers several valuable insights. What stands out is that CSAs often act "outside the space created by the state" (Padilla et al., 2024, p., 3181), embodying what Bang calls "everyday makers" (in Silver, 2018). These actors engage in "Do-It-Yourself" (DIY) practices that have tangible impacts on local communities (Silver, 2018). However, their roles are fluid and vary in levels of advocacy and commitment (Padilla et al., 2024).

Although CSAs alone cannot resolve structural injustices (Hansen, 2020), their practices reveal a politics of care and relationship-building that underpin empowerment. These relationship practices resonates with a "buddy schemes" and other relational practices, (Stock, 2019). This study shows how CSAs' practices during the pre-employment phase promote not only labour market access but also forms of citizenship within migration governance (Stock, 2019; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023). Even when appearing apolitical (Fleischmann, 2020), these practices acquire political meaning through everyday acts of solidarity (Ambrosini, 2021).

Further research could explore how local CSAs' practices can scale into trans-local solidarities or city networks (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). The results underscore CSAs' commitment to challenging exclusion and discrimination in the labour market and envisioning alternatives. Despite contradictions, CSAs can play a crucial role in empowerment (Togral Koca, 2019), offering glimpses of more just communities (Fehsenfeld & Levinsen, 2019) and opening space to challenge exclusionary systems (Agustín & Jørgensen, 2019). Therefore, the findings of this study highlight how CSAs contribute to nurturing the collective imagination which, in the words of Appadurai (2013, p., 287), becomes "a collective practice without which words such as 'empowerment,' 'voice,' and 'participation' cannot be meaningful."

Appendix 1. Civil society actors' Organizations' informations

Type of organizations	RCO	Private non-for-profit international development agency	Community Based Organization	NGO	Charitable organisation
Main activities	Social support /community mediation/ documentation support/ certified Portuguese language course	Training Partnership Coordination / Territorial Management	Training for Mediators/Resource Mapping/Visits to Services/Job Training/Training Sessions for Partners for Referring Target Groups/certified Portuguese language course	Supported Employment Methodolog/ Risk Reduction and Harm Minimization Approach (RRMD)/The established connection between beneficiaries and organizations already working with this target group, strongly anchored in the existing relationship with their staff/Technical know-how in the field of employability/Buddy support	Training aimed at young people (from 15 years old) and adults who wish to develop skills and enhance their educational and professional qualifications through a training and qualification response
Organizational mission	Understanding the needs of refugees and collaborate with other responsible institutions to develop effective responses, contributing to a well-defined and successfully	Improving livelihoods and the quality of life of vulnerable populations, mainly in Asia and Africa, irrespective of their race, religion,	Contributing to local development through the implementation of cultural activities and social businesses that promote artistic creation and dynamism and	Promoting the inclusion of vulnerable people in the community is fundamental to the development of a fair, participatory	Defending invaluable social values, from a perspective of proximity, respect and defense of good causes

	implemented strategy.	ethnicity or gender	community involvement and integration	and democratic city	

Fig.1 CSA's intervention and practices code application, stratified by subcathegories.

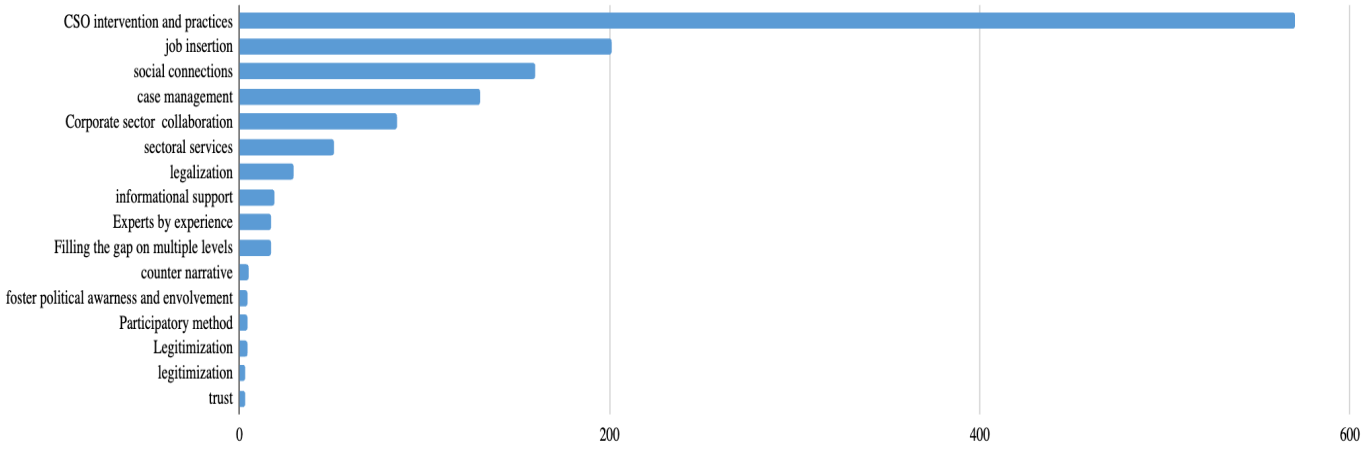
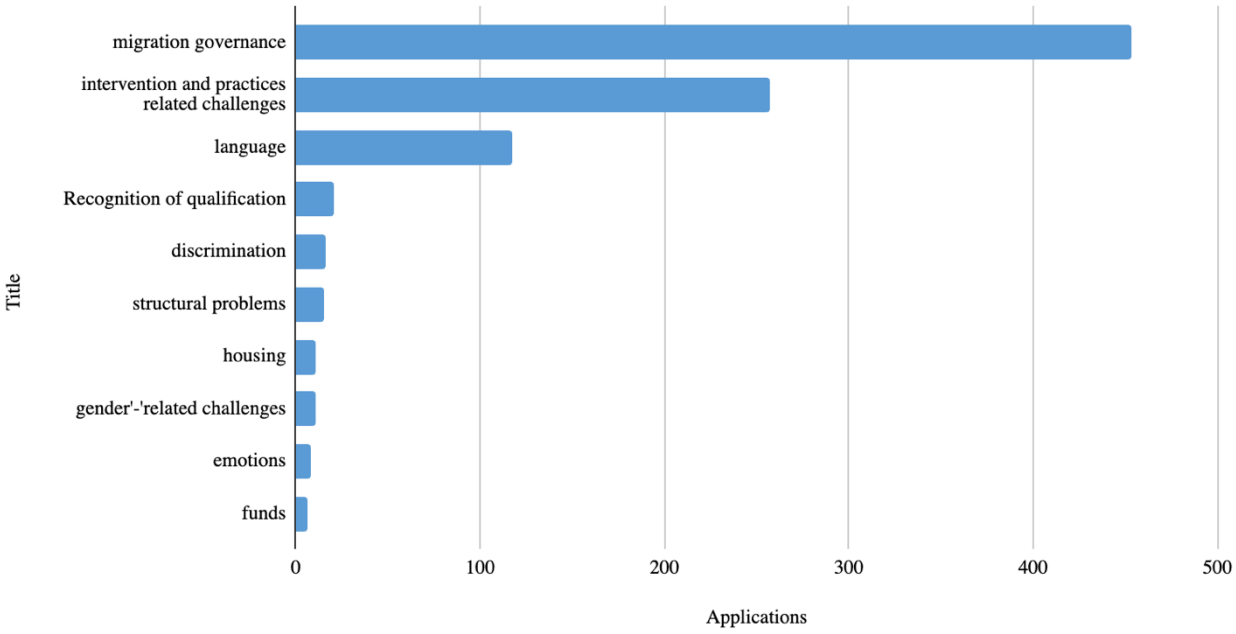


Fig.2 CSA's practices-related challenges code application, stratified by subcathegories.



appendix 2.

Themes and subthemes	Total	Description
CSA's intervention and practices	570	Community practices stands for the ways CSA deals the relationship between people and their contexts. Their ability to obtain goals and objectives, to fulfill people's aspirations to live according to their values, to prevent their distress, and to empower them
Job insertion	201	Formalization of job offers in informal and formal labor market alike; provision of trainning courses; work first solutions
Social connections	160	Through interagency collaboration within a heterogeneous network, CSAs leverage social connections to implement practices that foster community cohesion rather than reinforce segregation
Case management	130	Address self-determination foster equality and opportunities; continuity; strength the social accountability; person'-'centered attendance; The strategy to decide to focus on a specific geographic area and cover-it; person-centered attendance; problems' specifities; "no problem solving"; flexibility can be considered a practice that distinguishes civil society from isntitutions; Acknowledge the limitations of one's interventions to prevent creating unrealistic expectations during the process; Base the intervention of insertion into the formal labor market on the relationship with the people with whom the CSAs work.
Corporate sector collaboration	85	Demostrate which benefits hiring people; inclusive hiring process, meet the; pursue the benefits for companies; companies' rationales; provide to companies alternatives of social accountability;

		rebalancing of power with companies; ; match between people's necessities and companies' necessities
Sectoral services	51	CSA address target population' s needs by engage with diverse sectorial services addressing dominant population's needs; The practices implemented to promote employability do not concern only promote participation into the formal labor market, but also involve other areas of intervention
legalization	29	Legalization of the people through work
Informational support	19	Provision of information (e.g., welcoming content and language content simultaneously, through a free access portal) not euro'-'institutional centered material; producing media in nontraditional formats; Provide information about certified course, learning of portuguese as a host language; teach portuguese in a practical way;
Experts by experience	17	Reach-out and relationship practices aimed at addressing the cultural needs of the target population, creating safe and familiar space
Filling the gap on multiple levels	17	Address the law and official institutions gaps; address lack of information; reactive response; Provision of material support such
Counter narrative	5	Huminizing discourse; no difference between refugees and citizens
Foster political awarness and envolvement	4	The CSAs involved in labor market insertion discuss the importance to to foster political engagement and raise awareness among individuals so that they can influence policies — including labor policies
Participatory method	4	When the population target select interventions aims and guide the implementation process
Legitimization	3	Legitimize the interventions implemented, for example, by quantifying the results
Trust	3	To ground the intervention for integration into the formal labor market on trust.
Themes and subthemes	Total	Description
CSA's practice- related challenges	257	All the challenges involved in CSA practices.
migration governance	453	A concept that encompasses all the entities that are part of the migration arena (e.g, professionals staff, public services; institutions); and the diverse ways of governing in migration: mismanagement; lack of teachers of portuguese courses; lack of recognition of qualification; lack of training courses for professionals; lack of well'-'structure integration policies; expectation of the auto'-'regularization of labor'-'market; deliberate lack of state intervention and disinvestment; fragmented rights; divergence between local and European migration policies; gaps in policies formulation and implementation; lack of comprehension; lack of information (e.g., lack of awarness of job fiscal system); double standard; vulnerability paradigm; All confinement measures ranging from detention to reception responses in reception centers; low salary poor working condition; underpaid work; mismatch between people qualification and job offers; low'-'qualified job posisitons;

		operational job offers; Lack of a microcredit and self-employment program with access to initial capital
Language	117	Beginner Portuguese course: failure in the vocabulary used during the portuguese course; generational factor ;hiring stage; lack of a functional dimension in teaching portuguese; lack of course for host language learning; lack of European plan language learning; lack of certified portuguese course
Recognition of qualification	21	Refugees qualified and trained in a profession cannot practice because their qualifications and skills are not recognized.
Discrimination	16	discrimination on racial and national grounds and double standard; the hegemonic public understanding and interpretation of the issue.
structural problems	15	Structural problems that also affect the dominant population but are exacerbated when it comes to refugees.
gender'-'related challenges	11	difference between women and men, exacerbation of challenges due to the gender factor
housing	11	Housing as a challenge related to employment, and thus as an emerging area of intervention.
emotions	8	The political meaning of emotions: reading challenges through emotions.
funds	6	lack of material resources; lack of resources

appendix 3. code selected quotes from key themes and subthemes.

Themes and related subcathegories	Representative Quote
CSA practices -case management	Follow-up: **"P:** Well follow-up, are you able to do follow-up like that? **I:** Ah yes, yes… but follow-up? **P:** Of the cases. **I:** Of the people. **P:** Yes, that's actually part of our work. In fact, that's one of the things—one of the areas… well, that's from the second year of the project. It was one of the areas we really needed to invest in and improve. So, the team was also expanded; we hired another employment technician, and the goal was really to monitor the situations—both of the candidates and of the companies themselves". (IDI_TbA_3/06/2022) Person-centered attendance: "And then the follow-up is done according to what the candidate tells us they feel most comfortable with. Usually, the first and second months are times of more frequent contact, to understand how things are going, if there's any problem or situation, that's it". (IDI_TbA_3/06/2022) Bottom-up practices: "We carried out an analysis of the participants' needs"

CSA practices -companies collaboration	"It is also important to highlight to companies what the benefits are for them in hiring people with a migration background." (FO_TbA_13/12/2021) “It’s complicated to refer someone to a company—unless it’s a company with which we have a very good relationship, where there is trust and joint work.”**(**IDI_TbA_3/06/2022) “We need to raise awareness among companies, hold a meeting with those companies that are showing openness, because those that have good experiences with people who have a migration background are really good”(IDI_TbA_3/06/2022) “Inclusive job openings aim to adjust the criteria that companies sometimes set, such as requiring completion of ninth or twelfth grade, previous work experience, or proficiency in Portuguese. Basically, it means flexibilizing the criteria they impose and, through close collaboration with companies, explaining that people who apply may be able to do the job even if they don’t meet all the requirements stated in the job opportunities. Proficiency in Portuguese does not need to be perfect, and it’s important to assess with the company whether it is necessary or not, working closely with companies during the application process. (FO_TbA_19/10/2023)
CSA practices- sectoral services	“We should strive to build a relationship with some services—not many—for each area and work through a communication channel that is not spread across many places; specifically, establish community contacts by theme and create a map of privileged relationships between mediators and other institutions, with mutual recognition. The Alameda health center could be one of these. (FO_TbA_26/03/2021) “Housing is a new development compared to previous years, because it was never addressed by this network of civil society organizations focused on employment. The social sector isn’t even able to respond to it.” (FO_TbA_19/10/2023)
CSA practices- social Connections	“The festival describes itself as an "umbrella” which brings together many partners, etc." and thus it is an opportunity to connect these people, not in the usual way, with others who are in the same situation.” (FO_TbA_05/04/21)
CSA practices- counter narrative	“They are, first and foremost—before being migrants—people.” (FO_TbA_19/10/2023) “They are worthy as human beings, they have value, and they are recognized as part of a multicultural society that builds and includes itself on the basis of multiculturalism.” (FO_TbA_19/10/2023)

CSA's practices- related challenges- language	"There is no national language learning plan." (FO_TbA_14/06/2021) "Portuguese is a Latin-based language, read left to right. The course starts as an intensive course, but these people need the basics, and they need to learn how to pronounce the words." (FO_TbA_14/06/2021)
CSA's practices- related challenges- discrimination	"Exactly. Imagine when companies say: 'Oh, we don't want to hire migrants,' and we come across many companies that do this." I: Does that really happen? P: It happens very often, very often." "And then there's a lot of racism, isn't there?" (IDI_TbA_3/06/2022)
CSA's practices- related challenges-	housing "The people who face the most difficulties are single mothers with children who only speak their native language." (FO_TbA_26/10/2023) "Housing—there is a lack of social and public solutions." (FO_TbA_26/10/2023) "The issue of housing is clearly a priority, and it's something we can debate. We know we can't provide housing to people, but we can discuss ideas to support them with these issues." (FO_TbA_26/10/2023)

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Study IV Preliminary analysis of Study IV

Drawing on critical literature in migration studies, we carried out an interpretive analysis that identified overarching categories and themes, highlighting potential cross-cutting connections within the broader coding structure.

Capability approach

The Capability Approach is intended here to enact a methodological reversal and provides a new evaluative framework to unpack the lived experiences of actors within the entire "migration arena". The term' capability', rather than addressing an intra-individual dimension, emphasizes the relevance of context. Indeed, capabilities are defined as combined capacities resulting from personal abilities and external circumstances, including social and political arrangements (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011)

Capabilities are as freedoms to be and to do, or the real opportunities to achieve what one values (Sen, 2004). When chosen and enacted, these beings and doings become valuable functions that make a life worth living (Sacchetto, 2020). The Capability Approach is also employed in a proactive manner (Kimhur, 2020) to address areas that have emerged as key and to map out priorities for intervention in terms of public policies and actions. This approach aligns with the paradigm of CP, attempting to use research as a tool to promote transformative changes; to identify areas of intervention, while also considering the sociopolitical and structural dimensions involved. The list of nine dimensions presented here guided the coding process and reflects context-specific factors, shaped by a multidisciplinary critical literature on migration and an ongoing redefinition throughout the fieldwork (see Table 1).

Table 1

Description of Capabilities' dimensions taken into consideration for the analysis

Capability's dimension	Description

Health	Having access to healthcare services and being able to exercise the "health citizenship right" (Padilla et al., 2024).
Bodily integrity	Concept applies to people on the move at all stages of their journey where they are exposed to a series of challenges that undermine the integrity of their body (Emanuela C. del Re, 2018). Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e. being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction, the right to parent children in safe and secure environments. (reproductive injustice (Messing et al., 2020). physical transformation, reshaping of life trajectories (Giuliani, 2022).
Emotions Thoughts, belonging	This capability helps to theorize people's emotional relationships. Feeling of being treated as a normal person and not as a refugee or asylum seeker. Engaging in symmetrical relationships underpinned by reciprocity trust, self-confidence. feelings of belonging and identity. Maintain a strong cultural identity from their country of origin while simultaneously adapting to their new context and country (Pangas et al., 2019). Developing positive emotional attachments, rootedness in a broader ethnic or religious community (Wood et al., 2012). Conversely, sensing precarity and the deprivation of their subjectivity (Giuliani, 2022), sense of dependence. See the extent to which people are informed about what is going on in their community, in the country, and in the world. Take part in activities, initiatives in accordance with what constitutes the people (religion, culture, desire, politics). People's perception of : cultural sensitivity Assistentialism Infantilization Paternalism. The sense of thought and imagination lead to products and works that must be in accordance with what the person is and wants. Education: develop his/her own intellectual capacity to access further education or training. Being able to plan your education or your family's education? Job: meet jobs reflecting the person's background and qualifications . Explore women's attitudes towards services activities provided. maintain a strong cultural identity from their country of origin while simultaneously adapting to their new context and country (Pangas et al., 2019). Overall, this Capability helps to explore what kind of emotions people can afford and what role emotions play. Ultimately, how emotions change in navigating systems and communities.
Control over own environment	Material: Having a reception accommodation conditions, housing, legal assistance full participation in the formal labour market. Political: Being part of the inclusion process having the opportunity to express one's opinion on asylum policy. The capacity to take political action (e.g., activism, potential to change the status quo)

Capability housing	Having the possibility of stable and permanent housing solution

Table 2

Participants' sociodemographic characteristics

	Range	Mean	(SD)
Age	30 – 41	35,5	5,5
Time spent in Portugal	6 months– 5 years	33 months	27 months
	N	%	
Gender self-identification			
Cis Woman	9	60%	
Men	6	40%	
Country of citizenship			
Northeast Africa	1	6,7%	
Southern Africa	4	26,7%	
West Africa	2	13,3%	
Central Africa	1	6,7%	
Asia	4	26,7%	
Middle East	3	20%	
Special needs			
Pregnant at the arrival	2	13,3%	
In need of health care assistance	7	46,7%	
Parental condition			
with children in the host country	7	46,7	
With Children back home	3	20%	
Housing situation			
18-months program	4	26,7%	
Center	1	6,7%	
Hostel	4	26,7%	
Shared house	5	33,3%	
Independent housing	2	13,3%	
Rent bedroom	2	13,3%	
Previous institutionalization experience	7	46,7%	
Employment situation			
Employed	3	20 %	
Unemployed	12	80%	

Migration situation		
refugee	6	40%
Asylum seeker	7	46,7%
International protection	1	6,7%
Manifest of interest	1	6,7%

Data collection

Data were collected through in-depth conversations with the people we met during a one-and-a-half-year fieldwork. Here, the preliminary results of a study involving twenty-five individuals (aged 18 years or older) will be presented: three community mediators (N = 3), one social worker (N = 1), one community representative (N = 1), and twenty refugees (N = 20). Prior to the interview, all participants were informed about the aims of the study, the guarantee of anonymity, and its voluntary nature, including the right to withdraw at any time without justification. All the participants gave their verbal and written consent and agreed to the audio recording of the interviews

Data analysis

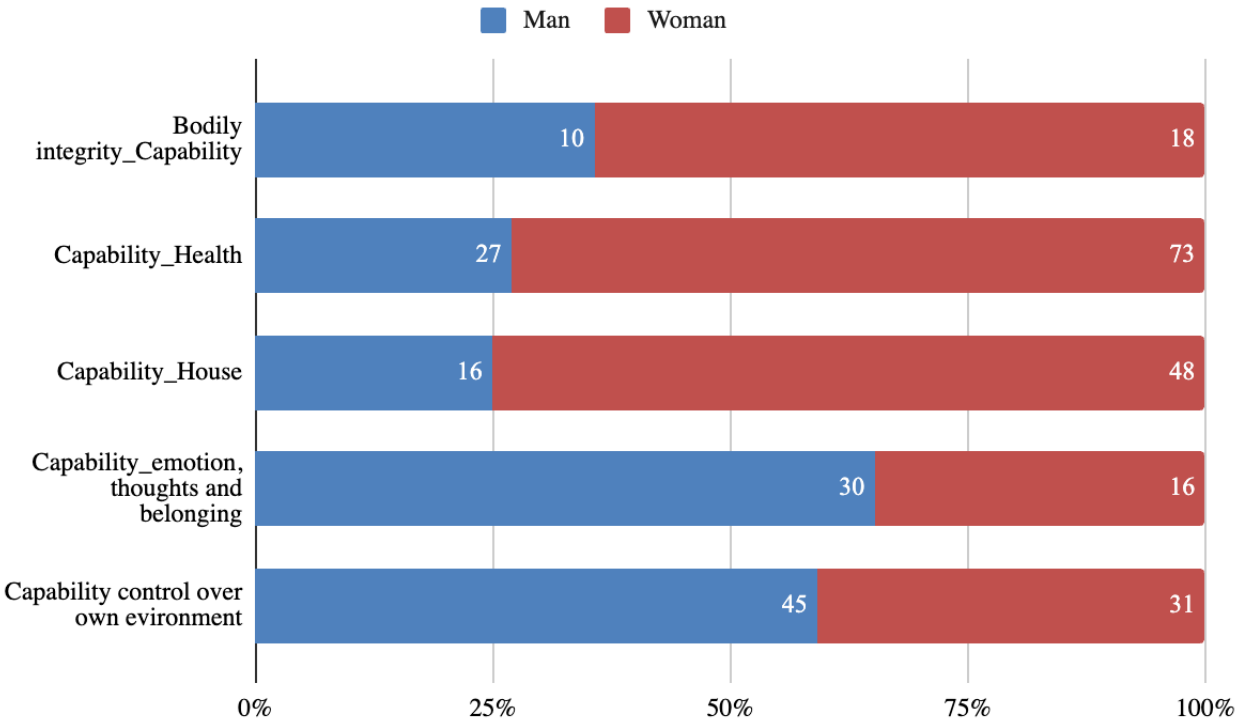
A preliminary analysis of fifteen interviews (N = 15) was conducted using a deductive/inductive qualitative coding approach. Participants' narratives were uploaded to Dedoose (version 10.0.25). The use of thematic analysis allows for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). Themes within the data were identified using a mixed deductive/inductive approach, where themes are linked to both theory and data-driven insights (Braun & Clark, 2006). We went through 6 phases in thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clark, 2006). The research team consisted of the principal investigator and a second team member who assisted in analyzing the data to confirm its validity. First, the principal investigator began by transcribing all the interviews. Second, the principal

investigator familiarized herself with the data and, using the qualitative coding software Dedoose, analyzed and coded the data verbatim. Next, the research team met to discuss the first code structure through a back-and-forth process of defining and naming themes to ensure the data were accurately represented. In the event of a disagreement, the researchers reviewed excerpts of each code to prompt further discussion and reach a consensus. After a code structure was established that reflected themes and subthemes, a report of the preliminary analysis was written.

While primary analyses focused on codes, we also quantified the number of excerpts by theme/subtheme, and stratified the analysis by quantitative socio-demographic characteristics (Dedoose descriptors), based on the themes and subthemes that appeared most meaningful for identifying potential differences and similarities according to participants' socio-demographic characteristics.

Preliminary results

Fig 1. Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by gender.

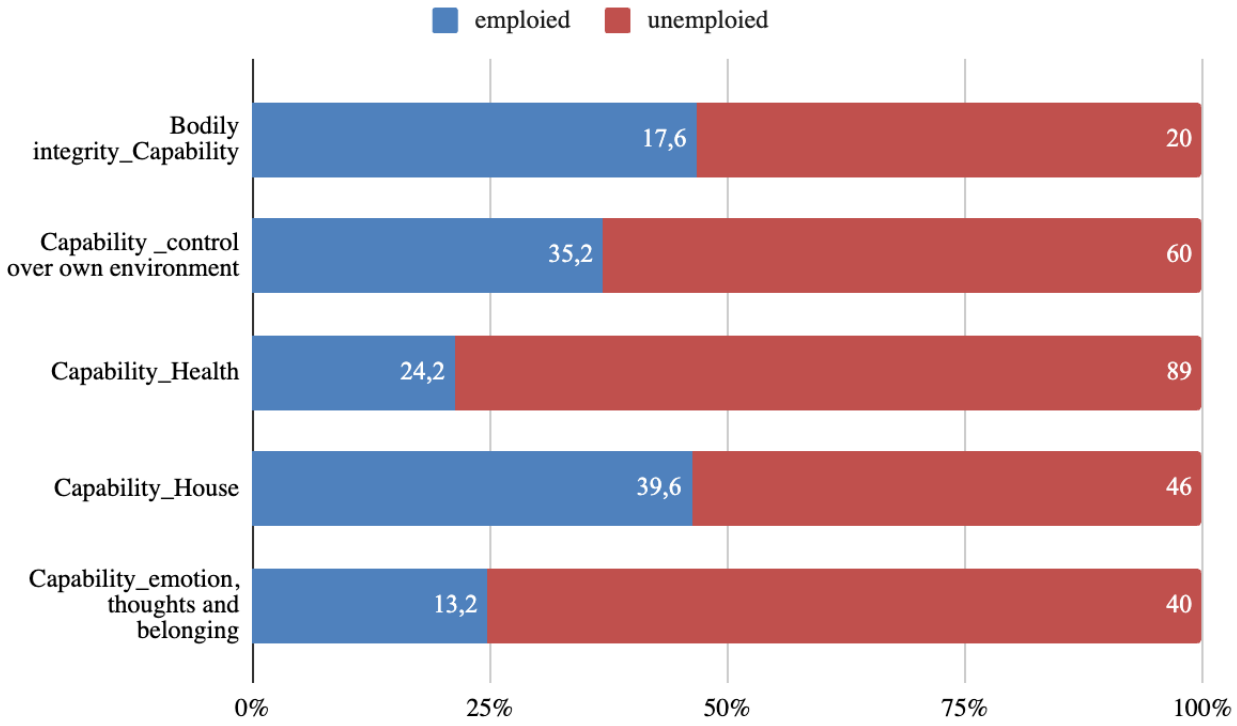


The dimension of the Capability Bodily Integrity was encoded 28 times in total (see Fig. 1**)**. This Capability appears to be more of a challenge for women than for men. Among women, it was mentioned 18 times, and almost half of the women (N = 4) (26,7%) discussed bodily integrity Capability as a challenge. None of the men interviewed reported feeling unsafe. Overall, public safety does not appear to be a major issue—most participants reported feeling safe in Portugal. There is a slight gender difference: 2 out of 9 women (22.2%) reported not feeling safe, with one woman in particular stating she does not feel safe walking alone at night. Conversely, one woman reported feeling safer in Portugal compared to her country of origin, especially regarding safety in public spaces. Women appear to be more exploited compared to men, and none of the women reported feeling free. Contributing factors to this may include the isolation, but mostly being perceived as "refugees," which further reinforces their isolation and vulnerability.

The Health Capability is the most frequently mentioned among all Capabilities, with a total of 100 mentions. However, it does not emerge in all 15 cases, but rather in 73.3% of them (N = 11). The Capability of Health represents a greater challenge for women compared to men (Fig. 1). The health Capability among women was mentioned 73 times and emerged in seven (N = 7) out of nine (N = 9) women. As for men, this Capability was mentioned 27 times by three men (N = 3) out of seven (N = 7).The Housing Capability was mentioned 64 times and identified in all cases (N = 15), underscoring its significance as a central and cross-cutting challenge. Due to its frequent emergence, housing Capability was considered a distinct capability, rather than being treated as part of the broader dimension of Control over one's material environment. The Capability was mentioned as critical aspect, forty-eight times (N = 48) by women, whereas men discussed this theme sixteen times (N = 16) (see fig. 1). The Capability Emotions thoughts and belonging was mentioned with a frequency of 46

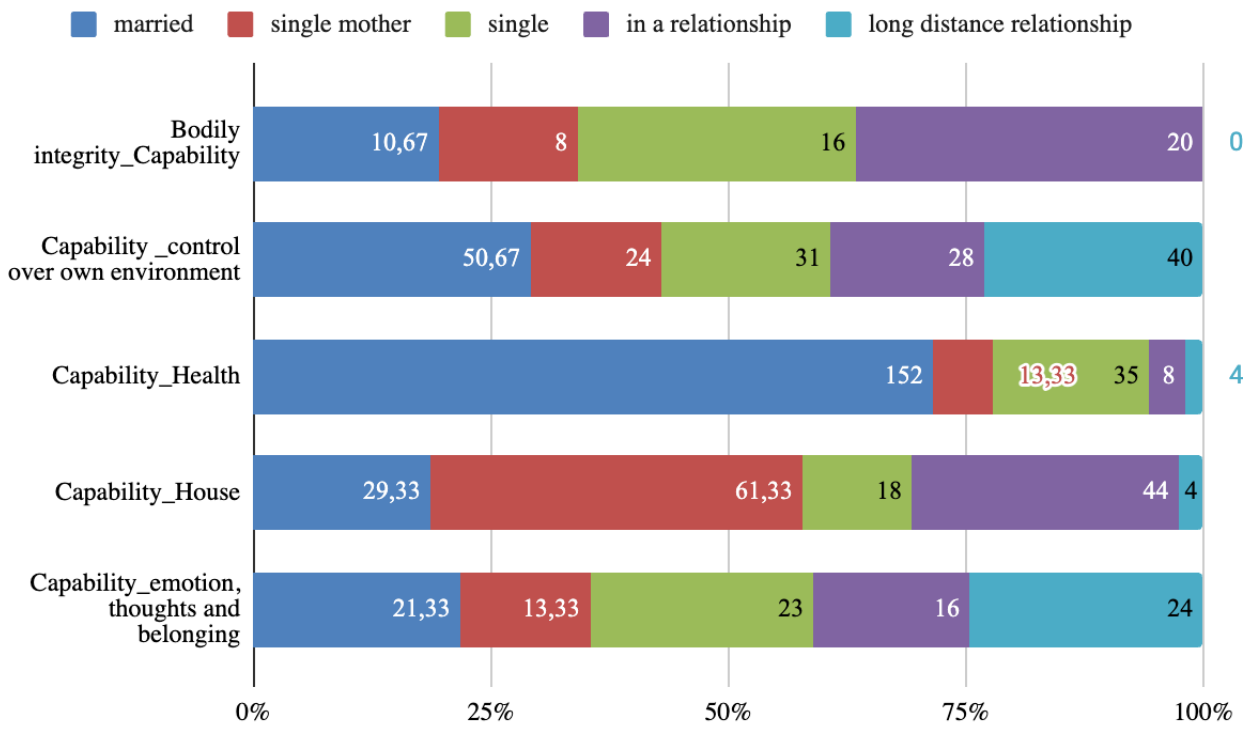
times (see fig. 1). A relationship between this Capability and the others unfolded (e. g., Capability control over own environment: Material). This Capability was mentioned more frequently by men than by women (see Fig. 1). The Capability of control over one's own environment was mentioned by the participants with a frequency of 76 times and emerged in all cases (N = 15). There was a higher frequency of the material subcategory in Control of one's own environment than in politics. In general, control over one's own environment—such as being able to find a job, pay taxes and bills, and be independent—is a challenge for both men, who discuss this Capability multiple times (N = 45), and for women (N = 31) (see fig.1). The aspects that concern women the most are: “access to kingergarden”; “enrolling children in school”; “not being independent of official institutions”(the subsidy they received from Social Security). Finding a job is a concern shared by both women (N = 7) and men (N=5) with job code applications (N=18), both for women and men. "Paying taxes”, on the other hand, is an issue discussed just by one man (N=1).

Fig. 2 Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by employment situation.



Most people were unemployed (80%). It is evident that for those without a job, the Health Capability represents a challenge; in fact, it was discussed 89 times by unemployed individuals, with a total of 8 participants. Similarly, it is not surprising that, in descending order, the Capability of Control Over One's Environment, the Health Capability, and the Emotion, Thoughts, and Belonging Capability pose more of a challenge for unemployed individuals compared to those who are employed. As for the Bodily Integrity Capability, there is no significant difference between people who are employed and those who are not.

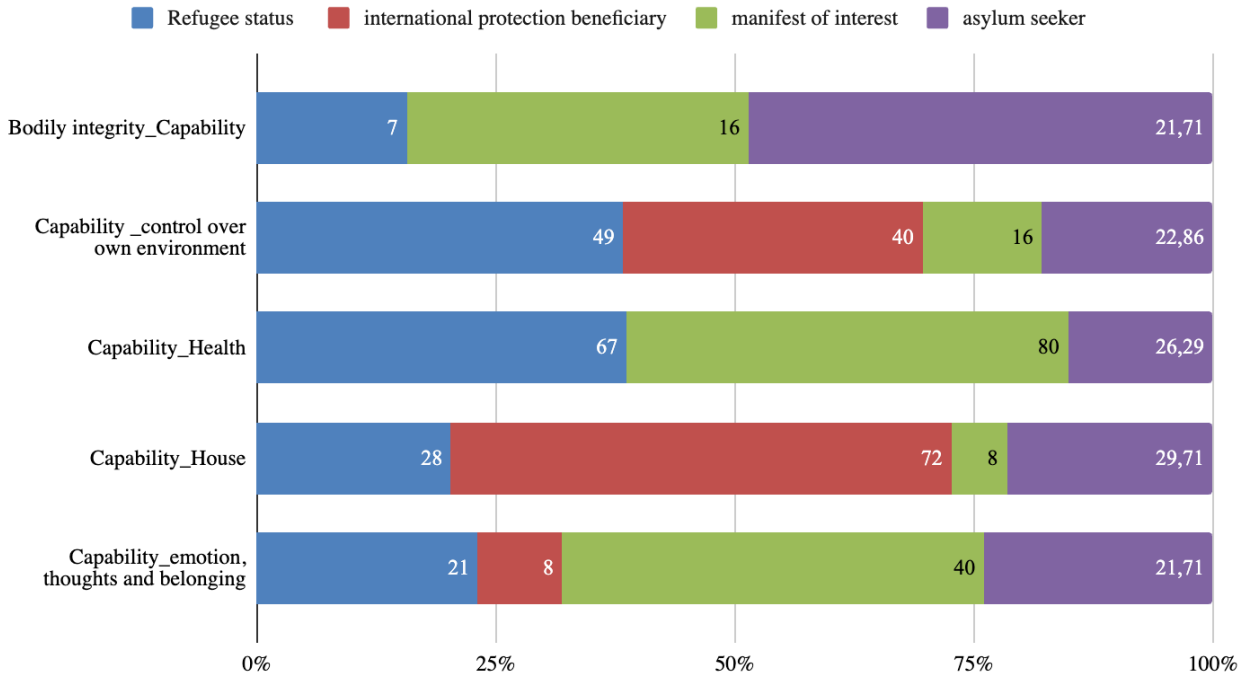
Fig. 3 Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by relationship status



The most interesting finding is that Health Capability remains a challenge even for people who are in a relationship, suggesting that being in a relationship could not be a facilitator factor for good health.

Conversely, it is not surprising that single mothers experience housing as a greater challenge compared to married individuals, with a smaller difference observed in comparison to those in a relationship. Another noteworthy insight is that being in a long-distance relationship can have effects on the Control Over One's Environment Capability and the Emotion, Thoughts and Belonging Capability. A general finding is that being married does not necessarily represent a facilitating factor in terms of Capabilities.

Fig. 4 Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by refugee status



Refugee status

The refugehood categorization has material implications for people's lives, with capabilities serving as an insightful indicator of these effects. In general, refugee status appears to have an impact on Capabilities, particularly on the Capability of Health. People who seem to mention the Health Capability as a challenge the most are those who have exited the asylum system and opted for the Manifest of Interest (*Manifestação de Interesse*) tool[21].

[21] The expression of interest was, until recently, a procedure established by the 2007 Immigration Law, which allowed for the regularization of immigrants already in Portugal. However, with the implementation of the new Action Plan for Migration, this mechanism has been officially discontinued. With this change, according to Decree-Law No. 37-A/2024, of June 3, any foreign national who wishes to reside in Portugal must now present a work contract or a formal job offer before entering the country. In other words, while the expression of interest previously offered an accessible path to regularization for immigrants already in the country, the new system limits this possibility to those who can prove they are coming to Portugal with a secured job opportunity. These changes are part of a broader reform of the immigration system in Portugal, marked by the replacement of the SEF (Foreigners and Borders Service) with the new AIMA (Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum). In addition to implementing new criteria for regularization, AIMA aims to reduce the long backlog of migration processes and ensure more effective control over both residence permits and family reunification.

These people also discuss more than others the Capability of emotions, thoughts, and belonging, which, as we have already mentioned, are mostly negative emotions that have emerged. Being 'labelled' as a refugee can lead to prejudice and discrimination (see Schuster and Solomos 2004): People who have done an expression of interest (*manifestação de interesse)*, in fact, experience a “feeling of being treated differently for being refugees. People with refugee status feel a “feeling of losing time,” a “feeling of starting from zero,” and a sense of being in a state of waiting. Those who are asylum seekers (N=2), instead, report a feeling of being humiliated by governance procedures (“humiliation” application code; N = 6).

The people who benefit from international protection, on the other hand, seem to view the housing capability as a challenge compared to other refugee statuses.

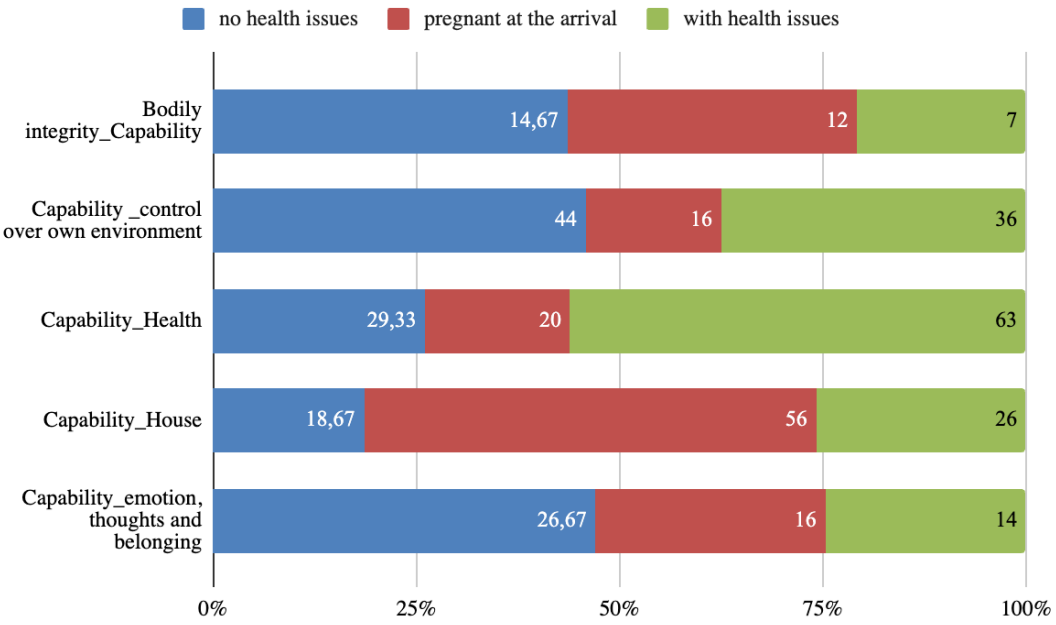
It is interesting to note that, from this preliminary analysis, we see that the Capability of control over one’s own environment was discussed more frequently by people who held refugee status (N = 49). These findings resonate with the results of other studies (see Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2017). Therefore, although the transition to refugee status—considered the most positive outcome for an asylum seeker and, according to many, the point at which integration should begin (Home Office, 2009)—in reality, the state's unpreparedness to support new refugees made this transition traumatic for many (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2017; Strang et al., 2018).

When it comes to the Capability of bodily integrity, asylum seekers (N = 3; 50%) discussed the Capability of bodily integrity nineteen times (N = 19).

As far as housing capability is concerned, it appears that for people benefiting from international protection, housing represents a significant challenge. This Capability is discussed nine times (N=9) by one person. The factors that contribute to this Capability being

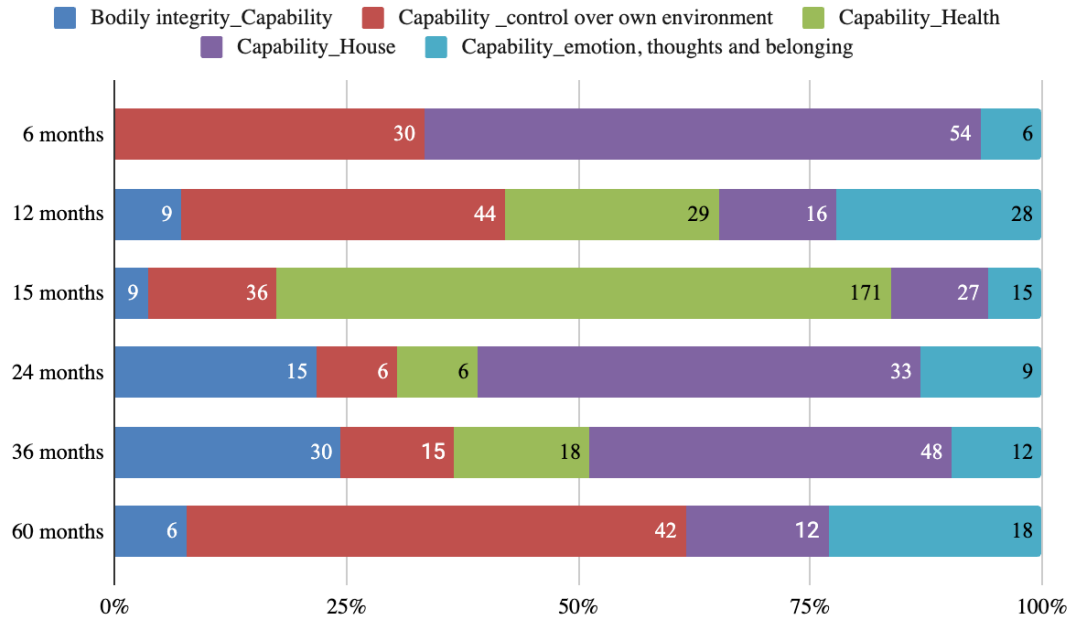
experienced as a challenge are varied, such as the push back to institutionalization, the "do it by yourself" model, which removes responsibility from the institutions in charge and places full responsibility on individuals to find a housing solution, the decentralized housing model, and the initial housing response based on the "hostel" model.

Fig. 5 Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by health situation



An interesting finding is that, regarding control over one's environment, there is no significant difference between those who do not have health problems and those who do, suggesting that this Capability does not depend on mental or physical health status but may be influenced by dynamics that go beyond the individual level. Women who were pregnant upon arrival appear to be those who experience the most significant difficulty with housing. As expected, the Health Capability poses a greater challenge for individuals dealing with health issues. Overall, framed in this preliminary analysis, health status does not appear to be a determining factor for the Capabilities.

Fig. 5 Total number of times Capabilities were mentioned, stratified by time spent in Portugal.



In the initial phase of settlement, the Housing Capability represents, among the various Capabilities, the main challenge. Consistent with this result is the frequency with which the Control Over One's Material Environment Capability was mentioned. After one year, people do not appear to have control over their material environment. It is interesting to note that this Capability worsens over time; in fact, it was mentioned significantly (N = 42) by those who had been in Portugal for the longest period, 60 months. The expected outcome is to observe an improvement in this capability over time.

This Capability represents a significant challenge for individuals nearing the end of the 18-month program. Consistent with the results of the analysis stratified by refugee status (see Fig. 4), the Health Capability is mentioned 51 times by individuals who benefit from refugee status and are therefore eligible for an 18-month reception program. When it comes to the Emotion, Thoughts, and Belonging Capability, it seems to worsen after one year, then decrease, and later increase again (see Fig. 5).

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Fig 6. Total number of times Capabilities-subthemes were mentioned, stratified by housing situation

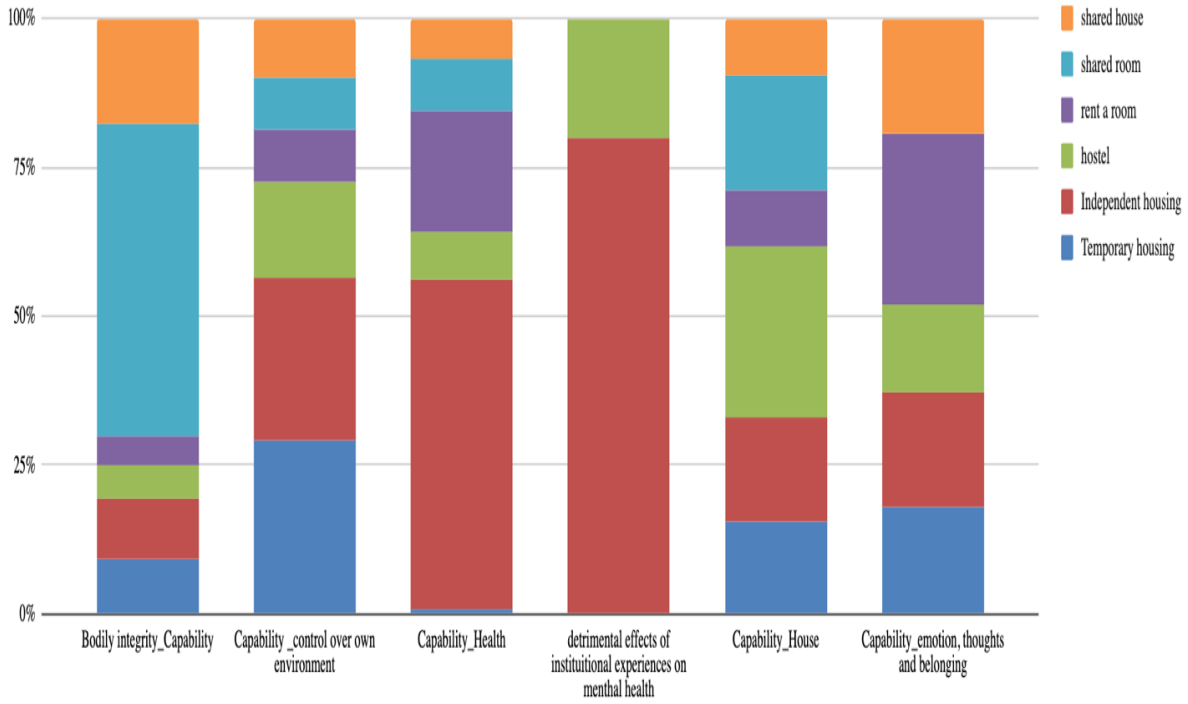
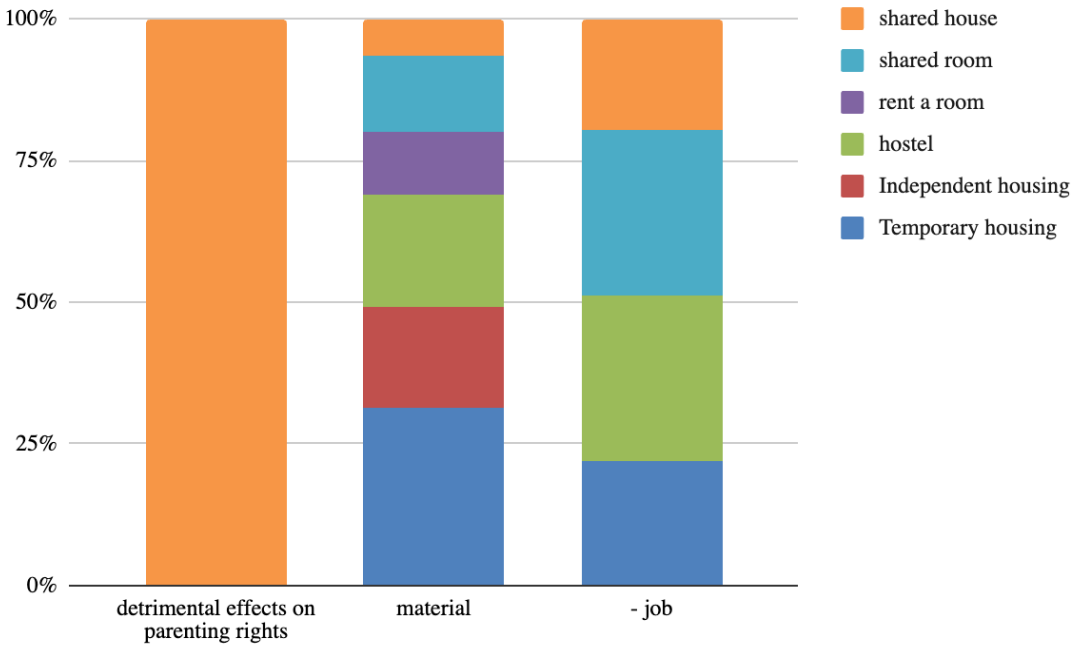


Fig 7. Total number of times Capabilities-subthemes were mentioned, stratified by housing situation



From Figure 6, it appears that those in a shared room feel their bodily integrity is compromised. However, in reality, this refers to a woman, who was sharing a room with another woman, during the interview, spoke about bodily integrity in terms of feeling unsafe — but she was referring to when she is outside the house and to the time when she first arrived and was detained at the CIT (*Centro de instalação temporanea*) in the Lisbon airport center for two months.

With this dimension, the Capability approach demonstrates how immigration policies violate the dimension of bodily integrity. Bodily integrity applies to people on the move at all stages of their journey, where they are exposed to a series of challenges related to border control systems that undermine the integrity of their bodies (Emanuela del Re, 2018). The current system of border control involves a series of practices and procedures that severely challenge the integrity of the body (Emanuela del Re, 2018). In this specific case, this Capability refers to being able to move freely from place to place, having one's bodily

boundaries treated as sovereign, and having the right to parent children in safe and secure environments (Messing et al., 2020).

Therefore, it can be inferred that bodily integrity is more closely related to institutionalized measures (e.g., detention upon arrival) rather than to the fact of sharing a room with someone. Still within the Realm of bodily integrity, those who shared a house reported experiencing detrimental effects on parenting (N = 1). Individuals living in temporary housing did not feel they had control over the material aspects of their lives (N = 19 “material” code applications) (see Fig.7), nor did those in independent housing (N = 8 “material” code applications). Similarly, people living in hostels seemed to have slightly less control over their lives (N = 12 material code applications) compared to those in independent housing (see Fig. 7). Additionally, having a hostel or a shared room as a housing solution appears to be linked to difficulties in finding a job**.**

Capability health for those in independent houses (N = 2) and women (N = 57) represents a challenge, particularly in terms of “Capability health” code applications. The barriers are: the lack of assignment of a general practitioner, which means not being able to access continuous healthcare with the same professional, and being forced to change doctors constantly; no proper follow-up is carried out based, for example, on the previous report made by the IOM doctor; systematic assistance is not provided for special health needs.

Fig 6. Application of the Capabilities

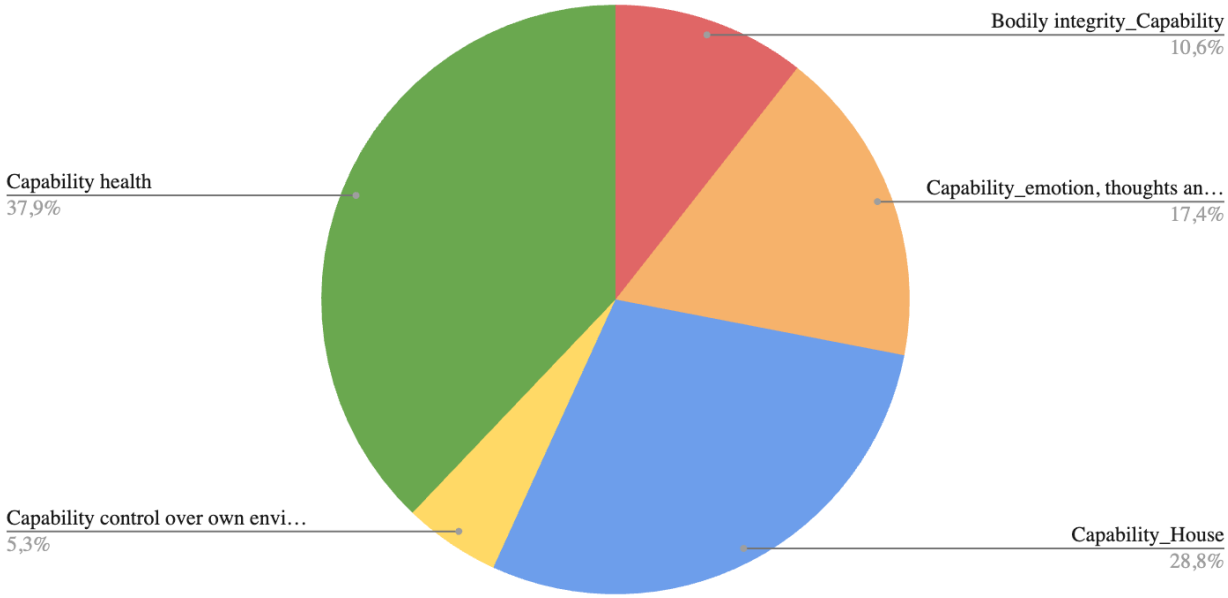
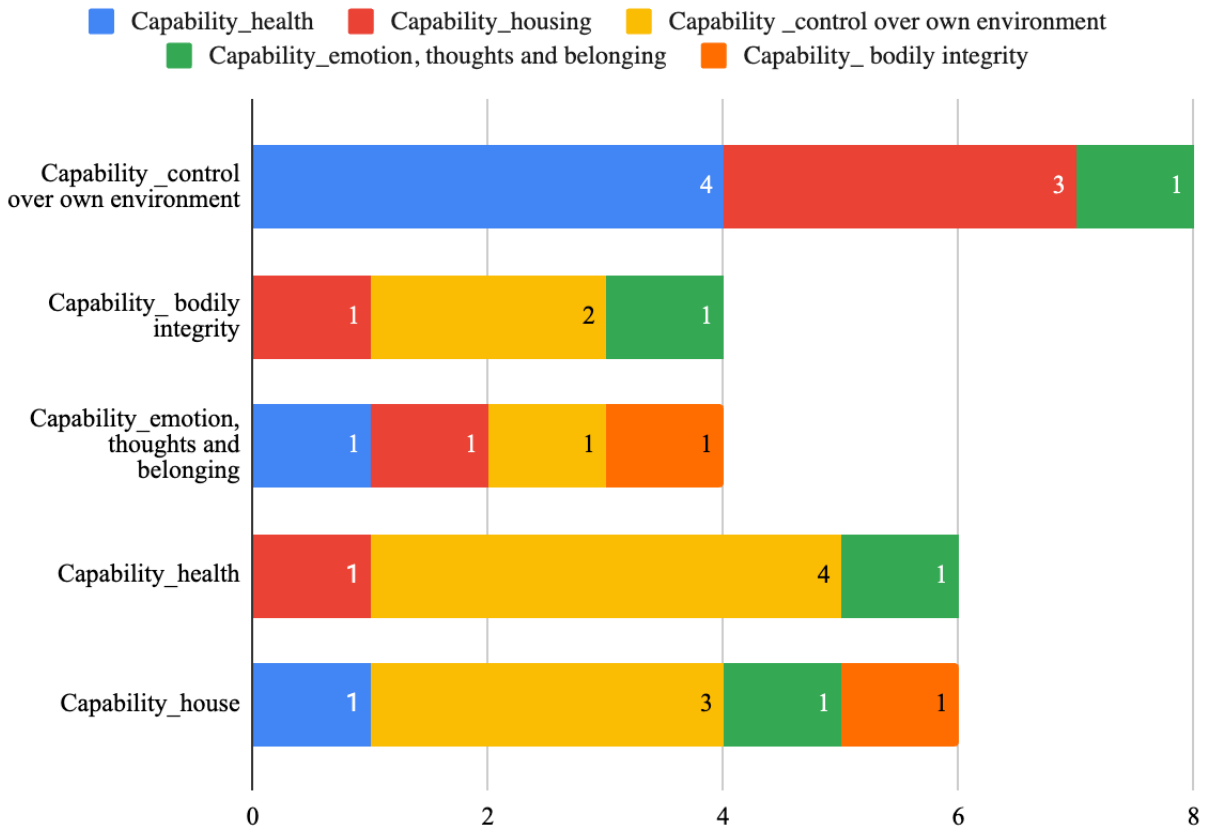


Fig 7. Co-occurrence among the Capabilities



Co-occurrence among the 5 Capabilities

The most frequently applied Capability was the health Capability (N = 100), followed by the capability to control one's own environment. Although the latter was applied more often than the Capability for housing, participants' narratives suggest that housing is a prerequisite for being able to exercise control over one's environment, more so, for example, than having a job. The Capabilities are interconnected. A co-occurrence emerges between the Capability control over one's own environment and the Capabilities health and housing, which appear to be the most significant.

The Capability emotions, thoughts, and belonging are related to all the Capabilities, as is the housing Capability. Housing definitely represents a challenge for people, for various reasons. For example, being in a precarious situation with underpaid jobs and no contracts. In fact, we can see from Figure 7 that there is a co-occurrence between the Capability of housing and the Capability of control over one's own environment, underpinned by the employment dimension.

Conclusion

The results of this preliminary analysis offer several points for reflection, but we will highlight only those that seem most significant in the ecology of the broader research process.

Theoretically, this preliminary analysis provides evidence of the several essential contributions of the Capability approach to the implementation of community-based model solidarity-oriented reception practices. These preliminary analyses show how capabilities are hindered by mainstream and institutionalized models of reception. Suggesting the importance of applying permanent housing models, rather than institutionalizing or trans-

institutionalizing solutions (such as hostels). Emphasizing the need for interventions that focus on developing capabilities in a natural environment to promote a dignified life for refugees.

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PART 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

1. Main findings: Methodological, theoretical, and practical evidence levels

With the normalization of the "crisis" narrative, the so-called "welcome culture" and the more humanitarian-oriented paradigm are increasingly being replaced by security-driven discourses, reflecting a political shift from reception to deportation in the management of refugee reception (Hess & Nagel, 2021). At the same time, on a global scale, we are witnessing a decline in solidarity in the management of refugee reception, the spread of Eurosceptic sentiments, and the rising xenophobia. In this context, it becomes essential to recognize the crucial role played by civil society initiatives that act in solidarity with those positioned outside the boundaries of the nation (Schwiertz & Schwenken, 2021). This thesis explores asylum experiences within migration governance. It fills a gap in the existing literature by offering a multi-level analysis of the experiences of both refugees and those who mobilize in solidarity with them. The following section will tackle the research project's evidence emerging from unfolding on three levels: methodological, theoretical, and practical.

1.1 Methodological evidence

At the methodological level, this thesis provides compelling evidence of the efficacy and appropriateness of qualitative methods for knowledge production in migration studies.

A multi-method qualitative design was strategically designed for the exploratory aims of the project. Critically, the qualitative approach enabled us to conduct ethically grounded research with the people and communities we engaged. In doing so, the qualitative method directly responds to ongoing ethical concerns in the literature, especially regarding research with racialized migrants (Esposito & Rebelo, 2025; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007).

The capacity of qualitative methods to attend to complexity and context has been widely acknowledged by scholars in migration and refugee studies (see Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007). This research project confirms its relevance; The integration of qualitative methods with triangulation techniques enabled us to engage with the inherent complexity of working with people in marginalized and often precarious conditions (Pittaway et al., 2010). This evidence also resonates with broader methodological literature that recognizes qualitative research as critical to deepening understanding (Hill, 2012; Stiles, 1993), investigating the formation of social constructs (Neimeyer et al., 2008), and confronting structural injustice (Fine, 2013). The use of ethnographic techniques—such as observation, in-depth interviews, and open-ended questions—proved particularly suitable for studying refugee populations (Omidian, 2000).

The ethnographic method enabled us to observe behavior in its natural setting, gaining insight from the participants' perspective. It also provided us with the flexibility and opportunity to adapt the research design informed by data that emerged along the research process (Omidian, 2000). Demonstrating what Chadwick (1984) refers to as the researcher's capacity 'to be surprised. ' This openness was crucial to uncovering the meanings participants attach to their experiences and to capturing the tensions, contradictions, and interactions that emerge across different contexts.

From a methodological standpoint, one of the most significant evidence is that questions that fall outside the scope of quantitative research can be formulated and pursued through the qualitative approach (Omidian, 2000). Specifically, it allowed us to ask not only 'how many' or 'to what extent, ' but also 'what kind, '" and 'what does this mean?'—questions essential for grasping the nuanced experiences of refugees (Omidian, 2000). Although qualitative data sets typically involve fewer participants than quantitative studies, the detailed

and highly contextualized accounts provided by the former are an ideal fit for the research project's exploratory goals (Levitt et al., 2018). As such, qualitative research is characterized by deep data analysis and is committed to open-ended inquiry rather than hypothesis confirmation. It was designed not only to address the exploratory aims of this research project but also to align closely with the epistemological principles of community psychology (Levitt et al., 2018). Consistent with Chang and Yoon (2011), our qualitative approach enabled us to critically engage with literature and findings that appear contradictory, problematic, or misaligned with the realities we are examining (see also: Migration Studies—State of the Art). It also enabled a more contextualized and situated representation of refugees (Levitt et al., 2018), who are frequently underrepresented in academic discourse (APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration, 2012; Frost & Ouellette, 2011), and helped generate insights in areas that, as discussed in Part 1, remain underexplored (Creswell, 2013). Based on the idea of a situated, contextualized, and culturally bounded nature of the meanings and experiences found within and between communities (Sonn et al., 2024). Recognizing how community can serve as a symbolic, material space and time of encounter, allowing us to consider communities and their pluralities as 'not-opposed categories or alternative goals' (see Mannarini & Salvatore, 2019, p. 27). The present thesis aims to focus on human experiences, actions, and social processes, which fluctuate. Qualitative researchers do not aim to seek natural laws that extend across time, place, and culture, but to develop findings that are bound to their contexts.

1.11 Theoretical evidence

At the theoretical level, evidence emerged in line with the principles of CP, which underscores the significance of contemplating the multifaceted, interwoven levels that collectively influence individuals' experiences within their broader socio-cultural contexts (Brunson et al., 2023; Christens & Perkins, 2008; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2014).

One of the principal findings from the entire research project is that sociodemographic characteristics, rather than being a cause in themselves of detrimental effect on Capabilities, are in fact exacerbating factors—rooted in intertwined multiple systems of oppression—that can exacerbate the challenges people face. To illustrate this point, it is important to note that women encounter a multitude of challenges that are often more significant than those faced by men. These challenges primarily pertain to health, housing, safety, and the ability to exercise control over their immediate environment.

On the Other hand, the protective factors of Capabilities are among many, such as CSAs social connections, and housing. As has been observed along the research project. The migration governance underpins the challenges people face. Within migration governance, the factors related to the challenges faced by refugees — and, to some extent, by civil society — are: the migration status, a factor initially considered as a sociodemographic characteristic, is, in fact, one that, to some extent, shapes experiences and influences the interventions of CSAs. Migration status is closely tied to the concept of *refugehood*, which, as seen in Study II, is a factor significantly related to social connections. Although *refugehood* is not explicitly used here as an analytical category in this exploratory research project, the findings provide valuable insights into its meaning and implications: isolation and vulnerability, and a sense of abandonment (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2017; Strang et al., 2017). In particular, it was observed that refugee status has an impact on: health, emotions and sense of belonging, control over one's environment, bodily integrity, and housing. refugee status, although considered a step forward towards integration, can be experienced as a traumatic event (Grzymala-Kazlowska & Phillimore, 2017; Strang et al., 2017). Capabilities do not automatically improve with legal status; on the contrary, the transition to legal status often brings new challenges.

The findings of this research project reveal how refugee status, as embedded within migration governance, operates both on a symbolic and practical level, as an institution (for further exploration of this concept, see Tsemberis, 1999). The meaning of being a refugee goes beyond being an isolated phenomenon; it is a systemic and institutionally shaped phenomenon perpetuated by restrictive migration policies, governance structures, and organisational conditions *designed* (see Boochani, 2019; Esposito et al., 2025) to sustain and reproduce a *subaltern* condition. In this way, *refugeehood* can be a form of "institutionalization," whereby people are categorized as a distinct and separate group, more likely to be exposed to institutional violence

The findings of this research project provide insightful contributions to the field of migration studies. The interdependence and co-occurrence of the selected Capabilities, as well as the occurrence of the many CSAs' interventions and challenges-related practices, in fact, confirm on one hand the multifaceted nature of refugee inclusion experiences (Phillimore, 2021) and on the other the gaps in migration governance, thus reaffirming that inclusion and citizenship are influenced by multiple factors.

Although a "do-it-yourself" migration governance pervasive model emerged, the present thesis also reinforces the idea of two-way inclusion (Castles et al., 2002), given the importance of civil society in fostering connections with refugees. It has been observed that, when mapping the literature, there is a general tendency to distinguish between different categories when discussing social connections, namely: immediate communities; mainstream communities; transnational connections; and connections with services. However, distinguishing between the immediate community and the dominant community has proved difficult. The two types tend to merge, suggesting a conceptualization based on a continuum between "bonds" and "bridges" (Strang & Quinn, 2019), problematizing Putnam's simple

binary distinction between bonding and bridging ties may be less useful (Ryan, 2011; Strang & Quinn, 2019). One of the main results, in fact, is to rethink the theory of the dominant community, orienting it towards a new direction that recognizes the heterogeneity, resources and strength points of the settlement context (Blank, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

1.11 Practical evidence

In terms of reception practices, this thesis argues that any intervention focusing exclusively on the individual or taking a psychopathological approach to refugees is inadequate. Ultimately, 'inadvertently legitimize— the structural causes' (Olson et al., 2025, p. 401) challenges people must face and 'risk perpetuating the very systems that harm' the refugees (p. 401). As Olson and colleagues argue (2025) therapeutic intervention must be combined with community-based efforts.

In fact, the thesis provides evidence for implementing community-based interventions to promote refugees' capabilities. Furthermore, the findings of this study support the hypothesis that the mainstream reception measures (e.g., temporary housing solutions) should move beyond institutional forms (Dadusc et al., 2021) (e., detention centers; reception centers) and proactively avoid any trans-institutional accommodation (e.g., overcrowded hostels). This thesis provides practical evidence in support of strengths-based, community-centred interventions (see Olson et al., 2025). For example, the outcomes pave the way for the implementation of a counter-housing model grounded in social connections among different actors. The proposed model is predicated on the principle of collaborative production, with the involvement of multiple actors in the management and sharing of resources, time, services, knowledge, information, and support. This model is founded on the tenets of solidarity and reciprocity, eschewing the pursuit of economic profit. (Felstead et al., 2019; Katrini, 2018; Light & Miskelly, 2015). The present research project provides a basis for a transformative

shift towards more collective, non-institutionalised and community-based reception models at a local level, within the framework of 'everyday sociability' (Penninx, 2009, p. 5), or as 'situated practices of solidarity' (Cantat & Feischmidt, 2019, p. 380,), which underpin concrete reception initiatives and transformative changes.

To engage with this practical goal, the Capability approach is proposed as a means of addressing collective challenges and promoting empowerment at the individual and community levels. Furthermore, this thesis proposes the implementation of structured, linear solidarity (Giacometti, 2021)—a coordinated, systematic response to develop a collective call capable of influencing public policies, reception practices, and the narratives within migration governance (see Giacometti, 2021). The promotion of CSAs' agency and right to self-determination and autonomy is finally acknowledged, including control over resources and funds. Finally, these findings indicate an imperative for a paradigm shift in migration governance toward a community-centered/based model.

2. Limitations and ethical challenges of the research project

During the implementation of this research project, several issues emerged, the main ones were linked to: participant recruitment and population representativeness; ethical challenges aimed at minimizing harm and maximizing benefits for the people involved (see Block et al., 2013; Matos, 2023); the priority given to the qualitative method and the use of CBPR. Likewise, the researcher's perception of proximity fatigue, due to the individual impact of repeated empathetic exposure to content involving struggle and suffering (see Matos, 2023), was also one of these challenges. To address these challenges, a comprehensive approach consistent with other research lines (see De Haene, 2010; Dehghan & Wilson, 2019; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Matos, 2023), considering aspects such as "agency", "power", "language", "culture", and discomfort at all stages of study design and implementation, rather than adhering

strictly to fixed ethical academic criteria, was adopted (Dehghan & Wilson, 2019; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Matos, 2023).

The sample representativeness was one of the main challenges. The limitations of this study in terms of the lack of representativeness of the selected sample, even if the 'thematic saturation' was reached (a point where no new information or themes are observed in the data), can be attributed to the lack of a clear sampling framework that addresses this issue, widely recognized in refugee research (see Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011).

We acknowledge, as other academics did (see Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011), that the selection of participants could only be considered as genuinely representative of the broader population if a random sampling technique had been employed. Nevertheless, consistent with the exploratory nature of the Research project, our priority was to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of participants (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011). The snowball sampling method was a process that allowed us to identify potential participants, present and obtain approval for the study's objectives and the researchers through a mechanism of personal endorsement (Sulaiman-Hill & Thompson, 2011).

Another limitation of this research study is that qualitative methodology was not combined with a quantitative one approach. Nevertheeless, the reasons underlying the priority given to the qualitative method are detailed in the section on methodological evidence; research process-related ethical issues emerged, partly because there are no practical solutions available to resolve these highly context-specific ethical challenges (Block et al., 2013). Ethical complexities associated with research involving vulnerable and marginalized population groups are well recognized, while practical solutions to these challenges are relatively less well depicted (2013).

Therefore, ethical considerations influenced the decision on whether to use quantitative methodologies as well (see Müller-Funk, 2021). Particularly, 'the need to ensure that the benefits of participation outweigh any potential risks' (Block et al., 2013, p. 71) was one of the main ethical considerations. Given the exploratory nature of this study and its potential ethical implications, a quantitative approach was not considered entirely appropriate. The decision to adopt a multi-qualitative approach was based on the need to ensure an optimal balance between the potential benefits for participants and the positive impact of the research on them. To this end, we decided to use a qualitative participatory data collection method that would be as meaningful as possible for participants and that would address both the methodological challenge of collecting valid data that reflected participants' perspectives and the ethical risk of causing harm (e.g., through symbolic violence) (Block et al., 2013).

However, to address these limitations, the data or findings from these analyses may be transformed into future further numerical quantification in quantitative or mixed methods analyses.

From a CBPR perspective, this study had limitations that are common when using CBPR (see Shalowitz et al., 2009). In fact, even in this exploratory research project, it was not possible to involve the interviewees and civil society in the data analysis phase. Based on these limitations, creating a theoretical framework with the participation of CSAs and refugees will be a future goal. The community is, in fact, a complex and multifaceted entity in constant movement. For this reason, as a future direction, we aim to develop a guiding theoretical Framework through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, always with the direct involvement of people with lived asylum experiences and those who work alongside them. Essentially, our goal is to review the research project’s findings together with

the community and collaboratively design a framework that genuinely reflects the collective desires and needs of its members.

3. Future Studies: What to Look At?

This research project offers several insights for future research. It calls for further study, as well as policies and migration governance models that are rooted in best practices in community participation to improve refugee Capabilities and foster a more inclusive, safe, and just society.

On an epistemological and theoretical basis, the present thesis aligns with the call for future research to conduct interdisciplinary studies in community psychology (see, for example, Perkins, 2017). This is crucial for community psychology to reduce the social, structural, and psychological factors that hinder psychological well-being (Perkins, 2017). The thesis not only demonstrates the significant contribution that community psychology can make to migration and refugee studies but also highlights the need for dialogue with other disciplines to understand the complex local and supra-local dynamics of the field of asylum (see Bloch, 2020). Moreover, this research project is also a call for a mode of knowledge production within migration and refugee Studies that embraces epistemic accountability and responsibility (see, for example, Bloch, 2020; Campbell, 2018; Harding, 2004).

Consistent with this last point, future research must consider the practical implications of their knowledge production. This thesis provides evidence for more transformative future research engaged to create 'evidence' for collective practices (see Overstreet et al., 2020, p. 787). This 'evidence' refers to the empirical support for community-based practices that promote collective well-being, rather than emphasizing conditions of oppression, which may prevent researchers from seeing the conditions for transformative changes that operate simultaneously within systems of oppression (Mosley et al., 2020). Referring to the thinking

of Overstreet and colleagues (2020), future research must indeed “demonstrate” with scientific evidence that systems of oppression exist and cause harm, but it cannot focus solely and exclusively on this point (p. 787). Future research must provide evidence on what “works” in communities, including pre-existing strength points, and bottom-up practices informed by an understanding of the multifaceted human experience. In doing so, promote those interventions that can lead to durable solutions for refugees (Bloch, 2020) and host communities worldwide.

The community psychology perspective can contribute to engaging with this aim, namely, validating and promoting inclusive and community-based reception models, rather than exclusionary ones, capturing the complexity and multiple entanglements of the contexts (Oosterlynck et al., 2016). Future research should explore how local solidarity actions can produce spaces of encounters and networks of solidarities. These networks, which connect different spaces of solidarity across different scales, are crucial for understanding and promoting collective well-being in diverse communities (see Ataç et al., 2021).

In an epistemological outlook, the present thesis represents a call for a careful collective effort to dismantle the status quo in psychology and a proactive commitment to critical research on power within and outside the field (Overstreet et al., 2020). Future research in CP can then contribute to the knowledge production about migration, portraying people and communities as active agents who struggle and have a transformative impact on the context they inhabit (Esposito et al., 2019; Esposito & Rebelo, 2024; García-Ramírez et al., 2011).

On the other hand, this research project suggests further potential avenues for future research: People's experiences may not be the sole unit of analysis (see Amelina, 2022), but rather a means of knowledge production on systems of oppression and control (see Esposito et al., 2025).

Finally, this research project represents a call for future research in Community Psychology (CP), committed to the empowerment, liberation, and well-being of socially,

politically, economically, and institutionally marginalized communities (Fernández, 2022). Ultimately, future research should aspire to be part of those 'agitations' (Langhout, 2016) rooted as much as possible in its values and commitments to transformative change and justice (Fernández, 2022, p. 29).

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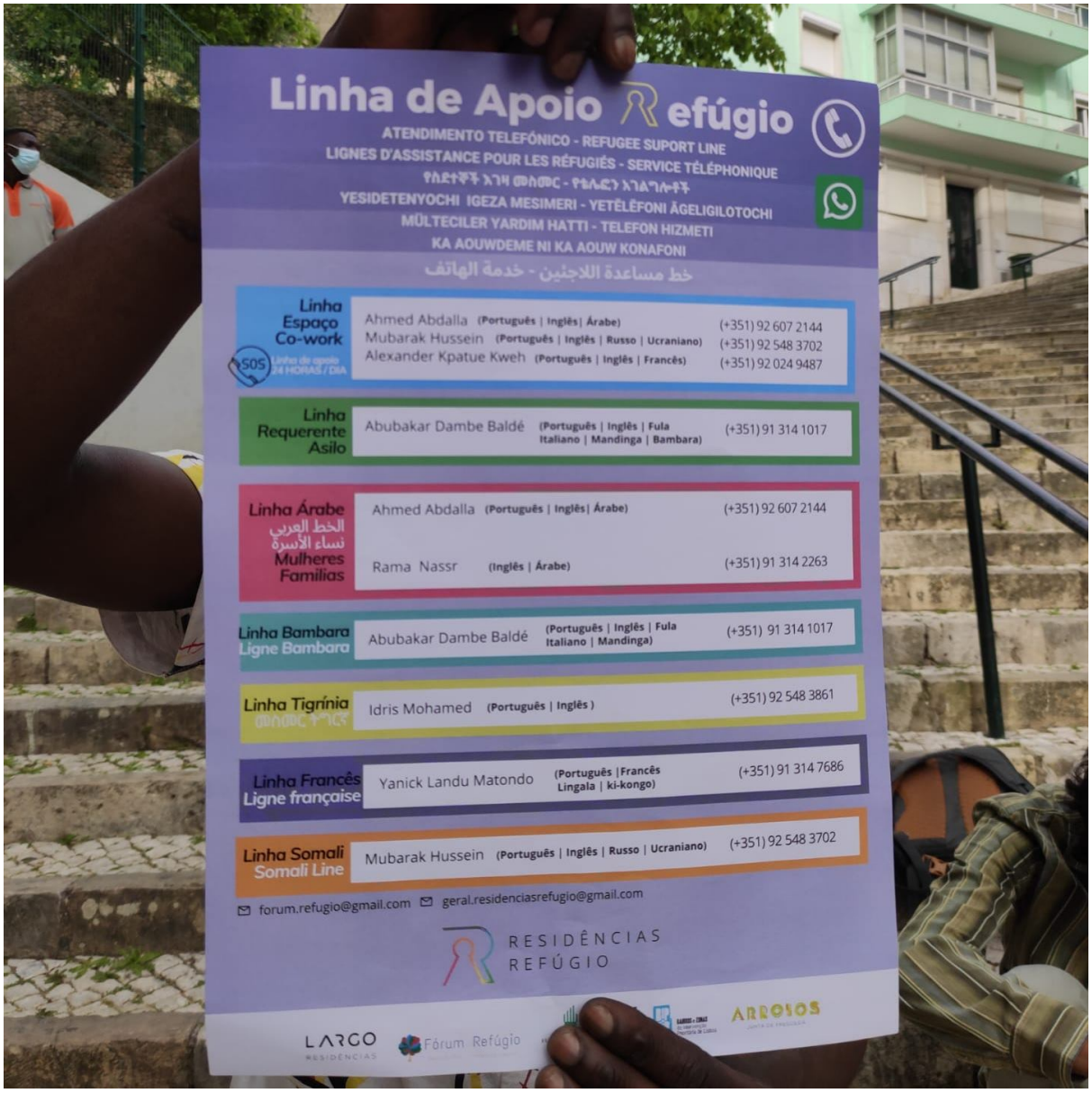
Annexes

Annex- I Fieldwork picture-1 first time I presented the exploratory research project's outcomes to the community during a festival called "Bairro em festa" photo credit LARGO team

Annex- II Fieldwork picture-2 Cultural program offered by the Community-based project

Annex III Fieldwork picture-3 Multilingual helpline established during the pandemic

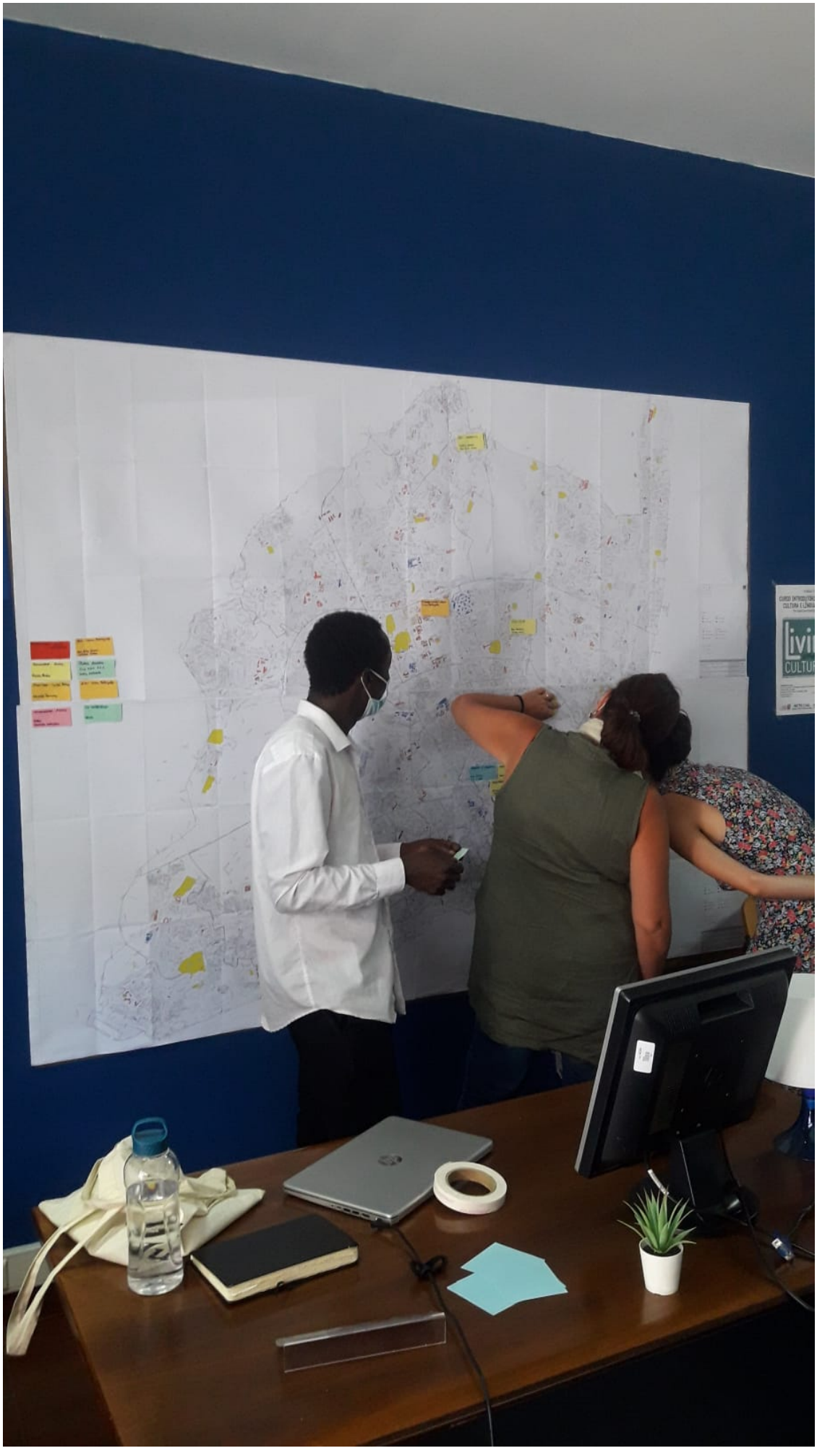


Annex IV Fieldwork picture-4 day when we went to Porta Aberta services

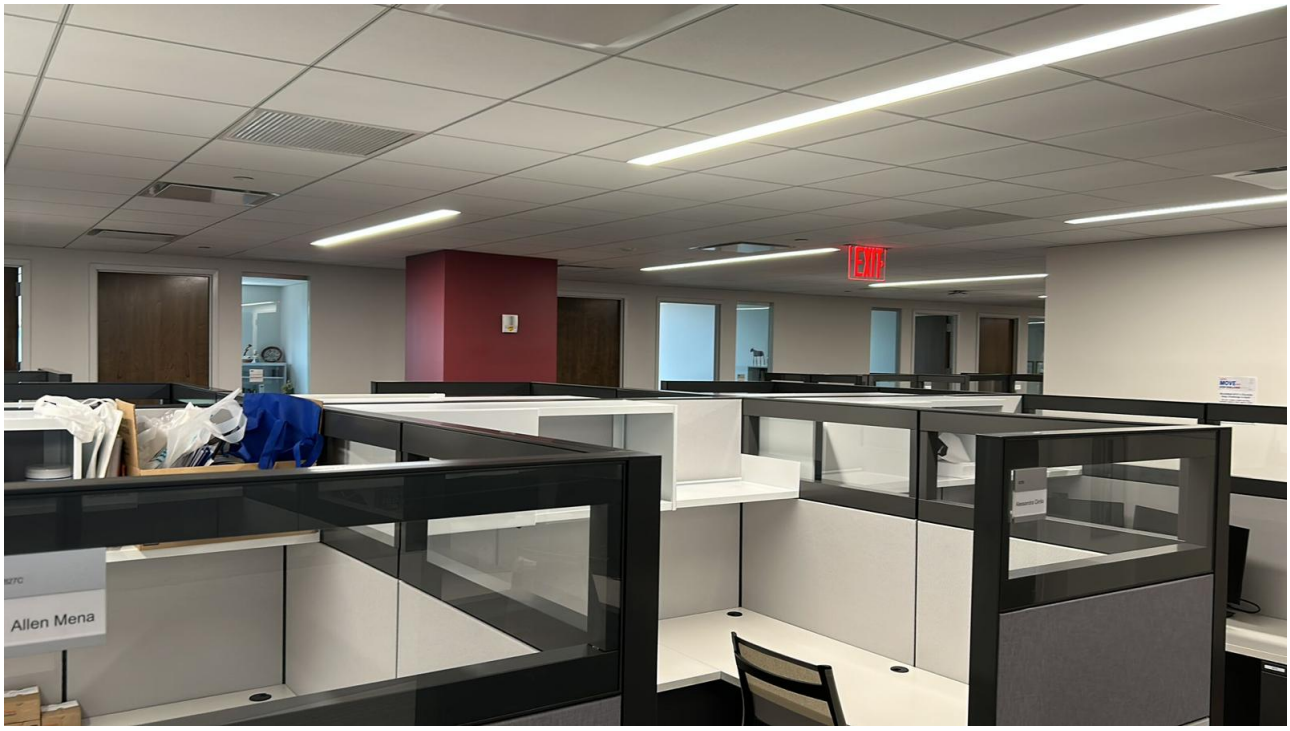
Annex V Fieldwork picture-5 lunch

Annex-VI Fieldwork picture-6 lunch

Annex-VII Fieldwork picture-7 mapping the community's services



Annex-VIII Comparative study fieldwork picture-1 Interior of the office in the CUNY SPH Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health



Annex-IX– Picture-2 view over Harlem from the office in the CUNY SPH Center for Immigrant, Refugee, and Global Health

Annex-X– Informed consent

ISPA APPsyCI APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH CENTER CAPABILITIES & INCLUSION

Research informed consent

The refugees' integration in Portugal: An Exploratory Study

Reference institution: ISPA-Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas Sociais e da Vida

Scientific Manager: Prof. José Ornelas

Investigator: Erica Briozzo

Department: APPsyCI Applied Pscychology Research Center Capabilities and Inclusion

Adress R. Jardim do Tabaco 34, 1100-304 Lisboa **City** Lisboa **State** Portugal

Email: erica.briozzo@gmail.com

We invite you to participate in a research project which aims to investigate the integration of Asylum seekers and refugees in Portugal, who benefit from the services created by the refugees themselves and which are provided by the Portuguese society. We expect in the future to publish outcomes of this study in order to raise awareness of lived experiences of Asylum seekers and refugees in Portugal. In the future publication participants' name never appear, nor data that will allow their recognition. Anonymity will be guaranteed by assigning to each participant a code with the following components: a) country of origin; b) support organization; c) migratory status; d) interview / questionnaire number; e) type of instrument. All personal and intimate information will be doubly safeguarded so that people cannot be compromised or identified. Information you provide, will not have implication of services you receive. Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not, to take part in this study. If you decide to take part to this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, if you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. Consent forms will be kept in a dossier whose consultation is reserved for the Investigator and the APPsyCI.

Consent

I_____read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntary agree to take part in this study.

Participant signature_____ Date____/___/_____

Researcher's signature_____ Date ___/___/_____ thank you for your collaboration

Annex-XI– Capability semi-structured interview guidelines and probes

Code Date I__I__I__I__I__I__I

General information

Gender: 1. Man 2. Woman 3._____ Age _____

Nationality_____ Place of born_____ Ethnic group_____ Linguistic identity_____
Religion_____

Academic level concluded:
1.Don' t know how to write and read 2. Know to write and read 2. Basic school 1 st grade (old 4th class) 3. Basic school 2nd grade (6th year or old preparation cycle) 4. Basic school 3rd grade (9th year or old 5th year of 2nd grade) 3. Secondary school (10th, 11th and 12th) 4. Professional qualification (e.g. as hairdresser/secretary) 5. Bachelor 6. Master 7. PhD 9. Don't want to say it/don't know 10. Other_____

Marital status: 1. Single 2. Married 3. Separated 4. Divorced 5. Widowed 6. Civil partnership 7. Engaged 8. Other_____

Children? 1. Yes 2. No If yes, did you seek family reunification? 1. Yes 2. No 3. Not yet

if no, where are them and with who? _____

Do you have family members here? 1. Yes 2. No I f yes, who?_____

Are you currently working? 1. Yes 2. No If yes which is your professional situation?_____

If no, how long time ago it was your last employment, and what kind of employment it was?_____

How long have you been in Portugal?_____What services were/

weren't provided to you upon arrival?_____

Country of origin information

Country-of-origin Circumstances of persecution:

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1. Persecution linked to protected right 1. Yes 2. No if yes, which ones?_____
2. Persistent pattern of discrimination at a certain level of seriousness 1. Yes 2. No If yes, which one?_____
3. No access to the basic means of survival was seriously restricted 1. Yes 2. No If yes, which ones?_____
4. Persecution on "cumulative grounds" 1. Yes 2. No If yes, which ones?_____

Information about the Refugee status

Did you tried to seek protection from the relevant authorities/actors_____

If yes, from which authorities/actors? _____

What is the result of your Asylum application process? 1. First-instance decision 2. Pending application

If the result of your process is negative are you currently appealing ?_____

Did you seek protection as: 1. resettled refugee 2. spontaneous asylum seeker rescued from humanitarian boats in the Mediterranean Sea

Refugee status: 1. Asylum seeker 2. Derivative refugee status 3. Stateless Are you an applicant with special procedural needs? 1.Yes 2. No
If yes, which are your current special needs?

1. Disable people
2. Elderly people
3. Pregnant women
4. Single parent with minor children 5. Victim of human trafficking

6. Person with mental disorder
7. People subjected to torture
8. Forms of psychological/ physical or sexual violence

Migration-related characteristic

Before arriving in Portugal, were you in a Refugees Camp? 1. Yes 2. No
Country?_____

3. asylum seeker

If yes, in which

Have you ever been in a detention Center? 1. Yes 2. No if yes, in which Country?_____

Health Information

Before arriving in Portugal, did you have any physical/mental health problems? 1.Yes 2. No
Did you develop any physical/mental health problem when you arrive in Portugal? 1. Yes 2. No
If yes, which ones?_____
Which medication are you taking?_____
What is prescribed by who e in what facility? _____

Place of residence

What is 1.

2. 3. 4. 5.

your place of residence ?_____ and your housing situation ? center

institution
rented apartment
rented room others_____

Information about Future

In case of return what do you think could happen? _____
Do you want to stay in Portugal? 1. Yes 2. No

If not, which Country do you prefer? _____

Qualitative Interview Guide[1]

● ***Guidance Notes to Interviewer:*** *Please be sure you reviewed the interview protocol before meeting the participant for this interview. In this interview, it is most important to cover each of the capabilities domains and to probe the participant's responses to learn more about a)*

Be sure to explore the role of reception programmes in the participant's capabilities in each domain. [italicized text in this document is only notes to

researchers/focus group facilitators and should not be discussed with participants].

● ***Probes:*** *For each domain, the following probes are designed to elicit the participant's talk about capabilities in these terms:*

pergunte às pessoas, (perguntas neutras) sobre a função dos serviços em cada área

sondas: O que é que escolhe fazer nesta área ?

A list of prompts are included on the last page of this interview guide.

what they choose to do, choose not to do, and what they cannot do but would like to be able to do in each domain; and b) how they experience aspects of themselves or aspects of their context as facilitating or blocking their capabilities in each domain.

o Que tipo de coisas escolhe de não fazer que poderiam ajudar-te [nesta área]? o Que tipo de coisas você não é capaz de fazer no momento [nesta área?

- o que é que te impede de fazer estas coisas?
- O que é que ajudaria a fazer estas coisas?
- O que é que o ajudaria a realizar estas coisas?

We know that not all probes will be relevant to every question, but make sure you have explored each domain as thoroughly as possible in terms of these dimensions. We have included the probes for the first domain (Life) in the interview guide below as an example. For each subsequent domain, you are expected to use your own judgment and draw on the probes above to gather further information.

Beginning the Interview: *In the opening comments, we ask you to take a little time to get acquainted and help the participant feel comfortable in the interview situation. We ask you to make a connection between this interview and the questionnaire, to help the participant feel recognized and remembered for the time and effort they've given to the project already. Once you have completed the informed consent forms, the following is a script you can adapt to connect to them and explain the purpose for the interview:*

In the questionnaire you completed with _____ <insert name of research interviewer>, you answered questions about the ways in which the services you receive from _____ <insert name of service> have affected your life. Today, we want to talk to you more about some areas of your life and the kinds of things you can and can't do in each of these areas. We want to focus on the ways in which the services you receive from _____ <service> support or block you in these areas.

Some examples of things that might help you or block you in these areas include service providers' attitudes toward you, their clients, or their job; the rules and regulations that govern the service, and the range of supports the service offers. Some things that could block you from doing all the kinds of things you'd like to do are your income, your access to

housing; the availability of affordable housing in your area; housing policy; your education, job training, and employment history; society's attitudes toward people with backgrounds like yours; the decisions taken by local authorities and elected officials; and the economy.. If you think members of your family or friends may help or block you in these areas, we'd like to know about that, too. Finally, some of your personal experiences may help you or block you from being able to do what you want to do, such as physical illness or injury, experiences of violence or abuse, substance use, psychiatric illness, or your prior education, training, or work experiences.

Code/number:_____ Date: __/___/____ Place of Interview: _____ Format (Face-to-Face/Online):_____ Services:_____Interpreter code:_____ Translation Format (Face-to-Face/Remote):_____

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Domains to explore:

Domain: Life

The first topic we want to discuss is your quality of life, which means your general health, happiness, and life circumstances.

Key questions:

Do you think that here in Portugal you will have the possibility to achieve everything you want and have a happy and healthy life or do you think there are some things that you will not be able to do?

Probes

- What things do you choose to do that contribute to your health and happiness?
- Are there any other people or things that contribute to your health and happiness?
- What things do you choose not to do that could improve your health and happiness?
- What are you not currently able to do, but you would like to do, to improve your health and happiness?
- What prevents you from being able to do these things?
- What would help you to do these things?
- How would you describe your general condition and happiness? How satisfied are you with your life circumstances?

Probes covid-19 related

- How the pandemic has been affecting your general health and happiness?
- Imagine when you are older, how do you imagine your life, do you imagine it here in Portugal?

Domain: Health

Next we will talk about 'health' and basic needs such as sleep, hygiene, good food, and physical exercise. Can you tell me about your basic health in these areas?

Key questions:
How healthy do you feel in Portugal? (give some examples...)
(People need access to basic health services for medical, dental, psychiatric) **Do you have access to health services in Portugal?**

Probes

- Can you describe how easy or difficult it is for you to access the services you need?
- Who helped you to have access to health services?
- Who gives you information about the health services?
- What prevents you from having access to these services?

Probes covid-19 related

- Does the pandemic and all the related measures influence access to health services, if so, how?
- Given the pandemic , what kinds of things can you do to maintain or improve your access to these health services?

Domain: Bodily Autonomy

The next topic is about how safe you feel, and whether you are safe from violence or any kind of abuse, such as verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse, or if you feel threatened with any type of violence or abuse.

Key question:
Do you feel safe at the moment in your daily life?

Probes

Religion

- Do you feel safe to practice your religion in the place you live or in your neighborhood? in Portugal?

- What prevents you from doing this?

- What will help you to practice your religion?

Gender-related safety

If the case:

- As a woman or LGBTQ+ person do you feel safe?

- Does someone have to take care of your safety?

- Would you say that you feel safe where you live right now? Do you worry about violence or any form of abuse? What helps you feel safe?

- Whether you don't feel safe you know who to contact (explore support network) ?

- What could increase your safety?

Having sex and being intimate with another person, if you choose to, are important aspects of life.

Key questions:
Can you describe the extent to which you feel you have freedom to express your sexuality or be intimate with others?

- Do you feel that you can easily experience your gender identity and sexual orientation in Portugal?

- Do you feel free to establish intimate relationships/start a family in Portugal? Why?

- If your family is still in your home country or in another place, are you still in contact with them?

Did you have any help in this regard?

- What difficulties do you experience in this aspect of your life?

- What would help you related to gender/sexuality/family life?

- These are issues you are concerned about?

Probes covid-19 related

- Do you feel that you do not run the risk of contracting the virus ?

Domains: Emotions, Thoughts, and Relationships

Key questions:

How would you describe yourself and who you really are, right now? Do you feel able to express your true self to others?

Probes

- Being refugees or asylum seekers is important to you? Do you recognize yourself as a refugee or asylum seeker?

- How do you feel here in Portugal, can you look at yourself in other ways, beside being refugees or asylum seekers?

- Can you give an example of a time when you did or did not feel comfortable to express your true self?

- Are there some situations in which you are more able to express your true self? Is this important to you? Could you give me an example?

- Is there anything that you do to make it easier to be your true self with others? What would help you or stop you doing this?

- Are you able to freely express your emotions to other people? Are you able to control your emotions when you want to?

Probes covid-19 pandemic related

- Did during the pandemic this aspect became difficult for you?

Domain: Sense, Imagination, & Thought

Key questions

- Is it important to you to be informed about what is going on in your community on the topic of refugees?

- Is it important to you to be informed about the local political situation?

- What kinds of things do you do to stay informed on these topics?

- What helps you to do these things?

- Are you able to be as informed as you would like to be? What kinds of things prevent you?

Education

Key questions:
How important is it to you to develop your intellectual capacity, to access further education or training?

Probes:

- Did someone help you?
- Are you able to plan your education or your family's education?
- Do your children have access to school?

Probes covid-19 related

- Despite the pandemic, are you able to plan your education or your family's education?
- If so, were you able to access school/language classes/training courses/university in Portugal?
- How have you been supported through this process? By whom? if not, who or what would help you?

Relationships with Others

(These next questions are about your relationships to others)

- Do you spend time with other refugees or asylum seekers? how?
- it's easy for you to spend time with the locals? how?

Domain: Affiliation, Social, and Community Interaction

Next, we want to learn more about your experiences of your community and your neighbourhood
Key question:

Do you feel part of the local community?

Probes:

- Do you interact with and connect to people in your community?
- Is it relevant for you to connect with the local community? If so, what would help you to be more

connected to the local community?

Probes

- Are you part of any association or group of your neighborhood or any refugees community associations?

- What have been the main difficulties/barriers you faced in connecting with Portugues people?

- What community resources do you usually use in the community (some examples are grocery shops, libraries, cinemas, churches, hairdressers or barbers, banks, post offices)? What is a typical day for you?

- Is there anything about your interaction in your community that you would like to change or improve? Would you know who to ask for support to improve this aspect of your life?

- What things do you do to maintain or improve these connections?

Probes covid-19 related

- Before the pandemic have you ever participated in any social events?

- During the pandemic did you participate in some online meeting, webinar, formation?

Domain: Other Species

- Next, we want you to tell us about your opportunities to care for animals or plants, or to go out in nature, like walk or sit in a park, walk in the countryside or at the seaside, of example. Which of these things do you like to do?

Domain: Play

Key questions:
Do you feel free to have fun like recreation or hobbies?

- What do you do for fun, like recreation or hobbies?

- Can you describe a recent time when you had fun?

- Can you describe a time where you felt joy?

- Do you feel like you have enough of those kinds of opportunities in your life?

- Are there opportunities for fun that you choose not to take?

- If you have a family do you feel your children can freely play and have fun?

Probes covid-19 related

● Does the pandemic influence this aspect of your life?

Domain: Control over Environment (Material)

Next, we'd like to know how much control you have over your legal, financial, and housing situations. What kinds of challenges are you facing in these areas?

Housing

● In which kind of accommodation are you living right now? (ex: hostel, house etc)

● How do you achieve this housing solution?

● Are you able to manage your housing expenses on your own?

Employment

Key questions:

Right now are you working?

● Who helps you to have a job?

● Was it easy for you looking for a job?

● If you are not currently working, who is helping you to find a job?

Probes covid-19 related

● Are you working before the pandemic? **Legal assistance**

Key questions:
Are you familiar with your existing rights as a refugee / asylum seeker in Portugal?

● Do you have a lawyer to provide you with legal information?

● If not, who or what helps you?

● What you decide not to do in legislative terms that could compromise your situation as an

asylum seeker or refugee?

Probes covid-19 related

● Does pandemic influence this aspect of your life? If so, how? ***Domain: Control over one's environment: Political***

(Now, I'll return to a topic that we've touched on throughout this conversation, and that is your experience of choice and control over aspects of your life).

Key questions:

Do you feel you can be part of your integration process, or the issue of refugee integration more generally?

Probes:

- Has your point of view been taken into account?
- Overall, how much do you feel that your own opinion is taken into account in the decisions that are made about your everyday life, activities, and goals?
- Do you express your opinion through voting in elections, or participating in public forums or meetings?
- Finally, do you feel able to help other people deal with this kind of problem? (give some examples)

(If the answer is yes, be sure to ask the participant to explain or describe how they advocate for themselves or for others. Be sure to explore any affirmative responses.)

Participant's feedback: do you want to add any information/reflections you didn't mention before, or also emphasize anything?

Domain(s)	Activities Prompts
Health; Life	Take my medication; see my health provider when I should; eat better; use substances less; go for walks
Bodily Autonomy	Avoid certain areas/people; Use substances less/avoid intoxication; Sexual freedoms e.g., having a private home or breaking curfews/segregation rules in congregate spaces;
Practical Reason	Pay my bills on time; set up a direct debit so that payments go out before I can spend the money;
Control over Environment (Material)	Make and attend appointments; turn up sober
Emotions, Thoughts, and Relationships	Know other people well; having a permanent place to build relationships; building trust; staying in contact;
Affiliation, Social, and Community Interaction	Go out; talk/say hello to other people in the apartment block/street, shop, park.
Other Species	Work to reach agreement with landlord to permit pets/plants.
Play	Save some money; look after health so I am well enough to have fun;

Control over one's environment: Political	Watch/read news, talk to others; go to meetings/residents groups; attend protests.

o Follow up with probes.

Okay, those are all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything you'd like to add or comment on?

WP3 Qualitative Codebook

● Please use the capabilities, choices, and affordances/constraints categories to code WP3 qualitative interviews. All three may not always apply (e.g. some text chunks may be related to capabilities only, others may be related to capabilities *and* choices etc.). Multiple codes may also be applicable to the same text. Please complete the grid below with your coding. Terms in **bold** can be used as a short-cut. We have included a pilot interview as an example.

Capabilities

Please code text chunks where participants describe any of the following domains:

- **Life:** life, general health, happiness, life circumstances, and desire to live to old age);
- **Health:** basic needs such as sleep, hygiene, food, physical exercise, access to basic health services (e.g., medical, dental, psychiatric, or substance use);
- **Bodily Autonomy:** a sense of safety, freedom from: violence / abuse (e.g., verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual), threat of violence / abuse, freedom to have sex and be intimate with another person;
- **Emotions, Thoughts, & Relationships:** view of themselves now & who they would like to be in the future;
- **Sense, Imagination, & Thought:** understanding of what is going on in the community, in the country, and in the world, and their relationships to others;
- **Affiliation, Social, & Community Interaction:** experiences of community and neighbourhood;
- **Other Species:** opportunities to care for animals or plants, or to go out in nature (e.g., to the park, countryside seaside);

- **Play:** opportunities for fun, recreation, hobbies, and joy;
- **Practical Reason:** sense of control over their own life;
- **Control over Environment (Material):** perceived control over legal, financial, and housing situations;
- **Control over one's environment (Political):** perceptions that their opinion is taken into account in making decisions about their life and goals.

- **Actions**
- *Also code text chunks related to the actions taken in relation to each domain:*
- **Choose to do** to improve their experiences in each domain;
- **Choose to *not* do** to improve their experiences in each domain;
- **Would like to be able to do, but are currently unable to** do, to improve their experiences in each domain
- **Would *not* like to** be able to do something***, and*** **are currently unable** to do it, to improve experiences;

Also code text chunks related to:

- **Affordances/Constraints**
- **Internal or external constraints** on capabilities or actions (e.g., factors within the person or in the environment that are restrictive);
- **Internal or external affordances** on capabilities domains (e.g., factors within the person or in the environment that are enabling).

Annex -XII – ISPA-Instituto Universitário Ethical Committee Approval

Comissão de Ética de Investigação
ISPA - Instituto Universitário de Ciências
Psicológicas, Sociais e da Vida
Rua Jardim do Tabaco, 34,
1149-041 Lisboa
Telefone: (351) 218 811 700
Fax: (351) 218 860 954

D/030/10/2020

COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA

PARECER

Título do projeto: "The refugees' integration in Portugal: An Exploratory Study (A Integração dos refugiados em Portugal: Um estudo exploratório)".

Investigador responsável: Erica Briozzo / José Ornelas (Orientador).

Instituição/Curso: ISPA- Instituto Universitário.

O protocolo do estudo apresenta objetivos relevantes. Foram descritos adequadamente os métodos e procedimentos a adotar e estes respeitam os direitos humanos e as recomendações constantes nos documentos nacionais e internacionais relativos à ética em investigação.

Assim, o parecer da Comissão de Ética do ISPA-Instituto Universitário é favorável à realização do estudo em epígrafe.

Qualquer alteração futura aos procedimentos descritos do estudo que possam colidir com os critérios éticos de investigação dos regulamentos acima referidos, exige uma reapresentação do pedido de apreciação a esta Comissão.

Comissão Ética do ISPA – Instituto Universitário

(Assinatura do Presidente da CE)

Lisboa, 23 de Outubro de 2020.

Annex-XIII– Comparative study semi-structured interview guidelines and probes

In-Depth Interview Guide

IDI number:
Date:
Interviewer:
Place of Interview:
Format (Face-to-Face/Online):

Informed Consent and description of the interview procedure	Check (X)
Explaining the purpose of the study	
Explaining data protection procedures and ethical standards	
Explaining recording purpose	
Explaining code of conduct of the researcher	
Providing space for questions and clarifications	
Confirming informed consent was given/submitted	

[Italicized text in this document is for researchers/interviewers only and should not be discussed with participants]

Guidance Notes for Interviewers

Preparation: *Please be sure you reviewed this survey and script before meeting the participants. In the discussion, it is important to cover each of the ten capabilities domains and to probe the participant's responses to learn more about a) what they choose to do, choose not to do, and what they cannot do but would like to be able to do in each domain; and b) how they experience aspects of themselves or aspects of their context as facilitating or blocking their capabilities in each domain. Be sure to explore the role of reception programs in the participant's capabilities in each domain.*

Probes: *For each domain, follow up questions are designed to elicit the participant's reflection about key capabilities. Ask the general question in each domain first, followed by follow-up questions, as needed, to focus the discussion.*

Beginning the interview: *In the opening comments take a little time to get acquainted and help participants to feel comfortable in the situation. Once you have obtained all informed consent forms, the following is a script to explain the purpose of the interview:*

Purpose and scope of the interview

Today, we would like to talk with you about some aspects of your life in New York City (NYC) and which kind of things you can or can't do. In particular, we want to focus on the ways in which the services you receive through organizations may support or block you in ten areas of your life. Some examples of things that might help you or block you include service providers' attitudes toward you; rules and regulations to live in NYC and the range of services that you have access to, such as your income, your accommodation; your education, your job opportunities; society's attitudes toward migrants; the decisions taken by local authorities or national economy, etc. If your local community, members of your family, or your group of friends help you or block you in these areas, we'd like to know about that, too. Finally, some of your personal experiences may help you or block you too, for example, physical or mental health challenges, experiences of violence or abuse, or your prior education, training, or work experiences.

Before we begin the interview, I will ask you to complete a short survey to collect some basic demographic information.. Informed Consent You previously completed the Informed Consent form, but I want to take a moment to remind you of some key elements – please let me know if you have any questions: This interview is voluntary and does not affect your immigration status or any services you receive. Some questions may be personal and could make you feel uncomfortable. Please remember that you can choose not to answer specific questions. You will be provided with $50 to thank you for your time following the

interview. I'll ask you to choose a fake name for the recording, so we can keep your identity and responses confidential. What name would you like to choose? Do you have any questions to ask before we get started? We're going to begin recording."

Pre-Interview Survey (if not yet completed)

General information

1. What is your gender:
    a. Man
    b. Woman
    c. Non binary

2. What is your age [Dropdown 18-65+]

3. What is your nationality [Dropdown]

4. Which ethnic group do you belong to [open-ended]

5. Which language(s) do you speak [open-ended]

6. What is your religion [open-ended]

7. What is your level of education?
    a. None
    b. Primary school
    c. Secondary school
    d. Professional qualification (e.g. as hairdresser/builder)
    e. Bachelor
    f. Master
    g. PhD
    h. Don't want to say it/don't know
    i. Other (please specify):

8. What is your marital status?
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Separated
    d. Divorced
    e. Widowed
    f. In a relationship
    g. Engaged
    h. Other (please specify):

9. Do you have any children?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    9.1 *(If yes)* Did you seek family reunification?
        a. Yes
        b. Not yet
        c. No

10. Do you have family members or loved ones here?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. Are you currently working?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    11.1. *(If yes)* What is your profession? [open-ended]
    11.2. *(If no)* How long ago was your last employment, and what kind of employment was it? [open-ended]

12. How long have you been in NYC? [Dropdown #s]

Refugee-status information

13. Which is your current migration/refugee status?
    a. Immigrant (visa holder)
    b. Refugee/Asylee
    c. Asylum seeker
    d. Undocumented
    e. Other (please specify):
    f. Prefer not to disclose

    (if answered b or c) Information about the Refugee status
    13a. Did you try to seek asylum/refugee status protection here in NYC?
        a. Yes
        b. No *[skip to health information]*

    13b. What is your refugee status:
        a. Pending
        b. Asylee
        c. Derivative refugee status
        d. Stateless
        e. Other (please specify):

Health Information

14. The process of immigrating to NYC can be difficult and may put people at risk of certain health conditions. Have you developed any new physical or emotional health problems since arriving in NYC?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Place of residence

15. What is your housing situation?
    a. Government-run Shelter
    b. Privately-run Shelter
    c. Rented apartment
    d. Rented room
    e. Other

In-Depth Interview Guide

"Thank you for answering those questions. We will now begin the interview. Do you have any to ask me before we get started?"

Topics (approximately 6 min/domain)	**General question** (ask *ALL*)	**Follow-up probes** (ask *some*)
Domain 1: Life *The first topic is about quality of life, which means your general well-being, happiness, and life circumstances.* ***Defined as:*** *Being able to live a full, natural life without premature death or suffering that makes life unenjoyable.*	**Describe a typical day for you.** **How would you compare your life today versus one year ago?**	• What *things* are you doing that contribute to your health and happiness? • Who are the *people* that contribute to your health and happiness? • What stops you from being able to feel better or happier? • What would help you to feel better or happier?

Domain 2: Physical Health *Next, we will talk about health and basic needs such as sleep, hygiene, good food, and physical exercise.* ***Defined as:*** *Being able to have good health, being adequately nourished, having adequate shelter, and having access to health services (e.g., medical, dental, and mental health)*	**How healthy do you feel in NYC? (give some examples…)** **People need access to basic health services for medical, dental, and mental health care. What kinds of healthcare do you have access to in NYC?** **How do organizations help you access healthcare?**	• How easy or difficult is it for you to access the care you need to feel healthy? • What/who helps you access healthcare? • Who gives you information about healthcare? • What prevents you from having access to healthcare?
Domain 3: *Emotions & Thoughts* *These next questions are about how you see yourself now and who you would like to be in the future.*	**How have you been feeling emotionally?** **How can an organization support you in getting you where you want to be?**	• Can you give an example of a time in NYC when you did or did not feel comfortable to express your true self/or your emotions? • How do you express your emotions to other people? • How do you control your emotions when you want to? • When you think about your future self, who would you like to be, say five or ten years from now?

Domain 4: *Sense & Imagination* *We would now like to learn more about how informed you feel about what is going on in your community, in the country, and in the world.* ***Defined as:*** *The feeling of being treated as a normal person and not as a "refugee" or "asylum seeker", namely an outsider. Establish relationships characterized by reciprocity, trust, symmetry, relationships, and self-confidence.*	**Please describe how informed you feel about what is going on in your community.** **What kinds of things do the organizations do to help integrate you into NYC society?** **How do organizations empower you?**	• How important is it to you to know what is going on in your community on the topic of immigrants and refugees? • What kinds of things do you do to stay up-to-date and connected? What helps you stay up-to-date and connected? • How does the organization help you stay up to date with what is going on in the community? • What prevents you from being as informed as you would like to be? • What do you want to learn in NYC?
Domain 5: *Control over one's environment (material and political)* *The last topic that we'd like to discuss today is your sense of choice and control over aspects of your life here in NYC.*	**(Political)** ● **How familiar are you with your existing rights *(as a migrant, refugee, or asylum seeker)* in NYC?** ● **How do you express your opinion in NYC *(e.g., advocacy, organizing, voting in elections, participating in public forums/community meetings, etc.)*?**	• How do organizations help you become informed about current events/rights? • How could this be improved?

	(Material) **I see that you are a/an *[CHECK PRE-SURVEY: asylum seeker, refugee, undocumented, etc.]*.** ● **Overall, how much control do you feel you have over different aspects of your life, such as your legal status, financial situation, or housing situation?**	• How can organizations better assist you in finding legal assistance, housing, and employment? • Who is supporting you to handle these issues? • In what ways do you feel that organizations support you/ or don't as you navigate through legal assistance, housing and employment?
Domain 6: *Practical Reason* *Next let's talk about your practical tasks of everyday life.*	**How do organizations support you to become independent?** **What can organizations do to help you feel more in control of your life?** ***If examples are needed: (e.g., managing money, paying rent and bills, keeping your home clean, washing your clothes, cooking, education access, etc.)***	• What stops you from being able to have control and choice over your everyday life? How does the organization do anything to help mitigate this? • In which aspect of your life do you feel less control and you would like to have more? • What would help you to feel like you have more control?
Domain 7: Safety *The next topic is about how safe you feel from violence of any kind of abuse, such as verbal, psychological, physical, or sexual abuse.* ***Defined as:*** *Being able to move freely from place to place; having one's bodily boundaries treated as sovereign, i.e., being able to be secure against assault, including sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and domestic violence.*	**How safe have you been feeling in your everyday life in NYC?** **Have any organizations helped you feel safer?** **How have organizations supported your safety, if at all?**	**General probes** • What helps you feel safe where you live right now? • Who would you contact if you didn't feel safe? • What could increase your safety? **Religion** • Where do you feel safe practicing your religion? • Is there anything that stops you from practicing your religion? • What will help you to practice your religion?

***Religion**: Being able to exercise his/her/their own religion in a safe environment* ***Gender-related safety:** feeling safe as a woman or as a LGBTQI+ person.* ***Sexuality and Intimacy:** feeling free to express his/her/their/own sexuality*		**Sexuality and Intimacy:** • How comfortable do you feel seeking information about sexual health? • Can you describe how much freedom you feel you have to express your sexuality or be intimate with others?
Domain 8: *Affiliation, Social, and Community Interaction* *These next questions are about your relationships with others.* ***Defined as:*** *Being able to engage in various forms of social interaction; being able to maintain connections within his/her/their community; create new meaningful relationships with locals or others, where people can experience basic emotions.*	**In what ways has the organization helped you develop relationships with other people in the community?** **How does the organization help you stay connected with your community back home?**	• What are the main difficulties you experience in connecting with other people? • What resources do you usually use in the community? *(If needed: e.g., grocery shops, libraries, cinemas, churches, hairdressers or barbers, banks, post offices*) • Please describe an interaction in your community that you would like to change or improve. • Do you know who to ask for support to improve this aspect of your life?
Domain 9: *Other Species* *Next, we would like to hear about your relationship with nature and animals (e.g. how important it is for you to walk or sit in a park, walk in the countryside or at the seaside, have pets, etc.).* ***Defined as:** Being able to live with concern for and in*	**Tell us about your access to nature and green space in your local community.** **Describe how having access to green space impacts your physical, mental, and/or spiritual health.**	• What kind of things do you do to stay connected with nature and/or animals? • What things could help to improve your access to green space?

relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.		
Domain 10: *Play* *Next aspect of life we'd like to learn more about is what you do with your free time. These questions should be tailored to the person you're interviewing.*	**What do you do to find joy?** **How do organizations provide opportunities for you to take care of yourself?**	• Can you describe a recent time when you had fun or felt joy? • What opportunities do you take to enjoy your life in NYC? • What opportunities for fun do you choose *not* to take? • If you have a family, what do your children do for fun?

The last question we will ask you is: What do you think organizations in NYC can do better in the future?

Participant's feedback: do you want to add any information/reflections you didn't mention before, or also emphasize anything?

Annex-XIV– Cover letter to the Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology Editor

Dear Journal Editor,

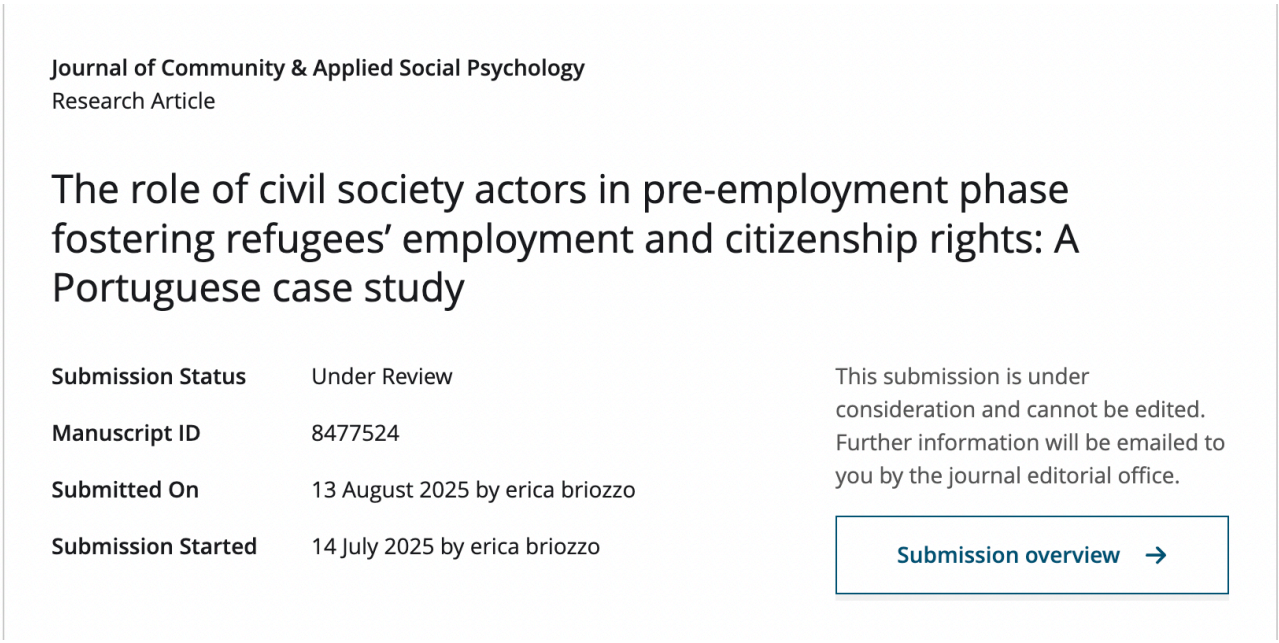
We are pleased to submit the manuscript "The role of civil society actors in pre-employment phase fostering refugees' employment and citizenship rights: A Portuguese case study" for consideration as an original article in the the Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology.

Civil Society Actors (CSAs) have been responding to the needs of people in refugee situations since 2015 (Bagavos & Kourachanis, 2021; Feischmidt, Pries, & Cantat, 2019; Pries, 2019) and more recently. CSAs have stepped in where state authorities have fallen short in protecting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Despite increasing body of literature explores integration programs and its shortcomings in formal labor market inclusion, little is known about the role of Civil Society Actors (CSAs) in greater depth, and even fewer have questioned their role in the employment inclusion of refugees. In this study, we use the Portuguese case to addresses these gaps by examining the underexplored discourse on the role of CSAs in facilitating refugees' entry into the formal labor market. The data collected over two years of fieldwork were analyzed using inductive/deductive qualitative analysis Overall, our study's results contribute to stark the political meaning of CSAs interventions and interventions.

From the analysis guided by the theoretical framework of empowerment, this study examines the practices and challenges faced by CSAs in promoting citizenship rights through employment. Moving beyond the analysis of CSAs' experiences in migration governance, this study contributes to a strand of research that produces knowledge beyond traditional integration model. It aims to support a broader scholarly shift toward migration research that embraces critical border perspectives (Ambrosini, 2021; Esposito et al., 2024; Tseng et al., 2002). The

Annex-XV–Snapshot of the under-review status manuscript



Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology
Research Article

The role of civil society actors in pre-employment phase fostering refugees' employment and citizenship rights: A Portuguese case study

Submission Status	Under Review
Manuscript ID	8477524
Submitted On	13 August 2025 by erica briozzo
Submission Started	14 July 2025 by erica briozzo

This submission is under consideration and cannot be edited. Further information will be emailed to you by the journal editorial office.

Submission overview →

Annex-XVI–Flyers English, Spanish, and Urdu

CUNY SPH CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE & GLOBAL HEALTH

ATTENTION
IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES, & ASYLUM SEEKERS IN NYC

Speak with researchers at the City University of New York (CUNY) about your experiences living in NYC and accessing services from immigrant- and refugee-focused organizations.

Are you an immigrant to the United States, are 18+ years old, live in New York City, and access services provided by community organizations?

We invite you to take part in a study at CUNY which seeks to learn about your experiences accessing services at organizations in NYC and how these organizations have helped with your resettlement. During the interview, we would discuss your experiences recieving services from community-based organizations, as well as reflections on your life in NYC. If you participate, you will receive $50 as a token of our appreciation for your time. **If interested, please email laura.hobbs@sph.cuny.edu, send a WhatsApp message to +13214443049, or sign up using the QR code below.**

What you can expect

Confidential

Your information will be kept confidential. Any study findings will not identify individuals. Your data will be deleted after the study is complete.

One-hour time commitment

Interviews will last approximately one-hour, followed by a short survey. After you've completed the interview and survey, you will recieve $50 as a thank you gift.

Choose your interview location

Interviews may be held via video chat, phone, or in-person at a location of your choosing.

CUNY SPH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HEALTH POLICY

cirgh@sph.cuny.edu | 55 West 125th Street New York, NY 10027

CUNY SPH CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE & GLOBAL HEALTH

ATENCIÓN
INMIGRANTES, REFUGIADOS Y SOLICITANTES DE ASILO EN LA CIUDAD DE NUEVA YORK

Hable con investigadores de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York (CUNY, por sus siglas en inglés) sobre sus experiencias viviendo en la ciudad de Nueva York y accediendo a servicios de organizaciones centradas en inmigrantes y refugiados.

¿Es usted un inmigrante en los Estados Unidos, tiene 18+ años, vive en la ciudad de Nueva York y necesita acceso a los servicios que ofrecen organizaciones comunitarias?

Te invitamos a participar en un estudio en CUNY que busca conocer tus experiencias al acceder a servicios en organizaciones de la ciudad de Nueva York y cómo estas organizaciones te han ayudado con tu reasentamiento. Durante la entrevista, hablaremos sobre tus experiencias al recibir servicios de organizaciones comunitarias, así como reflexiones sobre tu vida en la ciudad de Nueva York. Si participas, recibirás $50 como muestra de nuestro agradecimiento por tu tiempo. Si estás interesado, envía un correo electrónico a laura.hobbs@sph.cuny.edu, envía un mensaje de WhatsApp al +13214443049 o regístrate usando el código QR a continuación.

Lo que puedes esperar

Confidencial

Su información se mantendrá confidencial. Los resultados del estudio no identificarán a los individuos. Sus datos se eliminarán una vez finalizado el estudio.

Compromiso de tiempo de una hora

Las entrevistas tendrán una duración aproximada de una hora, seguidas de una breve encuesta. Una vez que haya completado la entrevista y la encuesta, recibirá $50 como regalo de agradecimiento.

Elija el lugar de su entrevista

Las entrevistas pueden realizarse a través de videollamada, teléfono o en persona en el lugar que elija.

CUNY SPH GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HEALTH POLICY

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CUNY SPH CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE & GLOBAL HEALTH

نیویارک شہر میں تارکین وطن، پناہ گزینوں اور پناہ گزینوں کی توجہ

سٹی یونیورسٹی آف نیو یارک (سی یو این وائی) کے محققین سے نیویارک شہر میں رہنے اور تارکین وطن اور پناہ گزینوں پر توجہ مرکوز کرنے والی تنظیموں کی خدمات تک رسائی کے تجربات کے بارے میں بات کریں۔

آپ کیا توقع کر سکتے ہیں

خفیہ

آپ کی معلومات کو خفیہ رکھا جائے گا. مطالعے کے نتائج افراد کی شناخت نہیں کریں گے . مطالعہ مکمل ہونے کے بعد آپ کا ڈیٹا حذف کردیا جائے گا۔

ایک گھنٹے کا وقت کا وعدہ

انٹرویو تقریبا ایک گھنٹے تک جاری رہیں گے ، جس کے بعد ایک مختصر سروے ہوگا۔ ایک بار جب آپ انٹرویو اور سروے مکمل کر لیتے ہیں تو ، آپ کو شکریہ کے تحفے کے طور پر $ 50 ملیں گے۔

انٹرویو کی جگہ کا انتخاب کریں

انٹرویو ویڈیو کال ، فون ، یا ذاتی طور پر آپ کی پسن د کے مقام پر منعقد کیا جاسکتا ہے۔

کیا آپ ریاستہائے متحدہ امریکہ میں تارکین وطن ہیں، 18+ سال کی عمر کے ہیں، نیو یارک شہر میں رہتے ہیں، اور کمیونٹی پر مبنی تنظیموں کی طرف سے پیش کردہ خدمات تک رسائی کی ضرورت ہے؟

ہم آپ کو CUNY میں ایک مطالعہ میں حصہ لینے کی دعوت دیتے ہیں جو NYC میں تنظیموں میں خدمات تک رسائی کے آپ کے تجربات اور ان تنظیموں نے آپ کی آباد کاری میں کس طرح مدد کی ہے اس کے بارے میں جاننا چاہتا ہے۔ انٹرویو کے دوران، ہم کمیونٹی پر مبنی تنظیموں سے خدمات حاصل کرنے کے آپ کے تجربات کے ساتھ ساتھ NYC میں آپ کی زندگی کے عکاسی پر بھی بات کریں گے۔ اگر آپ شرکت کرتے ہیں، تو آپ کو اپنے وقت کے لیے ہماری تعریف کے طور پر $50 ملے گا۔ اگر دلچسپی ہے تو، براہ کرم laura.hobbs@sph.cuny.edu پر ای میل کریں، +13214443049 پر واٹس ایپ پیغام بھیجیں، یا نیچے QR کوڈ استعمال کر کے سائن اپ کریں۔

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