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**Author(s):** Sacramento, Octávio; Turtiainen, Kati; Silva, Pedro Gabriel

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# **Policies of refugee settlement and integration in Europe: the cases of Portugal and**

## **Finland**

Octávio Sacramento  
CETRAD - University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro  
Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro  
Departamento de Economia, Sociologia e Gestão  
Quinta de Prados  
5000-801 VILA REAL – PORTUGAL  
octavsac@utad.pt

Kati Turtiainen  
University of Jyväskylä - Kokkola University Consortium  
Talonpojankatu 2B  
PL 567, 67701 Kokkola – FINLAND  
kati.turtiainen@chydenius.fi

Pedro Gabriel Silva  
CETRAD – University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro  
Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro  
Departamento de Economia, Sociologia e Gestão  
Quinta de Prados  
5000-801 VILA REAL – PORTUGAL  
pgpsilva@utad.pt

**Abstract:** Though geographically distant from each other, Portugal and Finland present an interesting comparison concerning the policies and devices of asylum. Both provide an informed and critical appraisal of the current international response to the refugee issue, especially considering the European Union. The Finnish situation evidences a long-standing integrated resettlement frame, associated with the inclusive and pluralistic character of Nordic immigration policies, in spite of the growing threat of regression under the emergent xenophobic pressure. Unlike Portugal, where a finely-tuned response system is still lacking in spite of the existence of an assumed political will and commitment to receive increasing numbers of refugees.

**Keywords:** Refugees; resettlement and relocation; integration; policy; Portugal; Finland.

## 1. Introduction

Portugal and Finland hold the common condition of sitting on the edges of the European Union (EU). Both are borderlands, peripheral to EU political and demographic centres, yet they present very distinct traditions and experiences of refugee settlement, without neglecting the fact that each comprises a very different history of welfare provision and social services organization (Esping-Andersen 2002). It is within this underlying paradox that we compare these countries: both are part of the same political and economic Union, yet holding very different historic traditions towards refugees, asylum and integration, as well as diverse intervention routines and levels of technical expertise regarding that subject. Nonetheless, both are confronted with a common challenge: that of responding to a set of goals, directives, and policy frames devised predominantly in the EU's political decision-making centres.

Hence, one the main aims of the present paper is to render salient the actual conditions present in the implementation, at multiple national scales, of European policy frames regarding the settlement and integration of refugees.<sup>1</sup> Herein, the terms settlement and integration are not used interchangeably. By settlement, it is considered the process of decision and routing of refugees to a place where it is expected to live in the welcoming society according to a system of protection constituted by legal provisions and social support aimed at ensuring the safeguarding of rights. By integration, it is meant the possibilities individuals have to actually access the rights, considering, also, the

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<sup>1</sup> By refugees we mean, first, those who escaped from their countries of origin and are waiting for a durable settlement solution. Secondly, we frame the concept after the UNHCR's legal definition of refugee (UNHCR 1951) which means people who, due to well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, leave their country of nationality and are unable or, while being fearful of persecution, are unwilling to avail the protection in their original countries. According to the UNHCR, refugees are also those who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of their former usual residence, are unable or, owing to the above mentioned fears, are unwilling to return to it.

possibilities of having an active participation in the civil, political and cultural life of the community (Ager and Strang 2008; Valtonen 2008).<sup>2</sup>

Portugal and Finland exemplify the strains and attainments that accompany the transposition of the EU's general policy frames. Coupled with this main aim, two further objectives are to be pin-pointed: (i) analyse how a rather-common legal framework prompted by the EU, and a quite similar openness to refugees' resettlement and relocation, become materialised through national and local protection mechanisms; and (ii) how does the organizational structure contribute to safeguarding the fundamental rights of refugees. Following this perspective, we also analyse how the framing of national law contemplates this dimension of rights, and to what extent the services and intervention devices allow the warranting of those very same legal and policy architectures. The comparison between Portugal and Finland allows an overview of how each country's policy frames and directives, related to different systems of welfare state, the Nordic and the Mediterranean (Alves 2015), become translated into structured measures, and services and intervention devices, or, as Wedel *et al.* (2005: 35) put it, it is about "understanding how policy functions in the shaping of society".

In the following sections, after addressing the EU's policy framing and response to the refugee issue, will be presented an overview of refugee movements in Portugal and in Finland in the last decades using content analysis of policy documents as main methodological approach. The same sources will be used to develop an outline of the Portuguese and Finnish systems of migrant settlement, including a comprehensive examination of each country's present-day integration devices and the corresponding policy, legal frameworks, and national strategies. Afterwards, drawing on the

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<sup>2</sup> According to the UNHCR (2011), the concept of resettlement applies to the situations when refugees are transferred from outside the EU in co-operation with that UN structure. As such, under the UNHCR, resettlement is not the best concept to address the settlement of refugees within the frame of the EU's Relocation Programme.

comparative data advanced in the previous sections, a general discussion and critical appraisal of the current policy frames, and their transposition into statutory frames and intervention devices, will be developed.

To that purpose, the notion of integration, in spite of being a contested concept, becomes an important dimension of analysis. Traditionally, scholars have defined integration as a process of acculturation to a new society (Berry 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Lately, integration is understood in connection to the holistic wellbeing of migrants as autonomous agents (Sotkasiira 2018). As such, it is related, for example, to gender, class, religion, education (Nordberg 2015), transnational networks (Levitt 2009) and power relations (Peltola 2014). In policy programmes, integration is a key objective and is often connected to housing, employment, education, language training, health and other rights (Ager and Strang 2008). And it is predominantly from this perspective that we consider it here.

## **2. EU's policy and response to refugees' protection needs**

In the last years, the issues regarding the settlement of refugees have defied the world to provide a solution to an ever growing humanitarian problem. In face of the magnitude of the situation, the United Nations (UN) called for global action, demanding that combined efforts were made to distribute the refugees in different countries. Dealing swiftly with what was often presented as a *crisis* (Carrera et al 2015; Padilla and Goldberg 2017) was imperative, not just because of the inherent human suffering, social commotion, and the loss of lives (Brian and Laczko 2014), but also to alleviate the escalating pressure that was being put on the border areas where the refugees converged. Thus, this so-called *refugee crisis* presented an enormous challenge to EU policy framing, and to its capacity to articulate responses and to coordinate multi-national resources and structures (Carrera *et al.* 2015; Hassel and Wagner 2017). It was also, arguably, a

challenge to the EU's ability to build a needed cosmopolitan Europe (Beck and Grande 2007) and stand as a sound political post-national project when the Union is under attack by nationalist claims and xenophobic politics.

To face the social urgency presented by the refugee phenomenon across the world, the EU has a resettlement scheme under the scope of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and, simultaneously, an emergency relocation programme, which was officially in operation between September 2015 and September 2017. The first involves the “transfer of individual displaced persons in clear need of international protection, on request of the UNHCR, from a third country to a member state, in agreement with the latter” (European Commission 2015: 33). The second is a more recent policy initiative, and an exclusively EU-based response to the current refugee issue in the Mediterranean and South-Eastern EU regions. In parallel with political efforts to deal with the structural causes of refugee displacements mainly after the Syrian conflict, which we will not address here, the EU has been producing a relocation policy plan for the refugees remaining in camps following a quota system decided at the top-level. This solution was not welcomed in the same way by all sovereign states, meeting open resistance from some right-wing conservative governments and the acrimony of considerable sectors of the population. Thus, the EU policy concerning refugee resettlement has been steered towards the enforcement of a common solidarity and integration agenda, and, simultaneously, driven by the voluntary compromise of some of the member states.

The framework of this EU policy is the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), in progress and construction since 1999, being that until 2005 (first phase of CEAS) structuring legal provisions were established with the main purpose of equalise and harmonise the legislation of the different member states through common minimum

standards (Parusel 2015; Raithel 2016). After a period of broad reflection, debate and public consultation on new strategies to adopt, the European Commission's Policy Plan on Asylum was established, proposing three major pillars for the development of the CEAS: "better and more harmonised standards of protection through further alignment of Member States' asylum laws; effective and well-supported practical cooperation; and a higher degree of solidarity and responsibility among the Member States, as well as between the EU and third countries" (European Commission, 2008: 4). Based on these pillars, the CEAS has made the original versions of the minimum standards more solid, precise and comprehensive, reviewing its five key components, which were renamed: the revised Asylum Procedures Directive; the revised Reception Conditions Directive, the revised Qualification Directive; the revised Dublin Regulation; the revised EURODAC Regulation (European Commission 2014; Raithel 2016). In an attempt to examine the results of the CEAS, Parusel (2015) concludes that, despite some unresolved challenges, some fragile progress has been made in two fundamental purposes: "solidarity" (more uniform distribution of refugees by member states) and "fairness" (harmonization of national decision-making in asylum issues). The presentation of the refugee's settlement system in Portugal and Finland will allow us to see that the trends of equalization and solidarity, induced by the common European framework, coexist with relevant national heterogeneities.

### **3. Refugee reception, getting asylum and integration in Portugal**

The welcoming of refugees in Portugal dates back to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a considerable number of individuals and families, especially Jewish, sought shelter during World War II (Pimentel 2008). In spite of this early contact with the phenomenon, the gradual development of a structured process of refugee settlement only took form after the establishment of democracy in 1974. However, and particularly considering the

situation of other countries, in the last four decades the number of asylum seekers in Portugal has been considerably low, with an annual average of about 400 (Sousa and Costa 2016). Within the EU scenario, the number of asylum seekers in Portugal, until very recently, persisted as a relatively residual phenomenon.

In 2007, in the frame of the UNHCR, the country expressed a willingness to initiate a resettlement operational plan to accept a minimum of 30 refugees per year, giving priority to women, persons in need of urgent legal and physical protection, unaccompanied minors, and victims of violence (UNHCR 2011). Formally, the resettlement selection process started with submissions made by the UNHCR, and the reception of refugees arriving in Portugal was managed by the Portuguese Refugee Council (CPR), assuring adequate social responses in the domains of health, housing, employment, and language learning and vocational training.

In total, from 1974 to 2015, the Portuguese authorities granted residence to 1605 persons: 864 for humanitarian reasons and 741 with refugee status (Sousa and Costa 2016). This scenario changed substantially after 2015. In that year alone 872 requests were made and, from September 2015 until November 2017, Portugal hosted 1520 individuals under the EU's relocation: 1190 coming from Greek camps and 330 from Italy (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, ACM 2018). Most of these were Syrian and Eritrean citizens. On 24 February 2018, the Portuguese government announced a new Volunteer Relocation Programme run by the UNHCR in articulation with the European Commission, replacing the former relocation programme and pledging to receive 1010 refugees until 2019 (LUSA 2018).

In spite of the vigorous political and social response put in place by the EU, and the eagerness demonstrated by the Portuguese government to welcome refugees, there is still a lack of reliable and detailed demographic data on the flows of refugees, which



might be explained, in part, by the feeble information systems at the Portuguese and European levels. However, the existing available data shows that this contingent of refugees is predominantly comprised of families, mostly from Syria, and male individuals (aged between 25 and 40) originating particularly from Eritrea, escaping from the dictatorship and the severe conditions of military recruitment (Neves 2017).

With regard to the reception and integration of these populations in the national territory, the Portuguese authorities have shown a clear concern to ensure a relatively uniform geographical distribution, and also widening this distribution to inland regions where population density is low. In this respect, when the possibility of receiving refugees was overtly assumed by the political agenda and public debate around the issue grew, in 2015, the Portuguese Prime Minister, António Costa, argued that Portugal should look at refugees, not as a hazard or a liability, but as an opportunity for territorial development, contributing to counter the shortfall of human capital in certain sectors of economic activity, such as agriculture and forestry, and, also, to contribute to fighting demographic decline and human desertification (Figueiredo 2015). This instrumental and utilitarian perspective was later criticised by experts. Then, the Deputy Minister, Eduardo Cabrita, presented a different justification for the strategy of territorial dispersion of refugees in Portugal based on the argument that it would avoid the creation of ghettos (*sic*) (interview in *Rádio Renascença*, 04/10/2016). It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the results of such a strategy. Nevertheless, it is a point of particular interest that, so far, there have not been any reports of tensions and conflicts involving refugees and the local population. In part, this can be explained by the fact that public opinion in Portugal has been relatively favourable of receiving refugees, according to a study by the NGO International Rescue Committee (IRC 2016).

Despite this rather general openness of Portuguese society to the welcoming of refugees and the irrelevance of the scaremongering of xenophobic political movements, the number of individuals that leave the country shortly after arrival is quite significant: roughly two out of five (41.4%), according to the Portuguese government (LUSA 2017; Padilla and Goldberg 2017). The destinations (e.g. Germany, Nordic countries) are the countries where they have family and friends, which they perceive as locations for a better life. In some cases, this mobility involves minors.

Mainly due to the low volume of refugees who were arriving in Portugal until 2015 there has not been a significant investment in implementing a wide, sustainable, and engaging resettlement programme, and the CPR (located in Lisbon) had to assume most of the responsibilities of management/mediation of the social responses to refugees. Despite the absence of a solid operational hosting structure, Portugal demonstrates a political position clearly in favour of continuing to receive refugees within the framework of the earlier 2007 resettlement agreements. The Portuguese government seems to understand this as an ethical imperative, seeking a demarcation from the resistance shown by other member states and, somehow, rescuing the historical notion of a Portuguese open, multicultural, and cosmopolitan identity<sup>3</sup>. This commitment has been accompanied by a concrete political standing. At the beginning 2016, for example, the Portuguese government expressed to the EU its intention of receiving an additional 5800 refugees beyond the established quota (4486) under the EU 2015 relocation programme (Government of the Portuguese Republic 2016).

The Portuguese system of refugees' settlement is regulated by the law n.º 27/2008, of 30 June – granting asylum or subsidiary protection – updated by the law n.º 26/2014,

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<sup>3</sup> Padilla and Goldberg (2017: 24-25) critically emphasize that “Portuguese marketing privileges the form rather than the content, which is manifested, among other aspects, in the little real information about the phenomenon that reaches the citizens, constituting a thematic vacuum, including in what concerns the performance and evaluation of the entities involved”.

of May 5. This last one transposes into the national legal order more recent EU directives, in particular: the directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament (EP) and of the Council of 13 December 2011, on the conditions to be met by third-country nationals to benefit from protection and asylum; the directive 2013/32/EU, of the EP and of the Council of 26 June 2013, on the common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection status; and the directive 2013/33/EU of the EP and of the Council of 26 June 2013, defining the fundamental standards for the processes of refugees' settlement (Diário da República 2014: 2606-2637). Under the Portuguese legal framework, refugees are granted a residence permit for a period of five years, which can be renewed for equal periods of time. Their rights include freedom of movement in the country, legal advice, housing, access to social integration programmes, health care in the national health care service, Social Security, access to education, vocational training and support for labour insertion.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MNE), through the Consular Affairs and Portuguese Communities (DGACCP), organises the first procedures under the agreement of the EU relocation programme of 2015. The Ministry of Internal Administration (MAI), through the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF), assumes the responsibility of putting into action the asylum policy, as well as ensuring the bureaucratic formalities related to the process of the arrival of refugees to Portugal and the granting of residence permits. In order to ensure the refugees' statutory rights, the settlement process and the initial social intervention outreach frame befall under the realm of the High Commissioner for Migration (ACM). In 2016, the ACM reconfigured some services (e.g. its national and local centers for supporting the integration of migrants) and created the Support Center for Refugee Integration (Núcleo de Apoio à Integração de Refugiados, NAIR). These were thought to enable a greater proximity of social responses and appropriateness in

attending to the needs of refugees (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações 2016). Following the proceedings of the European Agenda on Migration Task Force, a National Plan for the Reception and Integration of Relocated Refugee Persons was devised with the objective of allowing a swift response and fostering the social integration of the individuals (Sacramento and Silva 2018). In this process, integration was understood as inherently associated with access to housing, healthcare, education, learning of Portuguese, professional qualification and validation of personal competences, nourishment, labour market, community services, communication and engagement with civil society, legal information and judicial support, translation services (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações 2017).

In addition to the public sector, there are civil society organizations with whom the Portuguese state establishes a formal agreement for the settlement and social integration of refugees. The two main nationwide “umbrella-NGOs” with whom the Portuguese government established collaboration agreements are the Portuguese Council for Refugees (CPR), an organization representative of the UNHCR in Portugal since 1998, and the Refugee Support Platform (PAR). In the context of the serious humanitarian emergency in the Mediterranean, this platform was created in 2015 through the articulation of diverse civil society organizations, especially the CPR, UNICEF, and several Catholic bodies. The PAR complements the action of the CPR, directing interventions to support refugees outside the European perimeter, especially in Greece (PAR Frontline – Athens and Lesbos) and the settlement of families and children in Portugal (PAR Families). Both NGOs act as institutional links between the national government and the local entities providing integration services. Thus, these NGOs work with a vast number of municipalities or civil society organizations throughout the country, responding to the previously referenced political intention of distributing refugees across

the territory. The CPR, besides running a foster home for refugee children (CACR) and a reception centres for Refugees (CAR) in the vicinities of Lisbon, develops a reception and integration programme in correspondence, mainly, with municipalities, in the inland rural areas as well as in littoral urban centres. The PAR's main local partners are the religious brotherhoods (*Misericórdias*) scattered throughout the country. These partners of the CPR and PAR work, at the local level, with several other local institutions (public, private, and associative), either informally or within the framework of collaboration protocols already in place.

In face of the absence of integrated policies, organizational models, or procedural protocols to guide the reception and integration process, the local entities end up performing most of the outreach work (in health, education, language learning, professional training, employment, housing) to assure the adequate integration of refugees. These local services are the most heavily burdened with the need to implement social responses to these new service users. Although collaboration can be seen between the staff of the CPR and the PAR (which also make periodic visits to the local sites of reception), these two NGOs (and central government even more so) have difficulties ensuring a permanent and close-range monitoring of the process at the local level (Carvalho 2017). Henceforth, the municipalities, the *Misericórdias*, and all the other local agents responsible for the local settlement of refugees, are often confronted with the need to develop their technical solutions or improvise arrangements in order to cope with the impending intervention challenges. Often, when confronted with these new coming groups and families, practitioners tend to deploy the ordinary intervention procedures used with their usual service users which are based primarily on assistance-related tasks like directing and accompanying people to health-care, school and housing services (Challinor 2018). The issue, here, is not that these services and this kind of intervention

are not important. They are, indeed. However, a more structural work is either absent or hindered by local conjunctural (settlement in territories with less economic dynamics and job opportunities and with scarce resources and competent structures to provide language learning in articulation with labour insertion, not forgetting the conditions to exercise religious practice) or policy reasons (the already mentioned lack of a well-designed system able to integrate language training, schooling, recognition of habilitations and socio-labour integration, for example).

Combined or separate, these dimensions end up relating to fundamental rights that need to be recognised and promoted. In short, it means acceding the services and conditions upon which wellbeing and socio-economic inclusion rely. This circumstance shows that it is not enough to have a proper law safeguarding access to fundamental rights, nor is it sufficient to just have a state with a strong political will to grant asylum and welcome refugees. From the “law on the books” to the “law in action” (Nelken 1984) there is quite a significant difference. The same can be said of the distance that separates the will and the political discourse of state authorities from the actual structural conditions that accompany the settlement and integration of refugees. Despite the respectable will of politicians, and the good intentions of the policies in the recognition of fundamental rights, there are still many constraints to the work on the ground (Santinho 2013).

#### **4. Refugee reception, getting asylum and integration in Finland**

In Finland, there are three types of processes to enter the country under international protection: resettlement of refugees (quota refugees), EU relocation programme, and individuals seeking asylum on their own accord. When individuals come to Finland by the EU relocation programme, they are sent to reception centres and they go through a similar process to asylum seekers. Therefore, they do not automatically get a residence permit.

Finland is considered an old resettlement country, since the Finnish government started receiving refugees proposed by the UNHCR back in 1979, having an annual resettlement programme from 1985 onwards. Currently, the refugee quota (quota refugees) is defined in accordance with the Finnish Aliens Act (1152/2010, 90§):

Under the refugee quota, Finland may admit for resettlement persons considered refugees by UNHCR or other aliens in need of international protection. The refugee quota means admitting into the country, in accordance with the grounds confirmed in the State budget for each year, aliens who need international protection and are to be resettled.

Since 2001 the refugee quota has been 750 individuals, according to the annual resettlement programme. Exceptionally, in the years 2014 and 2015, the quota was 1050 due the Syrian conflict (UNHCR 2017) and, according to EU recommendations, Finland has fulfilled the targeted number of resettled refugees (European Commission 2017). Every year, the Finnish parliament decides the size of the refugee quota during its budget negotiations. The Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggest to parliament which nationalities will be given preference and the geographic areas of origin of refugees. The decision of the Finnish government is based on information given to it by the UNHCR, which has gathered evidence about existing resettlement needs from its regional offices. The UNHCR then submits the documents of the prospective refugees to the Finnish Immigration Service (MIGRI), under the Ministry of Interior. Finnish selection missions travel to the countries where refugees are staying and interview those who have applied for resettlement. The aim of the selection interviews is to assess the refugees' need for international protection. Some can be selected without interviews on the basis of UNHCR reports. The data available points to approximately 100 refugees being resettled through this process, covering emergency cases such as, for example, those of individuals suffering from serious health conditions.

Concerning the resettlement of refugees, Finland follows the criteria of resettlement needs assessed by the UNHCR. Therefore, the country is willing to receive individuals that are living under temporary protection by the UNHCR in countries that do not have the capacity or the resolve to provide wider protection. The selection criteria also consider the need to protect survivors of violence and torture, those in need of medical aid, women at risk (widows, single mothers, single women), children, adolescents, and older refugees, as well as family members with relatives in Finland. These criteria are considered to address those in the most vulnerable situations. The MIGRI decides on the basis of interviews and documents which refugees are to be selected to come to Finland under the refugee quota. Before coming to Finland, refugees are offered cultural orientation training provided by a non-governmental organization contracted by MIGRI.

The refugees coming through the resettlement programmes benefit from a more stable/secure situation. The same cannot be said about those who reach Finland outside of this resettlement frame and apply for asylum status, or who come through the EU relocation system. All the asylum applications are investigated on grounds of international protection. If they do not fulfil the criteria of refugee (UNHCR 1951), they may get a residence permit based on the subsidiary protection, on compassionate grounds or as victims of trafficking. Regarding the current situation of asylum seekers, in 2016 MIGRI received 28,208 applications, granting a positive decision to 27% of the applicants. Hence only a quarter of the contingent was granted a residence permit. Asylum applications also include people relocated from Greece (1196 Syrians) and Italy (779 Eritreans), 96% of whom obtained a favourable decision (MIGRI 2017).

Regarding the current circumstances that affect asylum seekers in Finland, a growing tendency to tighten the criteria to award asylum protection should be noted, as



controlling policies tend to prevail. To give an idea of this, in 2016, 21716 decisions for deportations were taken, whereas in 2015 this number was 7524 (Maahanmuuton tunnusluvut 2016). The reason for the drop in the number of asylum grants in Finland is a consequence of some notable amendments to the Finnish Aliens Act, and a clear sign of how policies regarding the safeguarding of people in need of international protection have been receding in the last few years (Wahlbeck 2018). At first, asylum seekers could have a residential permit on the basis of humanitarian protection, but this possibility ended in June 2016. In addition, asylum seekers have a right for legal assistance only if they appeal against the decisions of MIGRI, so they may not know their rights during the time when the asylum application is processed in the first instance, MIGRI. To have a clear picture of these problems, in 2017, Administrative Courts returned 32 % of MIGRI's asylum decisions back the MIGRI for processing the decisions again (Statistics for 2017). Moreover, in case a person cannot be returned to his or her country of origin, they can still attain a residence permit on the basis of temporary protection, which is granted only for one year at a time (Laki ulkomaalaislain muuttamisesta, 332/2016, 89 §). In practice, this is a time just waiting for the sustainable decision to get residency, or at worst, being deported.

If a person has received international protection in Finland it is possible to apply for a residence permit for family members (spouse, child, guardian, and, in some cases, other relatives), thus keeping in line with EU directives concerning family reunifications (2011/95/EU). After July 2016, refugees and asylum seekers who are granted international protection have three months from the time they have been informed of their asylum decision to apply for family reunification on condition that family life predated the applicant's arrival in Finland (MIGRI 2018).<sup>4</sup> These amendments violate seriously

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<sup>4</sup> Another change concerning family reunifications is that granting of a residence permit requires that your income is secure. This income requirement concerns the families whose family member is granted a

the rights of immediately getting their families together in Finland, because it is hard for individuals do have access to jobs that would grant them the necessary income. Quota refugees have a right to family reunification without income requirement (quota refugees), but, in practice, it is often impossible to get a family member to Finland, because family members must visit a Finnish embassy abroad. It is common that they do not have enough money to travel to the city centres, where the diplomatic representations are or they do not have the possibility to acquire a visa to travel to the countries where the nearest Finnish embassy is located.

In the processes of local integration, alongside quota refugees, municipalities (towns or rural municipalities) also include asylum seekers whose residency had been granted (MIGRI 2018). Once the selection process of quota refugees is complete, MIGRI places the refugees directly in municipalities in cooperation with the regional ELY-Centres (Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment).<sup>5</sup> Quota refugees and asylum seekers who had obtained a residence permit have their rights supported under the cover of the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010). In fact, the first Act devoted to the integration of refugees and to the reception of asylum seekers appeared in 1999. The purpose of that initial and comprehensive Act was “to support and promote integration and make it easier for immigrants to play an active role in Finnish society. The Act aims also promoting gender equality and non-discrimination and positive interaction between different population groups” (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 1386/2010). This means that integration is a two-way process of mutual transformation in which society changes as the population becomes more diverse and the immigrant acquires the knowledge and

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residence permit on the basis of subsidiary protection or temporary protection. In practice, the income requirement means that a person must have a sufficient income to fund his or her family’s stay in Finland.  
<sup>5</sup> In practice, each ELY-center negotiates with the municipalities in its region if they have a political will to receive refugees in the municipality.

skills needed in society and working life. Social empowerment is an important principle of the Act, which means “measures targeting immigrants that are aimed at improving their life skills and at preventing social exclusion” (*idem*).

In general, public authorities are brought together in order to provide guidance and advice concerning the measures and services related to the promotion of social integration and working life. Multi-sectorial cooperation is highlighted in the Act, which means cooperation between authorities in different sectors and other parties is recognised as a key component of the integration process. So-called stakeholder integration is very much desirable, as this means reinforcing co-operation between all the stakeholders at the local level (Valtonen 2008). Also, the role of the local communities and migrant associations is essential to pursue the desired integration after resettlement. Relations are built based on information sharing, assisting in building everyday life, and being available when it is needed. These associations also build a bridge between the public authorities and societal activities, enabling the agency of the newcomers in a new society.

In principle, all migrants (including refugees and recognised asylum seekers) have a right to an integration plan if they are unemployed jobseekers, a condition necessarily extended to quota refugees and asylum seekers who get a residence permit. The maximum period entitling them to an integration plan is, however, three years from the signing of the first integration plan:

The period (...) may be extended by a maximum of two years, if there are grounds for doing so, because the immigrant needs special integration measures. If the implementation of the integration plan has been temporarily prevented on account of disability, illness or maternity, paternity or parental leave, or for other similar reasons, the maximum period entitling the immigrant to an integration plan may be correspondingly extended (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 1386/2010, 12§).

The central government covers the costs of reception incurred by receiving municipalities in accordance with agreements between the government and the municipalities concerned. The compensation is paid to the municipalities for arranging integration measures. The costs cover the integration allowance, income support for the refugees, expenses resulting from special needs, such as chronic illness, child protection, or disabilities. Also, the refugees' special needs, such as illness, disability, age, family situation, and illiteracy, must be taken into consideration when selecting the measures of integration. According to the agreed terms, the municipalities provide assistance to refugees in the form of housing, social and health care services, education, and cultural and interpretation services. Costs relating to education for resettled refugees are covered by central government on a similar basis as costs for other pupils. Municipalities are also responsible for arranging preparatory education for basic studies for pupils under 16 years of age. The compensation for arranging preparatory education is covered by central government (Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 1386/2010).

The above-mentioned Acts show that the integration of immigrants (including refugees) enables an access to social security, education and language training. In practice, all the larger municipalities have services for reception and integration of refugees. The regional public employment and business services arrange language training and draw the integration plan for those migrants (including refugees), who are between 17-64 years (eligible to work related benefits). Most of the larger municipalities and regions have a long tradition of arranging the above-mentioned services for refugees. However, the rural areas face additional challenges to arrange sufficient services, such as language training and also services for refugees having special needs (e.g. rehabilitation for victims of torture). With the help of EU- and national project funding, local integration services and NGOs have developed methods for language training, services for refugees

having special needs, assistance for working life and promoting stakeholder integration including migrant associations.

### **5. Emerging vs. established reception systems: some critical considerations on the Finnish and Portuguese cases**

Considering the information outlined above, it is quite clear that Finland has a long tradition of resettling refugees from outside the EU. We can also claim that there is reasonable evidence that the process of reception and integration in local municipalities (from the camps or other places where refugees are waiting for a durable solution to be decided) is reasonably well organised. Underlying this process, we can point to the cooperation established by entities like the UNHCR, the IOM, Finnish state (ELY-centres), and local authorities, without forgetting the role of NGOs. Such a role should not be neglected, not just within the operational devices, but also politically. Though the refugee quota is set in law, the size of the quota is decided every year in parliament and these NGOs have an active role in campaigning for the Finnish government to assume a higher level of responsibility towards the reception of refugees. Indeed, while the reception system may be relatively well tuned, the response to refugees is highly dependent on the political divisions at the highest levels, and on the capacity of ruling parties to produce converging arrangements.

In the meantime, the asylum seekers' possibilities for benefiting from protection is becoming weaker in Finland. In 2016, Finland changed its guidances for assessing asylum applications, for example, from Somali, Iraqi, and Afghan nationals. The justification for this change lies, firstly, in the fact that Finland adjusted its legal frames to the European (CEAS) system. Secondly, the above-mentioned countries, or at least certain parts of them, became safe places to return to. Asylum seekers may not agree with that understanding and, therefore, resist the advances of Finnish police officers that are

actively trying to approach people with an impending deportation decision, for example demonstrating by having a hunger strike in Helsinki (Pellander and Horsti 2018). However, there have been signs of disagreement within Finnish society, not only from human rights activists, but also from ordinary people with a raised awareness of the situation of forced returns of rejected asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers' residency precariousness has a vital impact on their integration in the receiving society, especially if they do not have work or study placement. Moreover, the precarious residency or the threat of deportation affects seriously the wellbeing of all family members. This circumstance was particularly observed by Hiitola *et.al.* (2019, forthcoming) in their recent study in Finland, gathering evidence that refugee family members often expressed that they were living only one-day-at-a-time, unable to foresee a positive future.

Labour integration is a decisive aspect of the reception system (Toivonen 2018; Forsander 2013; Valtonen 2004, 2008). In Finland, even though the Act of Promoting Integration (1386/2010) is very much focused on labour market integration, unemployment constitutes an important barrier to the integration of migrants (Koikkalainen *et al.* 2011), with the employment rate covering only 50% of the migrant population. Moreover, the studies (*e.g.* Forsander 2013, 2004) show that the migrants' (including refugees) background has an impact on their chances of getting employed in Finland. Especially in small town refugees have difficulties to get jobs (Turtiainen *et. al.* 2018). In addition, Toivonen *et. al.* (2018) and Wrede and Nordberg (2010) show that people who are over-educated for their job were clearly over-represented among migrants, compared to other sections of the population. For example, refugees express their frustration and depression because of wasted skills and education (Turtiainen *et. al.* 2018). However, there are also

good examples of rural spaces providing relevant services that contribute to keep refugees and other migrants in those areas (Mattila and Björklund 2013).

In spite of the low work employment rate, migrants have a relatively stable position in terms of basic and social rights, with the Finnish government securing the basic rights (Constitution of Finland 731/1999: section 7) of all migrants who are entitled to residency in Finland. Furthermore, migrants are included in the residence-based social security system and as many scholars (*e.g.* Norberg and Wrede 2015) show, the Finnish welfare state has managed to provide income redistribution to refugees and other migrants, though the redistribution of power and knowledge with migrants including refugees remains weak (Norberg and Wrede 2015). This means, for example, that the integration work does not contribute to improve the refugees' and other migrants' wellbeing as critical and autonomous citizens (Hiitola and Peltola 2018; Sotkasiira 2018). As a clear reflection of this circumstance, migrants are not extensively participating in political and societal activities, nor are assuming agency in the planning of services for themselves. Moreover, the intervention focused on integration identifies the needs of migrants, but they end up not having enough tools to solve those very same needs. This is a result of the fact that, in line with the other service provision, the integration work is based on neoliberal demands of governance (*e.g.* not enough workers and time with the service users and real co-operation with refugees and other migrants), mainly fulfilling administrative needs (Turtiainen *et.al.* 2018.) In addition, the integration work often lacks gender focus, only remotely meeting the specific demands of women. For example, Nordberg (2015) shows that Finnish welfare services assign refugee mothers to the private sphere instead of identifying them as active agents in the society.

Refugees and recognised asylum seekers have the right to freely move and choose their place of residence. As it happens with other migrants, there are cases of local

opposition, often stirred by politicians, as Sotkasiira and Haverinen (2016) have shown in the case of local active propaganda against Somalis in Lieksa. This is symptomatic of a process of polarization of public and political opinion concerning, in particular, refugee reception and, in general, the whole migration debate in Finland (Wahlbeck 2018). In the current political atmosphere in Finland, the idea that the welfare state has been associated with nationalism, is clearly presented in the concept of “internal solidarity”, used in the political programme of the leading populist party in Finland, the Finns Party. Suvi Keskinen *et.al.* (Keskinen 2014; Keskinen *et.al.* 2016) calls this link to welfare nationalism, which refers to discourses and ideologies that merge welfare provision with national membership. If anti-immigration positions have been rising over the years and hostility towards migrants in general and refugees in particular has taken advantage of and instigated by nationalist right-wing political movements, it is true that civil stands and activist coalitions on the behalf of refugees have been brewing. In a recent survey conducted by Puustinen *et al.* (2017)<sup>6</sup> on citizens’ views about the asylum seeker situation and ideas for developing activities in the future, the above-mentioned polarization became evident. Amongst the results, we highlight the acknowledgement by respondents, whatever their views on the asylum question, that there was a very strong possibility that refugees could become stigmatised. Moreover, the results show that Finland should invest more in both development aid and better utilisation of the quota refugee system. Likewise, the asylum system should be further developed so that those in need of international protection would be the ones most likely to receive it.

Comparing the Finnish and Portuguese cases, it is evident that in Portugal the Relocation Programme grants refugee status to individuals, whilst in Finland relocated migrants are subjected to subsequent investigation/assessment as asylum seekers by

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<sup>6</sup> The data was gathered in the form of an electronic citizen survey (1047 respondents) and citizens’ forums in five different cities (123 participants).



MIGRI, on whose decision depends the granting of refugee status, subsidiary protection or compassionate grounds. On the other hand, it is clear that Portugal does not hold such a well-run system of integration as Finland. The magnitude of the numbers of refugees welcomed in Finland in the last four decades, and the fact that the system has been integrating this contingent in a consistent manner throughout the years, explains, in part, the difference with Portugal, a country where refugee flows have been more prone to sudden influxes. While the Finland developed a national response system highly dependent on the interconnection between central state entities and municipal services, articulated with NGOs, employment bureau, and civil society entities, in Portugal, the structures devoted to the integration of refugees have been, up until the recent relocation programme, concentrated in the main urban areas, relying heavily on the action of specific agencies and services. Suffice to say that, when it came to broadening the response to a wider territorial frame and involving a more diverse set of institutional and professional agents scattered throughout the country, difficulties emerged.

That said, we argue that we are facing a structural problem that is affecting the possibilities for a stronger welcoming of refugees and for a sustained and enduring integration in Portugal (Sacramento and Silva 2018). If Finland presents evidence of a well-connected system and a capable professional response by practitioners, the fruit of decades of experience and wide investment in research, Portugal, on the other hand, lacks an integrated response system capable of articulating, namely, language teaching and labour introduction, two key-vectors of integration. Beyond these two, other chronic vulnerabilities in important domains can be identified, mainly in rural areas, posing constraints to a more-successful integration, above all, in the realms of health care, vocational training, and sociocultural integration. Also, the majority of third-sector institutions that have responded to the challenge of welcoming and integrating the

refugees coming from the relocation programme, mainly those located outside the major urban settings, display difficulties dealing with culturally diverse people and putting in place planned intervention protocols (Carvalho 2017). A few municipal programme, like the *Guimarães Acolhe* (Guimarães Welcomes), in the northern city of Guimarães or joint municipal/civil society actions like those in Penela, are exceptions.

Our premise is that, in order to resettle refugees properly, it is essential, first of all, that the receiving contexts have an efficient network of institutional support and social protection devices. Having said that, it is fundamental, above all, to have dedicated support services or, to say the least, a service provision that takes into account the refugees' sociocultural background, their life expectations, mutual trust and social esteem, as essential conditions for promoting their agency and citizenship (Turtiainen 2012). Currently, the Portuguese case points to the fact that we are dealing with a rather contingent set of initiatives that depend on the effort, enterprise, and, often, on the creativity of local entities and practitioners. Their intervention is not properly state-framed in terms of resources and social protection devices adjusted to the specific characteristics and situations of refugees, a circumstance also noted by Challinor (2018) in her recent ethnographic study about refugee "hospitality" in Northern Portugal. In Portugal, the migrants' and refugees' organizations are growing, especially in Lisbon, though currently at a grassroots level and with scarce institutional input. The coming together and mobilization of refugee collectives has been induced by projects and academics (from ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute and IGOT-University of Lisbon, for example). Efforts have been made to articulate/communicate these associations with refugees placed in the inland municipalities and gatherings/parties/shows have been hosted in Lisbon. However, the levels of collective mobilization and the grassroots organizations of refugees in Portugal cannot be compared to the case of Finland, as we

have set out previously. If, as the Finnish case reveals, migrants' associations represent an important stakeholder in the process and even device of integration, efforts should be put in place in Portugal by the key institutional entities, front-line practitioners, and also engaged academics, to support the creation and organization of the associative bond amongst refugees. In this process however, it is important that the government does not look upon these organizations as giving them an alibi to pass up on their responsibilities. It is essential that the articulation between statutory and non-statutory is based on a logic of subsidiarity and complementarity.

## **6. Conclusion**

Although having relatively similar legal frameworks ("law in books"), manifesting in both an openness to refugees' settlement and the creation of social protection mechanisms, Portugal and Finland clearly differ on how their laws are translated into structures and procedures ("law in action") regarding the governance of refugees' protection and integration. In Portugal, the state tends to transfer the responsibility for ensuring social responses and articulating the services needed in the reception and integration process to the organizations of civil society and to the municipalities. Relying heavily on local level non-governmental services, the state waves a dismissive response towards providing the structural conditions that could allow local institutions to provide social protection to refugees in key-domains such as education, language learning, training, occupational opportunities, that are recognised by law.

In Finland, the central state administration seems to deal more consistently with the statutory frame and its enforcement through a set of decentralised actions and devices. This is in spite of the alarming signs of a policy retraction from rights-based values, in a certain sense counteracting the "civic turn" noted by Borevi *et al.* (2017) in Nordic migratory policies. The Finnish case appears to reveal a better articulation between what

is written in the law and what is put into practice. The action of the MIGRI and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is elucidative of this, as it seeks to ensure a transversal presence of the Finnish state throughout the whole resettlement process, in all stages: (i) upstream, in the selection process of potential refugees in conjunction with municipalities and state authorities; (ii) in the creation of conditions for individual integration plans and measures for refugees and other migrants; (iii) in the transfer of resources and the creation of structural conditions for local stakeholders, ensuring integration conditions at the local level. Nevertheless, in parallel with a system that works to ensure the safeguarding of rights of refugees through an articulated and integrated series of integration devices, there is a tendency to increase the rigidity of the conditions that allow the obtaining and maintaining of asylum status. The system, in principle, protects those who acquired the status of refugees under the resettlement programme, but the same system has introduced more severe conditions for asylum applicants, restricting their access to rights. In this way, the number of rejected asylum seekers in Finland is growing due to the tightening of protection options.

The comparison between Finland and Portugal is particularly illustrative of the differences regarding the integration of refugees across the whole of the EU. It shows a current state of affairs marked by the absence of an effective common asylum policy and a highly unequal response architecture. This circumstance should not be seen as a surprise, since the settlement of refugees at the European level is a process subject to many uncertainties, and heavily conditioned by ideological moods and shifting interests of EU member states. In face of such shifting ground, very heterogeneous policy guidelines, organizational settings, and settlement experiences tend to persist in Europe. As can be seen from the Finnish example, building and maintaining a serviceable organizational structure, relying on a system capable of articulating central state agencies,

local public entities, and non-governmental bodies, is fundamental to securing a response capable of safeguarding the fundamental rights of refugees. This requirement is particularly relevant when the already-highlighted shifting political moods and rising populist tendencies threaten to erode rights-based policies.

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