Artigo

IMMIGRANTS NEED CITIZENSHIP – THE ROLE OF ALMADA MUNDO ASSOCIATION

OS IMIGRANTES PRECISAM DE CIDADANIA - O PAPEL DA ASSOCIAÇÃO ALMADA MUNDO

DOI: 10.56083/RCV3N6-129
Recebimento do original: 23/05/2023
Aceitação para publicação: 27/06/2023

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ABSTRACT: Migration is a human right enshrined in article 13 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which reads “every human being has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to it” (UN, 1948). The positive effects of migration have recently been highlighted, both for the countries of origin and destination, as well as for the migrants themselves. In 2005, migration was named the central challenge of the century by the United Nations Global Commission on International Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015a). All signatory countries must empower vulnerable groups, recognize the positive contribution of migrants to sustainable growth and inclusive development. In turn, the European Union, in the European Consensus for Development (2017), aligned with that imposing to “Member States to promote dignity and resilience of displaced people and their inclusion in the economic and social life of host countries and communities”. Portugal has already committed itself to developing suitable policies for the social integration of the immigrant...
community, with a focus on culture and language, education and employment, and professional qualification, as stated in the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 12-B/2015. Despite all of the laws in place, the Almada Mundo Association's experience suggests that few people will be able to meet the international and national goals on a local level. In this article, we highlight the constraints being still faced by immigrants residing in Almada accessing citizenship, through the content analysis of their testimonies, taken through semi-structured interviews.

**KEYWORDS:** Migrations, Development, Citizenship, Almada, Social Action.

**RESUMO:** A migração é um direito humano consagrado no artigo 13 da Declaração dos Direitos Humanos das Nações Unidas, que diz que "todo ser humano tem o direito de deixar qualquer país, inclusive o próprio, e a ele regressar" (ONU, 1948). Os efeitos positivos da migração foram destacados recentemente, tanto para os países de origem e destino quanto para os próprios migrantes. Em 2005, a migração foi considerada o principal desafio do século pela Comissão Global das Nações Unidas sobre Migração Internacional e a Agenda 2030 para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ONU, 2015a). Todos os países signatários devem capacitar os grupos vulneráveis e reconhecer a contribuição positiva dos migrantes para o crescimento sustentável e o desenvolvimento inclusivo. Por sua vez, a União Europeia, no Consenso Europeu para o Desenvolvimento (2017), alinhou-se a essa imposição para que "os Estados-Membros promovam a dignidade e a resiliência das pessoas deslocadas e a sua inclusão na vida econômica e social dos países e comunidades de acolhimento". Portugal já se comprometeu a desenvolver políticas adequadas para a integração social da comunidade imigrante, com foco em cultura e língua, educação e emprego e qualificação profissional, conforme consta na Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 12-B/2015. Apesar de todas as leis em vigor, a experiência da Associação Almada Mundo sugere que poucas pessoas serão capazes de cumprir as metas internacionais e nacionais em nível local. Neste artigo, destacamos os constrangimentos que os imigrantes residentes em Almada ainda enfrentam para aceder à cidadania, através da análise de conteúdo dos seus testemunhos, obtidos através de entrevistas semi-estruturadas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Migrações, Desenvolvimento, Cidadania, Almada, Ação Social.
1. Introduction

Migration is a human right enshrined in article 13 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which reads “every human being has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to it” (UN, 1948). But it was only in this century that the international community began to rethink the relationship between migration and development, highlighting the positive effects of migration, both for countries of origin and destination and migrants themselves.

In 2005, migration was named the central challenge of the century by the United Nations Global Commission on International Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015a), which presents a vision for a more just, sustainable, and inclusive world, committing all signatory countries to the empowerment of vulnerable groups, recognizing the positive contribution of migrants to sustainable growth and inclusive development.

In turn, the European Union, in the European Consensus for Development (2017), states that “good management of migration and mobility can make positive contributions to inclusive growth and sustainable development (…) committing the Member States to promote dignity and resilience of displaced people and their inclusion in the economic and social life of host countries and communities”.

However, Portugal, in the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 12-B/2015, had already committed itself to implementing adequate policies for the social integration of the immigrant population, assuming as priorities the areas of culture and language, education, and employment, and professional qualification. There were established options for the Strategic Plan for Migration (2015-2020), which in its turn became the basis of the Municipal Plans for the Integration of Migrants (PMIM).
(AMAI) was a partner of the Almada City Council (CMA) for its PMIMA (2018-2020).

That experience led AMAI to develop projects, always with the conviction that many would still be few to achieve, locally, the objectives defined in international, European, and national instances. In this article, we highlight the constraints faced by immigrants residing in Almada in accessing citizenship, through the content analysis of their testimonies, taken through semi-structured interviews.

First, we start by presenting the concept of citizenship underpinning our work. Secondly, the action of AMAI pertaining migrants will be summarized. And thirdly the exploratory empirical study will be presented.

2. The Issue of Migrants’ Citizenship

By citizenship, in this article, we don’t mean only national citizenship, even though for migrants, national citizenship remains meaningful in their struggle for mobility across borders, according to Leitner and Ehrkamp (2006). However, equal protection under the law and equal access to social and political rights are far more relevant for their daily life, as our study reveals.

Despite the existence of international, national, and local regulations, emigrants struggle daily to have access to the rights assigned to them in the places where they live. As Andreouli and Howarth (2013) stressed, taking the case of British naturalization, the process whereby migrants become citizens is defined by immigration policies that determine migrants’ rights of mobility, but there are common-sense ideas, which are embedded inlay experience, that construct ethnocultural similarity and differences, i.e., citizenship is a building process contextually based.

Ultimately, language is unescapable at both levels, not only as Monforte et al. (2019) discusses, about the «deservingness» of acquiring citizenship.
by performing in language tests in many countries imposed by law, but as our study also highlights it is almost impossible to benefit from social and political rights without mastering the hosting language. And that was the understanding of AMAI since the very beginning of its action.

For AMAI, facilitating access to citizenship for immigrants residing in Almada has always been a priority. Hence, it joined the partnership with the Municipality of Almada to provide Portuguese language classes for foreigners, in 2018, within a program named Almada Acolhe Vamos Falar Português (Almada Welcomes Let's Speak Portuguese). Within this scope, AMAI provided 650 hours of literacy, initiation (A1 and A2), and certification classes to 150 immigrants. Throughout this experience, bonds were established with the immigrant community who came to trust and count on the support of AMAI, consequently, a new project was designed to continue providing support to immigrants. The new project was submitted and approved for financing by the Municipality of Almada, namely the program to support initiatives of the associative movement, with the title Almada a CreSER (Almada Grow(BE)ING) (2019), with the following objectives: (1) getting to know migrants and migrant communities residing in Almada, through an academic process of systematic data collection and analysis, contributing to the effective visibility of this population; (2) sensitizing the host community to the richness of diversity, that is, the awareness that migrants transport to the host territory, knowledge, experiences that stimulate economic, social and cultural development, in a local-global logic and, in this sense, public opinion must be informed, namely, fighting and demystifying stereotypes about migration with facts and scientific data; and (3) integrate the migrant person in the economic, social and cultural context in the municipality of Almada. In pursuit of these objectives, a wide range of activities was carried out throughout the year of the project’s development, in which numerous people and organizations from the county took part, always with the participation of immigrants, among which deserves to be highlighted the
conceptualization of the submitted project for the following year, under the same program, and designated Observatório Liga Almada – OLA (Observatory Connecting Almada). This project was developed throughout the year 2021, seeking to achieve the following objectives: (1) present and dynamize the digital platform previously designed around seven icons (About, Where to find help, Almada in Numbers, Migration in Almada in Science, Training, and Education, Intercultural Avenues and Media); (2) involving the migrant population in the production of content is certainly one of the differentiators of this proposal: a public space for the direct participation of the migrant population; (3) create spaces for interculturality and social activities in support of the migrant population; (4) strengthen collaboration between committed partners (networking); (5) contribute to combating sociocultural stereotypes; (6) contribute to the formation of spaces for citizenship and active participation of migrants; (7) facilitate the integration of migrants into the labor market and the creation of quality employment opportunities for them. The achievement of these goals can be observed on the project's website (https://olalmada.pt/).

Following four years of establishing three projects addressing migrants' difficulties and entrusting the development of the third project – OLA – to a group of immigrants, AMAI decided to interview several immigrants about their integration into the local community as part of that project.

3. Methodology

A semi-structured interview was used to gather information about the respondents' experiences, adaptations, expectations, and plans to determine how well immigrants have integrated into the Almada community (Coutinho, 2008, 2018).

At first, all the respondents were asked if they were interested in getting involved in such type of survey. Those who expressed their interest
were contacted by telephone to provide a brief description of the inquiry and request participation in the research. Having the consent of the respondents, some were interviewed face-to-face by one of the authors of this study and their answers transcript, others gave their responses in writing.

Data were collected by content analysis of both transcriptions and written answers, according to Bardin’s methodology (2011).

3.1 Participants

Almada is the municipality in the district of Setúbal with the largest number of migrants, having already surpassed 9% of the entire population of the municipality (177,400 inhabitants). The largest immigrant community is originally from Brazil and the population that has grown the most recently is the Nepalese community, out of a total of 113 nationalities identified there in 2021.

The subjects participating in this study constitute a sample defined by convenience, i.e., people to whom Almada Mundo easily had access, in the scope of its projects, namely OLA. Thus, nine Nepalese migrants, seven Venezuelans, and two Iranians gave their informed consent to the interview, in a total of 18 people, aged between 76 and 27 years old, but the majority (55.5%) is aged between 30-40 years, with the majority (72.2%) being women and the predominant marital status being married (61.1%), with children, some (two) already born in Portugal.

3.2 Instruments

The semi-structured interview comprised questions categorized into seven different sectors: (1) sociological profile; (2) professional profile; (3) domestic management; (4) family activities; (5) main obstacles; (6) future
planning; (7) dream. Based on these categories it was drawn a matrix to carry on Bardin’s content analysis.

3.3 Ethical issues

All the participants gave their informed consent to the interview, being assured of their anonymity.

3.4 Analysis

All the participants live in a family, except for a Venezuelan man who lives alone. The average length of stay in Almada is three years, some have lived in the municipality for four, others for three, and others for two years. The majority (61.1%) have a university degree, some with a master's and doctorate degree, but among those who have a professional activity (50%), only two work in their training area. All others perform functions below their skills and level of education, such as two lawyers who work in a call center and an engineer at Uber. Given this situation, the overwhelming majority (83.3%) of respondents are not satisfied with their employment situation.

Among the respondents, only six (33.3%) people do not have to share the apartment they live in with other people and/or other households. Thus, except for the man who lives alone in his own apartment and two Nepalese women, who said that their husbands do it, the rest (83.3%) said that the planning of family expenses and the respective payment of these expenses are carried out on a shared basis.

Half of the respondents, nine people, claimed to have a bank account and know how to use the ATM. These people were also the ones who reported carrying out many activities with the family, which are planned together, basically consisting of outings and entertainment. Forum Almada (shopping
center) and Parque da Paz, the largest green space in the city, were identified as the preferred spaces for those interviewed to carry out those activities.

Regarding the biggest obstacles faced by the interviewed immigrants, all mentioned the difficulty of employment and language. Particularly, Venezuelans also referred to the grammar of the Portuguese language. Four of the respondents mentioned health issues, two of chronic origin and two of supervening’s ones.

To the question about who had helped them to overcome the aforementioned obstacles, 10 answered that to learn the Portuguese language, they attended classes at Escola Secundária Cacilhas-Tejo. Those who mentioned health issues indicated the services of the Garcia de Orta Hospital, not only the doctors and nurses but also the social assistance of the hospital, which referred them to the Local Support Center for the Integration of Migrants (CLAIM) in Laranjeiro, with whose support they obtained the necessary documentation to receive health care.

However, one of the Nepalese women regretted that the assistance to her asthmatic mother had not had the expenses covered by the National Health Service as she had not yet obtained a residence permit, although she was already in Portugal, with a work contract and carrying out the respective taxes, for about two years. This is due to the lack of a vacancy for assistance at the Foreigners and Borders Service. As her salary was too low to pay for his mother's health expenses, she benefited from the solidarity of the Nepalese community residing in Almada.

As for the main problems that emigrants face daily, all mentioned again the lack of knowledge or insufficient command of the Portuguese language, finding a job, namely a job consistent with their education and training, renting accommodation, social and health care, issuing and obtaining documents.

Although some (six) respondents said they were not aware of any cases of immigrants in need of help, it was clear that most immigrants residing in
Almada need help in one form or another. So, when asked if they knew of any association that worked with immigrants, everyone said yes, specifically identifying Almada Mundo.

When asked what they would say to anyone who wanted to come to Almada, everyone pointed out the quality of life in the city, namely tranquility, beauty, green spaces suitable for tours and cultural experiences, cleanliness, and proximity to Lisbon, with associations, organizations, and authorities that support migrants and equally mentioned by all respondents, local people being very open and welcoming to migrants.

When asked about their dreams, all answered that they dream of having their own house (apartment or dwelling), seven dreams of having their own profession again, five of having their own business, two of their business continuing to prosper, one revealing her talent for making traditional costumes from her country and the other having a healthy and happy family.

4. Conclusion

Although our sample may be considered non-significant and identified as one of the limitations of our study, the data obtained allow us to state that there is a great distance between the benign intentionality of policies and the concrete living conditions that immigrants they face every day, namely access to the basic rights enshrined in them by law and which recognize their citizenship.

Despite the hope placed in a better life, in a space they consider beautiful, and the warmth of the host community they found in Almada, immigrants resist, nurturing their dreams, but face very harsh living conditions, such as experiencing the affliction of not make themselves understood to a health professional when ill; not having access to paid health services due to limitations of public service, when in fact, they can enjoy all
the benefits, as a contract worker, with their taxes paid on time. Citizenship is exercised in daily practice, but lacking in benefits, due to insufficient functioning of the provident state. The frustration of carrying out daily work that does not mobilize knowledge and skills acquired through academic training and previous professional experience and which is meagerly remunerated, only contributing to subsistence. No wonder many have indicated as their dream to return to their profession.

Fortunately, they find the solidarity of those in equal circumstances and those who see them as an enrichment for the local community. Until when? How long will it take for policies to materialize and for immigrants to enjoy their rights? How long will it take to achieve the deserved and so harshly pursued citizenship? The average stay in Almada of the interviewees is three years, some have lived there for four years, which can be considered few, but only for those who do not have to face the difficulties of daily life.

Thus, this study intended to highlight the need to effectively implement the policies, fulfill the ideals of global citizenship in which migrants play a role of dynamization, enrichment, and truly sustainable development of the real world, which so much needs it, but also that immigrants have their citizenship effected.
References


