

THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION IN CONTEXTS OF INCREASING MIGRATORY DIVERSITY: (MIS)ADJUSTMENTS, ADAPTATIVE PRACTICES AND CREATIVITY IN PORTUGUESE SCHOOLS

Os desafios da educação em contextos de crescente diversidade migratória: (des)ajustamentos, práticas adaptativas e criatividade em escolas portuguesas

Octávio Sacramento^a 

Elizabeth Challinor^b 

Pedro G. Silva^a 

Abstract. We discuss the repercussions of the intensification and heterogeneity of contemporary migrations, especially forced migrations, in compulsory schooling contexts in Portugal. Our objectives are (i) to identify the major educational challenges arising from transnational migration, (ii) to understand how schools, still very much rooted in an educational-pedagogical nationalism, adjust to these challenges and (iii) to understand the practices of educational agents in complex circumstances and subjected to many constraints. We draw on data from qualitative fieldwork that we have been carrying out for seven years on the settlement and integration of migrants in the North and Centre of Portugal. From the analysis of this data, we found that schools have been gradually adapting to the multiple challenges (support, resources, skills and specialised pedagogies) raised by migration. The discretionary capacity, informality, creativity and goodwill of educational agents have been fundamental to this, often compensating for the lack of guidelines and resources.

Keywords: migrations; refugees; school adaptivity; discretion.

Resumo. Debatemos as repercussões da intensificação e heterogeneidade das migrações contemporâneas, sobretudo das migrações forçadas, em contextos de escolaridade obrigatória em Portugal. Os nossos objetivos passam por (i) identificar os grandes desafios educacionais decorrentes das migrações transnacionais, (ii) perceber como as escolas, ainda muito enraizadas num nacionalismo educativo-pedagógico, se ajustam a estes desafios e (iii) compreender as práticas dos agentes educativos em circunstâncias complexas e sujeitas a muitos condicionalismos. Do ponto de vista empírico, partimos de dados resultantes de um trabalho de campo qualitativo que temos vindo a realizar há cerca de sete anos sobre a instalação e integração de imigrantes no Norte e Centro de Portugal. Da análise

^a University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, Centre for Transdisciplinary Development Studies. Vila Real, Portugal.

^b Nova University of Lisbon, Centre for Research in Anthropology. Lisbon, Portugal.

destes dados, constatamos que as escolas têm-se adaptado gradualmente aos múltiplos desafios (apoios, recursos, competências e pedagogias especializadas) suscitados pelas migrações. Para tal, foi fundamental a capacidade discricionária, informalidade, criatividade e boa vontade dos agentes educativos, compensando amiúde a falta de orientações e de recursos.

Palavras-chave: migrações; refugiados; adaptabilidade das escolas; discricionariedade.

1. Introduction

In 2020, there were around 281 million international migrants worldwide, more than double the migrant population in 1990 and three times more than in 1970 (McAuliffe, Triandafyllidou, 2021). The significant increase in migration flows in recent decades is a striking expression of the so-called processes of “late globalisation” (Turcan, 2016) and generates cross-cutting repercussions in the places of departure and destination of immigrants. In destination geographies, schools are one of the institutional contexts where the intensification and heterogeneity of contemporary migrations are most clearly visible, as well as many of the alterities, coexistences, tensions, identity negotiations and (need for) changes associated with the constitution of social spaces of great cultural diversity (Banks, 2009; Hahn, 2020; Sandoval-Hernández *et al.*, 2018; Vassallo, 2021; Veerman, 2015). In fact, “in today’s schools, immigration is the human face of globalisation” (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, 2009, p. 62), and this globalisation in the school context generates varied and sometimes ambivalent effects.

In this article, we look at the school as an institution that characterizes to some degree what Inda (2000, p. 92) refers to as the “post-national zone”: “a space of which the traditional nation-state is not in complete control, meshing together, as it does, various kinds of ‘circulating’ populations with different kinds of ‘locals’”. We thus consider the school context as a privileged place to observe transnationalisms arising from international migration. Our analytical interest is guided by three main articulated objectives: (i) to map some of the challenges, especially organisational and pedagogical, for the education system resulting from cultural diversity and transnationalisms driven by migratory flows; (ii) to understand how schools adjust to these challenges to overcome the limitations arising from the educational and pedagogical nationalism pervasive in formal educational settings; (iii) to understand the role and the informal adaptive practices of educational agents, especially teachers, in relation to the challenges resulting from growing cultural diversity.

The analysis we develop here is supported by original empirical data resulting from a qualitative, spatially, and chronologically extensive fieldwork that we have been carrying out for seven years on the settlement of immigrants in Portugal, paying special attention to refugees in rural and periurban areas (Iaquinta,

Drescher, 2000). In the context of this article, the data collection process has been based on the realisation of semi-directed interviews, a small case study of a school in a town situated 10 km away from the city of Guimarães¹ and, recently, a short-term ethnography in Fundão, a 26.503 inhabitants² municipality in inland Portugal that has registered a strong increase in its immigrant population over the last decade³.

2. Education and migratory diversity

As a social institution of reference, the school should be understood as a truly decisive social space in the process of integrating immigrants and harmonising the growing cultural diversity in many contemporary societies (Ager, Strang, 2008; Akkari, Radhouane, 2022). In addition to its more immediate pedagogical functions, the school can be a place of socialisation, belonging, building cosmopolitan cultural predispositions and socio-emotional support, care and rehabilitation, especially in the case of forced migration (Borsch *et al.*, 2021; Due *et al.*, 2016; Radhouane, 2023; Thommessen, Todd, 2018). Beyond its formative dimension, education should thus create conditions for migrants to participate in the socio-cultural processes of receiving contexts without having to renounce their own cultural identities (Ott, 2011). Integration according to this approach avoids the common neoliberal bias of expecting migrants to adapt to the hegemonic cultural norms of receiving countries (Basu, 2011; Schierup, Ålund, 2011).

In multicultural contexts of great migratory diversity, schools face additional challenges in the fulfilment of their role as providers of curricular training, facilitators of integration and of the construction of cosmopolitan citizenship for which there are not always adequate strategies and/or resources. The main challenges they face include: (i) the rigidity of the education system and lack of resources for the construction of educational projects and pedagogical responses appropriate to the specificities of the students; (ii) the curricular gaps or divergences resulting from the differences between the education systems in the countries of origin and in the host countries; (iii) language barriers, as many immigrant students have limited proficiency in the language of instruction, which conditions their learning and their involvement in the school community; (iv) the academic and pedagogical training of teachers for teaching in multicultural contexts; (v) the possible socio-economic precariousness of immigrant families,

¹ The number of residents in the municipality of Guimarães, according to the 2021 national census, was 156.830 residents. The town where data was collected had 6.304 inhabitants (pordata.pt, accessed on 12-10-2023).

² According to the 2021 national census displayed in the Pordata portal (pordata.pt, accessed on 12-10-2023).

³ The percentage of foreign population holding legal residence status in Fundão grew from 1.3% in 1991 to 5.5% in 2022 according to statistical data compiled in the Pordata portal (pordata.pt, accessed on 12-10-2023).

which will have a negative impact on the pedagogical performance and well-being of students; (vi) the emotional vulnerabilities of those who have experienced traumatic events in their countries of origin or during their migratory transit; (vii) the vagueness and/or delay in clarifying legal status in the host country and finally; (viii) the possible occurrence of situations of school segregation, discrimination, racism and bullying (Biasutti, Concina, 2021; Block *et al.*, 2014; Civitillo, Juang, 2019; Darling-Hammond, Bransford, 2005; Ee, Gándara, 2020; Esteban, 2020; Morrison, Bryan, 2014; Radhouane, 2023).

Education systems and, more particularly, schools recognise and try to adapt to the challenge of building culturally responsive teaching (Ford, Kea, 2009; Powell *et al.*, 2016). In the field, strategies are diverse and focus on different dimensions of the school community. In essence, these strategies range from a structural approach of building an inclusive culture to an everyday pedagogical relational approach in and outside the classroom (Banks, 2016; Basu, 2011; Herzog-Punzenberger *et al.*, 2020; Taylor, Sidhu, 2012). These responses are often subject to multiple tensions and limitations that condition their effectiveness. For example, the tension between attempts to construct an educational project coherent with the safeguarding of rights (including education as a right) and migration policies characterized by uncertainty and securitization (Radhouane, 2023; Sanchez-Mazas *et al.*, 2018). An example of a limitation can be found in the predominance of monocultural educational nationalism in school systems, characterized by “the reassuring standardization and cultural homogenization of individuals and groups into the mould of the national monocultural and often colonizing State” (Akkari, Radhouane, 2022, p. 5).

Due to their direct and daily participation in the social space of the school where tensions between policy provisions and the challenges of multiculturalism are manifest, educational agents, especially teachers, are confronted with a range of dilemmas and uncertainties. They tend to position themselves differently and sometimes ambivalently in the face of these tensions, adopting practices guided by the discretionary power that characterises them as “street level bureaucrats” (Lipsky, 2010). As such, they act not only as agents of mechanical reproduction of policies, but also as agents who informally adjust them and give them practical meaning according to the concrete situations they face (Brodkin, 2016; Caria, Sacramento, 2022).

Thus, although they act on behalf of and in response to policies, teachers and other actors with direct intervention in educational-pedagogical processes may go far beyond their official duties (Dovigo, 2019; Kaukko *et al.*, 2022; Radhouane, 2023), constituting themselves as creative agents of resistance, complementarity, rectification and even engage in repairing the State and its policies (Masood, Nisar, 2022). In certain situations, they may be in clear dissonance with the normative guidelines that regulate their practices or creatively improvise responses in a

scenario of state resignation and resource scarcity. In other situations, they may simply adjust policy guidelines more or less closely to the particularities of the contexts in which they operate. Regardless of the advantages or possible perverse effects, this contingency and discretionary nature of the actions of educational agents is, in general, an inevitability arising from the educational system itself, “a system that was not necessarily prepared to accommodate students with a different profile, with a difficult migratory background, and with extremely diverse educational needs” (Radhouane, 2023, p. 160). In Portugal, the flexibility of schools to make local adjustments in an educational system that is still culturally very standardised is a fairly recurrent situation, as exemplified in the research carried out by Fonseca *et al.* (2021).

3. Methods, contexts, and time frame

During the past seven years we have been carrying out research on the reception and integration of refugees in Portugal, focusing and collecting data in peri-urban and rural contexts in the districts of Viana do Castelo, Braga, Porto, Vila Real, Aveiro, Coimbra, Viseu, Setúbal and Castelo Branco. The attention was mainly directed to accompanying and comprehending the processes of refugee dispersal outside the larger urban centres of Lisbon and Oporto that have historically functioned as the key areas of asylum seekers’ placement in Portugal (Sacramento *et al.*, 2022). Following the post-2016 national response to the *refuge crisis* (Sacramento *et al.*, 2020a), the research adopts a diachronic multi-sited and multilevel approach, focusing in particular on the relocation and resettlement programmes and the cases of spontaneous asylum claimants. For the present article, most of the empirical data derives from two geographical areas: the municipalities of Fundão (district of Castelo Branco) and Guimarães (district of Braga).

The municipality of Fundão has been developing, in the past 10 years, an intensive work to attract new residents to this region menaced by depopulation, demographic ageing and loss of human capital. Incentives to entrepreneurial action and endogenous resources promotion have been accompanied by an integrated system of reception of migrants, foreign and national, including individuals and families benefiting from international protection. During May 2023, a total of 19 semi-structured interviews were collected with staff from the following institutions: the municipal agency created to manage the reception and integration of migrants, staff from local agencies responsible for delivering social and residential support, staff from the municipal enterprise incubator, a social worker hired by a pharmacy group and charged with corporate social responsibility actions, the mayor’s chief of staff, the directors of two school groupings, one elementary school teacher, the director of a vocational school, the municipal social services’ and migrants’ office director and one of its technical staff, the person in charge of the reception

of international workers at a multinational IT company, the director of the local public primary health care services facility, a socio-cultural animator and a social worker responsible for a school integration programme for migrants. Besides these interviews, two interviews were conducted with migrants from India and Brazil and informal conversations were held while conducting participant observation in the schools, including assisting classes of Portuguese non-maternal language, local community gatherings, festivities, and interacting with migrants in leisure moments outdoors (e.g. public park).

The analysis of a case in Guimarães draws on ethnographic data collected within the ambit of a national interdisciplinary research project on refugee integration in Portugal from May 2019 to March 2022⁴. This case constituted a rare opportunity in the research in which both the school and a family were interviewed in separate occasions and participant observation was possible in a classroom, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges that arose. In two visits to the family, informal interviews were conducted with the help of a translator – another refugee who was able to translate from Arabic to English. A semi-structured interview with the president and a social worker from the local NGO in charge of hosting the family was also conducted. Two separate informal interviews with two teachers responsible for the integration of refugees in the school were conducted, complemented with one day of participant observation in the classroom.

The article draws on the data gathered in the above-mentioned research, focusing particularly on the processes of enrolment in the formal educational system in all levels of mandatory schooling (up to the 12th year of Secondary Education)⁵. The chronological and territorial extension and the multi-level perspective facilitated the studying of policy dispositions and reception responses to refugees in Portugal after 2016. The government's initial emergency response to the refugee crisis, allocating the responsibility of hosting new-coming refugees to civil society and municipalities (Sacramento *et al.*, 2020a, 2020b), has, in our view, evolved over time. Our research testifies to the evolution of these responses, at least in some localities, from early unpreparedness and creativity to the development of adaptative integrated local systems of reception and integration.

4. Schools navigating through (in)formality and goodwill

Informality, *goodwill* and the creative conception or adaptation of intervention resources marked refugee reception in Portugal, most notably

⁴ Research project PTDC/FER - ETC/30378/2017 (PI Gabriele De Angelis).

⁵ In Portugal, before the optional higher education levels, the mandatory school system has two main levels, Basic and Secondary Education. Basic Education starts when students reach six years of age and lasts for nine years, until students reach the 9th grade. Secondary education lasts for three years, starting with the 10th grade and finishing with the 12th grade, when students are 18 years old.

in the earliest moments when the country accepted the EU's challenge of receiving larger numbers of refugees after 2016, as we observed from the start of our research activities. *Goodwill*, especially at the beginning, associated to the technical unpreparedness of the local institutional and professional stakeholders, fed informality and discretionary intervention. The reception of refugee children in the formal school system was not totally immune to this approach. The frailties of educational response loomed large since the earliest days of Portugal's implementation of the EU's Relocation Programme, as a social worker from a local NGO receiving refugees for the first time commented. The NGO was handling the teaching of Portuguese as a non-maternal language for two Syrian children whose school had not found a solution: "A voluntary nurse met twice a week for one hour to teach them the basics of Portuguese" (social worker, NGO, Vila Real, 2017).

This example reveals how the system was caught unprepared and, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, how services and practitioners often resourced to patching and informal solutions to deal with refugee hosting issues (Silva, Sacramento, 2020). In the years that followed, the capacity and processes of the response of municipal structures, civil society and state entities developed to a point where the initial inconsistencies and shortcomings in refugee reception were mitigated (Sacramento *et al.*, 2022).

Schools and the role formal education plays in refugee hosting may be examined in terms of four policy key-dimensions: school reception; recognition of previous school qualifications, non-maternal language acquisition and school governance (Radhouane, 2023). School placement represents a fundamental moment in the refugee hosting process. It allows for the fulfilling of a basic social right and provides a doorway to wider social inclusion and participation, not just for the children, but also for their family members (Pastoor, 2017). Beyond the primary social institutional goal of guaranteeing knowledge acquisition and qualification, school is a place of socialisation (Borsch *et al.*, 2021) that holds the capacity to support processes of rehabilitation (Pastoor, 2017). Other than contributing towards providing initial language acquisition, competences and knowledge, schools are to provide culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) and work as a cornerstone of intercultural mediation.

The basic and secondary schools in Fundão – a municipality located in the Portuguese inland that has been developing over the past decade an integrated system to attract and fix migrants – have been offering a series of projects of intercultural mediation and awareness raising. A good example of such is the project led by a social worker in a local school, in articulation with the municipal Centre for Migrations, entitled *Welcome to School*. The project provides individual support for migrants since their first contact with the school environment (refugees included). Initially, the project seeks to fulfil the immediate psycho-social and

material needs of the students, followed by class capacitation sessions based on group dynamics, also involving non-foreign students. The project also involves the creation of informal interethnic groups of students that meet twice a month to develop recreational activities in and outside the school setting (cinema, hiking, sports). According to the project leader and the school administration, this project has been fostering interculturality, promoting the integration of migrant students and enhancing their academic performance. The project facilitates what many authors claim schools should grant to immigrant and refugee reception: a sense of belonging (Due *et al.*, 2016) and a contribution to the construction of cosmopolitan cultural predispositions (Borsch *et al.*, 2021).

Migrants and refugees were not the only social groups that faced obstacles to their social inclusion in schools. The case of a Syrian couple who had three children of school age, hosted in 2017 in a town in the vicinities of Guimarães by a religious order, interviewed in 2020, illustrates how “the ‘otherness’ and ‘vulnerability’ of refugee children are produced and manufactured by the same system that produces disadvantaged children at the domestic (national) level” (Shuayb, Crul, 2020, p. 4). In the words of one of the hosting institution staff interviewed who had liaised with the school:

At the beginning the school did not want to accept them [refugee children]. There was a lot of xenophobia. Where are we going to put them? And they always wanted to place them with the gypsies [sic]... But in Portugal it's like that: the disabled are also integrated into the school, but then the school makes a class for the disabled. So, there is no integration. They say the school is inclusive, but it is exclusive. It was a class that had gypsies [sic], Romanians, Brazilians, the stateless class.

The group interview, conducted with the hosting institution staff directly involved with the family, elucidates how establishing informal mechanisms for building trust with the schools contributed to improving relations over time. By the time the institution hosted a third family of refugees, the schools were far more receptive, as one of the interviewees noted: “There was a lot of prejudice on the part of the teachers at first, but then, that was dismantled... now, they know us, they already have our personal contacts. That's also important, breaking that ice to achieve our goals”. Nevertheless, as another interviewee pointed out, the hosting institution still faced issues related to the specific circumstances of refugees, discussed above, for which there were no automatic responses. These included the recognition of school diplomas and what trade-offs to make in the attempt to meet both children's educational and psychosocial needs (Pastoor, 2017).

Although initially there were no government guidelines or pedagogical orientations for the concerns raised above, the Portuguese government did issue, in March 2016, a circular letter authorizing extraordinary educational measures which allowed schools to make case-by-case decisions⁶. Later, in 2020, the

⁶ <<https://www.dge.mec.pt>>.

government issued a handbook with guidelines on how to host refugee children (DGE, 2020), although it was not referred to in any of the interviews conducted in Fundão or Guimarães, which illustrates the implementation gap between policies and practices.

Language acquisition has been signalled in the literature as a pivotal dimension of refugee reception and an important requisite of socio-labour insertion (Condé *et al.*, 2019; Radhouane, 2023). As recognized by the director of the school grouping in Fundão, knowledge of the Portuguese language is the first obstacle foreign students face once they enter school. Providing initial Portuguese classes as a non-maternal language hence becomes a major feature of the school's pedagogical and social inclusive mission. If acquiring Portuguese language skills represents a considerable challenge to refugee children and adults, the task of the schools providing classes also becomes a challenge. Unlike the situation seven years ago, when the increase in refugee numbers admitted in Portugal caught the majority of the schools and hosting agencies unprepared and often led to improvised solutions regarding the teaching of Portuguese (Silva, Sacramento, 2020; Sacramento *et al.*, 2020b), in recent years measures have been taken to provide resources. These are more visible in the form of didactic materials and internet learning platforms.

A basic school board director from Fundão claimed that there are presently more didactic materials available, especially in the form of teaching manuals for all school levels. The same interviewee stated that, besides having more diversity of materials, schools and teachers, at least in their case, adapt and adjust the didactic resources, particularly teaching manuals. However, the main obstacle schools face concerning teaching Portuguese as a non-maternal language is structural, namely, hiring specialized teaching staff. For the above-mentioned school board director, the difficulties in hiring a full-time teacher to provide Portuguese language classes to foreign students have been weakening the school's response to the new-coming students. The fact that his school is located in a peripheral part of the country, facing a considerable loss of human capital, at least in comparison to the largest urban and industrial centres, renders the hiring of full-time professionalized teachers more difficult.

Faced with the same problem, another school grouping in the municipality of Fundão changed its strategy to hire Portuguese non-maternal language teachers by widening the call to those who did not hold the required professional qualification. This enabled the schools to hire other degree holders with sufficient habilitation (considering the national standards defined by the Ministry of Education). This case elucidates the importance local school autonomy may have to overcome structural problems. However, it also raises questions about the risks decisions like these may incur, particularly regarding pedagogical capacity. Nevertheless, the school board director argued that hiring teachers with other qualifications and

specialisations allowed for a widening of the profile of the educators, increasing the school's capacity for intercultural sensitivity. This premise and the option taken by the school grouping is consistent with the notion that the role of non-maternal language teachers should be more than just a formative one, i.e., they should function also as cultural mediators, involved in the overall processes of social and educational insertion, in the school and outside its premises (Kaukko *et al.*, 2021).

School governance and its influence on the capacity of formal educational institutions to respond to refugee reception challenges have been discussed by several authors (Block *et al.*, 2014; Papazian-Zohrabian *et al.*, 2018; Radhouane, 2023; Sanchez-Mazas *et al.*, 2018). As a way to avoid organizational isolation, we argue that school governance should also foster the articulation of educational institutions with other entities, either located at the level of central political decision-making or at the local level. Working in coordination with structures that operate in migrant reception, particularly at the municipal level, is vital to align the school's response with a local reception system to improve access to available resources and, at the same time, to grant resources to other agents operating in the territory. This is the case of the Centre for Migrations in Fundão (the municipal-run agency that coordinates the hosting of migrants, asylum seekers included) that works with the two school groupings amongst other entities. According to the board directors of the schools and the coordinator of the Centre for Migrations, this close articulation has contributed to a more agile handling of incoming migrant students and a better capacity to develop integrated educational and social responses. It has also allowed schools to have access to resources. For example, due to delays in teacher hiring or sudden lack of teaching staff, the Centre for Migrations serves as a resource hub, facilitating the provision of temporary resources.

4.1. Refugees and teachers searching for solutions

This sub-section examines the decision-making processes inside a school in a small town in the vicinity of the city of Guimarães, which in September 2019 received four Syrian students⁷ from the same family. It illustrates how concerns with the timetable need to be articulated with the family dynamics of the students. The data analyzed derives from two visits (June 2019) to the home of the family; two interviews (January and November 2020) conducted with the board teacher in the school and participant observation (February 2020) in one of the classes.

The father of the family had two wives, one of which he had left behind in Syria when he arrived in Portugal in October 2016, with his other wife who was pregnant and their three-year-old child. The birth of two babies and family reunification of older children eventually increased the family size to ten. In September 2019, the mother's own two teenage daughters from another

⁷ All names have been changed or adapted to safeguard anonymity.

relationship started school together with their half siblings, Mohammed (12 years old) and Rajab (15 years old). With ages ranging from twelve to fifteen years old, the school's decision of which classes to place them in had to consider the organizational and pedagogical challenges of integrating students of diverse backgrounds. First, there was the issue of language proficiency and the children only spoke Arabic. However, given that there were no intensive language learning classes available, the offer of Portuguese classes had to be integrated into a regular school timetable. This raised another challenge: how to reconcile pedagogical objectives with the social and emotional wellbeing of the students. To facilitate their learning of Portuguese, the mother had expressed the desire that the younger children be placed in the first grade. However, if language were to be the sole criterion for choosing the grade, then as Maria, the teacher responsible for their integration explained, all four of the students should be placed in grade one. The problem here, she went on to discuss, was that the teaching methods for a six-year-old would be inappropriate for students of their age. This option was consequently ruled out.

Aware that the school lacked resources to adapt and synchronize three separate timetables, it calculated an average of the students' ages and placed them together in the sixth grade. This choice was justified because it had more practical disciplines (such as musical education, visual and physical education). To resolve the issue of learning Portuguese, the school drew on its wider network. While the rest of the class had Portuguese and Maths, the Syrian students were taught Portuguese as a foreign language by a primary school teacher who came from a grouped school twice a week and by a teacher of Spanish in the school. These hours, incorporated into the teachers' timetables, did not correspond to extra hours. The primary school teacher was entitled by law to reductions in teaching hours due to her age and years of teaching and was at the service of the school for other projects that provided support for children with special needs, and she agreed to support the Syrian students. The Spanish teacher had an incomplete timetable and he agreed to take the rest of the hours to provide support to them too to complete his timetable.

The students may not have been able to understand the regular classes of sixth grade, but they still needed to know some basics Maths. Maria consequently approached another colleague and changed the timetable of a primary school teacher so that he could teach the siblings.

Another issue was the recognition of their studies in Syria. Contrary to the case of students from other countries the school had received, there was no official table in Portugal to convert their studies into a grade equivalent to the Portuguese education system and so the burden of responsibility fell upon the school to decide. The school board was also aware of the social and economic situation of such a large family. In the home visits, the mother said that young

Mohammed had asked her if he could work to earn money and his elder sister, Rajab, commented that she felt she could not ask her father for what she needed because she knew he was short on money. The mother wanted her two daughters to enroll in a vocational course so that they could work, when they turned 18 years old and so the school also took this into account when choosing which year to place them in.

Further challenges arose when the family moved to a larger house in another town. Since they no longer lived nearby, the students were unable to arrive on time for classes. The teacher Maria had to change the timetable again and they had classes during a free afternoon to make up for the hours they missed in the morning. This way, they had the same number of hours as the other students. However, during participant observation in a class, one of the teachers present commented how she noted that they would sometimes miss school and it tended to be a different student each time. A possible reason for this may have been to take it in turns to look after a sibling allowing the mother to take up some cleaning jobs. Relevant here is the issue of how socio-economic precariousness may impact on students' learning, referred to above, due to the pressure of managing family roles (Thommessen, Todd, 2018).

The school also liaised with a municipality project on diversity awareness in schools for the integration of migrant children. Four special sessions were given to the class, incorporated into the curriculum on visual education. During one of these sessions, the visual education teacher commented enthusiastically that she had researched the name Mohammed online and discovered that it originated from the name Pedro and so she decided to call him Pedro. She stated that Mohammed liked his new name; however, during the observed class, another student also answered to the name Pedro. This small anecdotal incident illustrates how the teachers exercise of discretionary power (Lipsky, 2010) revealed an inability to embrace diversity (Akkari, Radhouane, 2022) in a way that preserved the student's identity, linked to his culture of origin (Ott, 2011). The promotion of inclusion and belonging required more than *goodwill* and a flexible curriculum.

Conclusion

The growing cultural diversity in Portuguese school contexts has become more visible in the last decade, as a result of the intensification, diversification and geographical dispersion of migratory flows, namely after 2016, following the *refuge crisis*. This situation, as noted throughout the text, has raised multiple organisational and pedagogical challenges: specialised psychosocial support for newly arrived students, Portuguese language teaching, curricular gaps and recognition of previous qualifications, adequate pedagogical resources and teachers with skills/training to teach in multicultural environments. At an early stage, schools were not prepared to respond to these challenges, nor did the

education system itself have adequate guidelines or resources to support schools. However, the schools gradually adapted, at different rates and with different strategies. The informality and *goodwill* of the various agents most directly involved in the educational process were essential, often making up for the lack of formal guidelines and pedagogical resources.

These findings demonstrate the strategic importance of granting schools autonomy (and resources) in order to enable them to receive and meet the needs of migrant students, refugees included. However, the case material also illustrates the importance of coordinating with other local entities that work in migrant reception, to harmonize the schools' responses with local reception systems and to improve access to available resources. We have shown how the schools did not function in isolation; they drew on networks, collaborations, and projects with local municipalities, grouped schools and other institutions to compensate for a system lacking in resources and pedagogical orientation.

In this respect, the case of Fundão may be seen as a good practice with the Centre for Migrations working closely with the two school groupings. Their *Welcome to School* Project also provides an example of how attentiveness to the social and psychological wellbeing of students from diverse backgrounds may be placed within a broader strategy of promoting interculturality. In the case of Guimarães, the onus fell upon a teacher. Although the data illustrates the significant roles played by discretionary power, *goodwill* and institutional networking, it also reveals that they alone are not enough. The ethnographic vignette of changing a pupil's name to a Portuguese one (a practice encountered in other educational contexts) is indicative of the need for the availability of specialized training beyond the dynamics of local projects to help teachers to think outside of a national framework of cultural assimilation, predominantly structured according to educational and pedagogical nationalism. A related issue here is a need, not only to teach the host language but also to continue to support the development of the mother tongue (Cerna, 2019). This was expressed by an unemployed Syrian primary school teacher resident in northern Portugal frustrated that she could not teach Arabic to refugee children in the Portuguese education system.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by national funds through the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology – FCT under the projects UIDB/04011/2020; UIDB/04038/2020; 2021.02343.CEECIND; PTDC/FER - ETC/30378/2017.

References

AGER, Alaister; STRANG, Alison. Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, v. 21, n. 2, p. 166-191, 2008.

AKKARI, Abdeljalil; RADHOUANE, Myriam. *Intercultural approaches to education: From theory to practice*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022.

BANKS, James A. (ed.). *The Routledge international companion to multicultural education*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

_____. *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

BASU, Ranu. Multiculturalism through multilingualism in schools: Emerging places of “integration” in Toronto. In: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, v. 101, n. 6, p. 1307-1330, 2011.

BIASUTTI, Michele; CONCINA, Eleanora. Including migrant students in the primary school: Perspectives of Italian principals. *International Journal of Educational Management*, v. 35, n. 5, p. 984-999, 2021.

BLOCK, Karen; CROSS, Suzanne; RIGGS, Elisha; GIBBS, Lisa. Supporting schools to create an inclusive environment for refugee students. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, v. 18, n. 12, p. 1337-1355, 2014.

BORSCH, Anne Sophie; VITUS, Katherine; SKOVDAL, Morten. School caringscapes. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, v. 2, n. 100001, 2021.

BRODKIN, Evelyn. Street-level organizations, inequality, and the future of human services. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, v. 40, n. 5, p. 444-450, 2016.

CARIA, Telmo; SACRAMENTO, Octávio. Subordinações burocráticas e autonomias profissionais: Etnografias de políticas sociais em prática. *Etnográfica*, v. 26, n. 2, p. 455-465, 2022.

CERNA, Lucie. Refugee education: integration models and practices in OECD countries. *OECD Education Working Paper*, n. 203, p. 1-73, 2019.

CIVITILLO, Sauro; JUANG, Linda P. How to best prepare teachers for multicultural schools. In: TITZMANN, Peter; JUGERT, Philipp (eds.). *Youth in superdiverse societies: Growing up with globalization, diversity, and acculturation*. London: Routledge, 2019, p. 285-301.

CONDÉ, Valéria Gil; FLORES, Ana Alicia Manso; SILVA, Priscila Vasconcelos. Imigrantes nas escolas como “neofalantes”: Um meio para a integração social. *Linha D'Água*, v. 32, n. 3, p. 63-78, 2019.

DARLING-HAMMOND, Linda; BRANSFORD, John (eds.). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

DGE - DIREÇÃO GERAL DA EDUCAÇÃO. *Crianças e jovens beneficiários ou requerentes de proteção internacional*. Guia de Acolhimento: Educação Pré-Escolar, Ensino Básico e Ensino Secundário. Lisboa: ANQEP, 2020.

- DOVIGO, Fabio. Beyond the vulnerability paradigm: fostering inter-professional and multi-agency cooperation in refugee education in Italy. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, v. 25, n. 2, p. 166-181, 2019.
- DUE, Clemence; RIGGS, Damien W.; AUGOUSTINOS, Martha. Experiences of school belonging for young children with refugee backgrounds. *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, v. 33, n. 1, p. 33-53, 2016.
- EE, Jongyeon; GÁNDARA, Patrícia. The impact of immigration enforcement on the nation's schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, v. 57, n. 2, p. 840-871, 2020.
- ESTEBAN, Adrian Neubauer. El derecho a la educación de los menores refugiados y solicitantes de asilo desde el enfoque basado en los derechos humanos. *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*, n. 35, p. 70-91, 2020.
- FONSECA, Maria Lucinda; ESTEVES, Alina; MORENO, Luís. Migration and the reconfiguration of rural places: The accommodation of difference in Odemira, Portugal. *Population, Space and Place*, v. 27, n. 8, e2445, 2021.
- FORD, Donna Y.; KEA, Cathy D. Creating: for students' sake and teachers' sake. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, v. 41, n. 9, p. 1-18, 2009.
- GAY, Geneva. Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, v. 53, n. 2, p. 106-116, 2002.
- HAHN, Carole L. Educating citizens in an age of globalization, migration, and transnationalism: A study in four European democracies. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, v. 48, n. 2, p. 244-284, 2020.
- HERZOG-PUNZENBERGER, Barbara; ALTRICHTER, Herbert; BROWN, Martin; BURNS, Denise; NORTVEDT, Guri A.; SKEDSMO, Guri; WIESE, Eline; NAYIR, Funda; FELLNER, Magdalena; McNAMARA, Gery; O'HARA, Joe. Teachers responding to cultural diversity: Case studies on assessment practices, challenges and experiences in secondary schools in Austria, Ireland, Norway and Turkey. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, v. 32, n. 3, p. 395-424, 2020.
- IAQUINTA, David; DRESCHER, Axel. Defining the peri-urban: Rural-urban linkages and connections. *Land Reform, Land Settlement and Cooperatives*, v. 2 (January), p. 8-26, 2000.
- INDA, Jonathan. A flexible world: capitalism, citizenship, and postnational zones. *PoLAR – Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, v. 23, n. 1, p. 86-102, 2000.
- KAUKKO, Mervi; WILKINSON, Jane; KOHLI, Ravi. Pedagogical love in Finland and Australia: A study of refugee children and their teachers. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, v. 30, n. 5, p. 731-747, 2022.
- LIPSKY, Michael. *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2010.
- MASOOD, Ayesha; NISAR, Muhammad. Repairing the State: Policy repair in the frontline bureaucracy. *Public Administration Review*, v. 82, n. 2, p. 256-268, 2022.

MCAULIFFE, Marie; TRIANDAFYLLIDOU, Anna (eds.). *World migration report 2022*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2021.

MORRISON, Stephaney; BRYAN, Julia. Addressing the challenges and needs of English-speaking Caribbean immigrant students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, v. 36, n. 4, p. 440-449, 2014.

OTT, Eleanor. *Get up and go: Refugee resettlement and secondary migration in the USA*. Geneva: UNHCR, 2011.

PAPAZIAN-ZOHRABIAN, Garine; MAMPRIN, Caterina; LEMIRE, Vanessa; TURPIN-SAMSON, Alyssa. Le milieu scolaire québécois face aux défis de l'accueil des élèves réfugiés: Quels enjeux pour la gouvernance scolaire et la formation des intervenants scolaires?. *Éducation et Francophonie*, v. 46, n. 2, p. 208-229, 2018.

PASTOOR, Lutine de Wal. Reconceptualising refugee education: Exploring the diverse learning contexts of unaccompanied young refugees upon resettlement. *Intercultural Education*, v. 28, n. 2, p. 143-164, 2017.

PINK, Sarah; MORGAN, Jennie. Short-term ethnography: Intense routes to knowing. *Symbolic Interaction*, v. 36, n. 3, p. 351-361, 2013.

POWELL, Rebecca; CANTRELL, Susan Chambers; MALO-JUVERA, Victor; CORRELL, Pamela. Operationalizing culturally responsive instruction: Preliminary findings of CRIOP research. *Teachers College Record*, v. 118, n. 1, p. 1-46, 2016.

RADHOUANE, Myriam. Pedagogical challenges in integrating refugee students in the Global North: A literature review. *Prospects*, v. 53, p. 151-168, 2023.

SACRAMENTO, Octávio; CHALLINOR, Elizabeth; SILVA, Pedro G. Here and elsewhere: Multi-cited destinations and refugee place-making in rural and peri-urban Portugal. *Ager - Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development*, v. 34, p. 77-102, 2022.

SACRAMENTO, Octávio; SILVA, Pedro G.; CHALLINOR, Elizabeth. Stranded in mobility: A crisis of refuge. In: SACRAMENTO, Octávio; CHALLINOR, Elizabeth; SILVA, Pedro G. (eds.). *Quest for refuge: Reception responses from the Global North*. Famacão: Húmus, 2020a, p. 9-35.

SACRAMENTO, Octávio; TURTIAINEN, Kati; SILVA, Pedro G. Policies of refugee settlement and integration in Europe: The cases of Portugal and Finland. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, v. 21, n. 4, 2020b.

SANCHEZ-MAZAS, Margarita; CHANGKAKOTI, Nilima; MOTTET, Geneviève. Scolarisation des enfants de demandeurs d'asile: Nouvelles pratiques, nouveaux dispositifs, nouveaux «métiers» sous le signe de l'incertitude. *Raisons Éducatives*, v. 2, p. 223-248, 2018.

SANDOVAL-HERNANDEZ, Andrés; ISAC, Maria Magdalena; MIRANDA, Daniel (eds.). *Teaching tolerance in a globalized world*. Cham: Springer, 2018.

SCHIERUP, Carl-Ulrik; ÅLUND, Aleksandra. The end of Swedish exceptionalism? Citizenship, neoliberalism and the politics of exclusion. *Race & Class*, v. 53, n. 1, p. 45-64, 2011.

SHUAYB, Maha; CRUL, Maurice. Reflection on the education of refugee children: Beyond reification and emergency. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, v. 36, n. 2, p. 3-8, 2020.

SILVA, Pedro G.; SACRAMENTO, Octávio. Constraints and creativity: Local responses to refugee settlement and integration in the Portuguese inland. In: SACRAMENTO, Octávio; CHALLINOR, Elizabeth; SILVA, Pedro G. (eds.). *Quest for refuge: Reception responses from the Global North*. Famalicão: Húmus, 2020, p. 171-193.

SUÁREZ-OROZCO, Marcelo; SUÁREZ-OROZCO, Carola. Globalization, immigration, and schooling. In: BANKS, James (ed.). *The Routledge international companion to multicultural education*. New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 62-76.

TAYLOR, Sandra; SIDHU, Ravinder Kaur. Supporting refugee students in schools: What constitutes inclusive education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, v. 16, n. 1, p. 39-56, 2012.

THOMMESSEN, Sandra O'T.; TODD, Brenda K. How do refugee children experience their new situation in England and Denmark? Implications for educational policy and practice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, v. 85, p. 228-238, 2018.

TURCAN, Romeo. Exploring late globalization: A viewpoint. *Markets, Globalization & Development Review*, v. 1, n. 2, p. 1-15, 2016.

VASSALLO, Brian. The role of the school leader in the inclusion of migrant families and students. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 0/0, 2021.

VEERMAN, Gert-Van M. The relationship between ethnic diversity and classroom disruption in the context of migration policies. *Educational Studies*, v. 41, n. 1-2, p. 209-225, 2015.

About the authors

Octávio Sacramento, Doutor (ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), Professor universitário/investigador, Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, CETRAD - Centro de Estudos Transdisciplinares para o Desenvolvimento. Vila Real, Portugal. E-mail: octavsac@utad.pt. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8533-3653>.

Elizabeth Challinor, Doutora (University of Sussex), Investigadora, CRIA/FCSH-NOVA Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Lisboa, Portugal. E-mail: ephchallinor@fchsh.unl.pt. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4374-067X>.

Pedro Gabriel Silva, Doutor (University of Jyväskylä, FI), Professor universitário/investigador, Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro; CETRAD - Centro de Estudos Transdisciplinares para o Desenvolvimento. Vila Real, Portugal, E-mail: pgpsilva@utad.pt. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0635-725X>.

Section editors

Roberto Marinucci, Barbara Marciano Marques