



# CRITICAL DIALOGUES ON PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVES

Thinking about the Aftermath Challenges



**CRED**

CENTRO DI RICERCA  
ED ELABORAZIONE  
PER LA DEMOCRAZIA

Italy



Brazil



Estudios Chinos

Argentina



UNIVERSIDAD  
NACIONAL  
DE LA PLATA

Argentina

Organizers:

Cássius Chai • Alexandre Coura • Fabio Marcelli • Francesca Staiano

2024

# CULTURE AS A MODEL FOR THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF BRAZILIAN MIGRANTS IN PORTUGAL

*Lígia Moreira Almeida*  
*Raquel Moutinho*  
*Natacha Jesus-Silva*  
*Jorge Leite*  
*Marcelo Brigagão de Oliveira*  
*José M Peixoto Caldas*

**Abstract:** Migrants and refugees' influx into Europe has been steadily rising, and social indicators consistently show a decrease in economic and social protection towards vulnerable populations. Recent research shows that a sense of belonging is central towards integration in a new country. Unfamiliarity with culture contributes to isolating migrants and prevents participatory citizenship. Our objectives are to identify gaps in cultural competence and accessibility to culture in our country, understanding their cross-sectoral consequences – namely regarding the Brazilian community. Our study followed a qualitative methodology (online semi-structured questionnaires) for collecting and analysing data (content analysis) and was conducted in Porto, the second largest Portuguese city. Participants were 38 Brazilian immigrants, contacted through NGOs's, social associations and institutions during the pandemic. Brazilian collective is a strong consumer of cultural events and resources, having a very strong perception regarding its value and role when it comes to their own paths of integration.

**Keywords:** migrants and refugees; culture; social inclusion; belonging.

## **La Cultura como vía de Inclusión Social de los Migrantes Brasileños en Portugal**

**Resumen:** La afluencia de inmigrantes y refugiados a Europa ha aumentado, y sus indicadores sociales muestran sistemáticamente disminución de protección económica y social hacia poblaciones vulnerables.

Investigaciones recientes muestran que el sentido de pertenencia es fundamental para la integración. El desconocimiento de la cultura contribuye a aislar los inmigrantes e impide una ciudadanía participativa. Nuestro objetivo es identificar lagunas en competencia cultural y accesibilidad a la cultura en nuestro país, comprendiendo sus consecuencias intersectoriales en la comunidad brasileña.

Nuestro estudio siguió una metodología cualitativa para recogida y análisis de datos, ocurriendo en Oporto, la segunda mayor ciudad portuguesa. Los participantes fueron 38 inmigrantes brasileños, contactados mediante ONGs, asociaciones sociales e instituciones durante la pandemia.

Es evidente que el colectivo brasileño es un fuerte consumidor de eventos y recursos culturales, teniendo también una percepción muy fuerte en cuanto a su valor y papel cuando se trata de sus propios caminos de integración.

**Palabras clave:** inmigrantes y refugiados; cultura; inclusión social; pertenencia.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

European societies are, and will continue to be, increasingly diverse and heterogeneous. Over the past decades many people who have experienced difficulties in various dimensions of their lives in their countries of origin have come to Europe, and it is likely that many will continue to do so. A holistic inclusion strategy that prioritizes the socio-economic and political integration of refugees and migrants into host countries is of utmost importance. A comprehensive solution to this humanitarian crisis is twofold, comprising the need for urgent and organized reception and assistance to migrants and refugees, who always arrive in conditions of greater vulnerability (even in planned migrations, the unfamiliarity with the country, cultural differences and restrictions with support network are challenging conditions during the first times of arrival), whether they are people seeking better living conditions, or traumatized victims fleeing from war-torn areas (Robila, 2018; Cetrez et al, 2020; Duszczuk, Pachocka and Pszczółkowska, 2020). The need for a long-term solution to the growing inequalities, segregation and social exclusion to which migrants and refugees are exposed invariably undermines full European citizenship, compromises the flourishing diversity of our

societies, and fails to align deep European societal values with the upholding of the Universal Charter of Human Rights (European Commission, 2016; Robila, 2018).

Additionally, migration presents core development opportunities for the European Union, given the specificity and evolving needs of the labour market, essential for the reconfiguration of European social structure, as well as for the resumption of post-pandemic economic and cultural development (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Fasani & Mazza, 2020; IOM/MPI, 2021). Until the pandemic onset, mobility and migratory flows were at an all-time high, leading to an unprecedented “refugee crisis” (Eurocities, 2016). The context of SARS-Cov-2 didn’t ease migrants and refugees’ influx into Europe, but only contributed to further decrease the economic and social protection towards already vulnerable populations (Fasani & Mazza, 2020; IOM/MPI, 2021). Therefore, the integration of migrants and refugees in their host countries is of utmost interest - presently and especially in a near future, where the number of refugees is likely to increase due to restart of economic activities (Diehl et al., 2016; European Commission, 2016). Some typical indications of successful migrant integration are the decrease of the differences between migrants and non-migrants according to data on employment, education, health and social inclusion, among other areas (IOM, 2017).

The main focus of research with migrants has been on language barriers, on access to health and appropriate healthcare, on multiple discriminations that act as obstacles in accessing basic and quality information regarding services and rights, on hurdles to the acquisition of documentary legalization and citizenship, and on labour market inclusion - all absolutely fundamental dimensions to consider in the integration process (Duszczuk et al., 2020).

However, recent research shows that a sense of belonging is central to integration in a new country. Integration is not just an issue of social welfare and economic policy, the emphasis should also be on engaging people in valuable cultural experiences and achievements (Eurocities, 2016). Belonging is accepted to be a fundamental human psychological need (unquestionable, under the scope of psychological science since Maslow studies). While legal status, labour market

incorporation, education and healthcare are important integration measures, it can also be stated that belonging plays a key part within each of these contexts: belonging is the feeling of inclusion in the social group that migrants experience throughout their daily lives as they work, raise families, and navigate local school, community and health systems. Thus, Belonging is connected to finding a place of respect within the cultural and religious sphere of the host country during daily interactions (Foner & Simon, 2015; Simonsen, 2018; Rottman, 2020).

There are many ways of measuring integration and little agreement about its process. Belonging is being pointed as a key *soft indicator* for measuring integration (as Culture), but often omitted as an area of inquiry in Integration studies in favour of readily quantifiable measures, such as labour market integration, housing, education, health care and citizenship acquisition (Rottman, 2020). These are preferred because countries can easily rank them, as they are, for example according to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) used by the European Union. The capacity for migrants to identify with and feel attachment to a social group - to their new country - is a pressing political issue. Belonging is built over time. It is experienced (or not) as individuals pass through formal social integration or asylum system, both initially, when they interact with officials regarding their case evaluations, as well as later when they are seeking employment, education, and friendships, and becoming exposed to communities and local contexts, and media debates in their new societies. Feelings of belonging are of deep importance, not only for the psychological health of migrants, but also for social cohesion in local communities and even for reducing national security concerns of political leaders (Foner & Simon, 2015; Simonsen, 2018). One mustn't forget that one of the routes of integration consists in establishing social connections, relationships, and networks that provide links to other people and services. On another hand, studies measuring migrants' perceptions and self-reports frequently state that the feeling of belonging is of utmost importance for them to integrate in the host country (Ager & Strang, 2008; Cetrez et al., 2020). Thus, it is here considered that any integration recommendations and policies that do not serve the needs identified by their target populations will most certainly be doomed to fail.

The concept of “Culture” where our theoretical framework was based has its core in the definition proposed by Raymond Williams, and combines an aesthetic dimension - ‘the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity (this seems often the most widespread use: culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film)’ – with an anthropological dimension ‘which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general’ (Williams, 1994). Culture is the medium through which we communicate who we are, what is important to us, what has formed us and what aspects of ourselves we uphold as we move into the future. Identity is often defined in cultural terms, just as otherness is. It is therefore necessary and natural to move into the sphere of culture when there is a need to get to know the other, with the aim of forming an inclusive society, which can learn how to benefit from diversity (Le, Polonsky & Arambewela, 2015). Therefore, our definition of “Culture” here also contemplates its unavoidable psychological dimension: it refers to internal, external, behavioural as well as mental dimensions. A reference we corroborate resides in the definition provided by the intercultural psychologist Marsella (2005), who states that “(...) Culture is shared learned behaviour and meanings that are socially transferred in various life-activity settings for purposes of individual and collective adjustment and adaptation. Cultures can be (1) transitory (i.e. situational even for a few minutes), (2) enduring (e.g., ethnocultural life-styles), and in all instances are (3) dynamic (i.e., constantly subject to change and modification. Cultures are represented (4) internally (i.e., values, beliefs, attitudes, axioms, orientations, epistemologies, consciousness levels, perceptions, expectations, personhood) and (5) externally (i.e., artifacts, roles, institutions, social structures). Cultures (6) shape and construct our realities (i.e., they contribute to our world views, perceptions, orientations) and with this, our concepts of normality/abnormality, morality, aesthetics, and a number of arbiters of life.” (p. 657).

Culture plays an extremely relevant role in building and structuring the “sense of belonging” process. Acculturation refers to the phenomena occurring when individuals from different cultures come into first-hand contact; it has been described as moving towards a culture (Cetrez et al., 2020). This definition specifies acculturation

as a change occurring not only within one group (the minority), but also within all the cultures involved. Nevertheless, more change occurs in the nondominant group than in the dominant one (Organista, Chun & Marin, 1998), as acculturation impact depends on power relationships (DeMarinis, Grzymala-Moszczyńska & Jablonski, 2002; Cetrez et al., 2021). In a multi-ethnic context, State institutions of host countries are confronted with cultural and ethnic differences, which brings into contact diverse traditions, religiosities, languages and cultural and political practices of the host society and immigrant minorities. A deep process of collective construction of meanings, symbologies and emotionalities occur through these contacts (Cetrez et al., 2021). To the above definition it is also important to add that acculturation is a “developmental process towards adaptation and gaining competence within more than one cultural setting” (Oppedal, Røysamb & Sam, 2004, p. 482).

This concept of Acculturation is an essential bridge towards our understanding of Cultural Integration, being considered here as the ability to understand and participate in the host country’ culture, without losing one’s own culture. Cultural Integration is only possible when the cultures do not have to sacrifice the characteristics that make them unique. People are allowed to blend their beliefs and ideas without having to give up their culture – in order to accomplish this, people need to have their unique time to feel comfortable in their new lives and contexts, to develop a sense of security and to build a certain sense of belonging that allows the natural blending of cultures (Diehl et al., 2016). Thus, Cultural Integration requires an appropriate cultural response from both the host society (non-discriminatory policies and legislation) and the migrants (personal skills and competences) to promote inclusion. In our present research, we claim to evidence that Culture is a facilitator to migrants’ ultimate and fully integration in the host societies, as access to culture promotes both Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion (European Comission, 2016; IOM, 2017). Social inclusion refers to migrants’ inclusion and full economic, social, cultural, and political participation (participatory citizenship) into host communities. Social cohesion refers to concepts such as anti-discrimination, countering xenophobia and promoting mutual understanding (IOM, 2017).

Access to culture implies understanding sensitive and intangible aspects that permeate the social and structural organization of a country, which are embodied in norms (often informal and implicit), beliefs, customs, arts, languages, knowledge, collective identities and memories that make the social environment of a group meaningful and aggregative (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Culture is particularly significant as an enabler of sophisticated democracy: it provides spaces for the articulation and dissemination of complex ideas and facilitates broad participation in social space. The dynamic nature of cultural participation makes the cultural sector the perfect space from which to catalyse the development of polity and society as spaces in which refugees and other new citizens are afforded equal voice and status (Eurocities, 2016). On another hand, unfamiliarity with culture repeatedly contributes to isolating migrants and prevents the maximum expression of an active and participatory citizenship (Persaud, 2017; Goñda, Pachocka & Podgórska, 2021).

The concept of Participatory Citizenship goes further and deeper than simple citizenship reconnaissance or acquisition: regardless of inclusive and migrant-friendly legislation and policies – that differ from country to country - that enables several routes of accessing legal rights and duties (or not at all) (IOM, 2017), participatory citizenship relies on social and structural opportunities regarding political and social participation of migrants both at their countries of origin and host countries. It focusses on migrants' practices of engagement in political and civil mobilisations, aiming at influencing decision-making processes and scenarios which are perceived as relevant to them and actually have an impact in their communities and contexts of action. (Martiniello, 2022).

To facilitate the transition and psychosocial adjustments associated with migratory flows, society can increase its capacity and cultural competence, thus facilitating individuals (both nationals and migrants) to enhance their social toolkit, soft skills and competences oriented not only towards the host reality, but enhancing knowledge regarding cultural diversity, and to progressively allow individual to transform themselves into bi-cultural subjects (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). Cultural competence is the ability to participate ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural settings.

It requires knowing and reflecting on one's own cultural values and world view and their implications for making respectful, reflective, and reasoned choices, including the capacity to imagine and collaborate in cross cultural contexts. Through Cultural competence, society ultimately engages in valuing diversity for the richness and creativity it brings (Moita & Silva, 2016). This is relevant both in educational and cultural institutions in general, and in specific arenas where migrants can find and/or construct their own narratives in their bi-cultural reality. Intercultural competences are also crucial for the 'native' population if integration is seen as a bi-directional process (Persaud, 2017; European Union, 2017).

The Portuguese reality when concerning migration has been somewhat stable: the Brazilian community has been for some years now the largest immigrant community in Portugal. It is noticeable that the inflow and outflow of these immigrants increases or decreases according to the economic situation in Brazil. The reasons why Brazilians choose to migrate to Portugal are the language, climate, education, family ties, the possibility of acquiring citizenship and security (Oliveira, 2017; Reis, Sousa & Machado, 2021). This last factor has undoubtedly been one of the main reasons in recent years (Almeida et al., 2014; Reis, Sousa & Machado, 2021).

Furthermore, Portugal is one of the countries in Europe with the best policies on immigration and integration of immigrants (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Almeida et al., 2014). The Foreigners' Act - which deals with the legal regime for entry, stay, exit and expulsion of foreigners from the national territory - allows various possibilities for regularization (cf. Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Consultation between the Portuguese Republic and the Federative Republic of Brazil, which includes an extensive legislative package, accessible through the portal of the Public Prosecution Service of the Portuguese Republic). Portuguese privileged relations with Brazil are historical, and there are several bilateral agreements (e.g. Agreement on Visas on Joint Passports; Cultural Agreement, Treaty of Friendship and Consultation; Agreement, by exchange of notes for the Abolition of the Payment of Residence Fees by Nationals of Each Country Resident in

the Territory of the Other; among others)<sup>1</sup>. These agreements facilitate day-to-day procedures and bureaucracy. Among the existing settlements, it can be highlighted: agreement on equal civil and political rights, social security agreement with the right to medical assistance, convention to avoid double taxation, among others. Data shows that, although diversified, Brazilian immigration in Portugal covers various social classes and is, above all, continuous - mainly since Portugal enables these immigrants to create opportunities for a safe stay (Reis et al., 2021).

As citizens' rights are reasonably preserved by cutting-edge Portuguese Migratory Policies, and the issue of language barriers is not a priority raised (the Portuguese of Portugal and of Brazil are quite similar), communicational specificities and intricacies continue to emerge, hindering a fully inclusion of this collective (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Reis et al., 2021). Our European study (still ongoing) main goal focused in identifying gaps in cultural competence and accessibility to culture (in its multiple aspects) in host countries, understanding their cross-sectoral consequences; our main target along this manuscript is exploring these gaps – in cultural competence, cultural diversity acceptance and access to culture – in the Portuguese environment towards Brazilian community, considering the targeted population perspectives.

## 2 METHODS

This article relies on qualitative data. We believe that research focused on social inclusion and vulnerable populations is much more robust if exploring the personal and subjective aspects of the user's perspective, essential for a global understanding of the social reality. This approach has real impacts in well-being, involvement in leisure and cultural activities that promote integration in host communities and sense of belonging, subjective confidence, and perceived

---

<sup>1</sup> For further information please see: Immigration Law, Law no. 23/2007, of July 4 with the amendments produced by Law no. 29/2012, of August 9; Bilateral Agreements with Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP): Decree No. 34/2003, of July 30, 2003; Facilitation of the Movement of Persons, approved by Decree No. 43/2003, of September 24, which complements Decree No. 40/2003, of September 19.

competences. Additionally, research in this area consistently shows that soft indicators for migrants' integration and best succeeded social inclusion need to be measured considering the perspectives of the ones involved (Ager & Strang, 2008; Cetrez et al., 2020).

*Participants: sampling and recruitment*

A total of 38 participants were recruited, receiving support or in straight contact with civilian associations working with migrant individuals (NGO's) and/or from governmental institutions with the same aim. Approval for conducting the study was obtained from the Governing Boards and from the Ethics Committee of all institutions involved. The participants' recruitment process was initiated through contacts with the Governing Boards of the institutions and associations, after their approval of the study protocol. The questionnaires were gathered online, during the pandemics to best suit all parts' interests, after study approval. The participants were Brazilian immigrants, both men (10) and women (28) notified about the study and asked to participate in it. Participants were Brazilian migrants living in Portugal at the moment of the study, recruited between January and June 2021.

*Procedure*

Semi-structured online questionnaires with guidelines were conducted, evaluating the perceived needs and cultural challenges that potentially influence the perceptions of the migrant population, and that determine social integration, active and satisfactory citizenship, social opportunities in accessing goods and services, and participation in the social environment of the host society, in particular through cultural experiences. The methodology and general objectives of the study were explained to all participants in guidelines preceding the questionnaire, as well as its estimated duration (35 minutes). Questionnaires were analyzed by a well-trained researcher, graduated in psychology.

*Analysis of data*

Qualitative content analysis and categorization of emerged information were performed to make a systematic analysis of collected data, which involved transcription of the questionnaires' open questions and comments. Subsequently, a comprehensive interpretation of the resulting information was performed. Initial

categories were created (corresponding to the questions made) and later evolved with the analysis of new data (clustering of information). Some initial questions presented at the guidelines included: “How would you characterize your experience regarding employment in host country?”; “How confident are you to solve an issue with the immigration services?”; or “How confident are you to sign a new home lease?”; “Please use this space to list any issue that you are currently facing and/or to make any suggestion that, in your opinion, would increase your integration in the host country?”.

To maintain confidentiality, socio-demographic data were entered into a coding sheet, and the name of the participant replaced by an alphanumeric code. Quotes were chosen from migrants’ entries at questionnaire to best exemplify the main emerging themes.

### 3 RESULTS

#### *Socio-demographic characteristics of participants*

Participants were between 18 and 49 years old. Only two (out of 38) presented a level of education under graduation. Half of the sample were married, but only four people had children. Six people were living alone during the lockdown, and 23 were living unemployed or with a precarious work condition by the time they respond to the questionnaire.

The collected information emerged in three major themes: (a) Perception of Confidence, Safety and Belonging in daily life; (b) Resources and Experiences in Host Country (managing difficulties and suggestions of improvement); (c) Integration through Culture.

#### *a) Perception of Confidence, Safety and Belonging in daily life*

Since language does not occupy a prominent position in the pressing concerns of Brazilian immigrants (although all acknowledge a subjective fringe that can compromise the understanding and comprehension of more subtle meanings regarding full communication), we tried to assess relevant and complex dimensions, with a strong participation in the construction of the feeling of confidence, security and belonging - which are at the basis of any successful integration process.

Most Brazilian immigrants felt respected in their religious practices, maintaining customs and experiences as in their country of origin, or taking a more neutral religious approach by their own choice. The same sense of feeling respected was identified with regard to their moral beliefs. Religion is essential for the exercise of citizenship. Consistently, these results show a growing and accepted religious plurality in Portugal, which gave rise to a set of public policies, such as the Religious Freedom Law, which regulated a set of rights already enshrined in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, the Portuguese Civil Code, among other legal documents (Tomás, 2017).

When it comes to the involvement and active participation in activities of daily living that were gauged to measure perceptions of safety and trust, it was identified that almost all immigrants were confident or very confident to go shopping or to the grocery store, to buy a mobile phone or to open a bank account. Previous studies already stated that Brazilian immigration in Portugal, although diversified, covers various social classes, often in accordance with the economic situation in Brazil, but it is, above all, continuous, mainly due to the fact that Portugal enables these immigrants to create prospects for a safe move (Peixoto, 2008). Literature review has already stated the main mechanisms identified as facilitators of this process: acquiring nationality (length of stay in Portugal), and gradual adoption of the culture and customs of the host society - developing active and increasingly adapted social participation (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Almeida et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, only a half were confident or very confident to go to a job interview, or to sign a house rental contract. Those dimensions tend, however, to appeal both to intra-individual dimensions (perceived competencies, having the needed skills to a desired work position) and a relative burden related to social determinants of integration (better explained below, under the category “*Resources and experiences in Host country*”)

Nearly a third of Brazilian migrants felt little or not confident at all to go to a medical appointment. “*Just as we have a right to a family doctor (general practitioner), if we could have an immigration aid worker or something like that, the interaction with health services, the comprehensiveness might be better.*” Identical results were previously

documented in several studies (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Almeida et al., 2014), pointing towards differences in expectations of care, but mainly in distinctive structural organization regarding public health systems (SNS vs. SUS).

The same pattern was found when they had to address legal issues by attending the Aliens and Borders Service. *“The bureaucracy in Portugal is unpredictable and arbitrary, there are unclear rules and these are used (by administrative services) against the immigrant.”*

These results show that, regardless of inclusive and vanguard laws concerning immigration, there are aspects of the daily life of immigrants that continue to be hindered by barriers and information gaps, mostly in the articulation with services - public, governmental, and even health services (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Almeida et al., 2014).

The barriers most frequently identified by Brazilian migrants as inhibiting a full active citizen participation in their social and everyday life contexts were fear of discrimination and lack of correct and usable information, both dimensions being reported by half of our sample. *“(major barriers identified were) Lack of respect for the immigrant, how to provide correct information; I also would like to have felt less prejudice and racism, especially in public services and organizations. Maybe knowing how to provide information to the employees and staff that attend us in those places would be helpful, because it seems that they don’t know much when they have an immigrant to attend.”*

These issues, also corroborated by literature, turned possible to identify and to establish gaps not only in cultural competence, but also in accessibility to essential goods and services, - evidencing cross-sectorial consequences on the engagement of an agentic participatory citizenship (Wodak, 2016; Goñda et al., 2021) from Brazilian community in Portugal.

(b) *Resources and Experiences in Host Country (managing difficulties and suggestions of improvement)*

More than a half of our respondents found themselves in a worse than expected situation with regard to employment or access to the labor market. As for material resources and goods to be accessed to (e.g. a house, car, cloths...), almost a half of Brazilian immigrants referred being in a situation identical to what they expected; nevertheless, a

third of our sample reported to finding themselves in a worse situation than what they had anticipated. *“The salary issue is very complicated here: getting a good remuneration is difficult. Even with training and experience, Portuguese companies only offer the minimum wage.”* Work is the main factor for the whole migratory movement, being one of the most frequently measured indicators of integration or exclusion in the host society. All other areas of integration may fail if there is no successful economic and labour integration. Indeed, insertion in the labour market is a factor of socialisation and consequently of social integration. In this context, research points that it is preferable to have a precarious job with a low salary than a situation of unemployment, even with a reasonable compensation (Marques, 2006; Peixoto, 2008). Furthermore, Oliveira (2017) found there is a relationship between the resources that the individual was able to mobilize in the society of origin and his process of entry in Portugal; in addition, professional and class resources also have a relationship with the legal situation migrants have at the entry in Portugal. In snowballing, the subjects who are currently less capitalized from scholar and socio-professional point of view are the ones who entered Portugal in a more fragile situation because they are only qualified for the tourist visit to the country. On the contrary, those who currently possess high educational capital, those who work in highly qualified areas or belong to the most intellectualized social classes entered Portugal with visas corresponding to the intention of staying in the country for other purposes, especially professional ones.

When concerning interaction with others and social life, only a third of our sample manifested a worse than expected experience, despite the pandemics and lockdowns. *“My network is basically made up of immigrants, I have a few Portuguese friends. Apart from them, the population is very closed. I feel that the Portuguese people segment their relationship networks, for example, if the relationship is at work, they only relate at work. If the relationship happens at university, they only hang out at university.”*

Similarly, almost a third of our Brazilian migrants reported a negative adaptation experience, with more struggles, challenges, and difficulties than they initially awaited. *“My integration was far worse than expected due to covid pandemics.”* Like most international

studies on the impact of the pandemic on the migrant population, those conducted in Portugal also show a growing vulnerability of this group. Shaaban and colleagues (2021) found that immigrants were more prone to become unemployed during covid-19 pandemics when compared with natives, also being more subject to partially or total layoffs, to have their household income decreased due to the pandemics, to be more affected by financial difficulties and more likely to fall behind with bills. This often resulted, in practice, in having financial difficulties in buying hygiene products, to have financial difficulties in paying phone and internet, and they were also more likely to send their kids to school to have meals – putting themselves at a greater risk of contracting the disease (Shaaban et al, 2021).

Additional difficulties were identified and tend to reflect a certain degree of prejudice and stereotypes rooted in society, especially in older age groups (gender stereotypes). *“Portugal is still a very conservative and sexist country. As a Brazilian woman, I suffer discrimination from the host population. Nowadays, I already know how to behave, and I don’t keep quiet, I’m always polite and I point out if the situation has made me uncomfortable or offended. Without a doubt, my integration would be easier if the population didn’t have such consolidated stereotypes.”* The ethnicization of Brazilians in Portugal, both men and women, has contributed to the creation of specific employment niches for them. In this sense, the quality of friendliness largely associated with Brazilians can play a positive role, but in certain cases this ethnicization becomes a stigma for the immigrant (Malheiros, 2007; Peixoto, 2008). Gender research still shows that these stereotypes generated in society - through the Portuguese media, but also in a complex proliferation process of a sensual image of Brazilian women, often vehiculated through Brazilian television novels and artistic productions - favours and encourages the so-called sensuality and sexualization of the Brazilian woman. This conditioning of exoticization, image and stereotype about the Brazilian woman (which also exists within Brazil, especially in relation to black and mulatto women) – despite increasingly fragmental and diluted in national territory - exerts an extra burden on women. The friendliness in conjunction with the stereotyped image of the Brazilian women leads them to, sometimes, be biasedly seen as prostitutes or “easy” in

many circumstances. This ends up conditioning women's daily life, which, even without taking into account her appearance, social class and race, is often seen as a possible prostitute or "call girl." (Malheiros, 2007; Peixoto, 2008).

Once again, the obstacles caused by misinformation and bureaucracy in the most varied sectors of citizen participation are evidenced: *"One cannot imagine the difficulty and bureaucracy to validate documents and gain access to the labor market."*; *"It has been a huge difficulty to validate my studies (academic degree)."* Again, these results are consistent with previous studies, which corroborate a large bureaucratic problem in Portugal as a persistent barrier to access to essential information, which inhibits good reception and integration of migrants (Almeida & Caldas, 2013).

When asked for suggestions for improving or managing difficulties, we observed that a few Brazilian immigrants mentioned the need for support in approaching the labor market and strengthening their professional network. *"What I feel I need most, and what would result in a better integration of me here it would be support in labor market integration."*

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that an overwhelming majority of participants spontaneously mentioned the need to increase, improve and diversify the availability of cultural content. Cultural events (exhibitions, courses) and intercultural exchange (intercultural events, peer-to-peer programs), but also the multimedia offer of these contents (through TV and broadcasting services), as well as the promotion of and access to sports events and community centers (access to group activities, social support, public information) were the most reported activities which, in the perception of Brazilian migrants, would facilitate their integration in the host country. *"(what would improve my integration?) Events that encourage team sports or group music. Shows and theatre plays, music festivals... Fairs, exhibitions and festivals are great activities to promote integration. Unfortunately, we are living in a pandemic, which makes these kinds of events impossible..."*

#### (c) *Integration through Culture*

When attempting to assess the perception of multilevel integration (community and social based levels) of the Brazilian participants, a certain harmonization of answers has emerged: half

of the sample positioned themselves as reasonably integrated at both levels, a quarter identified themselves as totally or fairly integrated, and another quarter as poorly or not integrated at all.

As far as Culture is concerned, namely from the point of view of integrating - by their own free will - cultural dimensions of the host country in their routines and daily experiences, roughly half of the Brazilian migrants expressed themselves to be a frequently or reasonably user of the Portuguese culture and habits. Additionally, when evaluating the migrants' perception of respect for the culture of their country of origin, the answers of our sample are evenly divided: one third stated that they feel the culture of their country of origin is often or fully respected in their host country, one third of the sample elected a neutral position, and another third declared that they feel their country's culture is little or not respected at all.

Taking Culture in a stricter sense, of access to material and immaterial goods and services, the spontaneous emersion of the concept as subjectively perceived by Brazilian migrants as a real enabler in the adaptation and integration to the host country is noteworthy. This result is corroborated during the questionnaire, when examining the attendance of cultural events of the sample (e.g. cultural and transcultural activities, both from the host country and the country of origin). Not only is evident that this collective is a strong consumer of cultural events and resources, but they also have a very strong perception regarding its value and role when it comes to their own paths of integration. *"I love cultural activities and feel they help us to comprehend the local culture. Through cultural activities we can more effectively understand the society we are in at the moment, to perceive the functioning, the social behaviors, and we have a greater immersion and knowledge about that culture."* In this line of reasoning, the cultural dimension of integration can be considered as key to the effectiveness of the whole of integration – thus, contributing to the establishment of integration soft cultural indicators and its necessary attention when considering Migrants' Integration Policies (Zapata-Barrero, Caponio & Scholten, 2017; Goñda et al., 2021). Getting involved in cultural projects and activities (as a spectator or as an artist) is a way to increase people's sense of community and belonging, helps to raise their self-esteem and develop several personal skills (Eurocities, 2016).

## 4 DISCUSSION

Previous studies have been pointing out that Brazilian immigrants often struggle in early integration in Portugal (due to both internal and external barriers), but over time and from one generation to the next, integration is usually well succeeded (Almeida & Caldas, 2013). The reduction of social contrasts of minorities is indispensable for considering migrants' integration, but not necessarily in relation to cultural contrasts, as diversity and integration are compatible – and desired! For the social axis of ethnicity, the class dimension, but also the socio-demographic and residential dimensions contribute fundamentally. On the cultural axis, on the other hand, the most relevant dimension is the orientation of sociabilities, although language and religion are also important. Observing how the two axes intersect, we may find situations of strong ethnicity, when relevant contrasts occur at the social and cultural levels, and, at the other extreme, situations of non-ethnicity, when social and cultural continuities assume maximum expression (Oliveira, 2017).

We can state that Brazilian immigration in Portugal tend to have successful outcomes in the sense of a reasonable integration (Almeida & Caldas, 2013; Almeida et al., 2014). Additionally, when concerning immigration policies, Portugal is considered to be one of the European countries with the best policies on immigration and migrants' integration. Nothing can be as beneficial to an immigrant as the granting of equal civil and political rights, equivalent to those of nationals – the concept we truly defend here as Inclusion. Additionally, a social and structural evolution of the Portuguese society towards a greater sensitivity to multidiversity is denoted over time, as it has - progressively, during the last decades - been transformed into a welcoming country rather than an exporter of human capital (changing from an emigration to an immigration reality) - becoming more culturally competent and accepting as society. Studies in this field consistently show that the best way to grow in cultural competence is to immerse individuals in learning about other cultures. Cultural competence isn't necessarily a skill that can be mastered because there are always new people and cultures to meet. The goal is far from being accomplished in Portuguese society, and it shouldn't be

to master cultural competence, but mostly to be willing to share our own culture and learn about the culture of others – and this interest is already being developed and studied in national territory (Moita & Silva, 2016; Silva et al., 2016). Nevertheless, additional national research and corresponding data in this area is much needed.

In the context of a pandemic and especially during confinements, where we were all deprived of the fundamental value of freedom and personal space, it is easy to understand the existence of an unmanageable and never before experienced display of stress factors that added up to each other (e.g. relational stress, loneliness and detachment, difficulties in managing uncertainty, emergence of latent conflicts, loss of income due to unemployment or layoffs, running over domestic tasks with professional commitments, various personal overloads in the management of all this) – that amount of distress could only aggregate vulnerability to those already in a more vulnerable situation – as migrants and ethnic minorities often are (IOM/MPI, 2021). Moreover, the lockdowns, imposed social distancing and the sudden and drastic reduction in the social, cultural, and recreational offers contributed to deepen gaps in social support, the fragmentation of some affective ties and the exponential increase in feelings of maladjustment and isolation (Fasani & Mazza, 2020).

On another hand, even though the artistic and cultural world have suffered immensely since the beginning of the pandemic, artistic and cultural activities have totally stopped only for a short period of time. In fact, after a short period of total cessation, some socio-cultural workers and artists – both locally and worldwide - have invented new ways to pursue activities, on-line and sometimes outdoors. These activities have proven to be very important in combatting social isolation and in fostering solidarity between individuals globally, migrants or not (Martiniello, 2022).

Focusing on the subject of our analysis - the cultural dimension of migrant integration – it is imperious to comprehend how highly based on subjective perceptions (rather than objective differences) it is, and how it can be conceptualized at individual or institutional levels (Penninx & Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016). Integration through culture refers to the sensitive and heterogeneous matter of norms and values, as well as the (ethnic and national) identity of both migrants

and the receiving societies (Goñda et al., 2021; Shain, 2018). Here, we defend cultural integration as a process of mutual acceptance of cultural differences and of bilateral engagement in including migrants into the society's culture in terms of norms and values recognized as characteristic for specific host society as a whole (Vlachau, 2017; Wodak, 2016).

When studying the process of migrant integration, as we pointed out earlier, appropriate indicators make it possible to carry out not only several group comparisons, but also to establish different stages in the integration process or the effectiveness of integration policy (MIPEX, 2017). Nevertheless, we would like to highlight the idea that integration policies for migrant populations, distinct groups of migrants and ethnic minorities cannot be fully adjusted without taking into account the needs and perspectives of those targeted, the difficulties perceived from their point of view, which they sense in their contexts and communities, as well as aspects that are difficult to measure through questionnaires and harder/ numeric instruments - subjective dimensions of well-being, security, belonging... which - we hope – ultimate result in the feeling of full integration (inclusion). Therefore, our study focused on assessing soft indicators (e.g. subjective, individual, self-reported convictions and perceptions), as following governments increasing attention to the personal dimensions of integration: specifically approached here through culture (European Commission, 2016; European Union, 2017).

Our results showed us very interesting data regarding *everyday integration* concept - which allows us to foresee that, despite its avant-garde legislation, Portugal still shows several gaps hindering immigrants' integration, as discussed below.

When considering “Resources and Experiences in Host Country”, aside the already mentioned negative pandemic-related events, certain experiences of discrimination and stereotyping continue to emerge, namely when considering gender roles. Despite the enlargement of Portuguese consciousness when it comes to gender biases and stereotyping, we would like to highlight that changing a collective mentality that is still based on traditionalist functional structures is lengthy and an unfinished process. As we are aware of the latency of this stereotype, we believe that - through the improvement

of cultural competence and the immersion of Portuguese society in a multicultural reality - the discriminatory effects directed towards Brazilian women are becoming less frequent and less felt. This observation is corroborated by Oliveira, who did not find in her studies any effects of discrimination of Brazilian migrants associated with gender (Oliveira, 2017).

Our Brazilian participants highlighted several difficulties regarding employment and/or access to the labour market, as well as receiving a satisfactory income. We can confidently state that these are also the most significant and frequent complaints of the Portuguese population group, within the same age sector and with the same educational level. Perceptibly, being at a minority group, Brazilian migrants must feel those struggles with a wider intensity. Therefore, as pointed out by one of our participants, it would be incredibly helpful if our migrants could count with a of (cultural) mediation and interface to the Portuguese reality, which would allow a faster and more effective access not only to the labour market - but also to the remaining goods and services, rights and responsibilities guaranteed by law (Wodak, 2016). Additionally, national research has been focusing on characteristics of immigrant groups, namely regarding their availability for geographical mobility, which tends to be greater than that of nationals. On the one hand, studies show that in some situations this mobility is mostly of the horizontal type, allowing a greater geographical rotation according to needs. On the other hand, it allows the most qualified Brazilian immigrants to begin ascending professional trajectories, through a longer permanence at work which in turn provides them with greater job security. If initially the integration of these immigrants takes place in the lowest echelons of the professional hierarchy, there are later improvements, already observed in other migratory contexts (Peixoto, 2008). Additionally, as previously explored, there seems to be a certain line of continuity in migrant trajectories that links the characteristics of individuals in their society of origin, the legal means they mobilized to migrate and their current characteristics (Oliveira, 2017).

Moreover, it is relevant to reflect on the importance of Culture in its multiple dimensions – as these were the most reported activities that, in the perception of Brazilian migrants, would facilitate their

integration in the host country. Our results corroborate an idea we aim to point out: that Culture, social affairs and migration and integration departments within a city administration and / or local organizations need to work together to achieve a cross-sectoral cooperation. Public spaces in cities are ideal meeting places for cultural activities aiming to foster intercultural dialogue. The presence of institutions such as libraries or theatres outside their physical buildings encourages public participation; additionally, planning activities for children is deeply engaging for parents and promote a subliminal solidarity that fosters similarities and belonging (Eurocities, 2016).

As our Brazilian participants acknowledged, through cultural activities, migrants can more effectively understand the society they arrived at, to perceive its functioning, the social behaviours, and have a greater immersion in its values, norms and widespread culture. Only through that immersion, migrants can comply to an intangible subjective social comprehension that enables the previously mentioned sense of belonging.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Against the backdrop of multiple barriers and intersectional inequalities, integration through culture has a crucial role to play as it has a positive impact on making migrants feeling comfortable at their new environments and promotes cultural learning. It equips them with knowledge and confidence to actively participate in the life of the host societies and it is a necessary condition for and positively impacts on their chances to participate in education and labour market. Moreover, it positively contributes in strengthening the ties among the community, living together and fighting stereotypes (Cetrez et al, 2021; Eurocities, 2016).

Looking at migrants and their descendants as consumers and producers of artistic goods is also a way move beyond the victimising and stigmatising approaches that are very common nowadays. The lens of arts and culture acknowledges migrants' agency, helping to "rehumanize" migrants, who are too often reduced to impoverished unequal statistics (Martiniello, 2022).

Participating in cultural activities provides migrants a playful and relaxed context where they can interact and establish new relationships with local people, learn linguistic subtleties and express their cultural identities in their new countries. Cultural activities offer protected spaces, essential for migrants to acquire skills with significant impacts on understanding the host culture, which is reflected in the sense of personal autonomy and competence, well-being, perceived ability to use goods and services guaranteed by law, but also improving their perceived confidence for employability – thus resulting in a more effective and successful integration (Eurocities, 2016; European Commission, 2016).

**Funding:** Co-funded by Erasmus+ Programme, European Commission: “A new approach on cultural learning for promoting the social inclusion of migrants and refugees (NEST)” (612187-EPP-1-2019-1-EL-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN).

## REFERENCES

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21, 166-191

Almeida, L.M. & Caldas, J.P. (2013). Migration and maternal health: experiences of brazilian women in Portugal”. *Revista Brasileira de Saúde Materno-Infantil*, 13(4): 309-316.

Almeida, L.M., Casanova, C., Caldas, J., Ayres-de-Campos, D. & Dias, S. (2014). Migrant women’s perceptions of healthcare during pregnancy and early motherhood: addressing the social determinants of health. *J Immigr Minor Health*. 16(4): 719-23. doi: 10.1007/s10903-013-9834-4. PMID: 23616047.

Blanchet-Garneau, A. & Pepin, J. (2015). Cultural Competence: A Constructivist Definition. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 26(1), 9-15. DOI:10.1177/1043659614541294.

Cetrez, Ö., DeMarinis, V., Petterson, J., Shakra, M. (2020). Integration: Policies, Practices, and Experiences, Sweden Country

Report. *RESPOND Working papers Global Migration: Consequences and Responses*, Uppsala University. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3951714>.

Cetrez, Ö., Atchulo, F., Garosi, I., Hack, A. & Rajon, M. (2021). Integration and Determinants of Psychosocial Health. *RESPOND Working papers Global Migration: Consequences and Responses*, Uppsala University.

DeMarinis, V., Grzymala-Moszczyńska, H., & Jablonski, P. (2002). Polish Children and Refugees: The role of religious culture and gender in the host community acculturation process. In D. Moberg & R. Piedmont (Eds.), *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, 12: 23-52. Leiden: Brill.

Diehl, C., Lubbers, M., Mühlau, P. & Platt, L. (2016). Starting out: New migrants' sociocultural integration trajectories in four European destinations". *Ethnicities*, 16(2): 157–179.

Duszczyk, M., Pachocka, M. and Pszczółkowska, D. (2020). *Relations between Immigration and Integration Policies in Europe. Challenges, Opportunities and Perspectives in Selected EU Member States*. Routledge: London/New York.

Eurocities (2016). *Guidelines for cities on the role of culture in the integration of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers*. <http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/allcontent/Guidelines-for-cities-on-the-role-of-integrationof-migrants-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-WSPO-AE7DMC>

European Commission (2016). *Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals*. European Commission: Brussels. <https://ec.europa.eu/migrantintegration/news/europeintegrationactionplanofthirdcountrynationalslaunched> (accessed 11 November 2021).

European Union (2017). *How culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis*. <https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/how-culture-and-the-arts-can->

promote-intercultural-dialoguein-the-context-of-the-migratory-and-refugee-crisis-pbNC0117271/

Fasani, F. & Mazza, J. (2020). *A vulnerable workforce: migrant workers in the Covid-19 pandemic*. JRC Technical Report. Brussels: European Commission. (<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC120730/online.pdf>).

Foner, N. and Simon, P. (2015). *Fear, Anxiety, and National Identity*. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Gońda, M., Pachocka, M. and Podgórska, K. (2021). Measuring the Cultural Dimension of Migrant Integration and Integration Policy in the European Context: Dilemmas and Discussions. *Int Migr*, 59: 241-262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12757>.

IOM (2017). *Integration and Social Cohesion: Key Elements for Reaping the Benefits of Migration*. Global Compact Thematic Paper - Integration and Social Cohesion. [https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/our\\_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/our_work/ODG/GCM/IOM-Thematic-Paper-Integration-and-Social-Cohesion.pdf)

IOM/MPI (2021). COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/covid-19-and-the-state-of-global.pdf>

Le, H., Polonsky, M., & Arambewela, R. (2015). Social Inclusion through Cultural Engagement among Ethnic Communities. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 24(4), 375–400.

Malheiros, J. (2007). Os brasileiros em Portugal: a síntese do que sabemos. In: *Imigração brasileira em Portugal*. Lisboa: ACIDI , 11-37.

Marques, R. (2006). Os fluxos migratórios: da Gestão a uma melhor integração. *Cadernos Sociedade e Trabalho*, 6, 25-30.

Marsella, A. (2005). Culture and Conflict: Understanding, negotiating and reconciling, conflicting constructions of reality. *International Journal of Intercultural Research*, 29, 651-673.

Martiniello, M. (2022). Researching arts, culture, migration and change: a multi (trans)disciplinary challenge for international migration studies. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 10, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00281-5>

MIPEX (2017). *Policy Indicators List and Questionnaire*. <http://www.mipex.eu/methodology> (accessed 10 November 2021).

Moita, M. & Silva, A. (2016). Modelos de Competência Cultural: Uma Análise Crítica. *Pensar Enfermagem*, 20(2), 72-88.

Oliveira, M. (2017). Inscrições no Espaço Social: O Imigrantes Brasileiros no Grande Porto. *Sociol Antropol*, 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1590/2238-38752017v726>

Oppedal, B., Røysamb, E., & Sam, D. (2004). The effect of acculturation and social support on change in mental health among young immigrants. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 28(6), 481-494.

Organista, P., Chun, K., & Marin, G. (1998). *Readings in Ethnic Psychology*. New York: Routledge.

Peixoto, J. (2008), Imigração e mercado de trabalho em Portugal. *Revista Migrações*, 2, 19-46.

Persaud, A. (2017). Geopolitics: Needs of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Europe. *TPM-Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology*, 24(3), 399-407.

Penninx, R. & Garcés-Mascreñas, B. (2016). The Concept of Integration as an Analytical Tool and as a Policy Concept, in B. Garcés-Mascreñas and R. Penninx (Eds.), *Integration Processes and*

*Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors* (pp.11-30). New York: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4>.

Reis, S., Sousa, P. & Machado, R. (2021). Relatório de Imigração, Fronteiras e Asilo 2020. Serviços de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF): Oeiras.

Robila, M. (2018). *Refugees and Social Integration in Europe*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: New York.

Rottmann, S. (2020). Integration Policies, Practices and Experiences. Country Report Turkey, *RESPOND Working Papers: Global Migration: Consequences and Responses*. Retrieved from <https://respondmigration.com/>

Shaaban, A., Abecasis, A., Fronteira, I., Muggli, Z., Amado, R., Vaz, D., Silva, A. & Martins, M. (2021). Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 among immigrants in Lisbon Region. *Tropical Medicine & International Health*, 6 (1), 14.

Silva, A., Piedade, A. Morgado, M. & Ribeiro, M. (2016). “Mediação Intercultural e Território: estratégias e desafios”. *Entre Iguais e Diferentes: a Mediação Intercultural - Atas das I Jornadas da Rede de Ensino Superior para a Mediação Intercultural*. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para as Migrações.

Simonsen, K. (2018). What It Means to (Not) Belong: A Case Study of How Boundary Perceptions Affect Second-Generation Immigrants’ Attachments to the Nation. *Sociological Forum*, 33(1).

Schain, M.A. (2018). *Shifting Tides: Radical-Right Populism and Immigration Policy in Europe and the United States*. Migration Policy Institute: Washington, DC.

Scholten, P. & Penninx, R. (2016). The multilevel governance of migration and integration, in B. Garcés-Masareñas and R. Penninx (Eds.), *Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and*

*Actors* (pp.91-108). Springer: New York. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4>.

Tomás, M. (2017). Pluralidade Religiosa, Fluxos Migratórios e Cidadania. *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões*, 20, (pp. 469-482).

Vlachou, M. (2017). A Inclusão de Migrantes e Refugiados: O Papel das Organizações Culturais. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian: Lisboa.

Williams, R. (1994). The Analysis of Culture. In J. Storey (Eds.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture – A Reader* (pp. 48-56). Georgia: The University of Georgia Press.

Wodak, R. (2016). Integration and culture: From “communicative competence” to “competence in plurality”, in R. Bauböck and M. Tripkovic (Eds.), *The integration of migrants and refugees. An EUI Forum on Migration, Citizenship and Demography* (pp.116–138). Florence: European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

Zapata-Barrero, R., Caponio, T. & Scholten, P. (2017). Theorizing the “local turn” in a multilevel governance framework of analysis: a case study in immigrant policies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 82(2): 241–246.