

EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Portugal

1 INTRODUCTION

Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.

1. Mentors for Migrants

One of the projects that has been running for several years to support immigrants' long-term integration in Portugal is the *Mentoring Programme for Immigrants* organised by the High Commission for Migrations (former High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue); a project promoted at the national level. It ran as a **pilot initiative** between September 2012 and June 2014. Since July 2014, it is in its **2nd phase** with a new designation - Mentors for Migrants. It now targets migrants (both immigrants and emigrants) as well as refugees.

The incorporation of emigrants, due to the rising volume of native Portuguese leaving the country, led to a change in the scope of the programme, adding the support for Portuguese emigrants wanting to return. Moreover, the recent inflow of refugees also introduced a modification in the target population of mentees, in order to accommodate this particular group of foreign citizens. According to the national coordinator of the programme, the inclusion of emigrants and refugees in the project increased the interest for the issue of mentoring and gave higher visibility to the programme, leading to an increase in the number of volunteers interested and enrolled in the programme. The profile of the organisations involved in the network has therefore been enlarged.

This initiative consists of a national network of volunteers – mentors – available to provide guidance, orientation or information to migrants – mentees –, according to their needs in different areas (qualification and job search, entrepreneurship, health, parenting, citizenship and participation, etc. It was inspired by [Mentor's Kvinfo Network](#). The programme is divided in three dimensions of intervention:

1. Communication and dissemination of the interventions;
2. Mentoring and matching;
3. Training and network activities.

Concerning the geographical scope, it covers the entire country (mainland and the two Portuguese archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores), with 56 partners ranging from local authorities, NGOs, immigrants' associations and cooperatives to private institutions of social solidarity and foundations.

[List of partners](#)

2. Mentoring for migrants - JRS

As part of the Pedro Arrupe Centre - CPA, the reception centre for immigrants and refugees of the Jesuit Refugee Service, a project of social mentoring has been implemented since 2010. Its aim is to provide an individual and personalised support to immigrants and refugees to promote and facilitate their integration. Through the development of a close relationship with the tutor, the mentee develops stronger links with the Portuguese society. The volunteer tutor can contribute to greater socialisation and Portuguese language skills or help in active job search, etc. Since 2010, this project has had 35 tutors and 50 mentees.

3. Mentoring Program for Immigrants - ACM

This is an initiative promoted by the High Commissioner for Migration (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações) and developed by a group of local partners. It aims to foster exchange and mutual understanding between Portuguese citizens and migrants (including refugees).

Other long-standing initiatives involving a significant number of volunteers in the integration of immigrants include the project [Speak](#) which focuses on language and cultural exchange and Association [CEPAC](#) where volunteers participate in a number of activities in areas such as health and legal services.

In addition, multiple platforms have been developed to bring together voluntary offers by individuals and the needs of institutions, streamlined by Volunteering Grants of several authorities or institutions such as the Municipal Council of Lisbon, the Youth Foundation, Entrajuda, among others.

3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.

In Portugal, there has been a major civil society mobilisation to welcome and host the share of refugees assigned to the country (in principle, a total of 4,500 people) with EU distribution schemes. In a country like Portugal, used to receive a very small amount of refugees every year, the attention and resources involved in the process is a remarkable fact.

On 4 September 2015, a network of Portuguese civil society organisations supporting refugees was presented to the public. Platform to Support Refugees / [Plataforma de Apoio aos Refugiados](#) - PAR is a set of 30 founding institutions and agencies united under the motto 'We see, hear and read. We can't ignore'. The institutions involved range from religious oriented organisations, like the Jesuit Refugee Service, Cáritas-Portugal or Lisbon's Islamic Community, to corporate foundations such as EDP Foundation or the Montepio Foundation, public institutions such as the Portuguese Refugee Council or the European Anti-Poverty Network-Portugal, as well as NGOs including the National Youth Council Community and Life and Peace. In January 2016, PAR had 200+ members available to provide logistical, financial or dissemination assistance, among others. It also benefits from direct support from 18 institutions and companies¹ and the participation of 19 media outlets.

The mission of PAR is to 'promote a culture of acceptance and support for refugees, both in the Portuguese society and in countries of origin and transit'. The Platform's focus is therefore twofold:

1. registration and support in countries of origin and transit
2. reception and integration in Portugal

For the moment, it has two lines of action:

1. Project PAR Families (Projeto PAR Famílias) that aims to create a design for reception and integration of refugee children and their families in Portugal, in a community context, with the involvement of local institutions. The working model of the project is "an institution - a family."
2. The Project PAR Frontline (Projeto PAR Linha da Frente) to support refugees in their home or neighbouring countries, through the work provided by Caritas and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) to enable refugees to live with dignity and security.

It should be noted that the basis of this work relates to previous experience of reception and integration of refugees in Portugal, namely the reception of large numbers of refugees from Kosovo, as well as the experience of some Portuguese institutions in the refugee relocation, hosting and integration process in Portugal, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service and the Portuguese Refugees Council.

In October 2015, it was [reported](#) that since its establishment, PAR had collaborated with 238 civil society organisations and a range of 115 institutions expressed their interest and capacity to host about 650 people. Following an intense work of public awareness, citizens show interest in refugee-related issues and are available to collaborate with this initiative, through donations or volunteering. By January 2016, PAR had brought together about 90 hosting organisations (35 institutions or foundations, 26 religious institutes, 24 parishes, 20 Private Institutions of Social Solidarity, 6 enterprises, 5 schools, 3 civil parishes and 2 municipal councils), with 119 offers to host refugee families (about 600 refugees). In terms of geographic spread: 30 hosting organisations are located in the North, 18 in the Centre, 66 in the region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley, 5 in the Alentejo region and only 2 in the Algarve region.

¹ the Portuguese Episcopal Conference; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation; Morais Leitão, Galvão Teles, Soares da Silva & Associates; Vieira de Almeida & Associates - Sociedade de Advogados, R. L (Lawyers) .; Sérvulo Correia & Associates - Sociedade de Advogados (Lawyers), R. L .; Ernst & Young; Volkswagen Portugal; Campos Ferreira Sá Carneiro & Associates; Ipsos APEME; University of Lisbon; Portugal BP; Jerónimo Martins; Portuguese Foundation Centre; SIBS; PT Foundation; Porto Editora; DHL; National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education, I. P.

Concerning volunteers, in January 2016, it a network of 6,206 volunteers (1,522 in the North, 609 in the Centre region, 3,682 in the region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley, 127 in the Alentejo region and 173 in the Algarve region). In addition, 93 volunteers are based in the archipelagos of Madeira and the Azores, although there are not hosting institutions in these regions. The offer of volunteers is divided into different areas, including basic needs (housing, food, etc. - 721 volunteers); technical support (legal, psychological, social and health - 900 volunteers); integration support (Portuguese language learning, education, etc. - 2235 volunteers); others language support (393 volunteers, of which 69 master the Arabic language); and more.

Given that the project PAR Families brings together different host institutions, a Technical Secretariat, run by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), has been set up. Its task is to monitor the host institutions, guaranteeing them all the technical and administrative support needed for the integration and progressive empowerment of families in the country. (1288 volunteers).

Another very recent initiative is [Refugees Welcome](#), inspired by the original [German](#) project which matches refugees looking for accommodation and those willing to host them, and was later replicated in several EU countries. In Portugal, it began on 4 September 2015. According to Ms. Andréa Martinez, one of the co-founders of Portuguese branch, the project partners with the Association Akto (located in the city of Coimbra), project [Iduka](#) and with an informal Refugees Association in Bobadela (municipality of Loures, in the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon). At the end of 2015, Refugees Welcome Portugal had 110 volunteers enrolled at the national level and 8 refugees supported.

4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.

It seems that civic mobilisation for refugee integration and related initiatives greatly exceeds that of other themes. Perhaps due to the public visibility and debate that the issue is having in the *media*.

It also appears that the civic mobilisation of immigrants and their associations follow the pattern of earlier actions in which they are under-represented compared to the Portuguese population / organisations. Volunteers are nevertheless diverse in age and gender. They are also closely related to host institutions or networks and geographical close to the settlement areas of the refugees (as it happens with the projects covering the immigrant populations).

The majority of the registered 6206 PAR volunteers in January 2016 were women: 5205 against 1001 men. Most were aged between 15 and 60 (5,623 volunteers) but it is worth mentioning that 8 were aged between 75 and 90. It is important to note, too, that most registrations occurred right at the launch of this initiative, demonstrating a strong desire of the civil society to act and address the 'crisis'.

Concerning the profile of the volunteers working in the recent project Refugees Welcome, the majority is aged between 20 and 35, attending bachelor or master studies or already active in the labour market. There are also Portuguese volunteers residing abroad and immigrants living in Portugal who want to help.

But most volunteers live in the Lisbon and in the Algarve regions. Volunteers from the Algarve are aged 50 or more and retired.

5 INNOVATION ASPECT

Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.

Comparing the programme Mentors for Migrants with the PAR, one identifies similarities but also some differences. From its inception, PAR showed a greater professionalism and organisational know-how, with high ability to mobilise different sectors of the Portuguese society:

- a) It uses a professional image (logo and appealing website) for communication and dissemination its goals and strategies, as well as a presence on Twitter and Facebook;
- b) It works with an impressive quantity and diversity of organisations thanks to the development of a refugee reception methodology that succeed to bring together a large number of institutions of the civil society, enhancing its networking and capacity to share best practices. PAR promotes coordination and communication among institutions, enabling the creation of synergies.
- c) It has established protocols either with civil society institutions that have long been working in this area or with governmental institutions, and receives support from the private/business sector.

The programme *Mentors for Migrants* is also very professional and equally involves enterprises and companies from the private sector, but has a less noticeable presence of (religious) organisations.

PAR also offers an opportunity to test the methodology of reception and integration in different contexts, particularly with regard to the types of host institutions and local communities, allowing the assessment of good practices in the integration of refugees.

Another innovative aspect of PAR, compared to others, is the structure and focus of actions carried out: both in Portugal and in countries of origin or transit. The goal is to have a greater focus on the most vulnerable refugees: children with their families (or unaccompanied minors). Within Family project, the reception and integration are intended to lead to autonomy (labour market for adult and school for children). In addition, support for language learning and access to health services are also provided. In parallel, host institutions will be trained on how to avoid and address difficulties in processes. The granting of residence permit on humanitarian grounds is to be negotiated with the Portuguese authorities.

According to Ms. Andréa Martinez, the innovative aspect of the recent project Refugees Welcome resides in the nature of the service provided: sharing private dwellings with refugees. A family willing to share its accommodation with a refugee can contact the project through an [on-line registration](#) and the project's staff members will find the best match. Volunteers also provide support after the refugee has moved to the family's dwelling.

6 ADDED VALUE

Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.

The added value of initiatives like the programme Mentors for Migrants is to render available a kind of orientation and guidance for migrants (including refugees) to whom many challenges in Portugal are quite difficult to overcome. Mentors help migrants find their way within the Portuguese bureaucratic society, design and conceive a small business, find training or apply for already existing resources, just to name a few activities. The institutions and agencies involved are private and public (especially at the local level) to cover diverse resources and services.

The added value of PAR lies in the mobilisation of such a volume of human resources and institutions, while it is too soon, according to Ms. Andréa Martinez, evaluate the added value of the recent project Refugees Welcome.

7 IMPACT

Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.

The PAR platform complements services and activities already provided by other institutions, namely the Portuguese Caritas, the Portuguese Refugee Council and the Jesuit Refugee Service, contributing to a greater supply and promotion capacity of reception and integration of refugees. The initiative was welcomed by all sector of society.

One of the major impacts is the rapid response in the provision of housing for refugees in Portugal. It is also important to highlight the process improvement on the part of institutions and the capacity to meet new needs, as most of the institutions that proposed their help had no experience in integrating refugees. Finally, the networking powered by PAR can promote greater coordination between institutions, allowing greater gains for the various stakeholders in this process, and ultimately, better integration of the families sheltered in local communities.

However, due to the visibility that the PAR is having in Portuguese media and the huge inflow of refugees into Europe, one may consider that some Portuguese citizens think that these new refugees are being given “too many resources” which are financed by the Portuguese tax payers. One must recall that Portugal is still going through an austerity programme negotiated with the Troika in exchange for a bailout. This austerity led thousands of Portuguese citizens to emigrate and increased the proportion of people living in poverty. In the social networks, one can find positive reactions to the arrival and hosting of 4,500 refugees in Portugal but also negative opinions.