

**EMPLOYABILITY, MIGRATION & GENDER: CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES  
& POLICY FOCUS – INTERSECTIONALITY IN MIGRANTS RIGHTS ADVOCACY  
Lisbon (Portugal), 6-7 July 2023**

### **Context and objectives:**

"Employability, migration & gender: challenges and good practices" is one of SOLIDAR's Social Rights Ambassadors events for 2023 and took place in Lisbon, Portugal on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2023. It was co-organised by SOLIDAR and its transnational member Rede Sem Fronteiras, through their representation in Europe, Portuguese organisation Casa do Brasil. Representatives from 7 SOLIDAR members were present: [MPDL](#) (Spain), [Liga de la Educación](#) (Spain), [Willi-Eichler Akademie](#) (Germany), [Centre for Peace Studies](#) (Croatia), [CGIL](#) (Italy), [Initiative for Development and Cooperation](#) (Serbia), [Diáspora Sem Fronteiras](#) (Portugal).

Participation in the labour market is one of the major elements to social inclusion, all the more so for newcomers for whom, for various reasons, a job is usually the only source of income and a driver of integration in other areas (such as accessing decent housing).<sup>1</sup> At EU level, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion recognize the need to foster migrants' access to employment. However according to latest figures, the employment rate for non-EU born people in the EU was significantly lower than that of EU citizens.<sup>2</sup> Looking specifically at migrant women, they are in fact almost 25% less employed than their EU-born counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

The event brought 68 together various stakeholders to discuss issues related to employability of migrants in Portugal and in Europe, under a gender intersectional perspective, trying to identify not only challenges but also successes of different approaches. Testimonies from people with the lived experience of having emigrated to Europe and perspectives from civil society were central to the dialogue. The conversation also provided a space for practitioners on migrant inclusion from various countries in Europe to connect with each other, present their work and get inspired by good practices.

### **Description:**

**Cyntia de Paula, President of Casa do Brasil de Lisboa and political Coordinator of Rede sem Fronteiras** opened the discussion and welcomed participants to Sala do Arquivo, in the beautiful City Council building of Lisbon. **Sónia Pereira, Portuguese High Commissioner for Migrations**, took the floor to give an overview of the Portuguese approach to migration. Portugal strives to apply transversally a gender perspective to its migration and integration policy-making, to give a better account of women and girl's

specific migration and integration experiences, in line with commitments under the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. There is a clear objective to promote women's independence. This is particularly the case on the labour market, with policies to facilitate fair and dignified recruitment.

It was then the turn of **João Albuquerque, MEP from Portugal (S&D Group)** to present the European Union's role in designing and implementing migration and integration policies. After underlining the shortcomings of the migration deal previously reached by Member States, he reminded that welcoming non-EU people to work in the EU will be not a choice but a necessity if Europe wants to counter its demographic decline and meet the challenges of the green transition. Regularisation of people already present on the EU territory could be another option. All this will require long-term investment in people and particularly in their education, focusing not only on marketable skills but also on their transversal skills, and their citizenship education.

**Panel 1: Disqualification of immigrants in the labour market.** Moderator: Erica Acosta, Casa do Brasil de Lisboa / Rede sem Fronteiras

**Joana Topa, researcher from Maia University** explained that women migrant always existed, but were long invisibilised in migrant studies. In Portugal though, they make up the majority of migrants. Many identities come to play in the migration and integration processes, that should all be looked at. She set the record straight with some figures, explaining that the migrant population in Portugal is more active than the national one, while facing a lot more barriers. Among them, they are mostly underemployed as they cannot get a job matching their education level, or the language barriers even though many of the migrants in Portugal speak Portuguese too.

It was then the turn of **Patrícia Brederode from the hosting organisation, Casa do Brasil de Lisboa (CBL)**, to give specific elements on migration of Brazilian people to Portugal. The gender element can be an important barrier to employment in some sectors, notably the care sector: because of stereotypes against Brazilian women, those women are sometimes not accepted in position of providing care to men. CBL, in activity since 1992, is actually the only organisation dealing with South American migrants, not only from Brazil. There is a lack of representativeness.

**Ana Mansoa, Centro Padre Alves Correia (CEPAC)** presented cases of loopholes in the access to labour market in Portugal. For instance, the country has a protocol with Portuguese-speaking African countries under which, should a national of that country require a treatment that is not available there, they can

get a medical visa to receive it in Portugal. Though the visa does not explicitly forbid it, its validity prevents *de facto* anyone to find work in Portugal.

## **Panel 2: the labour market under an intersectional perspective** Ana Paula Costa, Casa do Brasil Lisboa

**Freda Paranhos, CBL** shared powerful testimonies of being a trans woman from Brazil – the country that most kills its trans people in the world – and a migrant in Portugal.

**Mariana Araujo, Casa da Gente Barcelona** built on the previous intervention to make the point that projects aiming to support certain categories of people can be problematic as well if they try to put a label on beneficiaries; what if people want or need to stay hidden (e.g. trans migrants, undocumented people)?

**Juliana Wahlgren, European Anti-Poverty Network**, brought the perspective of economic justice, a concept going beyond employability to look also at the quality of jobs. Most of the Europeans that work are in a poverty situation. Poor migrant people exist at this specific intersection where the fragmentation of inclusion and welfare policies makes them vulnerable as social protection requires a certain amount of previous contribution into the system, while migration policies focus on attracting so-called highly-skilled workers. In addition, the specific burden of migrant women is almost not dealt with from any side. She took the example of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Social Scoreboard to demonstrate that frameworks for welfare/social rights tend to leave out the question of migration, as well as clear links to poverty.

**Neusa Sousa, Chá de Beleza Afro** argued that Black women are seen as bodies that can be used for multiple purposes, who are made for work. They might want something else coming to Portugal but this is what they're left with, and it perpetuates over generation because their children may also find themselves in poverty and victims of discrimination, with few options other than the same low-paid jobs their mothers had.

## **Panel 3: Good Practices** | Moderation: Helena Schimitz, Diáspora Sem Fronteiras.

**Leise Semedo presented the work of Cooperativa Bandin (Portugal).** This cooperative welcomes unemployed women, often mothers. When these women arrive to the association, they are helped to find a job, they join a group that can help them. Some of them are still in debt of smugglers and victims of exploitation. Some students come with the idea that they will get a scholarship once in Portugal but

nothing of the sort, which means they can easily fall prey to exploitative employers and fall off their educational path. Girls sometimes have to resort to sex work to survive.

**Susanne Drake, Willi-Eichler Akademie (Germany).** In Germany, the majority of migrants are not first arrivals. Most people. One can now change their status from asylum-seekers to job seeker which helps with integration.

Successful integration can only start with a comprehensive legal framework, but this needs support. All the hardwork of civil society organisations can only be a drop in the ocean if there is no political will – which is hard to reach, we know that migrants are not welcome in most places in Europe.

Integration done by Länder in Germany. Integration is for people who are deemed "integrable", not people in irregularity. People are by law owed education and training, with the aim to integrate them in a way that enables them to participate in a democratic structure. They would also be citizens and voters. The majority of women migrants come with family reunification, with children, and little to no formal education. They are often left in unemployment, all the more as Germany is famous for having a significant gap in salaries between men and women, and not even remotely enough childcare.

She ended her presentation mentioning two recent developments in German politics from June 2023, both targeting skilled workers, the Skilled Immigration Act and the Opportunity Cards (Chancenkarten).

**Antonija Potočki, Centre for Peace Studies** contended that Croatia and Germany are quite similar, except Croatia is on the so-called "Balkans route", making it one of the first countries people enter but don't want to stay, with Germany usually being the target. It's the longest external EU land border, and violations of fundamental rights have been happening for years. Employment is the last thing people think about when they arrive there, with international protection being the objective. Integration should start from the 1st day people enter the country but in Croatia, it does only once you are granted asylum or a permit. People in camps do not receive any language class, only 10 euros per month from the government.

**Milena Susic, legal advisor in Serbian organisation Initiative for Development and Cooperation,** explained that in Serbia, support to people in the period of waiting for a decision on a work permit or protection, is mostly funded by international donors, as there is no political will from Serbian donors. IDC has been working since the dissolution of Yugoslavia with refugees from former Yugoslavian countries and is currently working with returnees: Serbian citizens who had asked for asylum in EU and were returned, voluntarily or not. A lot of these projects funded by German donors, or countries who want to prevent secondary migration.

One main focus is on socio-economic empowerment, with capacity-building, information about access to rights and services, to enhance employability of women, resorting at times to a sort of affirmative action.

**Ana Casado, social workers in the women's intervention department of Movimento por la Paz MPDL** underlined the need to understand the whole situation of a person, and coordinate between all actors of a social intervention. The situation between someone in a regular administrative situation and someone who is not, single-parents or not, is completely different. For the employment part, there is a lawyer with them to explain to them how the Spanish system works, what are their rights as a job-seeker. After this, a phase starts where the woman gets in touch with employers, the MPDL social workers support her in preparing an interview, show her how to use job portals etc. This goes in parallel with group sessions that don't necessarily have the aim to improve the job-seeking or technical skills, but mostly their social skills and their networks. The idea is to improve their autonomy, and reduce their dependency on social services.

**Lisbon City councillor Beatriz Diaz** closed the event with the acknowledgement of the crossing dimensions of race, class, migration and gender as something fundamental to address inequalities and discrimination, as well as the need for policies impacting foreigners to be built with local organisations representing them.

**Carlos Roldán, Social Policy Coordinator in SOLIDAR**, had the last word calling for a common and comprehensive, intersectional European migration policy based on human right, and solidarity.

### Takeaways:

Throughout the event, debate with participants highlighted that gendered stereotypes against migrant are not an isolated experience (alleged impossibility of women from some cultural or religious background to work with men, belief that migrant women are more likely to have kids and need maternity leave, etc). This requires fighting both against sexism and racism/islamophobia. It was also interesting for international participants to hear that people from Brasil even speaking the same language, are still not accepted – proving this is never really only about speaking the language.

Migrant women, black migrant women are not included in decision-making processes and this is a problem. The bigger problem is that participation in decision-making, as many political rights, is linked to citizenship and when you do not have it, you are left outside.

The lack of knowing the law and your rights is a dire problem, so is the difficulty in getting your skills recognised when you studied outside Europe, which effectively prevents one to exercise a regulated profession. Plus, a lot of women tend to underestimate their skills and previous work experience.

Among the main good action points that emerged from the discussion were:

- Good practices involving affection, emotion, story-telling.
- Systems of mentorship/buddies for migrants can be a good thing, especially when mentors are migrants themselves. CBL encourages more and more migrant people to fill leadership role.
- We as civil society and grassroots movement shouldn't wait for governments to knock on our door, we should organise and be active at the political level, while doing the good work on the ground. We have to vote (those who can), such as in the European elections next year, to translate our will in a larger political project. We cannot create systemic change with good practices that rely on short-term funding.

### **Policy Focus – Training on intersectionality in migrants rights advocacy**

On 7th July, 20 people including representatives from SOLIDAR Secretariat and members, had the privilege to take part in a training led by Juliana Wahlgren, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), on Intersectionality and migrants rights, learning why and how to apply intersectionality when analysing/designing policies and interventions on borders, anti-discrimination or inclusion of non-Europeans. It was a great opportunity to exchange knowledge, views and experience around migration in Europe!

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