

Francesco Vacchiano (ICS-ULisboa) | *On Marginal Inclusion: refugees and the fringes of citizenship in Portugal*

Among the most urgent measures envisaged in the European Agenda on Migration (the EU Commission plan to face the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe) one finds a “scheme to relocate 40,000 people from Italy, Greece and other Member States” (a number later increased to 160,000) and a “scheme to resettle over 20,000 people from outside the EU”. Whereas some countries resolutely refused the plan, the Portuguese government promptly endorsed the initiative and agreed to receive 4,700 people. As a consequence, an issue that had gone almost unnoticed in the country (Portugal registered only 477 asylum requests in 2014), took center stage and became a matter of public debate. As time passed, however, the asylum seekers, and particularly the awaited Syrians, were not arriving. Greek and Italian authorities were occasionally blamed for their supposed lack of organization, while some began to guess that asylum seekers might not want to come to Portugal. After some months of uncertainty, ‘relocated’ people began to arrive in March 2016 and Portugal has officially received 957 people hitherto. They are hosted in collective facilities or private apartments predisposed by receiving organizations (public institutions and NGOs), which were also designated to provide services expected to include language tuition, vocational training, legal counseling, and, whenever necessary, medical and psychological support. Although, one year after, the official narrative tells mainly a success story, almost 300 people have already fled the country, many beneficiaries complain of the distinctive treatment put in place by different bodies and point to the lack of actual possibilities of social inclusion, mainly through work and family reunification.

Based on my ethnographic work in this field, this contribution aims at following the process of social insertion of a group of refugees who arrived in Portugal throughout the last year. The objective is taking stock of the initiatives and discussing the problems that remain unaddressed. As I will show, reception works frequently as a process of marginal inclusion into the most fragile strata of society, relies on re-emigration as a relief-valve and is supported by a redundant rhetoric of good practice.