



Portuguese perspectives for education and inclusion of young forced migrants through sport

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ABSTRACT

As migratory waves increase and get more complex, social inequalities are likely to arise due to challenges associated with cultural differences, language or lack of supportive networks. Beside international laws and guidelines, responses have been developed for supporting young forced migrants inclusion in host countries. There are suggestions in the literature that sport, if intentionally used as an educational strategy with inclusive purposes, may benefit young forced migrants, not only in terms of their well-being but it may also provide a safe and educational space that allows opportunities for dialogue, language learning and cultural awareness. It is suggested that promoting its practice may create new forms of social, human and cultural capital, leading to meaningful relationships and a sense of (new) belonging. For young forced migrants, sport may become the first motivational asset for engaging with their host community due to familiarity and a common shared language. This article explores Portuguese settlement and inclusion practitioners' perceptions and uses of sport as an inclusive educational strategy for young forced migrants. Methodologically, the article is based on document analysis of international and national policies and semi-structured interviews with Portuguese actors linked to settlement procedures and sport. The results indicate the existence of policies that aim to protect young forced migrants and acknowledge different challenges concerning their resettlement in Europe. Despite sport being perceived as a valuable educational strategy, particularly in language learning, and an inclusive mechanism for creating a sense of (new) belonging, there are currently limited policies and guidelines in Portugal to implement educational strategies that use sport to include young forced migrants.

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Introduction

Migratory waves are increasing and getting more complex as people flee their homes, with latest estimates projecting more than 100 million forced migrants by 2022 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). In Europe, several laws and guidelines have been created to search for a common asylum policy that can support needs and offer the best possible conditions for resettlement and standardise procedures throughout the European Union (European Commission, 2020b). Such laws and guidelines that ground policies and define priorities related to forced migrants have been applied and adjusted to the Portuguese context.

The concept of ‘forced migrant’ refers to ‘a person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes’.¹ (Re)starting in a new country may bring challenges, like language barriers, lack of supportive and meaningful relations, traumas from migratory process, or restrictive asylum and settlement policies. These require educational and inclusive responses for (re)building life paths alongside with personal and social development. O’Reilly (2005) considers that social inclusion and exclusion of an individual rests on three main features: material social interactions that may help in establishing relationships among people; the relationship between personal and society’s values; and the relation between the group, that can be linked to some particular characteristic (e.g. ethnicity), and the society, where different physical, moral or behavioural characteristics shape the view of society about the group. From this perspective, social inclusion is a multidimensional concept, with material and non-material dimensions (McDonald et al., 2018) which together shape the individual and the society’s views about their (re)settlement process and belonging.

Education is acknowledged as a key aspect of inclusion (Ager & Strang, 2008), as educational measures may promote employability and enable people to be active and constructive members of their communities. However, as the authors suggest, ‘refugee children’s experience of education is impacted by insufficient support for learning the host-society language, isolation and exclusion (bullying, racism, difficulty making friends, etc.)’ (p. 172). The Portuguese approach to settlement includes measures to address immediate forced migrants’ perceived needs, such as housing, food, employment, education, health (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, n.d.). Other measures have been implemented to promote educational and inclusive processes, by developing initiatives that foster engagement with Portuguese cultures and communities with similar backgrounds (Vieira et al., 2017).

One of the contexts in which programmes/activities have been developed to foster forced migrants’ inclusion is sport (e.g. Ollif, 2008). The use of sport with educational and inclusive purposes has been studied through a variety of lens, exploring the complexities linked not only to forced migration, youth, gender, culture, religion or host contexts, but also on effects and impacts given to sport on their settlement and inclusion processes. Other researchers in the field of inclusion and migration suggest that sport’s specific characteristics, the plurality of contexts where it can occur and the habitus associated with sport may provide room for communicating and establishing meaningful relationships (Dukic et al., 2017; Mayblin et al., 2016; McDonald et al., 2018), allowing the creation of cultural, social and human capital without losing identity (Spaaij, 2012).

European policies are starting to recognise sport’s wider role and social value. In Portugal, while inclusion through sport is implemented with diverse populations (e.g. disabled, disadvantaged, forced migrants, elderly), there is little research on inclusion processes (Constantino & Minas, 2022) and limited knowledge on how sport is used or could be used as an educational strategy with inclusive purposes for young forced migrants. This article seeks to address this gap.

Policies of settlement and integration: the Portuguese context

Portuguese law (Act No. 27/2008; Act No. 26/2014) assumes two types of international protection: refugee status and subsidiary protection. The process for getting international protection on arrival in Portugal (if there is no previous request) is represented in Figure 1.

The arrival mechanism (spontaneous, relocation, resettlement) may influence the diversity of the population that comes to Portugal (status, country of origin, socio-economic status, age, culture, reason for fleeing). The Portuguese settlement model is based on a decentralised approach and coordinated local answers (Oliveira, 2022; Sousa et al., 2021), that is, forced migrants are assigned to different places throughout the country, supported by a diverse network of institutions.

Portuguese law and governmental institutions provide guidelines that seek inclusion for forced migrants in education (specific educational measures and school support), access to services (creation of specialised answers) or health (dissemination of health policies/guidelines in languages

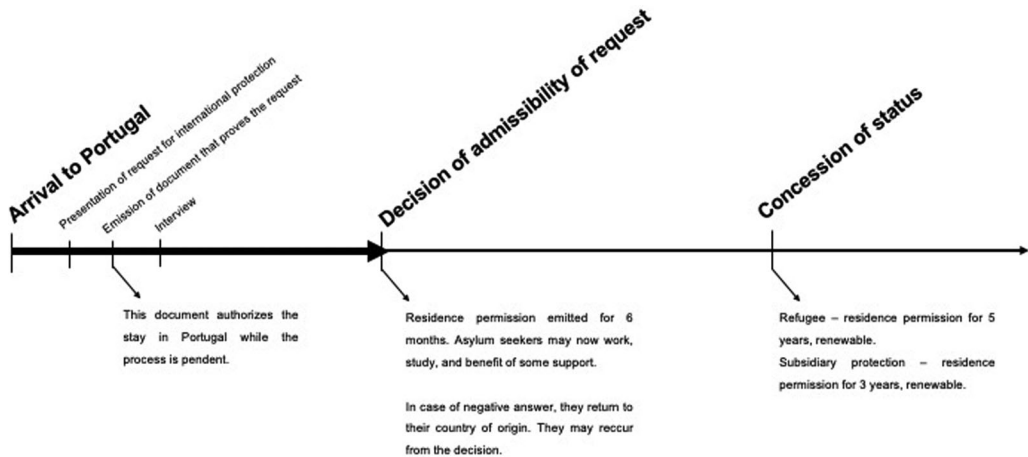


Figure 1. Representation of an international protection request process according to Portuguese law.

that forced migrants understand). Forced migrants also benefit from an 18-month settlement programme, which seeks to promote autonomy and integration into the Portuguese context (Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, *n.d.*), supported by a local institution responsible for helping to (re)construct their lives.

There are also other initiatives for fostering inclusion, such as art, gatherings, conferences or sport-related activities. These can act as spaces for expression and transformation of cultural identities, for cooperation and dialogue and for promoting forced migrants as active and valued members of the community (Dukic et al., 2017; Marsh, 2012; Santinho, 2022). In Portugal, Santinho (2022) reflects on the role of theatre and the arts as places of inclusion and empowerment, where ‘migrants actively constitute themselves as producers of culture’ (p. 142) and ‘where personal and collective stories gain visibility’ (p.148). The same author refers to the importance of these initiatives as familiar spaces for increasing social relationships through a safe environment. However, young forced migrants inclusion in Portugal through sport is still a little-known area, which may hinder its potential to be an inclusive space where they can express themselves and build supportive relationships. Therefore, investigating sport as an educational strategy for the inclusion of young forced migrants, from the perspective of Portuguese practitioners in settlement and inclusion of forced migrants, will provide knowledge that can be used to inform better policies and strategies that promote social inclusion.

The role of sport in young forced migrants’ processes of inclusion

As Pastoor (2017) points out, young forced migrants are not only a heterogeneous group in terms of culture, ethnicity or religion, but also due to their life stories. Their life stories may differ in terms of: reasons for fleeing, whether they were accompanied, how their journey was made, and their social and personal situation. These differences call for individualised responses that meet the young people’s needs (Horgan & Raghallaigh, 2017; Wernesjö, 2012).

Young forced migrants’ ability to be included may be strongly influenced by existing policies that shape the social context in which they are inserted (Hynie, 2018). As Arnot and Pinson (2005) suggest, the increasingly restrictive character of such policies may limit inclusion outcomes. In their study of how schools in the U.K. addressed the inclusion of asylum seeker and refugee children, they found that they were ‘treated first and foremost as asylum-seekers and refugees rather than as children’ (p. 15). The way policies influence public opinion may also reinforce positive or negative attitudes towards young forced migrants. For example, on the basis of her study of how social,

political and strategical dynamics shape how refugees and refugee centres are perceived by local actors, Casati (2018) concludes that 'local circumstances shape reception in non-linear ways, and individual dispositions to foreigners are co-constructed in relations that bring together local histories, values, emotions' (p. 805).

Through the study of settlement and well-being of young refugees in Australia, Correa-Velez et al. (2010) suggest that it is essential for young forced migrants to establish meaningful relationships and feelings of belonging with the host community, in social spaces that allow them to continue to build their identity and their life paths. On arrival, young forced migrants are likely to 'feel powerless, lacking not only in language skills and confidence but also in knowledge of how the new society works' (Strang & Quinn, 2019, p. 329). The development of meaningful connections can be considered one of the main components of inclusion (Ager & Strang, 2008), since it can lead to the creation of social and human capital, where people adjust to diverse social contexts, gain new insights into their skills and abilities, and have access to different institutions (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001). For example, Borsch et al. (2019) study of a Danish school practices for supporting young refugees points out that schools were considered as one of the most important spaces where interactions between young forced migrants and hosts occur, having an important role in skills and competences development.

The research suggests that the involvement of young forced migrants in different contexts can provide meaningful learning experiences. In her study of learning opportunities for unaccompanied young refugees in diverse learning contexts, Pastoor (2017) found that young forced migrants' engagement in NGOs, contributed to the improvement of their language skills, their socialisation with peers and their learning of social norms. A systematic review developed by Mahoney and Siyambalapitiya (2017) showed that participation in community-based programs had a positive effect on young forced migrants' language learning, connections and sense of citizenship, through approaches that involved 'mobile phone technology, community gardens, skill development (...) and general recreation programs for children' (p. 74). Sport is one of the contexts which has been identified in the literature as providing meaningful learning experiences for young forced migrants. As Dukic et al. (2017) conclude from their study of the inclusive and exclusive experiences of young forced migrants playing in an asylum seeker football team, sport had different meanings in relation to their inclusion. Sport was not only a field for playing, where 'kicking the ball provide[s] a space of familiarity, confidence and even freedom in the sense of movement and flow' (p. 105), but also an important means for negotiating belonging.

The research of Dukic et al. (2017) and others supports claims that sport aimed for inclusion can be a facilitating environment for (re)settlement processes, as a safe and educative space where barriers related to language, social isolation or cultural differences can be transcended. Young forced migrants' engagement in sport has the potential to promote positive feelings and experiences related to effort and success, increase confidence and self-esteem, and transfer skills and behaviours to other life domains (Gibbs & Block, 2017; Ollif, 2008). In addition, the plurality of contexts where it can occur (i.e. school, sport clubs, outdoor spaces) allows the creation of different social spaces as a means for developing a sport habitus – a social disposition for sport 'that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). According to several researchers this has the potential to promote engagement of different cultures, allowing normalisation of young forced migrants in host communities and leading to changes in behaviour (Dukic et al., 2017; Mayblin et al., 2016).

Gender can be a particularly challenging issue, as 'girls and women have faced harassment, discrimination, abuse and under-recognition, usually perpetrated by men and male-run organisations and institutions' (Lugueti et al., 2021, p. 121). However, sport can play here a meaningful role, by promoting empowerment and giving room to girls and women to express themselves on a safe space. On the basis of their study of meanings given by high-school young women from refugee backgrounds to sport, Harwood et al. (2021) suggest that sport can create an educational and inclusive space for negotiating cultural differences and improves feelings of well-being and positive emotions. For the young African-Australian refugee-background women in Lugueti et al. (2021)

study, sport provided means for engaging with local community and empowered them to promote change, overcoming issues linked to gendered roles and expectations.

In educational terms, Spaaij et al. (2016) argue that sport can be used to educate young forced migrants 'regarding health, gender equality, employability and conflict transformation' (p. 571). Other researchers also suggest that sport's ability to promote dialogue and problem-solving on and off the field, involving participants and coaches/educators, enables sport to take on a transformative role in the creation of new forms of social and cultural capital, fostering communities' cohesion and development (Mohammadi, 2019; Spaaij, 2012; Spaaij et al., 2016). However, sport cannot be seen as a 'force for good' or a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. In their study about meanings of participation in sport given by young forced migrants during their integration, Middleton et al. (2020, p. 6) found that the 'development of an inclusive context was dependent on the needs of, and values held by, individual forced migrants relative to the host community in which they had sought refuge'. From their study of a sports club that actively promoted refugees' integration through table tennis, Doidge et al. (2020) point the importance of treating all participants as valued members and the 'active approach taken by staff, the positive welcoming atmosphere and inclusive narrative, and establishing the club as a safe space, fun activities and sociability' (p. 13), if sport is to have the desired inclusion effects.

Most of the sport-based interventions aimed at young forced migrants inclusion, identified in the literature, rarely provide opportunities for participants to have a say and rarely engage the community. A critical review on the pedagogies implemented in PE and sport with young refugees by Hudson et al. (2023) and a systematic literature review related to the cultural capital of forced migrants in sport and physical activity developed by Smith et al. (2018) suggest that sport-based intervention outcomes seem to be more related to assimilationist traces than to co-construction of cultural capital. These include cultural deficit approaches, where young forced migrants are referred to as 'others' (Bartsch & Rulofs, 2020), stereotyped according to gender (Spaaij et al., 2019) or seen as a 'deposit' of information (Hudson et al., 2023). For example, in their study of German PE teachers' perceptions of young people with refugee backgrounds, Bartsch and Rulofs (2020) found that the teachers required the young people 'to adapt uncompromisingly to the social structures and the prevailing norms and values of the sport and school system in the host country' (p. 9). This points to the ways that sport can be 'a powerful social force, but it is not necessarily a positive, prosocial one' (Hartmann and Kwauk 2011, p. 289). If sport is to have inclusive goals, then sport-based initiatives need to be designed with an 'emphasis on the educational value of sport' (Bourdieu et al., 1998, p. 21).

As pointed out above, the contexts where young forced migrants engage with sport may also differ, with consequences for the meanings and values attributed to sport and for inclusion outcomes. These contexts may vary from the formal 'sport club' settings to informal leisure in open spaces with non-structured play, all with differing potentials for young migrants to negotiate their belonging. Spaaij et al. (2022) argue for the need to study the role of sport taking into account 'the multiplicity of meanings it holds for the various actors involved, as well as the political, socio-cultural and economic structures and frames that shape those meanings' (p. 408). The same authors acknowledge sport as a multidimensional space, with different expressions that may reinforce exclusion and marginalisation, or promote opportunities, experience, access and representation of young forced migrant populations.

The complexity of contexts and meanings pointed above suggests that young forced migrants inclusion through sport is non-linear, reinforcing the need to examine sports' multidimensional role in (re)settlement processes and recognise its qualities and limitations as a social and educative strategy. In addition, the relationship with sport for many forced migrants begins previous to the arrival to the host country. This relationship can be based on deep and long-standing experiences, as player, fan or consumer, which can in turn provide a sense of continuity through time regardless place, community and forced migration experiences, that place sport as a 'sphere of belonging beyond integration' (Nunn et al., 2022, p. 48).

The research reviewed above points to the potential of sport, if targeted for young forced migrants inclusion, as a valuable educational strategy for promoting learning, dialogue and cultural awareness. Considering such potential, this article aims to understand Portuguese practitioners' views on using sport as an educational strategy for promoting their social inclusion, providing deeper insights into an area that remains little-known in Portugal.

Method

To understand how settlement processes work and how is Portugal framed as a host country, we analysed European and Portuguese policy texts related with migration, settlement, inclusion and sport. To understand Portuguese settlement and inclusion practitioners' views on using sport as an educational strategy for promoting inclusion, we conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals representing institutions involved in forced migrant settlement and inclusion, and sport institutions that promote inclusion through sport for young forced migrants.

Document selection process

Our process for selecting documents for analysis began with identifying organisations that produce international and European policies on forced migrant populations. Then, we search for documents produced by those organisations (e.g. United Nations, European Commission), by using the key-words 'inclusion through sport', 'forced migrants', 'refugees', 'youth refugees' and 'sport'. As inclusion criteria, documents needed to be related to legal procedures for forced migrants, the role of sport in society, or to make mention of sport as an educational strategy with the purpose of inclusion for young forced migrants. From this search, 34 documents were selected and organised according to the international sources from which they came and the main topics of the documents from each source (Figure 2).

This research was then extended to Portugal to explore procedures for settlement, identify main priorities related to forced migrants' inclusion, and ascertain if there were any specific

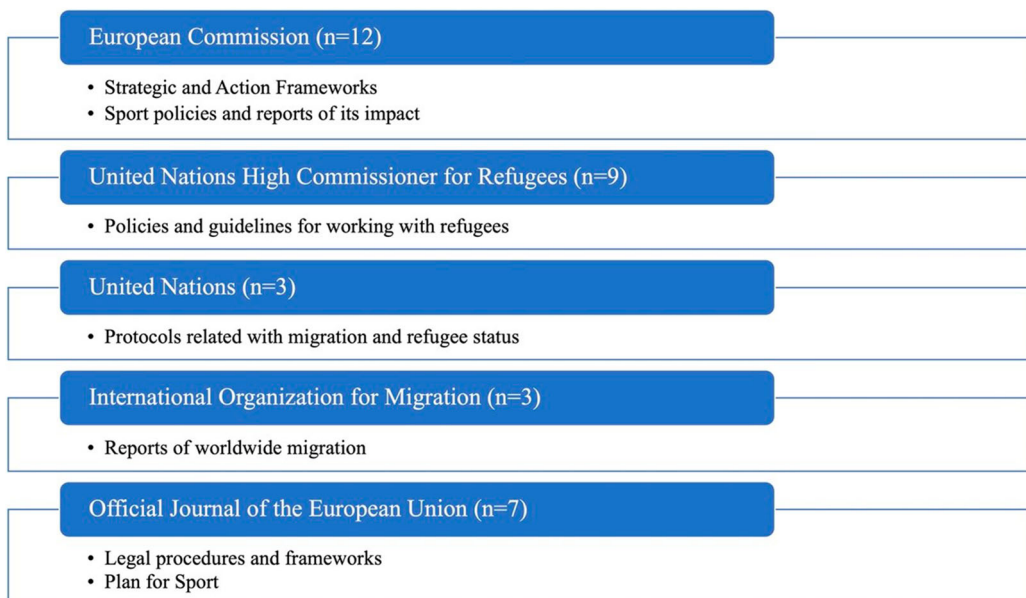


Figure 2. Sources for international documents and main themes from the selected documents.

concerns with the use of sport as an educational strategy in inclusion processes. The keywords for this search were: 'priorities of settlement', 'inclusion through sport', 'forced migrants', 'refugees', 'youth refugees' and 'inclusion of refugees'. As inclusion criteria, documents needed to be related to Portuguese procedures and priorities of settlement. Documents about inclusion through sport needed to identify forced migrants or refugees as a target population. From this search, 19 documents were selected and organised according to the main institutional sources from which they came, the number of documents from each source and the main topics of the documents for each source (Figure 3).

Semi-structured interviews

For understanding how sport is used in inclusion processes of young forced migrants and how policies support such use as an educational strategy in Portugal, we proceed to semi-structured interviews (Adams, 2010), with key actors linked to settlement and inclusion institutions. The institutions related with settlement processes were identified based on the institutional sources from the document search. The sports institutions were identified through online research and an exploratory question in the interviews which asked if the participants knew any sports-based initiative aimed at forced migrants inclusion in Portugal. Nine institutions were identified and contacted through email to set up an interview. Seven professionals from seven institutions responsible for the settlement process agreed to be interviewed. All were coordinators inside their organisation, with five linked to political, legal, reception, monitoring, and inclusion issues and two to sport-based initiatives aimed at including refugees. All interviews happened online were audio-recorded and lasted 35–70 min. The interviews were in Portuguese and transcribed in English. All interviewees signed an informed consent that gives confidentiality to the data, and protection of the privacy and integrity of participants was accounted for in the interviews. The research was submitted to the Ethical Committee of Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences University of Porto, being approved with reference 2022/06-01b.

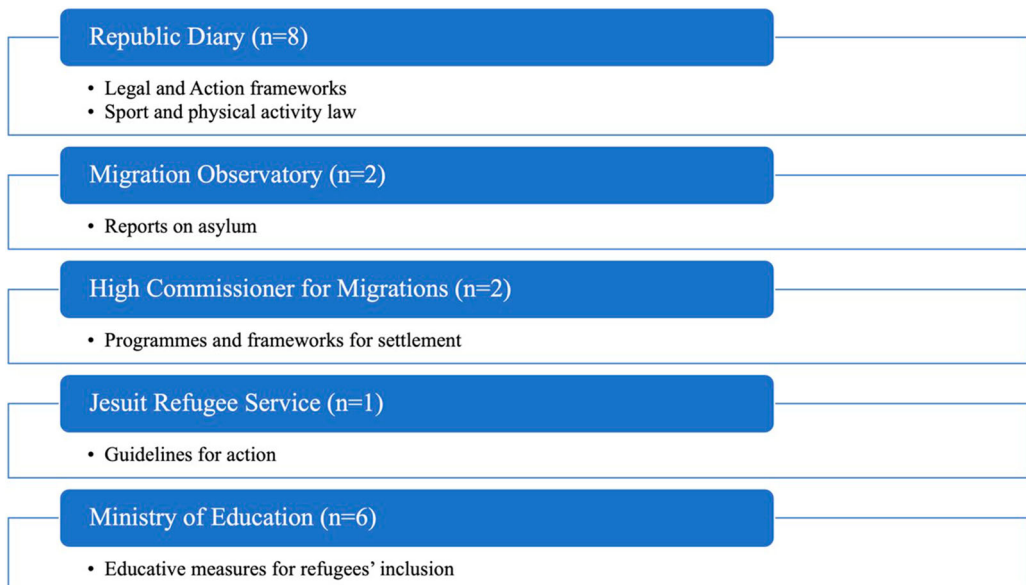


Figure 3. Sources for national documents and main themes from the selected documents.

Data analysis

Initially, we organised the documents according to the main topics linked to their content (e.g. political frameworks in matters of migration, sport and inclusion). Then we read all the documents and organised their content in categories, through an inductive approach. The interviews were transcribed and then read and re-read to identify meanings and patterns (e.g. uses of sport in settlement processes, challenges in settlement processes), following an inductive approach. Through NVivo, we codified and organised the information into categories, recurring to content analysis. Then, we compared the categories from documents and interviews, to identify the matches and possible gaps from policies to practices, and to understand how sport is regarded as an educational strategy in inclusion processes of young forced migrants. While comparing the results of documental analysis and interviews with those responsible for putting in practice may be a robust approach for understanding political and practical levels, we acknowledge that some limitations may arise by not considering young forced migrants points of view. Moreover, we recognise that our perception is influenced by our life stories and experiences, and our social constructions from the world (Harding, 1992), meaning that our interpretation is subjective to our reading of reality (Haraway, 1988) as women and European citizens. This may influence how results are interpreted, since young forced migrants are a non-European cultural diverse population, with different contextual backgrounds and beliefs, that come from different life situations, and that have been through a forced migratory process.

Findings

On the basis of our analysis of the documents and interviews we organised our findings according to the European and Portuguese contexts. In the first section, we present the European policy context on matters of young forced migrants rights and protections and how sport is perceived as part of social inclusion processes. The second section covers (a) issues and challenges that Portuguese policies of settlement raise and (b) uses of sport as an educational strategy in young forced migrants processes of inclusion based on national sport policy and settlement and inclusion practioners' perspectives.

The European policy context

Rights and protections

European policies seek a robust framework to ensure fundamental rights for forced migrants and provide general procedures for their settlement and inclusion, putting people at the centre of its action (European Parliament et al., 2012). Different mechanisms are designed to provide answers, divided into three main lines: protection, related to rights and legal procedures, including specific measures for their distribution across Europe; integration, related with main priorities and lines of action in host countries, and different structural challenges that need to be overcome; inclusion, as it supports implementation of initiatives aimed for their inclusion.

The integration of forced migrants rests on policies that, in line with European values, seek to grant effective and humane ways to 'provide certainty, clarity and decent conditions for the men, women and children arriving in the EU' (EC, 2020b, p. 1). Inclusion is approached as 'being both a right and a duty for all' (EC, 2020a, p. 1) and as a two-way process where there are active efforts from both community and forced migrants. Issues like gender, inclusion, access to work, housing, education and health are considered priorities, mirrored in different frameworks, where the main goal is to reinforce cohesion and inclusion among all through access to services and institutions and by promoting social awareness (EC, 2020a).

The European Union also acknowledges the increased risk of social exclusion, acting on the creation of partnerships with local and regional authorities, civil society and social/economic partners to

increase opportunities for dialogue and cooperation (EC, 2020b). International documents present specific concerns related to young people as an heterogeneous population with specific challenges. They are described as having ‘diverse needs, backgrounds, life situations and interests’ (Council of European Union, 2018), with a ‘capacity to participate in their protection’ (UNHCR, 2012), and needing to be provided with adequate resources to become active and participatory citizens (Council of European Union, 2018). Almost half (41%) of forced migrants are young, less than 18 years old (UNHCR, 2022), and are described as being particularly vulnerable due to their age, whether accompanied or not. The main priorities are ‘protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; ensuring immediate access to appropriate services; and ensuring durable solutions in the child’s best interests’ (UNHCR, 2012).

Sport as promoting social inclusion processes

Sport is seen as a ‘social and economic phenomenon which makes an important contribution to the European Union’s strategic objectives of solidarity and prosperity’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, p. 2). It is regarded as being multidimensional, as a site for education and the inclusion of diverse populations. Educationally sport is perceived as a means to developing ‘for personal, social and learning skills and promoting tolerance, solidarity, inclusiveness as well as other sport values and EU values’ (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 4).

However, constructing sport-based answers is not exempt from the issues and challenges that are associated with resettlement generally. The ways in which host countries treat forced migrants – the disparities in the recognition of refugee status between Member States, negligence in respect to sharing responsibilities in settlement, disproportional action on receiving forced migrants (EC, 2020b), or promoting detention as a rule and not an exception (Strungari & Rodrigues, 2022) – may limit resettlement and the creation of sport-based answers targeted for inclusion. Access and participation in sport, on a broader sense, may also be hinder due to the increasing restrictive character of asylum and settlement policies, as EU tends to walk to assimilationist measures (Kataria & Ugolotti, 2022). The adoption of such policies may hinder sport potential on having an active role in inclusion processes, as well as serve as ‘trap’: policy and decision-makers are promoting sport as a solution, but there is limited effect or action due to political measures.

In 2016, the EU published a report, by Ruitinga et al. (2016), that mapped initiatives and programmes that sought to include young forced migrants through sport in the EU. While in many of these initiatives sport acted as a space for cultural interactions and social development and offered possible pathways for promoting education and inclusion (Ruitinga et al., 2016), the authors also point out that, ‘There is a need to develop support structures and build capacity in this regard at country-level, but also at higher level’ (p. 29). They point to the challenges of implementing sport-based initiatives for inclusion, such as obtaining information and applying for funding, lack of mentoring and knowledge of how to manage organisations with these types of initiatives; the limited opportunities for sharing good practices and doubts; and dependence on funding over time. These challenges suggest structural constraints in using sport at the European level for promoting education and inclusion of young forced migrant populations. While it is acknowledged as an educational and social strategy, sport faces several challenges linked not only to matters of development and implementation but also due to Member States’ different positionings and increasingly restrictive character on resettlement policies.

The Portuguese context

Policies of settlement: issues and challenges

Portuguese laws and guidelines are based on international and European decisions and agreements. Documents relating to young people suggest that they are perceived as a heterogeneous group that

requires policies to be adjusted to their identities and situations, broad enough for all young people but also directed to specific needs that may arise (Presidency of the Council of Ministers [PCM], 2022). These include a concern with ensuring rights and access to institutions for young forced migrants, particularly through integration into the school system, with guidelines for promoting inclusion in classrooms and other civic and participative spaces. The Portuguese curriculum includes a subject, 'Education for Citizenship', where there is room for developing and promoting cultural awareness, 'enhancing diversity as an opportunity and source of learning for all' (Direção Geral da Educação, 2013, p. 5).

According to the National Implementation of the Plan of the Global Migration Compact (PCM, 2019), the framework for settlement and inclusion in Portugal is defined by a coordinated answer that links governmental, national and local institutions in a multidimensional approach. However, settlement processes in Portugal face several challenges, related to access to appropriate answers in language learning, labour market, housing and obtaining documentation (Strungari & Rodrigues, 2022). Besides the residence authorisation that forced migrants need, access to health, finances or social services is contingent on the allocation of identification numbers for each service, so they can work or open a bank account (Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados, 2019). The time that these numbers take to be issued is time that might be lost during an inclusion process, as it may limit access to important life domains. As one of the participants pointed out, 'These numbers take some time to be issued, many weeks, sometimes months, which leaves people in a very uncomfortable situation' (E4). A report developed by Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados (2019) suggests that these issues might happen due to a lack of human resources and an inability to provide a timely answer to demands, enhancing possible struggles for having an adequate number of professionals. Moreover, a study developed by Sacramento et al. (2019) that compared Finnish and Portuguese settlement policies refers to the Portuguese 'absence of integrated policies, organisational models, or procedural protocols to guide the reception and integration process, the local entities end up performing most of the outreach work to assure the adequate integration of refugees' (p. 417), which can explain the heavy burden of local services. E3, responsible for settlement of unaccompanied minors, reinforced this issue, commenting that 'Currently, the number of spontaneous requests exceeds our capacity for settlement'.

Young people may face additional challenges if contexts do not promote the Portuguese language or allow relationships to be established. Our participants pointed out that the diversity of young forced migrants reinforces the need to provide responses that respect individuality, promoting inclusion through sport without losing their identity. Moreover, gender issues were also pointed as challenging for participation and access to sport, limiting its potential educational and inclusive goals, as E2 refers:

We had a young woman, she was a swimmer, we arranged her a great clube, with a great coach. But it was a male coach. So, she went to another place to be coached by a woman. Specially women, it is not easy for them to play sports. Firstly, our experience with women/girls is smaller, because unfortunately they do not succeed in reaching to host countries. We had a family with a grandmother, a mother and her daughter, we arranged them gym passes, and when we were visiting the gym, we realized that the grandmother was uncomfortable because of mens' presence. So we point the women-only classes, and even still it was quite hard, because, for the grandmother, it was unacceptable to cross the same corridors than men.

According to Guo-Brennan and Michael Guo-Brennan (2019), belonging is essential for young forced migrants to feel part of their communities, and it is linked to several positive outcomes related to personal and social issues. The work developed by the local actors is based on an approach that, as E4 pointed out, requires 'closeness, work and much, much attention with these people', alongside with the will to promote inclusion by knowing young forced migrants cultures and providing them with opportunities appropriate to them as individuals. This allows the establishment of closer relations with young forced migrants that ease their engagement with Portuguese society. As E3 commented: 'This forces us to try to meet the best possible about their countries and cultures, to know what we can do to make their inclusion easier here'. E5, responsible for an institution that is

developing a programme for inclusion of young forced migrants through sport, reinforced the need to bring together different local actors with different knowledges and experiences around resettlement processes to provide the best conditions for promoting social inclusion:

The work is developed for their psychological, school, or daily life, and we don't have that know-how, so we search for partnerships. There is individualised monitoring by our partners, and they give the necessary feedback so that we can prepare training.

As indicated by our participants, the different approaches and challenges linked to resettlement and inclusion processes may facilitate or work against the uses of sport for promoting inclusion in young forced migrants. One of the main ways to promote sport as an educational strategy may lie with local actors' ability to establish close relations with young forced migrants, alongside a welcoming environment and individualised answers. On the other hand, it was evident that bureaucratic issues, the local services' lack of adequate resources, and structural barriers like gender and culture, may limit the uses of sport, hindering its potential to promoting inclusion of young forced migrants.

Uses of sport as an educational strategy for social inclusion processes

The access to sport is a right referred to in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic (Portuguese Parliament, 2005, Article 79°), with young people having a 'special protection of their economical, social and cultural rights, namely (...) on physical education and sport' (Article 70°). Portuguese sport-related law is centred on one document – Fundamental Law on Physical Activity and Sport (Act No. 5/2007), that regulates principles, public policies on sport and the competences of sport institutions. It emphasises that 'Everyone has the right to physical activity and sport, regardless of origin, sex, race, ethnicity, language, territory of origin, religion, political or ideological convictions, instruction, economic situation, social condition or sexual orientation' (p. 3). At settlement level for young forced migrants, educational measures include using school sport as a promotor for physical activity and inclusion in projects/activities that promote interaction and learning of Portuguese culture (Direção Geral da Educação, 2020). However, our document search did not reveal national guidelines for young forced migrants' inclusion through sport. The guidelines we were able to identify came from coordinated international networks and partnerships (e.g. European Football for Development Network), not national policies or guidelines. Moreover, although the use of sport is identified in the *Escolhas* Programme² and diverse social projects, the structure or goal of sport in inclusion processes is still being determined. The lack of information on using sport as an educational strategy was also evident in the National Plan of Implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which does not refer to any specific concern for including forced migrants through sport (PCM, 2019).

Despite this lack of information on young forced migrants inclusion through sport in the documents we analysed, all the interviewees recognised the potential of sport as an educational strategy for promoting inclusion. For example, all of the interviewees recognised the value of sport as a mechanism for promoting the learning of Portuguese language, and as one of their first motivations for communicating with peers and the coaching team. As Valentine and Sporton (2009) point out, a young migrant speaking another language where people only speak Portuguese might be an exclusionary factor; conversely, speaking the same language might be seen as belonging. Other studies reinforce this issue, as they refer to sport as an encouragement for language education (e.g. Jurković & Spaaij, 2022). Our participants from sports institutions, E5 and E6, commented that sport provided a context for opportunities for interaction and involvement in the local community through sport-related activities such as going to matches, training and visiting sport venues. E6 added that: 'They start going to sport clubs; it's the first time they want to learn Portuguese and start learning Portuguese and living in the community'. E2, who was associated with settlement support, pointed to other similar potential uses of sport: 'I think that (sport) also could help; for example, with language

issues and in the inclusion itself; in other words, it could help in knowing the local community and being more included in the community, and help with Portuguese language learning’.

Sport was also acknowledged as an important step in the normalisation of young forced migrants lives through skills development and creation of meaningful relationships. However, opinions on how sport might be used as an educational strategy with inclusive purposes differed among the interviewees. While some emphasised the need to include them in mainstream clubs, or programmes that involve interaction with other cultures, others argued that it takes time, as they might be better starting with people from the same background and then start to engage with others. For example, E6 and E5, although both representing sports institutions, had different views. While E6 suggested, ‘We never wanted to create refugee-only teams – we didn’t want to increase prejudice. If it’s inclusion, then the idea is that they could play with others and in the same place as others’. In contrast, E5, argued that,

The ones in our programme start to be mentors of the ones that arrive. There is integration work that is done by them, not by us, because we think that if I arrive in another country, maybe I would like to be welcomed by a Portuguese person that already lives there, my integration would be easier than a person with a different religion, a different culture, no matter how cool that person is.

This difference of opinion may be due not only to different approaches and experiences from the participants on implementing their programmes, but also due to the cultural diversity that young forced migrants present. Moreover, E5’s suggestion about the roles that young forced migrants start to assume, namely on welcoming new participants from similar backgrounds, may be an effective strategy for educating and value young forced migrants as active members from their communities, providing them opportunities for create new relationships and feelings of belonging.

Final considerations

The evolution and adjustment of European policies suggest flexibility and recognition for improving social responses to settlement and inclusion processes in each Member State. However, challenges linked to political divergences, social contexts and more restrictive asylum policies, may limit expected settlement and inclusion outcomes. Inclusion needs to be implemented through policies that truly fulfil needs and optimise procedures so young forced migrants can perceive themselves as full-rights citizens, and provide welcoming environments where they feel part of something. The diverse background and voices of young forced migrants must also be taken into account, as policies may hide assimilationist traces that put the responsibility exclusively on young forced migrants to be part of their host country. Although Portugal is considered a country with good integration policies (Migrant Integration Policy Index, 2020), the analysis and the interviews suggest that more work on cultural awareness and improvement of local services should be developed, which enhances the need to look to the challenges that practices brings.

While research by Rapanta and Trovão (2020) suggests that Portuguese people are strongly in favour of receiving forced migrants, Tiefenthal and Brandt (2022) reinforce that, for inclusion to occur, coexistence must be negotiated and shared through active participation. The practice of sport in a space where differences are respected and acknowledged may promote community engagement and empowerment. Nunn et al. (2022) describes sport (more specifically, football) as a ‘mobile, transnational sphere of belonging’ (p. 43). Being a young forced migrant goes beyond the integration or inclusion in a host country, rather, the relationship with sport provides an opportunity for being recognised beyond the forced migrant label. Moreover, using sport as an educational strategy should not imply only the cultural appropriation of the host country but a dynamic process where there are cultural exchanges and room to engage through time within the community.

The importance that young forced migrants give to establishing relationships (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) reinforces the need to provide adequate contexts that may act as educational strategies with inclusive purposes, alongside cultural awareness and engagement of host communities. Sport is

referenced amongst these strategies particularly by its ability to learn language, engage in dialogue and promote interaction between young forced migrants and host communities. Jurković and Spaaij (2022) argue a similar premise, suggesting that practising sport may provide meaningful opportunities for learning from different cultural backgrounds, helping forced migrants ‘deal with everyday life in the receiving society, (...) understand better local culture, gain insights on how the local community functioned, and find their place within society’ (p. 647). However, we were unable to find any national guidelines on using sport in inclusion processes, suggesting the necessity to give sport greater visibility and to discuss its importance at political level to promote it as a means for the inclusion of these populations. Acknowledging the multiple dimensions in which sport can assume a relevant role, particularly in educating and including diverse populations, and developing pedagogical frameworks for sport-based interventions among young forced migrants (Hudson et al., 2023) for promoting their inclusion in Portugal are needed. Although sport practice appears in educational documents, it appears only for school sport and not in other contexts (i.e. clubs, initiatives).

Portuguese practitioners recognise the importance and impact that sport can have in young forced migrants lives, namely in language learning and for promoting engagement with communities, despite a lack of clear policies or guidelines at national level, which may hinder the implementation of initiatives where sport is used as an educational strategy. Moreover, although Portuguese settlement and inclusion policies are designed to provide access to immediate needs and predict young forced migrants’ engagement in different contexts, due to other pressing matters identified by the participants, linked to a lack of proper answers by local services, bureaucratic issues, and gender and cultural constraints, sport may become a low priority for using it as an educational strategy in the inclusion processes of young forced migrants.

The research reported in this paper reflects the documental analysis to European and Portuguese policy texts and the semi-structured interviews to key actors in settlement and inclusion in Portugal. In line with Bartsch and Rulofs (2020), as they argue for the importance of putting young forced migrants in the centre of research, further research is needed, namely by bringing young forced migrants’ views for this debate, to understand, from their perspectives, how sport helps them learn and to be part of their communities.

Notes

1. Retrieved from European Commission – Migration and Home Affairs on 19 October 2022: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/forced-migrant_en
2. National programme funded by the Portuguese government that seeks to promote inclusion of diverse youth populations from more vulnerable contexts, via the support of initiatives aimed for education, employment, and community engagement.


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