Barriers towards the refugee employment in Brazil and their impacts on long-term integration

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This article seeks to analyze how individual, national and organizational barriers and their interrelationships impact the employment of refugees in the Brazilian labor market, based on the theory of the relational structure of diversity management of Syed and Özbilgin (2009). Through an interpretative paradigm, a qualitative approach, and the use of descriptive research, this study was conducted with eight refugees formally employed in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. The findings of this study indicate the prevalence of national barriers over job exclusion for refugees, which may potentiate exclusion factors at the individual and organizational level. The Brazilian government appeared as one of the main national obstacles to integration, playing a particularly important role in the relational structure. This research presents its contributions to regard the refugee's condition as inherent to an extension of diversity. By shedding light on the perspectives of refugees about the Brazilian organizational reality, the article proposes solutions for policy makers and organizations in order to minimize the impacts that the different barriers provide to the effective integration of these groups in Brazilian organizations.

Keywords: Refugees. Labor market. Organizations. Barriers. Brazilian.

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Introduction

The refugee crisis around the world has intensified global debates about the effective integration of refugees in host countries in recent years. In Brazil – the target of this study – it is estimated that the country has surpassed the 30,000 people in refugee situation mark, of different nationalities – mostly Venezuelans, Syrians, and Congolese (SILVA *et al.*, 2020). The same authors show that, in 2019, the Brazilian territory was one of the major world destinations of those requesting the recognition of refugee status, a fact explained, among other reasons, by a greater flow of displaced persons from Venezuela today.

A refugee's main desire when arriving in a new country is to be protected. They are not people who go for a walk for fun, but to ensure their own survival; to seek a new life in a new community: "a cozy and comfortable place" (BAUMAN, 2003, p. 7). To increase the chances of successful integration, employment is considered by the literature as a key factor for the effective integration of refugees in the host country (AGER; STRANG, 2008; LEE *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, the Brazilian scenario is marked by an economic crisis that directly affects employment in the country. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2021), in June 2021 Brazil had 14.8 million unemployed. In addition, the country is divided by ideological polarizations in relation to the most relevant issues of social and global interest and by inefficiency in terms of employment generation and income distribution programs (XU; MEYER, 2013). In addition to national contextual factors (laws, society, culture, religion, government), Syed and Özbilgin (2009) argue that the effective integration of refugees into the Brazilian reality is also influenced by organizational issues (processes, rituals and behaviors in the work environment). Based on this understanding, the following guiding question arises for the research: how do individual, national and organizational barriers, and their interrelationships impact the employment of refugees in the Brazilian labor market?

Thus, this article aims to understand how individual, national and organizational barriers and their interrelationships impact the employment of refugees in the Brazilian labor market, based on Syed and Özbilgin's (2009) theory of the relational structure of diversity management. This theoretical model argues that a greater probability of effective diversity management occurs when there is an alignment of structural, institutional and individual supports, involving the participation of all social actors in the integration of people in the work environment.

The justification for carrying out this research is based on its important contributions. First, by presenting insights that reinforce the need to associate the refugee as members of a minority that should be addressed by diversity management. Second, applying the theory of relational structure of diversity management, not only intends to understand how individual, national and organizational barriers affect the inclusion of displaced persons in the labor market in isolation, but also how their interrelationships enhance this process. Third, by exploring the Brazilian reality, a context poorly explored in studies on refugee integration, especially addressing the labor market, the article addresses particularities inherent to its context, such as the tensions resulting from differences in the political-social context and structure of the labor market and how these can directly or indirectly interfere in the achievement of the objectives of permanent integration in Brazil through the employment of people in a refugee situation.

In a practical way, by giving voice to refugees and understanding their experiences and perspectives of integration in the Brazilian labor market, this article proposes solutions, for policymakers and organizations, to minimize the impact the different barriers provide to integration of these groups in Brazilian organizational contexts.

Literature review

The phenomenon of integration in migratory processes has been the subject of research in the world for several decades, but there is still no consensual definition among researchers of what would a successful refugee integration be (AGER; STRANG, 2008). Unlike other types of migrants, refugees have a peculiar characteristic: They leave their country of origin unwillingly, in search of better living conditions driven by well-founded fears of persecution related to factors such as religion, race, nationality, political opinions, civil wars, and serious violations of human rights, as defined by Law 9474/1997 (BRASIL, 1997), not being able or willing to use the national protection of their former nation.

In this sense, authors argue that an effective integration of refugees in the host country needs to be multidimensional, taking into account a set of factors such as employment, housing, health, education, citizenship, language, culture, and social relationships (AGER; STRANG, 2008). Agbenyiga *et al.* (2012) and Dubus (2018) consider formal work and fluency in the host language as the two factors that most contribute to a successful integration. For this research, it is understood that integration involves the perception of belonging and esteem that individuals establish towards the social and work groups to which they belong (SHORE *et al.*, 2010).

Diversity management and the need for a multilevel look at its effectiveness

Following the line of recent research (KNAPPERT *et al.*, 2018, 2019), this study argues that the refugees category should be treated as an extension of diversity management, as it understands that displaced persons have similar characteristics and risks to other historically disadvantaged minorities.

Diversity management is concerned with effectively managing the workforce in its complexity. Through human resources practices such as recruitment, selection and retention of people with diverse origins and identities, organizations seek to create a cultural, favorable, human, and equal environment for all of those who participate in them (SYED; TARIQ, 2017). It originated in the United States and spread throughout the West (THOMPSON; WEI; SWALLOW, 2019). The idea was to go beyond the affirmative actions

imposed by the American State on companies that had some type of direct or indirect contract with it, forcing them to have a mixed staff, balancing the number of women, blacks, Hispanics, indigenous people, people with disability, among other categories. Based on this, instead of legal impositions, the proposal for managing diversity would be to start with the interest of the organizations themselves in the recruitment, selection, and retention of diverse people in their work environment (ABAKER; AL-TITI; AL-NASR, 2019).

Although the United States was the cradle of diversity management, in practice, there have not been great advances in correcting historical injustices against minorities in the country's organizations. For example, Dobbin and Kalev (2016) noted that in commercial banks and other U.S. companies, the number of blacks, Hispanics, and women evolved only slightly from 2003 to 2014. However, in management positions, the prevalence of occupants and the highest salaries continued to be for white men.

In addition to the United States, diversity management has found it difficult to replicate effectively in the rest of the world (SYED, 2008; SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009), failing, in many cases, to expand the diverse workforce, especially in management positions, nor reducing discrimination rates, which led many companies to experience failures (NOON, 2007), setbacks (KONRAD, 2003), and wrong internal diagnoses (KIM, 2006), in addition to failing to overcome negative attitudes based on social stereotypes (FURUNES; MYKLETUN, 2007) in the implementation of their programs.

Syed and Özbilgin (2009) explore why many diversity programs fail, stating that part of this problem stems from the lack of a broader view on the part of many companies that try to implement them, restricting their attention to internal organizational issues, when reality requires complex and multidimensional care. For example, Cheong *et al.* (2007) call attention to the need for a more critical view of the social cohesion existing in the work environment, since the way individuals think and act involves political, economic, cultural, and even ideological aspects.

Based on this context, the theory of the relational structure of diversity management (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009) proposes a broader view, arguing that effective management of a heterogeneous workplace must be observed from three aspects: a) the macro-national level, including national laws, culture, religion, institutions, social organization, among others; b) meso-organizational level, which involves organizational processes, such as behaviors and culture within the work environment; and c) micro-individual level, related to issues involving each individual, their motivations, capacity for change, values, experiences and subjectivities. From a more integrated approach, it may be possible to minimize the negative effects that diversity programs still face regarding day-to-day organization, such as horizontal and vertical segregation, discrimination and salary differences (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2015).

The individual, national and organizational levels for the refugee context are presented below.

Individual level

The individual level concerns the physical, psychological, and technical resources that an individual has to respond to the challenges imposed on them in the organizational integration process (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009). Due to the pre and post-migration circumstances faced by refugees when arriving in a new country, they tend to experience problems related to inadequate skills (JAMIL; ALDHALIMI; ARNETZ, 2012), low levels of education (CAMPION, 2018), lack of proficiency in the new language (HYNIE, 2018), post-traumatic stress disorders (HYNIE, 2017), limited work experience in the new country (MARSHALL, 1989), conflicts of identity, age, and gender (ESSERS; BENSCHOP; DOOREWAARD, 2008), expectations of changing jobs and address (AL-RASHEED, 1994), lack of social networks (DAGNELIE *et al.*, 2019), among others.

The issue of language and the difficulty of transferring skills are two particularly strong indicators for the exclusion of refugees from employment in organizations (MARSHALL, 1989). In the latter case, studies show that even though many displaced persons have held highly complex positions in their countries of origin, most of these professionals are unable to make the transition to similar tasks in the new country (AGER; STRANG, 2008; JAMIL *et al.*, 2012), being susceptible to underemployment, informality or work in factories and restaurants, where the number of jobs is higher for this group of people (SCHENNER; NEERGAARD, 2019).

The question of staying in or leaving the host country is another factor that can jeopardize the refugee's successful insertion in the labor market. Many individuals in this condition nurture the idea that Al-Rasheed (1994) called "The myth of return" or the hope they carry of returning to their home country one day. Sayad (2000) echoes this thought by showing there is a natural desire in everyone who leaves their homeland to return one day, even if it is impossible for them to do so. This occurs, according to Moreira (2014), due to the notion of transience and temporality, intrinsic to the reality of refuge, in which people in this condition live between the worlds of the past and present, that is, they do not enjoy full belonging as members of the new locality in which they live.

The reasons that may make a refugee want to move to another country or want to return to their land of origin are diverse and can influence their investment of time and resources in professional, cultural and linguistic training in the host society. For example, Ager and Strang (2008) realized that family connection plays an important role in the preservation of cultural and relationship practices, something that can facilitate or hinder the establishment of refugees in the new country depending on whether or not they were able to bring their loved ones to the new location. Another factor is the way in which displaced persons are treated in different aspects in their new housing destination, often on the basis of hostile treatment by society and the government, without recognition of full and permanent rights, except when there is some kind of interest in the workforce, which means that the presence of refugees in that country is only tolerated for a longer time (SAYAD, 1998).

Finding a job is also difficult when gender issues are involved. For example, research shows that refugee women take longer to find a job than men in the same conditions and tend to earn less than them (LIEBIG, 2018), especially when they are less qualified (DUMONT *et al.*, 2016) and have less work experience (MÅNSSON; DELANDER, 2017). Their accessibility to the job market tends to be more difficult than for males. Research carried out in Nordic countries, for example, shows that these groups take longer to get a job than men in the same condition and tend to receive less (LIEBIG, 2018).

In the European Union, a study revealed similar results: Female refugees with low qualifications have higher unemployment rates (21%) than men (19%) (DUMONT *et al.*, 2016). In line with these findings, Mountian, Gomes and Carvalho (2020) found that refugee women residing in Brazil tend to be relegated to informal work; Faria, Ragnini and Brüning (2021) concluded that when they find a formal job, their activities tend to be precarious and low-paid, regardless of their education and professional experience.

Månsson and Delander (2017) argue that employment for females becomes an additional challenge when factors such as low education and insufficient experience in the labor market are taken into account, as a result of the long time that many refugees have spent as housewives, taking care of children and household chores, when the culture of their country had traditionally reserved these duties for them. In addition, they are more vulnerable to mobbing, sexual harassment, isolation, especially when they are single mothers and do not obtain social support or mediators in the new place of residence (SAKSENA; MCMORROW, 2021; SILVA *et al.*, 2021). Because of the gender stereotype conceived by the host society and policymakers, many displaced women may see their indicators associated with language, health, housing and employment worsen over time (CHEUNG; PHILLIMORE, 2017).

Teixeira, da Silva, Balog and Sá (2021) point out that these situations of precariousness, lack of opportunities and organizational impermeability among refugees are potentiated when they experience additional race intersectionality, whether for men or, on a larger scale, for women. In agreement with this narrative, Boyd-Swan and Herbst (2019) found, in their study, that black applicants received significantly fewer interview requests when compared to white applicants in a recruitment and selection process for day care teachers.

In many cases, there is a tendency for black refugees to be channeled by the State or organizations into a specific, dangerous, delimited, low-wage and racialized labor market niche in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency at any cost and fill job openings previously refused by national citizens (FRYDENLUND; DUNN, 2022). In addition, they need to deal with veiled or exposed racism, especially when they are in nations that have deep historical roots of slavery and racism, present to this day in the midst of society and organizations (SAKSENA; MCMORROW, 2021), being forced to keep silent at the risk of losing their jobs and sharing their social networks (PITTAWAY; BARTOLOMEI, 2001).

National level

The national level encompasses social, legal, economic, political, cultural and religious aspects that can affect the organizational trajectory of individuals (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009). Recent research has demonstrated the impact that macro-level barriers have had on refugee employment around the world. Issues such as legislative framework (WASSENHOVE, 2015), economic crisis (KNAPPERT; VAN DIJK; ROSSE, 2019), culture (HOLCK; MUHR; VILLESÈCHE, 2016; WEHRLE; KIRA; KLEHE, 2018), religion (LINDLEY, 2002), and rejection (KNAPPERT; KORNAU; FIGENGUL, 2018) are generally associated with the low number of jobs for these underrepresented groups in host countries.

Local politics also play a key role in the effective integration of refugees into the labor market. Studies have shown examples such as the Netherlands, which recently, through government policies, implemented a program of subsidies for private organizations in order to encourage the recruitment and selection of displaced persons (SER, 2018). Similarly, Sweden has been investing, through partnerships with private companies, in hiring refugee interns to accelerate their placement in local jobs (ALARAJ *et al.*, 2018).

In contrast, government measures observed in many countries have reduced the likelihood of employment and may threaten the permanence of displaced persons in their territories. Amaral *et al.* (2018) found that the need for lifestyle adaptation and fluency in the local language are priority requirements for foreign individuals in the labor market in countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom, respectively. Factors such as these require longer adaptation time, which most often delays refugees' obtaining formal employment, in addition to demanding cultural and behavioral changes, resulting in partial or total loss of identity and preventing them from autonomously shaping their lives, in a direct or indirect demonstration of prejudice or xenophobia internalized by national leaders.

Kohlenberger, Buber-Ennser, Rengs, Leitner and Landesmann (2019) understand that political discrimination can occur from the moment refugees arrive in the territory and the mentality and treatment given to displaced persons can vary rapidly according to the power rotation resulting from the choice of local rulers. For example, there was a drastic reduction in the admission of refugees in the Trump administration, compared to Obama's, in the United States, in addition to the adoption of measures that limited the access to employment of displaced persons in the country, in an attempt to stigmatize them as a dangerous source of disruption to the American labor market (FRYDENLUND; DUNN, 2022).

This evidence shows that national-level phenomena not only occur in isolation, but also have potentially important implications for organizational and individual levels, in a reciprocal structural relationship (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009). A local authority, for example, may omit to provide assistance, increasing the exclusion of refugees from employment in their countries (GONÇALVES, 2019; SAFARIK, 2020; VITOR, 2015). On the other hand, it can facilitate their integration when it promotes training practices, affirmative actions and reduction of bureaucracy aiming at greater equality of opportunities in organizations

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(BLOCH, 2007). However, despite the understanding that the association between the individual, national, and organizational levels shape the integration of these groups, research in this regard is still scarce (see KNAPPERT *et al.*, 2018, 2019).

Organizational level

The organizational level concerns the behavior of the members of an organization and work relationships, considering how these relationships affect the objectives of integration (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009). In the context of refugees, the inclusion difficulties at this level include issues associated with language, stereotypes, and biased procedures (KNAPPERT; VAN DIJK; ROSSE, 2019), the lack of recognition of the displaced persons' potential for business growth (COLIC-PEISKER; TILBURY, 2006), and discrimination (WISE; TSCHIRHART, 2000). On this last point, Bursell *et al.* (2021) assert that employers tend to have lower peaks of discrimination when the desired positions are low-skilled, and higher when the level of demand increases. This point was observed by Faria *et al.* (2021), who, in a study carried out in Brazil, indicated that, in addition to non-compliance with the technical qualifications of the displaced, many employers consider them to be a public of lower quality within the social hierarchy in the country. As a result, the skills developed by refugees along the professional trajectory become irrelevant or incompatible with the criteria required by employers in the new country (CALMFORS; GASSEN, 2019).

Another important issue that causes obstacles in the organizational aspect is cultural acceptance by employers (MESTHENEOS; IOANNIDI, 2002). In this sense, barriers related to issues such as prejudice and intolerance regarding dress, behaviors, thoughts and speech stand in the way of refugee access to employment. Organizations tend to impose their local culture and habits, in order to delegitimize or not recognize the cultural values developed by the displaced throughout their lives in their country of origin, which leads many of them to lose their cultural identities or mix them up with their new reality (BERRY, 1989).

From a relational perspective, the barriers of many employers to hiring refugees may represent their predispositions arising from paradigms created by society or local government (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009). With the objective of mitigating such barriers, in addition to the creation of strategies by public initiative and voluntary entities, to train expatriates in the new language, culture, and work (SILVA *et al.*, 2021; WASSENHOVE, 2015), diversity management programs, implemented by companies, would increase the possibilities of recruitment and selection, cultural and organizational adaptation, through a learning approach that could increase retention levels and at the same time reduce the turnover of these professionals (KALLIC; ROLDAN , 2018).

Methodological course

Based on the interpretive paradigm (CROTTY, 1998), a qualitative and descriptive research was adopted and applied (WASSENHOVE, 2015), conducted with eight refugees from Syria, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tunisia, and Pakistan. The profile of participants is listed in Table 1.

Data collection was carried out through a semi-structured interview (DEY, 1993) in the workplace and in other places when it was not possible to access interviewees at the companies where they work. Data was collected in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, during February 2019. The choice of location and participants followed two established criteria: First, the city of São Paulo is one of the most sought-after destinations by refugees when they arrive in Brazil (COMITÊ NACIONAL PARA REFUGIADOS, 2018); and, secondly, people in refugee situation formally employed at the time of the study would meet the purposes of this research.

Initially, the researchers had difficulty identifying refugees who met the formal employment criteria to participate in the research. However, through research on social networks and internet sites, it was possible to locate some philanthropic entities, one of them chaired by a Syrian refugee, who promptly collaborated with the indication of possible participants. From a total of 12 suggestions, eight people in refugee situations made themselves available to participate in the study. Thus, the snowball strategy (ATKINSON; FLINT, 2001; BOWEN, 2008) proved to be useful in allowing the ideal number of respondents to be reached for the purpose of the research, and the mediation of these actors allowed the participants to feel free to share their experiences about employment in the country. Although the number of respondents to reach data saturation is not consensual in the literature, the researchers of this article were based on authors who argue that 6 participants is enough to have a solid understanding of the phenomenon investigated in relatively homogeneous samples (ADLER; ADLER, 2012; BECKER, 2012; BRINKMANN; KVALE, 2015; GUEST; BUNCE; JOHNSON, 2006; KUZEL, 1992; MARSHALL, 1996). It is the case of this study, in which the chosen number of respondents allowed for the research question to be answered (SAUNDERS; TOWNSEND, 2016).

In order to ensure the confidentiality of the information provided by the participants, fictitious personified names were assigned to them (Table 1). The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and the data collected were later submitted to qualitative content analysis (GLÄSER; LAUDEL, 2013).

Results and discussion

Description of participants' profile

Table 1 describes the profile of each research participant and shows how each detail can influence the success of their insertion in the job market in Brazil.

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Table 1: Profile of respondents.

Variables	Participant							
	Habib	Aisha	Omar	Abasi	Ziwa	Malala	Jamal	Daliji
Country of origin	Syria	Syria	Syria	Congo	Congo	Pakistan	Tunisia	Democratic Republic of Congo
Sex	Male	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age	28 years old	33 years old	39 years old	35 years old	46 years old	22 years old	33 years old	28 years old
Marital status	Not married	Separated	Married	Not married	Not married	Single	Not married	Not married
Children	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Education	Higher degree in administration	Higher degree in history and geography	High School	Higher degree in literature	Higher degree in accounting	High School	Higher degree in accounting	Higher degree in computer science
Religion	Muslim	Muslim	Muslim	No religion	Protestant	Protestant	Muslim	No religion
Time living in Brazil	5 years	1,5 year	5 years	4 years	3,5 years	6 years	1 year	5 years
Reason for leaving country of origin	Civil war	Civil war	Civil war	Political persecution	Political persecution	Religious persecution	Civil war	Political persecution
Intention to return the country of origin	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Brought the family	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Received assistance from a voluntary organization	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Position held in the country of origin	Entrepreneur	Teacher of History and Geography	Driver in a transport company	Literature teacher	Accountant	Administrative assistant	Accountant	IT analyst
Current position in the company	Administrative assistant at an NGO	Administrative assistant in a recruitment company	Arab food chef in a Brazilian restaurant	French teacher at an NGO	Production assistant in a supermarket	Administrative assistant in a global mobility company	Accounting assistant in an accounting office	Administrative assistant in a global mobility company
Time at the position in the company	1 year	1 year and three months	6 months	1 year	4 months	8 months	4 months	10 months

Source: Own elaboration, based on the author's refugee research project (2019).

From this data, it is possible to observe that most interviewees are of African origin, with the exception of three Syrian refugees. Most respondents are male, over 30 years old, single, without children, with complete higher education, Muslim, have lived in Brazil for more than three years, received help from voluntary social entities, work in the administrative field, and have not yet completed a full year in their current company. Many left their homeland for reasons related to civil wars and were unable to bring their families to Brazil.

Barriers for the integration of refugees in the Brazilian labor market

Individual barriers

The refugees were unanimous in saying that the language was the first obstacle they encountered when arriving in Brazil, which corroborates previous research (CAMPION, 2018; HYNIE, 2018). In terms of gender, female interviewees, although they did not have difficulties to find a job initially, a result that is the opposite to other realities in the world (DUMONT *et al.*, 2016; ESSERS *et al.*, 2008), the working time of all of them, less than one year, compared to living in Brazil, indicates job permanence has been a much greater challenge than its mere achievement, especially for refugees who are single mothers, as is the case of Aisha.

[…] the daughters were also a difficulty because I didn't know where to leave the children, and as I am a single mother, everything is more complicated here. In Syria we worked 6 hours a day and here it is 9. I work in the capital, but I live in Santo André, I must use transport to arrive at the company. Imagine how difficult it is to have to leave your daughters with someone, or pay someone to stay with them, when we barely have money to eat (Aisha).

Aisha's account shows the challenging reality that a single mother, and still a refugee, faces when working in Brazil. The difficulty she has with the workload, much higher than when she worked in Syria, combined with the lack of social or institutional support, can result in fewer opportunities for employment or job permanence in the long term (SAKSENA; MCMORROW, 2021), reasons that may explain her brief work experience so far. In addition, Aisha faces a gender-discriminatory historical context in Brazil. Syed and Özbilgin (2009) note that patriarchal traditions shape a company's organizational culture and without an integrated analysis of this intersection, employers and employees will struggle to overcome deeply rooted attitudes.

The non-recognition of skills is another problem affecting refugees' intention to being employed in Brazil. Asked, for example, whether his qualifications fit into the current work routine in Brazilian companies, Ziwa, who has a degree in accounting, said that the closest role he held was of accounting assistant. Corresponding to the previous account, Abasi stated that:

"They never fit! I even tried to distribute resumes in some companies to work in the area, but I was never even called for interviews" ( ).

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The problem of non-transfer of skills in Brazil is, in the first instance, a macro-national factor that can influence actions at a meso-organizational level (SYED; ÖZBILGIN, 2009), this is due to legal obstacles that make it difficult to revalidate foreign certificates within the country and, consequently, the recognition of a refugee's qualifications, which can restrict actions, on the part of company managers, aiming at greater equality of opportunities, or, in the opposite direction, the underutilization of displaced persons. In a micro-individual way, the situation can also facilitate the opportunism of those employers who, taking advantage of the legal obstacle to hire or promote to a position consistent with the specialties of each refugee, will be able to use this narrative to explore their knowledge and skills with low remuneration (DEROUS *et al.*, 2012).

Jamal believes that underutilization has become natural for a group he considers stigmatized. According to him, "there's a philosophy that I've always liked: Whatever you have in front of you, do it, then you can talk. Worry first about getting some work; then you try to grow."

These findings, by revealing different feelings experienced by refugees are not doing what they would like, are consistent with the literature showing that, regardless of the qualification and experience of people in refugee situations, most tend not to follow their careers in the new reality (JAMIL *et al.*, 2012), in addition to being susceptible to underemployment (BABAN; ILCAN; RYGIEL, 2017; EGGENHOFER-REHART *et al.*, 2018; SCHENNER; NEERGAARD, 2019). Comparing the information in Table 1, it appears that not one of the interviewees who has a higher education actually performs his/her role in the Brazilian companies investigated, which suggests the need for greater flexibility in the specific legislation that allows the recognition of foreign certificates, and helps individuals pursue careers according to their abilities.

National barriers

Many economic, political and social issues can be fundamental to the success or failure in the integration of refugees into the labor market in Brazil. For example, the unemployment crisis that affects more than 14 million Brazilians (IBGE, 2021) intensifies disputes between Brazilians and displaced persons and can generate diverse social and organizational consequences, leading to exclusion and underutilization factors. Reacting to these possibilities, Habib believes that "Brazilians will feel bad because I'm trying to take their place, but we're fighting for opportunities, not to take their place." The issue of refugees is not yet approached as a component of diversity and, therefore, there are no practices from private organizations, nor affirmative actions created by the State to minimize the negative situation of these groups, without this incurring greater wear and tear in competing for job vacancies with the inhabitants of the places of origin.

When looking at the current political landscape in the country, it is clear that each respondent has divergent thoughts on this point. For Omar, "the government helps and at the same time does not. It teaches you to fish, but does not give you the fish", referring to the attitude of the State to provide basic assistance to welcome each individual, but not to keep them inside the country. Daliji, on the other hand, considers that the government was slow to believe that the humanitarian crisis would result in a high number of asylum requests to be evaluated in Brazilian territory and that, therefore, it is overloaded and has difficulties to manage the new scenario. According to the same interviewee:

> Things were very difficult in the beginning, to file a protocol, receive documents, things that they needed to organize and adapt to. Today it is more organized. I don't think the government sees refugees as a threat, but as an additional burden to manage, because there are more people now to go to hospitals, to eat, to provide housing for, so it's difficult for them (Daliji).

Despite the few advances mentioned by interviewees regarding the basic conditions for refugees today, it appears that there were no new measures from the State to help with the inclusion of this public in society and in the workplace, which would serve as a stimulus for companies to hire displaced persons. One of the reasons may relate to the following statement:

> The government... I see a lot of the ideology issue, right and left, which is strong in Brazil. I'm afraid of the current president, because he seems to sell a sexist, xenophobic idea and contrary to refugees' wishes, but let's wait for the future (Habib).

Habib's speech seems to better portray how government policy has been one of the major obstacles to the effective integration of refugees. Incompatible with a humanitarian stance, the current government, led by President Jair Bolsonaro, has adopted xenophobic political rhetoric, manifested in public speeches, comments on social networks, and practical actions. Statements such as "the scum of the world" (VITOR, 2015), the thought that most people in refugee a situation have bad intentions (SILVA *et al.*, 2021), Brazil's withdrawal from the UN Global Compact for Migration right at the beginning of his administration (GONÇALVES, 2019) and the reinforcement of the stereotype created by many political leaders and societies that these groups threaten the social order, cultural heritage and security of local communities are just a few facts that arouse attention, polarize public opinion (SAFARIK, 2020), create and strengthen walls, not yet physical, but symbolic, capable of separating, forming opinions, influencing jobs and actions in favor of justice and social equality, and can negatively impact measures that may favor their permanent integration.

In this sense, refugees see the political issue in a polarized way, which can also affect their individual and organizational barriers and provide continuous insecurity about their future in the country. In a context in which part of Brazilians and, above all, businessmen, support the current government, xenophobic political rhetoric becomes intertwined with different social narratives, which can result in greater discrimination and fewer job opportunities. Contrary to countries such as the Netherlands (SER, 2018) and Sweden (ALARAJ *et al.*, 2018), Brazil has not implemented any policy in recent years that could encourage the hiring and permanence of these groups in local private companies. As is the

case in the aforementioned nations, subsidies, partnerships with voluntary and business social entities, social assistance for unemployment, emergency aid, linguistic, cultural, and job market training are just some practices that could be implemented for the benefit of people in refugee situations. A change of paradigm from the nation's greatest leader needs to be the first step to legitimize and encourage practices of inclusion across levels that will unite and facilitate the effective integration of these individuals.

Organizational barriers

At the organizational level, respondents understand that stereotypes shared between managers and members are one of the main factors of exclusion in the labor market, which confirms previous findings (DEROUS *et al.*, 2012; KNAPPERT *et al.*, 2019). According to respondents, the view that refugees are fugitives, terrorists, people who have done something wrong in their country of origin or who have come to take jobs from Brazilians are some of the images going through the minds of managers and employees, and they create particularly strong obstacles for their integration, favoring a series of other problems, such as prejudice, racism, and discrimination (WISE; TSCHIRHART, 2000). Malala's account confirms this understanding:

> [...] I sent several emails to companies asking if there was a vacancy to work and a woman replied, I remember to this day, saying that she did not hire outsiders. After that I also received a similar response from another company. [...] I also went to three interviews. In the first one, I competed with two other Brazilian women, but they didn't call me. In fact, I don't even know how they called me. I went through this situation twice and now it worked out in the company I am in (Malala).

Malala's speech portrays the way many companies act with biased exclusion procedures. Narratives such as "I don't hire outsiders" reinforce how stereotypes materialize in discrimination in the recruitment and selection processes. Abasi went through a similar experience. After spending four years in Brazil, he faced a similar problem. With the support of a voluntary organization, he found his first job. However, he quickly faced situations of disrespect, salary disparity, work overload, and activities that did not march his professional qualifications, a situation that showed the real interest of the employer in question (KNAPPERT *et al.*, 2018). In his second job in Brazil, Abasi says that:

> [...] I also suffered a lot in my second job, in a cheese processing company, because the cheese was stored in a cold chamber. The company had 3 men, a woman and a head of service and they always sent me into the cold room to organize things, 8, 9 heavy boxes of cheese, and organize everything by expiration date. So, imagine how long I would be in there. Even with special clothes, I felt a lot of pain. I asked them: Why can't we change sometimes, like... today I go, tomorrow someone else goes, and so everyone rests? Then I asked the boss why it was happening like this, and I made the proposal to him. He understood and accepted the proposal. But it turns out that when the Brazilians' turn came, they slowed down the work, dragged their feet so they didn't want to do things right. Then I saw that there was discrimination because they made mistakes and the boss

was not strict, but he was with me. There was a difference in treatment, and it left me with a pain in my heart, almost crying inside me. I spent 3 months just there as an experience. Then my boss said I couldn't stay there. In my heart I said, "Thank God" (Abasi).

Once again, discrimination in the work environment was observed. The desire to explore the one who is different. The prejudice involved in the horizontal and vertical spheres of the company that left the refugee professional dissatisfied, disillusioned, and in no mood to go to work. This professional's gratitude to God, paired with his resignation, point to his sadness for living with colleagues and superiors who despise him and nullify his desires to achieve his greatest goals. It is this evidence that perpetuates the process of exclusion, a result of issues involving individual factors (which can circumscribe different elements), national factors (co-workers who legitimize the way in which part of society and local authorities see refugees); and organizational (in the figure of the boss, who seems to have the support of the company's owners), which gradually and silently prevent the effective integration of refugees into organizations, based on the indifference and coldness of their members (VERWIEBE *et al.*, 2018; WISE; TSCHIRHART, 2000) and segregation from leaders who, in their eagerness to improve their public image, adopt false practices of diversity.

Final considerations

This article investigated how individual, national and organizational barriers and their interrelationships affect refugee employment in the Brazilian labor market, based on Syed and Özbilgin's (2009) relational structure theory of diversity management. Through the theoretical slow used, it was possible to understand that macro-national, meso-organizational and micro-individual factors are interconnected and can affect diversity management programs implemented in Brazil in relation to refugees.

The Brazilian historical context, in which historically rooted patriarchal traditions predominate, leads to macro-national factors threatening the integration of refugees observed in the study, such as lack of social support, discrimination, the prejudiced views from the President of the republic, reverberated by the business world and Brazilian society, which, influenced by an ideological thinking that marginalizes the person in refugee situation, create obstacles to the encouragement of partnerships with companies, philanthropic organizations, introduction programs, as well as hinder social and business awareness practices regarding greater inclusion of this audience. Furthermore, legal barriers to recognition of qualifications, according to Syed and Özbilgin (2009), shape the way HR managers will include them in diversity management.

Thus, the theory of relational structure indicates that, in the Brazilian reality, an effective integration of refugees requires a more integrated look from policymakers, organizations, and society, in a multilevel sense.

This article contributed to scientific knowledge by facilitating a greater understanding the influence of different levels, not only in isolation, but also in association with the

inclusion of refugees in the Brazilian labor market. Additionally, research evidence helps reinforce the argument that the refugee situation should be framed as an extension of diversity. In addition, the study provides new insights into issues involving refugees and integration by addressing the perceptions of refugees on the reality of the Brazilian labor market, which, as an emerging country, is a context still little explored by researchers in the world.

In a practical way, by giving a voice to refugees and understanding the interaction between the different factors that shape the integration of these groups in Brazilian organizations, it is clear that greater structural support can enable an effective long-term integration. The establishment of in-country programs and the implementation of partnerships and subsidies as government incentives for organizations that hire refugees; flexibilization of legislative norms, with a view to reducing bureaucracy and accelerating the recognition of displaced persons' qualifications; diversity practices by companies, facilitating recruitment, selection and retention with equal opportunities for nationals and non-nationals; political and social campaigns, through the media, social networks, digital influencers, focused on broadening the concept, the characteristics and the respect people should have regarding what refuge is, are just a few examples of how a multilevel view can facilitate effective integration.

This evidence can be considered by policymakers, social entities, researchers, organizations and society in general, interested in promoting good conditions for refugees who seek better opportunities for existence in our country, understanding that employment and its maintenance are the key for a successful integration. For example, by treating the refugee as a member of a minority group covered by diversity management, science, the State and companies will be able to take a new look at the need for more inclusive practices, such as affirmative action and diversification of the workforce, by government and private organizations, respectively.

Even though the relevance of the results of this study is recognized, its evidence does not seem to be replicable for other realities in the country. Thus, it is suggested that new investigations be carried out, using different approaches and methods, in order to delve deeper into refugee integration in Brazilian organizations. Some research questions may form the basis for further studies, such as: What is the perception of employers and mediators about the Brazilian reality and how does this impact the integration of refugees? What is the impact of COVID-19 on the integration of refugees in Brazilian organizations? What practices have organizations adopted for the integration of refugees? What contributions can refugees make to managers who hire them? What are the benefits and challenges of hiring refugees for managing diversity in Brazil?

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Resumo

Barreiras ao emprego de refugiados no Brasil e seus impactos na integração de longo prazo

Este artigo visa compreender como barreiras individuais, nacionais e organizacionais e suas inter-relações impactam o emprego de refugiados no mercado de trabalho brasileiro, com base na teoria da estrutura relacional da gestão da diversidade de Syed e Özbilgin (2009). Por meio de um paradigma interpretativo, abordagem qualitativa e utilizando uma pesquisa descritiva, o estudo foi realizado com oito refugiados com emprego formal na cidade de São Paulo, Brasil. As descobertas do estudo indicam a prevalência de barreiras nacionais sobre a exclusão de emprego para os refugiados, podendo potencializar fatores excludentes em níveis individual e organizacional. O governo brasileiro configurou-se como um dos principais obstáculos nacionais à integração, tendo papel particularmente importante na estrutura relacional. A pesquisa apresenta suas contribuições ao defender a condição do refugiado como inerente a uma extensão da diversidade. Ao lançar luz sobre as perspectivas dos refugiados acerca da realidade organizacional brasileira, o artigo propõe soluções que visem, por parte dos formuladores de políticas e organizações, minimizar impactos que as diferentes barreiras proporcionam à integração eficaz desses grupos nas organizações brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Refugiados. Mercado de trabalho. Organizações. Barreiras. Brasileiro.

Resumen

Barreras en el empleo de refugiados en Brasil y sus impactos en la integración a largo plazo

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comprender cómo las barreras individuales, nacionales y organizacionales y sus interrelaciones impactan en el empleo de refugiados en el mercado laboral brasileño, con base en la teoría de la estructura relacional de Syed y Özbilgin (2009) de gestión de la diversidad. A través de un paradigma interpretativo, un enfoque cualitativo y utilizando una investigación descriptiva, el estudio se llevó a cabo con ocho refugiados con empleo formal en la ciudad de São Paulo, Brasil. Los hallazgos del estudio indican la prevalencia de barreras nacionales de exclusión del empleo para los refugiados, que pueden aprovechar los factores de exclusión a nivel individual y organizacional. El gobierno brasileño se ha convertido en uno de los principales obstáculos nacionales para la integración, ya que juega un papel particularmente importante en la estructura relacional. La investigación presenta sus aportes defendiendo la condición de refugiado como inherente a una extensión de la diversidad. Al arrojar luz sobre las perspectivas de los refugiados sobre la realidad organizacional brasileña, el artículo propone soluciones que apuntan, por parte de los políticos y las organizaciones, a minimizar los impactos de las diferentes barreras en la integración efectiva de estos grupos en las organizaciones brasileñas.

Palabras clave: Refugiados. Mercado de trabajo. Organizaciones. Barreras. Brasileño.