



# The Meaning of Detention on Life Trajectories and Self-Identities: the Perspectives of Detained Migrants in a Removal Centre in Portugal

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## Abstract

Migrants need the consent of the host country to enter and stay in its territory as the right to “immigration” itself does not exist. States have the autonomy to regulate access to their territory with a variety of rules depending on the type of migration. One of the mechanisms of control that states use, and a means for the management of immigration, is administrative detention. This study intends to reflect on the phenomenon of detention of non-national migrants in Portugal, from the perspective of the *agent*. While the Portuguese legal frame may be broadly aligned with the European and the international frames and in wide compliance with the human rights’ expectations, our concern focuses on how the individual lives the experience of being institutionally and legally labelled as an irregular, deprived of freedom. The experience of dealing with deviance, which by its turn results from a condition external to the individual, is a phenomenon to which citizenship and migration studies still need to pay more attention.

**Keywords** Migrants · Detention · Deviance · Trajectory · Identity · Irregular · Agent · Portugal

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## Introduction

Migrants need the consent of the host country to enter and stay in its territory as the right to “immigration” itself does not exist (Gil 2011). States have the autonomy to regulate access to their territory (Gil 2011), with a variety of rules depending on the type of migration. One of the mechanisms of control that states use refers to administrative detention of irregular migrants and their consequent deprivation of liberty (Grant 2011; Kotsioni 2016). The aim of such mechanisms is not to detain prisoners by declaring criminal sentences (Bosworth and Kaufman 2011) but to make use of an import mechanism of criminal justice (detention) as a means for the policy of immigration management (Grant 2011; Bosworth 2012). The mechanism of detention that precedes the expulsion of immigrants is applied to people who entered irregularly, or whose residence permit has expired, or who are waiting for their deportation as an additional penalty after a criminal sentence (Bosworth 2011). While the aim of the detention of irregular migrants may be to prevent absconding before the expulsion or deportation, in practice, the deprivation of liberty has also been used for the control of asylum seekers, children, victims of trafficking and stateless migrants (Grant 2011) even if they are recognized as most vulnerable groups entitled to special protection.

This study intends to reflect on the phenomenon of detention of non-nationals in Portugal, from the perspective of the agent. For that purpose, it takes as reference the findings of fieldwork conducted at the Temporary Immigrant Centre (TIC) in Porto between April 2013 and December 2014. We will present the data of the research at the TIC based on semi-structured interviews to a group of detainees and discuss the results that emerged from the analysis of the data.

## Literature Review

Studies signal the high human cost of detention, namely the psychological consequences of stress, anxiety and a wide range of depressive symptoms (e.g. DEVAS Project 2009–2010), due to isolation from the outside world and the interruption of a life plan.

Other concerns about detained migrants signal stigmatization (Robjant et al. 2009) or exacerbation of previous traumas (Phillips and Spinks 2013). The detention, as well as the expulsion, carries also a psycho-social impact on the entire family unit as stated by the Inter-American Human Right Court (IAHRC 2013), mostly when the detained migrant is the family’s main financial support in the country of origin and sometimes the “bread winner” in the country of immigration.

In the case of detained children, there is anxiety separation symptoms, negative socialization associated with detention (Australian Psychological Society 2012) and psychological damage due to the family breakdown or separation as the result of the expulsion of a family member (IAHRC 2013).

Another consequence of the detention experience is in respect to the self-image of the detainees. Studies show that detention affects deeply the notion that individuals have about themselves (Australian Psychological Society 2012; Jesuit Refugee Service 2014, 2015). “The mortification of the self” resulting from the system of closed institutions shows how the segregation produced in confined spaces acts on the

individual, creating stigmatization (Goffmann 2007: 49). Though Goffmann was not talking about migrants, we may consider that similar consequences of detention can be found in detention centres for migrants,<sup>1</sup> where individuals report self-experiences that translate a state of disgrace or infamy upon them (Australian Psychological Society 2012).

The Labelling Approach Theory or Theory of Social Reaction advocated by Becker (2008) considers “deviation” as a social construction. The behaviour is tolerated or considered “illegal” according to a given historical and cultural moment (Cusson 2011). Becker (2008) considers that the various groups within the society are who produce deviation and create the rules that, once violated by an individual, build the idea and experience of “deviant”. Deviation becomes, thus, socially interpreted as the consequence for not complying with the rules. In light of this, the individual (the migrant under our perspective) who does not comply with the rules of migration becomes the enemy, the threat, the migrant prone to crime (Guia 2012). Labels created from criminal stereotypes, along with the moral panic that spreads a feeling of fear among society (Bauman 2013; Cohen 2011), would therefore justify the punishment of these individuals in order to secure the society and to preserve moral order (Aas 2000).

Taking Europe as an example, one would say that the demanding socio-economic contexts and a growing sense of insecurity due to several terrorism acts have been stimulating the creation of a kind of wide social consensus on the relevance and urgency of security issues, migration being one of them. The nexus between security *and* migration is sustained on powerful discourses and practices that reinforce each other, as the Copenhagen School (Balzacq et al. 2015; Buzan et al. 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003) and the Paris School (Bigo 2008, 2010, 2016; Bigo and Tsoukala 2008) have insightfully showed. Such nexus, once successfully consolidated among public opinions, opens the path for the emergence of more legal measures aiming at the restriction of individual freedoms and rights, in particular through repressive policies or exclusion of certain groups. The labels emerging from criminal stereotypes foster thus both informal practices of exclusion (Miskolci 2005) and the “legitimate” or formal practices of exclusion of “the deviants”. In that sense, assessing certain behaviours as criminal derives as much from daily social construction as from policy choices of the State as the institutional source of production and application of the law (Becker 2008).

As Foucault (2013) states, any confined institution under the responsibility of the State represents the way through which the power keeps the custody and control over individuals to ensure the incorporation of discipline “in bodies that are controlled”, to introduce disciplinary standard, to regulate them, and to normalize them. In the case of the detention centres for migrants, however, the purpose is not to “rehabilitate” the individual *in and for society* but ultimately his/her expulsion. Looking at the cases where expulsion is impossible (e.g. undocumented migrants whose nationality or country of origin is unknown) provides evidences of this. Indeed, in such cases, migrants are often released from detention centres only to risk facing new detentions

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<sup>1</sup> Detention centres for migrants stand usually for facilities conceived for detaining individuals who entered irregularly, or whose residence permit has expired, or who are waiting for their deportation as an additional penalty after a criminal sentence. The designations may, though, vary across countries. For instance, in Portugal as in France, centres may be called centres of retention, temporary installation centres, etc., as the very word “detention” is perceived as conveying the idea of “arrestment” of people.

(since expulsion to a specific country is not viable), while none of the detentions resolves their condition of irregularity.

More than reasonable or pertinent, it is therefore imperative to give voice to detained migrants so that they may express the meaning of this control in and over their lives and tell freely their story. By giving space to these discursive processes, we intend to reinforce the idea that the presence of the migrant (agent) as a person, as whole human being, must be equated at all times in the making of future public policies regarding immigration management and integration.

## Detention of Migrants—the Problem in the Literature

The incorporation of criminal law mechanisms into the policy of migration management (Grant 2011; Boswell 2007) results in the treatment of administrative questions related with irregularity of migrants, as criminal ones. This approach is extended to discourses on immigration which promote the nexus between criminality and foreigners (Bosworth and Kaufman 2011), while no evidence of correlation between increased crime and immigration exists (Martinez and Valenzuela 2006). In that way, “Crimmigration” or the convergence between criminal law and immigration law (Stumpf 2011) is materialized in the “criminalization of behaviours related to entry and stay” (Guia 2012) in such a way that those behaviours are seen as synonym of criminal practices.

Several countries have criminalised irregular entry leading to criminal proceedings and prison sentences.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to observe those tendencies in Europe, as irregular stay is punishable in all EU member states except for France, Malta and Portugal and only Spain and Portugal do not criminalise irregular entries.<sup>3</sup>

As Cusson (2011) refers, formal social control is based on power which is based on the law. In that sense, the law becomes the instrument used to control behaviours seen as threatening and deviance becomes no more than “the consequence of a normative activity of law-making and enforcement” (Cusson 2011, 97). This reasoning, though conceived within the frame of criminology, is also applicable to irregular migration. Indeed, it seems, as Aas (2000) refers, that punishing these individuals (the migrants) with expulsion or detention would contribute to strengthening social ties and the moral order, “protecting” nationals from the threats of foreigners.<sup>4</sup>

An ethnographic investigation to irregular non-nationals (migrants and asylum seekers) between 2004 and 2006 in Swedish detention centres and in Teheran camps between June 2005 and August 2007 alerts for the negative impacts of detention on individuals’ identity. Between the stay in detention centres and the acceptance of asylum seeker status, the asylum seekers participating in this study felt increasingly

<sup>2</sup> [www.globaldetentionproject.org](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org).

<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2014/EN/1-2014-199-EN-F1-1.Pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> A study by Lages et al. (2006) in Portugal shows the ambivalence in Portuguese society regarding the rights of immigrants and their repatriation. In this study, the majority of Portuguese recognize the right to family reunification to immigrants and the right to vote or naturalization. However, 79.5% of the participants of the study agree with the expulsion of an immigrant who has committed a crime or, for 61.3% of the participants, when they do not have work. On the other hand, 76% of the Portuguese participants of the study agree with the regularization of migrants but not if they are unemployed (repatriation being preferable in this case) for 75% of the participants.

criminalised because they were in detention centres. On other hand, in the case of expulsion from the territory by the Swedish authorities, expulsion was seen by the Swedish population as mechanisms for preserving national security (Khosravi 2009). The effects of these representations triggered in the participants feelings of guilt and self-responsibility for their own detention and expulsion (Khosravi 2009).

In the UK, another ethnographic study carried out between 2009 and 2011 in five detention centres (Bosworth 2012) revealed in the discourses of the migrant detainees, the association they made between detention, punishment and irregularity. The absence of citizenship seemed to be the main focus of the psychological discomfort, namely discomfort of the identity of detainees, not only from a legal point of view but also from an emotional point of view. As Bosworth (2012) points out, the period of detention, contrary to what is usually intended by the penal system, which is rehabilitation, does not change the immigrants' perceptions on their status of irregularity or does not prepare their return to the country of origin but simply confirms or reinforces the perceptions of "irregularity" and deviance felt by the individual.

## Detention Within the International and European Legal Frame for Migration

Enter or stay in a territory requires the authorization of the country to which an individual (non-national) wants to go or stay. The right of entry into a territory is recognized only for the nationals of that country according to Article 13 (2) of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#) "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country".

The rules of reception or stay of each state vary according to the type of migration. In forced migration, the protection derives from the Geneva Convention, while for voluntary or "economic" migrants, international protection stands on protocols that restrain what states can do regarding limitations to individual rights and freedoms.

The prohibition of arbitrary detention, for instance, as stated in Articles 3 and 9 of the UDHR, is enforced by the principle of universality to nationals and foreigners alike (Gil 2011).

In the European legal framework, as well as in the UDHR, the prohibition of expulsion of a given territory refers only to nationals: "No one shall be deprived of the right to enter the territory of the State of which he is a national" as stated in Article 3 (1) of the protocol 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). In the EU, therefore, the detention of migrants is accepted in the context of coercive measures for removal purposes of an individual from a territory.

The Directive 2008/115/EC<sup>5</sup> of the European Parliament and of the Council is also particularly relevant as it envisages a common approach to immigration policy among the EU Member States, the uniformisation of rules and their application for the treatment of irregular migrants (Leite 2010), namely regarding the periods of detention, the rules about the period of voluntary return, or the re-entry ban. The directive stipulates that the

<sup>5</sup> "The Return Directive"—Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of The Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32008L0115>.

maximum detention period can go up to six months with the possibility of extension for a further period of 12 months, depending on each specific case (Leite 2010). The directive states that “The use of coercive measures should be expressly subject to the principles of proportionality and effectiveness with regard to the means used and objectives pursued”. The also called Directive of Return emerges from the need of uniformising rules of repatriation procedures and the treatment of irregular migrants from non-EU countries (Leite 2010). This legislation represents a common approach to immigration policies between the Member States of the European Union, applicable in the Schengen area, and introduces a common legislation on the period of detention, a more restrictive rule on the period of voluntary return and a tighter re-entry ban (Leite 2010; Borges 2012). The Directive has been transposed into national law by all EU Member States, plus the four Schengen-associated countries, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, except by the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Article 15 of the Directive states that deprivation of liberty is intended exclusively to prepare the return of the individual or carry out the removal process to the country of origin. The detention is acceptable when there is risk of absconding or the third-country national (TCN) avoids or hampers the preparation of the return or the removal process and this measure shall be ordered by administrative or judicial authorities.

The Directive 2008/115/EC stipulates a maximum period of detention up to six months with the possibility of extending this period for a further period of twelve months depending on a lack of cooperation by the TCN or delays in obtaining the necessary documentation from third countries.

The legislation has procedural safeguards regarding the decision of return. Member States shall take in account the best interests of children, family and the state of health of the TCNs, and respect the principle of non-refoulement as stated in Article 5 of the Directive 2008/115/EC.

The protection conferred to minors is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Directive reinforces this concern (Article 17(5))<sup>6</sup> by stipulating that “The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in the context of the detention”. Still according to Article 17, minors “should be detained as a last resort”, not separated from their parents and families detained “shall be provided with separate accommodation guaranteeing adequate privacy”. In addition, “Minors (...) shall have the possibility to engage in leisure activities, including play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and shall have, depending on the length of their stay, access to education” and “facilities which take into account the needs of persons of their age”.

Conditions of detention are dealt with in Article 16 of the same directive. It should be noted that such article opens a door for the possibility of detention in a prison if no specialised detention facilities are available. In such case, migrants are required to be separated from ordinary prisoners. In any case, the detention should take into account certain rights that may derive from the migrant’s vulnerability, such as urgent personal health care and basic treatment of diseases. The migrant has also the right to contact legal representatives, relatives and consulates.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> This directive is controversial because it considers detention as a legitimate device in dealing with migration flows, and this may contradict the idea of safeguarding migrants’ human rights (Borges 2012). This directive, however, is also responsible for the harmonization of legislation among several European countries aiming at limiting the possibility of abusive use of detention.

## Detention of Migrants and Refugees in Portugal: The Legal Frame

The Portuguese law of immigration follows the Directive 2008/115/EC on the expulsion and detention. The legal framework of entry, stay, exit and removal of non-nationals is regulated by the Law 23/2007 of July 4th (Law of Immigration). At the time of the research, this law had already been amended by Law 29/2012 of 9 August. Currently, its fifth amendment was introduced by Law 102/2017 of 28 August. The articles referred in this study have not been altered though under any of the amendments.

Article 146 (3) of Law 102/2017 ensures that the placement of the detained migrant cannot go beyond the necessary time to allow the execution of the decision of compulsory expulsion and may not in any case exceed 60 days, or, according to article 160, 30 days in certain cases as those of deportation resulting from penal sentence.<sup>8</sup>

The definition of irregular migrant is applicable to any individual who enters and stays illegally in the national territory (Article 146 (1)), unless the individual submits an application for asylum within 48 h following the irregular entry (Article 146 (6)). In this case, there is no detention.

The law contemplates also expulsion as an additional penalty applied to non-resident foreigners sentenced for a crime to more than six months of effective prison (Article 151, paragraph 1) or to non-national residents who committed a felony sentenced to more than one year in prison. In the latter case, the application of the expulsion penalty takes into consideration, among other aspects, the level of integration in social life and the length of time residing in Portugal (article 151, paragraph 2).

Complementary to the remoteness of the Portuguese territory, an entry ban decision is applied (Article 149) during a year when return is voluntary (Article 147); otherwise, this ban is up to five years (Article 144).

The removal has limits according to Article 135 of the law of immigration. For instance, foreigners who were born in Portugal and who are regular residents in Portugal and foreigners who have minor children (whether of Portuguese nationality or not) under their care may not be removed from the territory.

In the juridical analysis of detention, it is also worth looking at the legal frame for the protection of asylum seekers. In Portugal, the Law of Asylum is based on Law 27/2008 of 30 June amended by Law 26/2014 of 5 May.<sup>9</sup> The law establishes the conditions and procedures for granting asylum or subsidiary protection and the statutes of asylum seekers. The current law introduced some relevant procedural changes in the protection of the most vulnerable individuals, namely for applicants “whose ability to exercise rights and fulfil obligations is limited by personal circumstances, namely by virtue of age, sexual identity, sexual orientation, disability or serious illness, mental disorder, having been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence” as pointed out in Article 17-A. The amendment to the Asylum Law in 2014 establishes also a clear distinction between unfounded claims and inadmissible claims (Article 19-A), the establishment of the deadline for the first procedural phase in the national territory in 30 days (Article 20 (1)) and the extension of the period for judicial decision challenge of rejection of the request up to four days

<sup>8</sup> Law 102/2017 available at <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/108063583>.

<sup>9</sup> Law 26/2014 available at <https://dre.pt/pesquisa/-/search/25343767/details/maximized>.

(instead of the 48 h as in the previous law of 2008), with suspensive effect (Article 25 (1)).

The decision on the inadmissibility of the request determines the notification of the applicant to leave the country within 20 days (if the individual is in irregular situation) (Article 21 (2)). With regard to detention, the Article 35-A (1) of the Law on Asylum states that “applicants for international protection cannot be kept in detention for having requested protection”, but may be kept in Temporary Installation Centres according to Article 35-A (2) based on “national security, public policy, public health or when there is a risk of absconding”, in a case-by-case decision and if it is not possible to apply less burdensome measures. Here, as in the Act regulating the entry and residence of third-country nationals, the placement in a Temporary Installation Centre will not exceed 60 days (Article 35-B (1) of the Law on Asylum). In case the application is accepted, the case goes to the Portuguese Refugee Council.<sup>10</sup> According to the Portuguese Asylum Law, refugees enjoy the same rights of the foreigners living in our country with a resident permit.<sup>11</sup>

## The “Temporary Installation Centre” in Portugal

Located in Oporto, the TIC (*Centro de Instalação Temporário*)<sup>12</sup> is a Portuguese centre for detained immigrants in irregular situation, created by the *Decreto-Lei 44/2006*<sup>13</sup> under the name *Unidade Habitacional de Santo António*, hereafter referred as UHSA.<sup>14</sup>

While the Service of Foreigners and Borders (SEF—*Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras*)<sup>15</sup> is the Portuguese entity responsible for managing the UHSA’s facility, other entities—the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Doctors of the World (*Médicos do Mundo*—MdM) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)—are also present on the ground. These entities provide psycho-social support and guarantee the rights of immigrants.

Respecting the conditions of detention of irregular migrants, Portugal has been though pointed out as the European country with the best treatment of detained migrants, taking as reference the TIC (DEVAS Project 2009–2010) that we will describe ahead.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [www.sef.pt](http://www.sef.pt).

<sup>11</sup> Article 65 of Asylum Law—They are also “subject to the duties of foreigners resident in Portugal.”

<sup>12</sup> Temporary Installation Center. “Temporary” because this center was meant to be temporary until the construction of new one.

<sup>13</sup> <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/694046>.

<sup>14</sup> Portugal has also detention facilities at the airports of Lisbon, Oporto and Faro, considered as transit detention facilities once the entry into the country is denied at the “border”. At the Islands of Azores and Madeira, there are also detention facilities used usually for “the shortest possible time before migrants are transferred to Lisbon (GDP 2017).

<sup>15</sup> [www.sef.pt](http://www.sef.pt).

<sup>16</sup> However, in 2017, the Portuguese Ombudsman reported that there is a lack of adequate space and conditions for families and children that can guarantee privacy to families or a lack of equipment for children (GDP 2017). The report, titled “Treatment of Illegal Foreign Citizens or Asylum Seekers in Temporary Installations or Similar Sites” authored by the Portuguese Ombudsman refers that in 2015, 108 persons were detained at the UHSA and 148 persons in 2016. [www.globaldetentionproject.org](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org)



## Methodological Considerations on the Field Work

In Portugal, the reality of the refugee crisis seems “more distant” in comparison with other European countries and the flows of migrants are also moderate. In the years between 2011 and 2014, there was even a decrease in the number of migrants arriving at the UHSA since its opening in 2006.<sup>17</sup> In parallel, the socio-economic context of the country during its international financial bailout between 2011 and 2015, along with the lack of opportunities in the labour market and the deterioration of living conditions, in general, had notorious effects on the complexity of the cases that were followed by entities present at the UHSA during the period of the research (JRS 2014).<sup>18</sup>

From the perspective of detained migrants and of those who work with such reality (social workers, psychologists, health professionals, among others), the social control of undocumented migrants is a phenomenon often unperceived, unknown by public opinions and broadly ignored by many policy-makers. Aware of this reality, we assumed that designing a qualitative research was the best choice to provide us access to the experiences and perspectives of the agents (Ritchie 2003). Our goal was to get access to life stories from the point of view of those who were detained and who were so precisely because of their trajectories as migrants.

This research aimed therefore at analysing the meanings of the immigration control process (*structure*) from the perspective of detained migrants (*agency*), taking also into account their life stories prior to the detention moment. The analysis of the migrant's life trajectory until detention, narrated in the first person, allows to understand not only the reasons underneath the decision to migrate but also the circumstances that lead the individual to an irregular situation in a foreign country. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, allowed to access the meanings that detainees attributed to the deprivation of freedom and to the idea of expulsion in their lives, as well as to how detention affected their representation of the self.

The process of selection of participants (Appendix 1)<sup>19</sup> followed the assumptions of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss *apud* Strauss and Corbin 1990). The participants were 10 migrants detained in the UHSA between April 2013 and March 2014.

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<sup>17</sup> As the research experience at the UHSA took place between 2013 and 2014, the data here refers to those two years only. In 2013, there were 162 migrants at the UHSA (JRS 2014)—the lowest number recorded since the opening of the center. Three children and one pregnant woman were also detained among the migrants. During 2014, the UHSA received 163 migrants—131 men and 32 women—from 37 nationalities and one stateless person. Brazilians were the most represented, followed by Ukrainians and Guinea-Bissau citizens. In 2014, contrary to previous years, there was also a prevalence of citizens from Cape Verde at the UHSA.

<sup>18</sup> The year 2009 registered the highest number of legal permanent non-national residents (457.306) in Portugal. Since then, the numbers did not stop falling until reaching the lowest total in 2015 (397.724). In 2016, likely as a consequence of the signs of economic recovery of the country, the population of permanent non-national residents grew again to a total of 407.504. This was the highest level recorded since 2010 and a 24% increase relative to 2015 according to the OECD International Migration Outlook 2018 (OECD 2018). Still, and, in general terms, the percentage of legal immigrant population in Portugal is less than 5% of its global population, a modest percentage in comparison with other European countries. As for the population of refugees, there has been a growth of requests for asylum status (from a total of 896 in 2015 to 1750 in 2017), and by December 2017, Portugal had resettled 4574 refugees. The figures are though quite modest in comparison with those found elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Germany with 198,000 requests accounted in 2017 for 31% of all first-time applicants in the EU-28, according to the Eurostat (Eurostat 2018)).

<sup>19</sup> Names are fictitious but correspond to names that detainees could possibly have taking into account their national/ethnic/cultural origins.

We intended to gather a sample of the participants able to portray the reality of the detention experience, relevant for the phenomenon under study (Fernandes and Maia 2001 *apud* Almeida and Fernandes 2001).

In order to reach the theoretical saturation (Fortin 2009), initially, our goal was to select a number of individuals that could be considered reasonable from a quantitative as much as a qualitative point of view. For ethical reasons, though, we excluded individuals who were considered more vulnerable, such as victims of human trafficking (especially women) and children, as the research could exacerbate their vulnerability.

The technique for data collection was the semi-structured interview, based on a predetermined interview script that we adapted to the case of the UHSA. Prior to the conduction of interviews, we requested authorization from the Service of Foreigners and Borders.

Bearing in mind that “questioning and listening is the art of the interview” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005), the interviews were conducted in a flexible way for better adaptation of the participants and to provide them with an open space that would allow them to share as much information as they wanted (Fortin 2009). In parallel, this process allowed us to get a general sense of the interviews and to recognize emerging units of “meaning” in the discourse of the participants. The life path narratives were aimed at exploring ideas, feelings, attitudes and opinions (Fortin 2009) about the detention process and the expulsion measures.

The methodology used was based on grounded analysis as it was fundamental to let the reality speak for itself, instead of going to the field with pre-established categories that could simply waste the valuable information provided by the interviewees. The technique used for data treatment, as already stated, was the analysis of discourse through the open-coding procedure of the entire interview until the stabilization of core categories. Not all data were used as they were not relevant for the purposes of the research and did not meet the aims of the study. Following the constant comparison method analysis, we reached inductively seven main categories (first level), with subcategories (second, third and fourth levels). The first-level categories related respectively to the following: reasons of immigration (1), the journeys of immigrants since their arrival at the host country (2), the images that somehow participants associate with their migratory process (3), the vulnerability pathways (4), the facilitating aspects for their integration in the host country (5), the meanings attributed to the migratory route, to the arrest and to the expulsion (6) and, finally, their prospects for the future (7).

## Evidences from the Field Work and Discussion

The reasons why the migrants left their country of origin were part of their history of migration until they had been caught into an irregular situation. The detention, and, in some cases, the expulsion, is one moment of such migration trajectory. That is why it is important to understand the reasons for migrating before asking the individual about the meanings of detention and expulsion in his/her life.

Regarding the reasons that led participants to leave their countries, it was found that most of the participants ( $n = 6$ ) migrated compelled by labour reasons, in search for a better life, corroborating previous studies (Ríos 2008; Patarra 2006; Baganha 2005) that suggest these motivations tend to be prevalent among migrants. The lack of

perspectives about the future, high rates of unemployment, economic and social instability, among other disruptive factors commonly found in their countries of origin, along with the demand for labour, especially cheap and flexible one, in the countries of destination, are thus powerful forces still driving to migration (Leite 2010).

In the other four cases, the reasons were quite different from those above-mentioned. One participant, Tânia (Brazil) arrived in Portugal at the age of 10 with her family and was enrolled in school: “I came to Portugal with 10 years old, I came with my whole family, my family lives here ...”. A second interviewee, Orlando (Cape Verde) won a scholarship in his teens and arrived at Portugal to study: “There, I was studying normal school, I was in 10th grade and then I applied for middle school, which gives [us] a double certification, so I came, I came here to study”. For Yaroslav (Ukraine), the reason to leave his country was the desire to know other countries since his childhood: “I decided to emigrate (...) it is not decided ... I keep it in my head since I was 5 or 6 years old”. At the age of 20, Yaroslav had the opportunity to leave and visited some other countries before Portugal: “I was 20 ... 20, 20 and I already had ideas, I’m going to go out, go out, I went to Poland, I went to Germany, to France ... I got there, I was ... I stayed, I stayed here”.

Migrating due to the political regime of the country of origin was referred by one migrant only, Saimir from Iran. Saimir stated he had “problems” with the Iranian police though he did not enter into details about the real nature of the problems: “[in] 2009 I leave Iran I have the problem [since] ... 2007, with the police”. He stood about 5 years in Norway, but this country refused his asylum application. So, without the possibility to return to Iran and to regularize his situation in Europe, he decided to migrate to Canada via Portugal, with false documents hoping that once in Canada, he could become legal. In this case, Portugal was seen as a transit country in his migration path. He was at TIC because he was waiting to be returned to Norway, officially the first country of arrival.

Connected to the reasons for migrating, it is also important to understand whether the migrant was in a regular or irregular situation when arriving at Portugal and if the situation was regular, then, why did the migrant fall into irregularity. Quite parallel to Düvell’s (2011) participants in his study, most of our interviewees (7/10) arrived at Portugal regularly. Among those who entered irregularly, one participant, Lúcia (Brazil), said that the authorities did not raise any problem when she entered the passenger control at the airport, despite the lack of a visa in her passport: “I was able to come in and let them in ... so ... look ... just like they say, you violate, violate ... no! I show my document, they let me in ...”. The second one, Saimir, resorted to fake documents: “I got some money I gave some traffic man to help me get documents”. The third participant, Mohamed (Algeria) arrived as a sort of “clandestine passenger” in a boat from Algeria: “There I arrived ... I boarded a boat, ... goods, hidden, I arrived in France, France–Portugal ... I went to the port, illegal immigration”.

As for reasons why those who entered regularly fell into irregular condition, the situations reported were also quite different. Tânia, who entered with the family regularly, reported that the irregular situation resulted from her ignorance about the Portuguese legal frame but also because, as she was in Portugal since childhood, she did not perceive herself as a “foreigner”: “I studied here, in my head, studying, automatically I had residence in Portugal.”

The negligence is an aspect mentioned by other participants. For Bacar (Angola), falling into irregularity was due to pure negligence: “It was my fault, not the family, neither the SEF, nor the embassy, because I did not get to try ... I was already habituated here.”

Being sentenced to prison was another motive invoked by one participant. Once in prison, Orlando (Cape Verde) could not renew his residence permit:

“... but when I entered the prison, I had a student residence because the school gave me a paper to renew all the documents (...) So when I got stuck I had documents up to date, except that ... I stayed inside [in prison], it's logical that ... document expired”.

For Tânia, irregularity derived also from her history of domestic violence. Her partner prevented her from dealing with her legal situation: “... later ... I joined this guy ... yes, I knew, I had to go to SEF to find out how to regularize my papers and everything ... then I could not leave the house, I could not do anything ...”

Finally, four interviewees referred the lack of labour to justify the irregularity, either because they did not get a job, as Yaroslav said: “I had a residence permit, my last residence title had 2 years, then I lost my job ... I lost my job, then I could not get a job anymore ...” or, because they had illegal work.

The irregular stay in the country happened mainly because the migrants were engaged in illegal work and, in some cases, involved with sex trafficking networks. As we find in literature review, immigrants are a particularly vulnerable population in employment terms, because they represent an easily hireable and dispensable force, usually employed in the toughest tasks (Guchteneire 2007; Baganha 2005). In our interviews, jobs were mainly related to food sector and restaurants (4/10) and construction (3/10). In Portugal, these activities are traditionally linked to illegal work (Baganha 2005).

Due to some big national projects (Expo98, Euro2004) and also to several major infrastructures (bridges, highways, etc.) that took place in the last decade of the twentieth century, the construction sector in Portugal absorbed a large number of foreign workers, especially between 1996 and 2003 (Baganha 2005).<sup>20</sup> One of the participants (Igor, residing for 13 years in Portugal by the time of the interview) referred that in those years “bosses [were] running after us”. More recently, with the economic crisis in Europe that affected most severely the southern countries, such as Portugal, migrants are confronted with the paradoxical situation of the labour market: the reason that led them to migrate—the existence of labour opportunities even if low paid—became an obstacle to the improvement of their living conditions, either because it is inexistent, precarious or illegal.

Regarding migration associated with trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation, this has been portrayed as a relatively recent phenomenon in Portugal (Peixoto et al. 2005 *apud* Neves 2011) that is though growing significantly (POAT Project 2009) despite its lack of visibility in the national media and in Portuguese academic studies (Clemente 2017). Our sample included two references to trafficking networks for labour exploitation. One participant, Samba (from Cameroon), was raised in his country of origin with the promise of joining a football club. Once in Portugal, Samba soon realized that the idealized migration project did not correspond to what he was expecting to find in the destination country:

<sup>20</sup> This leads to at least three major extraordinary processes for the legalization of labor migrants. One such extraordinary legalization occurred back in 1992/1993, in 1996 and in 1998. According to Pedro (2010: 165), these regularisations marked the passage from what Pedro calls the “colonial lusophone” migration cycle to the “economic-European” cycle strongly associated to the massive arrival of thousands of East European migrants and non-European migrants.

“His name is Roger Titi, a Cameroonian who lives in Portugal ... he's a man, he says he's a manager, I do not know if this is real, he works with a man who is in Cameroon, well, this [second] man is a Cameroonian too. Roger, he lives in Portugal since almost 15 years.”

A second case, Mohamed, revealed the reality of labour mafias that exploit migrants by taking advantage of their irregular situation and particular vulnerability:

“Many times (we) work with mafias ... why ... (we) did not know who the boss was, don't know” (...) Working only with intermediate, intermediate ... but under paid and, also, I have no document ... Underpaid.”

Besides aspects related to the labour market, also the lack (or withdrawal from) social security support and the lack of knowledge about the administrative and legal functioning of the host country, constituted vulnerability factors for our participants, corroborating, again, the literature in the field (Ríos 2008).

The vulnerability of the individual enables also to see how important the protective factors (back-up of social nets, including family and friends) can be in adapting to the host country and in minimizing the negative impacts of situations that occurred during the life span (e.g. going to prison because of a felony). This social support is particularly important in the period of arrival at the host country, due to the cultural shock that tends to occur at that moment, making the individual more susceptible to vulnerabilities (Bhugra 2004).

For four participants, family had been a major support at key moments of life, in difficult times or as an important turning point in the migratory trajectory. Orlando spoke particularly about his mother's support while he was incarcerated: “... later I had the support of my family, thank God, my mother, paid a lawyer and such ...”. For Lúcia, her boyfriend “an angel who fell from the sky” had been decisive to change the course of her journey and to “get out of that life” (meaning to leave prostitution).

Three interviewees referred the support of solidarity institutions, in two cases linked to religious congregations. For Valeri, those congregations gave important support in the treatment of alcohol consumption:

“I went, I started to see different people, they said -eh, you're going to stand with us, stay with us- I started walking in the Baptist church , I started, I liked, I started to read bible, to read something ...), but also as support and financial aid in the return to the country of origin of this same immigrant (“I still do not have money, when I arrive in Kiev, my city is 600 km [from Kiev], And here, Mr. Vitor of the Church, you are trying to get money for me ... help.”

In another case, a Catholic congregation served to fill the socioeconomic needs of a migrant, Igor (Russia) especially after he lost his job:

“Then I ... I found this place, [they] want to give me meal ... I went to CASP.<sup>21</sup> I do not know if you know ... There, there's a cafeteria, there's this church

<sup>21</sup> CASP Centro de Apoio e Solidariedade da Pousa—Social Solidarity Private Institution of the county of Barcelos, North of Portugal.

organization ... Santo Antonio, Barcelos ... but they help ... I ... I also go with them driving car, CASP, I helped pick up things.”

Orlando mentioned the existence of an association that used to “go to prison” to help foreign detainees in the process of regularization in a given moment, but they “no longer went after a while”.

The figure of the legal defender and his/her role in helping with criminal and administrative expulsion proceedings was mentioned positively by three detainees. One participant (Orlando) expressed satisfaction with the attorney’s work—“he did a great job”—because the initial sentence of 13 years of prison had been reduced to 6 years. The attorney, in this case, conveyed hope to him, as he stated:

“I felt uncontrollable ... I told you, to have 21 years old, to be convicted, to be convicted in this prison sentence ... I'm going to get out of here [the prison] old, I'm going to lose my all my youth ... later, the lawyer said [to me] he'll do anything and such ...”

In another case, Tânia described the legal defender as transmitted hope and trust during the expulsion process: “is a person who gradually gives me hope and gives me some encouragement to be in here ... because it’s complicated, it’s horrible.”

Finally, the individual himself can be a major protective factor. The psychological resilience of some participants under adverse situations (e.g. indifference to provocative attitudes and/or discriminatory attitudes) was notorious. This psychological resilience appears in the literature as individual key factor for the adaptation of migrants to the host society (Bhugra 2004). The way some participants faced discriminatory events is illustrated in the extracts below: “... but we have to stand up, talk [with people] and move on” (Lúcia); “I never stop to think too much, I always go beyond this, I always go beyond, I don’t think about it” (Orlando).

As for the main obstacles to inclusion in the host country, language emerged as quite important as indicated by five participants, mainly in the early days after arriving. Language is usually recognized as having a great importance in the process of migrants’ adaptation, as being a facilitator of adjustment to the culture of the host country, and a factor of acceptance by the host society (Neto 1997; Ríos 2008; Ribeiro 2018). Ignorance about the language had consequences at work, as Samba said:

“Well, I do not know the Law of Portugal since he [the Cameroonian recruiter] lives here for more time [than me]. He had remake the contract with Espinho [football team] that I didn’t know ... It’s a mistake for me, I can’t read Portuguese, I couldn’t read Portuguese yet.”

The difficulties with language had also impacts on the social integration due to the lack of language teaching structures in the host country as Yaroslav said: “Well, at that time it was a bit complicated because I used English only. Portuguese, Portuguese, alone, I had no school, I had to learn alone.” Even when support existed, it was insufficient as Saimir noted:

“When you reach Norway for first time ... you give them your information and you ... for first time in Europe, they give you 250 hours to study, but it’s not

enough, it means nothing because it's too difficult to learn Norwegian ... so it means nothing, when you learn alphabet you want to stop.”

The fieldwork also revealed the experience of discrimination as a vulnerability factor, reinforcing the idea that policies and practices of welcoming are fundamental to the adaptation and adjustment of the individual to a new and strange community. As Berry (1997, 2001) points, the success of integration within the new community depends on the community acceptance. In our study, four participants referred openly to the economic crisis as the main cause of the discrimination they felt. For Igor, discrimination

“... began to happen more often because of the crisis, because Portuguese began to lose jobs (...) bosses started get in foreign people to pay less ... without contracts, without those things, so it started to get worse.”

This goes in line with recent studies (Carvalhais and Fernandes 2018) that recall the importance of economic positioning in the making of the native citizens' perceptions about the presence of migrants. Far more relevant than cultural, religious or the national origin of migrants, it is their economic condition, or better saying, how national citizens perceive it (as being harmless or as being a threat), that weighs the most on their evaluation regarding the presence of migrants in the country. Pereira et al. (2010) demonstrated that the relationship between prejudice and opposition to immigration in Europe is mediated by the perception of a material threat (e.g. unemployment). Between 2011 and 2015, the Portuguese socio-economic context was affected (and still is, though much less severely) by a strong economic crisis, marked by high rates of unemployment especially among youth people and a sudden return to high rates of emigration flows (Carvalhais and Fernandes 2018: 70–71).<sup>22</sup>

According to the literature, this fear for the loss of jobs may well explain some discrimination attitudes against immigrants, although reality showed also, in the same period, that immigrants were in fact and by far the most affected by unemployment (Jornal de Negócios 2015; Publico 2018).<sup>23</sup> Still, that was not what public opinion perceived as reality. This fact certainly reinforces the importance of looking at perceptions and consequently of designing public policies capable of fostering the combat to prejudice.

In the discourse of six participants, losses and grievances of family members emerged as events which negatively marked the migration trajectory. One participant mentioned the impact of the separation from his wife. According to him, the separation was a decisive moment, since it precipitated an increased consumption of alcohol:

<sup>22</sup> Since at least 2009, unemployment rates began rising. The golden years of 2000 (3.9%) and 2002 (5.3%) had been left behind, and by 2008, the rate was already 7.6%. The escalating number though was still to happen, from 9.4% in 2009, it went up to 12.7% in 2011, reaching the highest in 2013 (16.2%) (PORDATA 2017a). Youth unemployment was even worse, reaching rates as high as 38.1% in 2013 (PORDATA 2017b).

<sup>23</sup> In 2014, for instance, the unemployment rate among Portuguese citizens was 13.7% against 22.3% among immigrants. However, it is also important to mention that, according to a report of the OECD, Portugal was, in 2017, the only Southern European country where immigrants have recovered jobs ten years after the crisis, against the tendency in Spain and Greece. In 2017, the employment rate among immigrants in Portugal was 74.3%, while the unemployment rate among immigrants in the same period has dropped to 10%.

“She said ‘I have another [person]’ (...). I left, left (...) I was out in the street and there were people ... from the Ukraine, I was annoyed. [They told me] Eh [Valeri] you were never sad, always happy, you’re sad, what’s going on? (...) you drink, you stay better.” (Valeri)

Two immigrants referred the loss of their mothers and the fact that they were not present at the death moment, namely one participant referred to this moment of loss as a “big shock”:

“I lost my mother (...) I entered ... and after 6 months, I called [home] ... to ask (...) and ... well, and how is my mother? My sister did not answer me ... I started to insist, and she began to cry, “Mother, Mother died ...” and it was ... a big shock, a big shock. Well ... I ruined my life.” (Mohamed)

At the same time, from Mohamed’s discourse, vulnerability emerged as a result of drug consumption (heroin and cocaine) which led him to robbery. Three cases reported alcohol consumption, one of them with consequences in terms of labour:

“I started drinking, then I already drink at work ... And then ... I have to leave Javat [my boss] because I did not stop drinking”). This same immigrant refers, in addiction to alcohol abuse, gambling addiction (“always played in the casino, always”) which led him to be a homeless (“... and then these homeless people, (...) and I went with them, to the street, I went to the street with them.” (Valeri)

As for the meanings of detention and expulsion, participants focused mostly on the “imprisonment” imposition as part of the expulsion measure. Although participants made a distinction between prison and the UHSA, for 8 of them, to stay at the UHSA meant to be deprived of freedom. As Mohamed referred, “it’s not prison but it’s to be deprived of freedom, [so] it’s prison.” or Saimir, “this building ... it does not look like a prison, but we don’t have freedom actually”. For two participants, to be at the UHSA also meant the regimentation of everyday life. As Bacar said “(...) now, you’re going to eat, there’s security [guard], I’m going to do this, there’s security [guard], I want to do that, I have to ask [security guard]”. Bacar felt the days ruled by imposed routines as a process of infantilizing the person: “looks like [I’m] a child, a teenager ... that complicates a lot”. For five participants, this period of detention only reaffirmed their condition of “illegality” with negative impacts on their identity like Bosworth (2012) has shown in her study. Recalling the moment of his detention, Yaroslav stated:

“There’s no need for me to go in handcuffs ... they handcuffed me, all that is a shame, ... [without] a sweater, a shirt [dressed] so that neighbours see <he’s a foreigner, (...) he is a criminal and ... a serious criminal>, didn’t need to handcuff me as a criminal ... just because of the passport, no right to do that!”

This monitoring mechanism serves primarily to strengthen the labelling mechanisms of illegal immigrants because the act of migrating appears, in that way, comparable to a crime, since illegality is punished in a similar way (Zuín 2010).

Three participants pointed out that being detained meant an association between crime and irregular immigration. In the words of Bacar: “I owe no one, I am free, I did not kill



anyone, I did not steal”; therefore, detention should correspond to a punishment for someone who committed a crime and not for someone who is irregular. Yaroslav, who was arrested while at home, also complained about the connection between immigration and criminality. For him, to detain an immigrant means that he is seen by society as “a serious criminal”; therefore, being arrested at home was for him was a most dramatic event.

The authors have called attention to the fact that the detention does not resolve the illegal condition of the individuals, leading instead to its perpetuation (Bosworth 2011, 2012; Boswell 2007), since the administrative aspects of the irregular stay are not solved by simply depriving the individual from freedom. As Saimir said, detention is useless because it did not solve his situation, nor allowed him to elaborate concrete projects for the future: “but here it is difficult for us, I think for myself, I lost my money, I lost my time, it is difficult I do not know what to do, I do not know what to do, I do not know what to do.”

For five participants, detention reinforced the condition of irregularity in defining their own identity, because they were indeed undocumented. Samba stressed that detention corresponded to a space where the “no papers” (*sans papiers*) were grouped together: “For me it is a place, where we gather undocumented [people] ... I should not speak in those terms but I recognize that I am undocumented, even before the law I would say that I am undocumented.” But it was one participant (Yaroslav) that made perhaps the most poignant statement regarding his condition as detainee by affirming “I feel a hole, a void”.

The 2014 Annual report of the Jesuit Service for Refugees refers to the presence of an increasingly growing number of poverty cases at the UHSA in 2013 and pointed to the social exclusion of most of these migrants (JRS 2014). In this regard, one participant (Tânia) said that, in her opinion, the UHSA represented a space for people “who end up being here because they have no family, [they] have no ties with anyone out there”. As it became clear from the interviewees’ narratives, the causes that lead to migration are related to structural difficulties in the countries of origin, and the causes that lead to irregularities are, in most cases, the perpetuation of these difficulties felt in the host countries. Social exclusion associated with detention is highlighted by Wacquant (2009) referring to the trend towards the substitution of a social State by a State that uses the confinement of people to solve social problems.

The definition of a prison can, thus, be applied to the case of Detention Centres for migrants since both institutions share similarities, among which, and paradoxically, a sense of rejection of the detention space and its acceptance as sometimes the sole space of inclusion. One participant (Tânia) considered detention a punishment for not having regularized her situation: “I think, it must be a kind of punishment for having spent so much time in the country and not having gone behind ... it means not that I do not want to take care of my papers, but [actually] I did not ....”

For Samba and Saimir, being at the detention centre was a waste of time. Samba who was waiting for a safe conduct from the authorities to leave voluntarily the Portuguese territory, said: “I am wasting time since I am already two months ... no activity. For a footballer, two months without activity is a lot, so much, it is as if you had lost a year. I eat, I sleep, I eat, I sleep, and I tell to myself that’s why I have to go home to Cameroon.”

For two participants, detention meant family separation with psychological impacts also on other family members. Tânia stressed: “My worry is my son because he calls me, he cries, he [on the phone] ... “Mother where are you” ... I will not bring my son here to visit me because for me, this is a psychological torture, also for him.”

When questioned about future prospects, half of the interviewees had difficulties to verbalize future plans. We were often faced with silence and a high commotion before the individual said something. Four responded “I do not know” repeatedly. Yaroslav showed some anxiety when confronted with this question while answering

“For me ... now, what I feel ... a hole, an emptiness, I cannot imagine how it will be ... How do I anticipate my future ... I already answered, I already answered that I do not know (...).”

Saimir replied that he felt hopeless and mentioned no alternative:

“Actually I’m so hopeless ... right now because I think ... it’s natural when you pay some money to get your future but you didn’t ... I cannot find it yet, I hope to solve this problem ...”.

Other two participants insisted on the negative impacts embedded in the expulsion process, due to the absence of references (labour prospects, family or social networks) in the country of origin. The expulsion and subsequent return to the country of origin was seen as a disruptive event with a negative impact on the future adaptation to the returning society. Three immigrants expressed their concern about the prospects in the country of origin in case of expulsion. To be expelled meant to break a life project because the future for them meant to have a future in Portugal. Lack of identification with the country of origin was another meaning manifested in the identity process of two detainees. Tânia recognized herself as Portuguese:

“It is horrible because (...) I am a Portuguese citizen, I do not consider myself a Brazilian citizen because I do not even remember anything”. Valeri said that Portugal became his place of belonging: “... I [will] come back here [after the expulsion] (...) I’m going to ask for Portuguese nationality (...)”.

After the first impact of the question on the prospects for the future, four immigrants stated that their future was to live in Portugal as illustrated by Valeri, who had been living in Portugal for 23 years and had a 21-year-old daughter born in Portugal: “... I’m going back here because I’m used to it, my life is more from here.” Tânia claimed that she would even use less appropriate means to return, if necessary, because she could not imagine living in a country but Portugal.

The return to the country of origin was part of the life project of two participants (Samba and Lúcia) because they had family support and did not see Portugal as a good for their professional lives. Samba thought of returning to his professional career in football, since he had left a good image in the country of origin: “I think I arrive in Cameroon, considering the good image that I left, all will be well and I could revive.”

For Mohamed, the two main projects were to get out of drug addiction and to raise a family: “My projects, the future ... get out of this life ... of drugs, easy money” and “marry, have a wife, have children”. For Samba, family too was a major plan: “I have a child, he makes me think a lot, since I would like that my child has a good future”.

Finally, work was mentioned as a component of their future project. As suggested by Mohamed’s discourse: “my projects for the future, (...) an honest job”, while Orlando

stated the desire of studying: “then if I stay here [Portugal] (...) would like to finish that course I was doing, I already did a year and then if I could do college ... because I have always liked mechanics and such.”

## Conclusions

One of the methodological limitations we found was the sample size. Indeed, and though increasingly debated and contested (O’Reilly and Parker 2012), the saturation point is still a major reference in the design of samples in qualitative studies (Saunders et al. 2018). In this regard, we consider that we did not reach the theoretical saturation with our ten interviews, as these were quite far from exhausting all the immense variety of realities that the UHSA meets. However, there were serious reasons for this to happen, which were mostly ethical. Indeed, it was not always possible to interview migrants in vulnerable situations (especially women and children) and sometimes the length of stay of the migrant was not enough to establish a good rapport between this and the interviewer, being rapport and some level of empathy always an important dimension for an interview’s quality (Black and Champion 1976; Partinton 2001). Linguistic and cultural constraints limited also the opportunities to select a larger number of individuals. Thus, the results obtained were conditioned to these limitations. However, this field work was still quite valuable and enabled to reach some pertinent conclusions.

It seems reasonable to state that policies of immigration and integration should be focusing, among other aspects, on the well-being, both physical and mental, of any migrant as this is part of his/her whole integrity as a human being, regardless of his/her legal status. However, this field work reveals that despite of what the legal frame may intend in this regard, once a migrant is considered irregular, this “objective” labelling has impacts of a subjective nature that only individuals can assess. Indeed, while the law pursues a clear distinction between detention and imprisonment, that is not perceived as such by the individual, who sees detention mostly as a negative experience.

We observed during the interviews stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms on participants due to the isolation provoked by the detention and the interruption of a life plan as referred in the DEVAS project (2009–2010). We also found vulnerability signs due to the lack of social support and the lack of knowledge about the administrative and legal functioning of the host country as stated by (Ríos 2008). As Guchteneire (2007) and Baganha (2005) stated, immigrants are a particularly vulnerable population in employment terms. Again, our study corroborated this as our participants had all been working in low skilled and badly payed jobs. The experience of discrimination perceived by five participants as a vulnerability factor reinforced the necessity of welcoming policies for better adaptation and adjustment of the individual to the new community. As Berry points (1997, 2001), integration will have more successes if the community accepts the new comers.

Despite the existence of vulnerability factors, we also found positive dimensions, such as the psychological resilience of some participants. This finding corroborates Bhugra’s (2004) study about the impact of the psychological character in a well succeed adaptation of a migrant.

As referred by Bosworth (2012) or Khosravi (2009) studies, an association between detention and irregularity was made by our participants (3/10). Those migrants felt guilt and self-responsibility for their own detention. As regards to the meanings of detention,

the participants focused in the “imprisonment” imposition as part of the expulsion measure. Although participants made a distinction between prison and TIC, for 8 of them, to stay at the UHSA meant to be deprived of freedom. As one participant, “it’s not prison but it’s to be deprived of freedom, [so] it’s prison.” As Zuín (2010) stated, migrating appears comparable to a crime, since irregularity can be punished by deprivation of freedom.

The period of detention reaffirmed the condition of irregularity for five participants and impacts on their identity, like Bosworth (2012) has shown in her study. As Becker (2008) stated, the deviation (the irregularity) is the consequence for not complying with the immigration rules. Three participants pointed out that being detained meant an association between crime and irregular immigration. As we previous mentioned, for Yaroslav, to detain an immigrant means that this immigrant is seen by society as “a serious criminal”. However, detention does not resolve the irregular condition of the participants as also pointed by Bosworth (2012; 2011) and Boswell (2007). Regarding expulsion, for two interviewees, expulsion meant a lack of framework reference in the country of origin, because they had established their lives in Portugal. In the present study, three participants were most anxious and apprehensive about the expulsion, as they did not know what reality they would face once they were back in their home countries.

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## Appendix

**Table 1** Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewed migrants

Name	Country	Sex	Age	Years in Portugal	Reason for detention	Days at UHSA	Situation at exit from UHSA
Tânia	Brazil	F	24	14	Irregular stay and not comply with the expulsion order	14	R.O.
Valeri	Ukraine	M	46	21	Irregular stay	29	R.O.
Bacar	Angola	M	48	23	Irregular stay	45	L.Mod
Igor	Russia	M	43	13	Irregular stay	59	R.O.
Orlando	Cape Verde	M	25	7	Extra penalty after prison conviction	30	L.Mod
Yaroslav	Ukraine	M	31	11	Irregular stay and not comply with the expulsion order	11	R.O.
Mohamed	Algeria	M	35	17	Irregular stay and not comply with the expulsion order	27	L
Lúcia	Brazil	F	47	9	Irregular stay and not comply with the expulsion order	3	R.O.
Saimir	Iran	M	27	–	Irregular entry	30	R
Samba	Cameroon	M	18	4	Irregular entry	58	R.O.

All names are fictitious but correspond to names of persons who have been detained

R.O., return to the country of origin; L.Mod, liberty after the defense process; L, end of the dead line for expulsion; exit in liberty (30 days—case in of extra penalty sentence); R, return to the country of 1st admission (refugee case)

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