

# Syrian refugees in Brazil: Labor Integration in the Absence of Specific Public Policies and the Role of Civil Society Organizations

## Refugiados Sírios no Brasil: a inserção laboral na ausência de Políticas Públicas e o papel das Organizações da Sociedade Civil

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**Abstract:** Brazil is the main receiver of Syrian nationals seeking for asylum in Latin America. In spite of the distance from Syria comparatively to European countries, Brazil is often chosen as a destiny country due to two main reasons: the humanitarian visa granted to people affected by the instability in Syria, that demands less requirements than a regular visa, and the possibility of acquiring a working permit even before the refugee status is granted. However, Syrian refugees/refuge seekers face challenges in accessing labor market due to language barriers, difficulties in proving previous professional qualifications and the discrimination against refugees of arab origin. The public sphere is by law responsible for promoting integration policies for refugees, and has covered issues such as juridical assistance for this population, but does not have clear actions in integrating refugees in the labor market. The organized civil society realizes a valorous work in this sense, with many initiatives to assist refugees inserting in the labor market, such as language courses, resume creating and raising of awareness to companies about the hiring of refugees. Since these institutions do not count on enough financial support from the public sphere, they vastly rely on volunteer workforce, which despite being very helpful, many times is not specialized in dealing with refugee issues. By performing a qualitative review of literature in the subject, extracted from books, articles, journal articles, doctorate thesis, bachelor thesis and newspaper databases both in Portuguese and in English, this research intends to figure out how the civil society organizations are assisting Syrian refugees to integrate in the labor market in Brazil, filling the gap left by the public power, and often suffering from overburdening.

**Keywords:** Syrian Refugees. Public Policies. Civil Society Organizations. Labor Integration.

**Resumo:** O Brasil é o principal receptor de cidadãos sírios que procuram refúgio na América Latina. Apesar da distância da Síria comparativamente à dos países europeus, o Brasil é frequentemente escolhido como destino devido a duas razões principais: o visto humanitário concedido às pessoas afetadas pela guerra na Síria, que exige menos requisitos do que um visto regular, e a possibilidade de adquirir uma permissão de trabalho mesmo antes da concessão do status de

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refúgio. Contudo, os refugiados/ requerentes de refúgio sírios enfrentam desafios no acesso ao mercado de trabalho devido a barreiras linguísticas, dificuldades em provar qualificações profissionais anteriores e discriminação contra pessoas de origem árabe. A esfera pública é, por lei, responsável por promover políticas de integração para refugiados e abordou questões como assistência jurídica a essa população, mas não possui ações claras na integração de refugiados no mercado de trabalho. A sociedade civil organizada realiza um trabalho valioso nesse sentido, com muitas iniciativas para auxiliar os refugiados inseridos no mercado de trabalho, como cursos de idiomas, criação de currículos e conscientização das empresas sobre a contratação de refugiados. Como essas instituições não contam com apoio financeiro suficiente da esfera pública, elas dependem muito da força de trabalho voluntária, que apesar de ser muito útil, muitas vezes não é especializada em lidar com questões de refúgio. Ao realizar uma revisão qualitativa da literatura sobre o assunto, extraída de livros, artigos, artigos de periódicos, teses de doutorado, teses de bacharelado e jornais tanto em português quanto em inglês, esta pesquisa pretende descobrir como as organizações da sociedade civil estão auxiliando refugiados sírios a integrar-se no mercado de trabalho no Brasil, preenchendo a lacuna deixada pelo poder público e sofrendo muitas vezes com a sobrecarga de responsabilidade e trabalho.

**Palavras-chave:** Refugiados Sírios. Políticas Públicas. Organizações da Sociedade Civil. Integração Trabalhista.

## 1. Introduction

It is estimated that three million Brazilians are descendants from Syrians, (UNHCR 2013), and according to the UNHCR, Brazil received more than two thousand Syrian nationals in 2015 (FARIAS, 2018, p. 143). Data from the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) show that nationals from ninety five countries applied for refuge in Brazil in the year of 2016, and Syria was the sovereign state with the highest number of deferments (DE SOUZA; ZOLIN-VESZ, 2018, p. 884). Today, more than 2,000 Syrian refugees live in Brazil (Rodrigues, Sala, and de Siqueira 2017, 52), and In Latin America, Brazil is the main receiver of this population (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 57).

Two important factors make Brazil an interesting destiny for the Syrian refuge seekers: the first is the humanitarian visa, that allows the entrance of people affected by the Syrian conflict in Brazil by the fulfillment of relatively less requirements. The second is the relatively simple

procedure to obtain permission to work in the country, described by the law 9,474 of 1997.

Even though Brazil is known as a generous receptor of refugee seekers, there are few public policies for integrating this population in the society. In particular, the integration of refugees\* to the labor market is not directly assisted by public policies. Refugees\* face barriers in accessing the labor market, such as the need of learning another language and having to prove their professional abilities in another country. Syrians in particular have to deal with the discrimination by their origin, frequently perceived by the Brazilian population as connected to islamic religion and terrorism. The organizations of the civil society have actions and programmes that can currently be understood as the main resource for Syrian refugees\* to access the labor market.

This work intends to answer the question: *“considering the lack of direct public policies for the labor integration of Syrian refugees\* in Brazil, what is the role of the civil society organizations in overcoming the barriers to their access to the labor market?”*. Since the instability in Syria unfortunately has no prospect to be close to an end, it is possible that Brazil will still receive Syrian refugees\* in the next few years. Also, the current situation of Venezuelan refugees\* in the north of Brazil has called attention to the urgency in the establishment of more effective public policies for the integration of refugees, especially in what concerns to access to the labor market, in order to give them a better chance to obtain their own sustainment. The aim of this work is to call attention to the overburdening of the civil society in filling the gap of public policies for labor integration of refugees\*, exerting pressure for the creation of relevant public actions in this area.

The next topics will briefly explain the existing public policies in other areas of the integration of refugees\* in Brazil and explore the absence of such policies in labor integration. Also, the sections will investigate the

difficulties faced by the Syrians and the practices of the civil society to overcome these obstacles and assist them into their integration to the labor market.

The research method of the present research is qualitative review of literature in the subject, which was extracted from books, articles, journal articles, doctorate thesis, bachelor thesis and newspaper databases, using as a main research mechanism the website 'google scholar'. The keywords used for the research were 'integration of refugees in Brazil', 'public policies integration refugees', 'difficulties refugees in Brazil', 'difficulties refugees labor market', 'Syrian refugees in Brazil', 'civil society in Brazil integration refugees', as well as those terms in Portuguese, since great extent of material about the subjects is produced in Brazil.

The main result of this research points to the civil society organizations and the UNHCR as often the only institutions that directly assist Syrian refugees in integrating into the labor market. The consequence of this - excessive - responsibility left to the civil society organizations is often their overburdening. The recommendations are that more specific regulamentation is created to the work of these institutions (DE MORAES; DE AGUIAR, 2018, p. 110), as well as quality control measures. Plus, it is urgent that more financial resources are invested by the government in the development of the labor integration programmes carried by civil society institutions.

## 2. Conceptual framework

According to Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx (2015, p. 14), integration is the process of becoming an accepted part of society. This paper will focus on the so-called analytical dimension of integration described by these authors as 'socio-economic', in which an individual is considered (or not) to be an accepted part of society according to her/his participation in

domains that are essential for any resident, such as access to institutional facilities for finding work, for example (GARCÉS-MASCAREÑAS; PENNINX, 2015, p. 15). The use of these facilities and the outcome received in comparison to the one offered to natives with the same qualifications are also means of analysing the depth of acceptance of an individual in a society (GARCÉS-MASCAREÑAS; PENNINX, 2015, p. 15).

The definition of refugee used in this research is the one established by Federal Law no. 9.474 of 1997. The first article recognizes a refugee as any individual who:

I - because of well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion, is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to accept the protection of that country;

II - not having a nationality and being outside the country where he previously had his habitual residence, can not or does not want to return to it, depending on the circumstances described in the previous paragraph;

III - due to a serious and widespread violations of human rights, one is obliged to leave his or her country of nationality to seek refuge in another country (BRAZIL, 1997).

This paper considers a refuge seeker a person who applied for refugee status but was still not granted. The footnotes along the paper indicate with a star (\*) when the described situation also applies to them. The present work will use the definition of public policy by Cochran and Malone (2010) presented in Birkland (2016, p. 8) that states that “public policy consists of political decisions for implementing programs to achieve societal goals.”

### 3. State of the art

There can be found a vast literature on the integration of refugees\* in Brazil, especially in what concerns to labor market. As an example, the paper ‘The (im)possibilities to the refugees in Brazilian labor market’, by Goerck *et. al.* (2017) reflects on the difficulties found by refugees that go to Brazil due to wars in accessing the labor market, but does not focus on the

peculiarities found in the case of the Syrian nationals, as the present work does.

The journal article ‘Syrian refugee families in São Paulo: the right to integration’, by Calegari and Justino (2016) analyses the public policies and civil society initiatives focused on the integration of Syrian refugees in São Paulo, Brazil. The work discusses the usually passive role that the refugees are forced to play in this process. The article, contrarily to this present research, does not focus on the labor section of the integration.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 Why choosing Brazil?

One reason for Syrians to decide to seek refuge in Brazil is the humanitarian visa for the people affected by the Syrian conflict. The resolution was created by the National Committee on Refugees (CONARE) in 2013, allowing people touched by the conflict in Syria to obtain a visa that has fewer requirements than a regular one (JUBILUT; DE ANDRADE; MADUREIRA 2016, p. 76). The resolution was renewed and will be valid until September 20, 2019 (BRAZIL, 2017). The move was praised by the UNHCR (UNHCR 2013). The measure of granting humanitarian visas was incorporated to Brazil’s new migration law (Federal Law no.13.445 of 2017), that establishes principles and guidelines for public policies for the emigrant (RODRIGUES, SALA; DE SIQUEIRA, 2017, p. 53).

The humanitarian visa has the goal of easing the relocation to Brazil, as the country recognizes that people fleeing conflict situations usually face obstacles in fulfilling the requirements for the regular visa, such as presenting invitation letters, bank statements or round trip tickets (JUBILUT; DE ANDRADE; MADUREIRA, 2016, p. 77). The visa can be emitted in Brazilian embassies in countries neighboring Syria (NEVILLE;

RIGON, 2016, p. 2), even if the passport of the applicant is to expire in less than six months. Also, a laissez-passer is granted for those who do not possess a valid passport (JUBILUT; DE ANDRADE; MADUREIRA, 2016, p. 77). The visa can be granted not only to Syrian nationals, but also to other people affected by the Syrian conflict.

When arriving in Brazil, it is then necessary to apply for the refuge status or another immigration status (JUBILUT; DE ANDRADE; MADUREIRA, 2016, p. 77). Brazil has also granted humanitarian visas to Haitians in 2012, due to the earthquake that happened in the country in 2010 (BRAZIL, 2012). In what regards to Venezuelans, the Interministerial Ordinance number 9, of March of 2018 determined that they should have a temporary residence permit valid for two years. This permit can afterwards be expanded for indefinite period (BRAZIL, 2018).

Another reason why many Syrians choose Brazil as destiny, in spite of the long distance in comparison to Europe, is the ease of access to the work permit. According to the law 9,474 of 1997 and the Normative Resolution 18 of CONARE, the asylum seeker in Brazil can apply and obtain his/her work permit and social security even before being granted the status (BRAZIL, 1997). The asylum seeker can request asylum in any unit of the Federal Police, and the access to this procedure does not depend on previous proof of filing any of the requirements in article 1 of law 9.474 of 1997.<sup>2</sup>

## 4.2 Public Policies for Integration in Brazil

In Brazil, the labor integration of refugees\* happens by the actions of Organizations of the civil society, since the public policies occur in different

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<sup>2</sup> The Federal Police will immediately emit the Refuge Protocol, independently of auditory (BRAZIL, 2014) The protocol will then be enough proof of the condition of the asylum seeker, and can be the document used by the asylum seeker to emit his/her Individual Fiscal Registration and the Work Permit and Social Security (BRAZIL, 2014). This last document allows the asylum seeker to work regularly in Brazil even before acquiring the asylum, as well as to the public services, such as health and education (SCHWINN; FREITAS, 2015, p. 20)



areas of integration - such as housing - but not in the economic insertion of refugees\* in society. De Moraes and de Aguiar (2018, p. 101-110) state that Brazil does not have a clear policy to integrate different cultural communities, but some municipalities or federal states sometimes adopt one-off measures, since these federation units have certain financial, planning and administration freedom.

About integration of refugees in general, Jatoba and Martuscelli (2018, p. 14) notice that the partnership between state and civil society is essential for refugee population, since there is a recognized failure of the State as a main satisfier of the needs of the excluded populations. In what regards to public policies for the integration of refugees in areas other than employment, the Public Defender of the Union provides integral free juridical assistance to migrants and refugees, translations and guidance about public services (SANTOS, 2018, p. 143).

Also, Brazil has granted the access of Syrian refugees to the Bolsa-Família, a federal income monthly transfer programme created in 2003 with the aim of combating famine in families in poverty or extreme poverty situation (ROSALINI *et al.* 2019, p. 308)<sup>3</sup>. Many of the refugees arriving in the country apply to this program in an attempt to have access to basic resources for their survival, such as food and shelter (MOURA, 2016, p. 11).

In Brazil, the rights of refugees are defined by Federal Law no. 9.474 of 1997, also known as the Status of Refugees. The dispositive also explains who the refugees are, what procedures the State adopts to give them protection, and what are their duties in the country (CÁRITAS, n.d.). Also, it was this law that created the National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), public organ responsible for deciding the refugee status of the applicants and defining the public policies towards refugees (BRAZIL,

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<sup>3</sup> The programme has requirements for compulsory conditionalities related to access to health and education (ROSALINI *et al.*, 2019, p. 308). According to the Ministry of Social Development and Fight Against Hunger, between 2015 and 2016 about 400 Syrian immigrants began to enjoy the benefits of *Bolsa-Família*.



1997). This law defines mechanisms for the implementation of the 1951 Status of Refugees Convention<sup>4</sup>, and determines other measures (BRAZIL, 1997).

The National Committee for Refugees (CONARE), is also responsible for stating norms that clarify the terms of the Status of Refugees Convention. The Organ has an innovative tripartite structure, with no precedents in Latin America, composed by the Brazilian Government, the UNHCR and organizations of the civil society (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 68). The main chair of the Committee is occupied by the Ministry of Justice, and the vice-chair by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BRAZIL, 1998).

The members are representatives (one of each) from the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Health, the Federal Police department, the civil society organizations and the UNHCR (BRAZIL, 1998). Each of these representatives has a vote, and the UNHCR participates with a voice, but no vote (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 68). Due to its relevance, the Institute of Migration and Human Rights (IMDH), also a civil society entity, was invited to compose the Committee as an observer member (CARITAS, n.d.).

#### 4.3 Difficulties for Syrians to find jobs in Brazil

Even though the access to work is guaranteed to the refugee\* by law, and the work permit can be obtained even before the refuge concession, the Syrian population faces difficulties to access the labor market. Silva and Fernandes (2017, p. 51) stress that one of the biggest barriers is the language. Since Brazil is a monolingual country, a large part of the population does not master a second language, and therefore the refugees\* need to learn Portuguese to increase their chances of finding a job (SILVA; FERNANDES, 2017, p. 51). In this sense, Ishizuka and Brulon (2019, p. 63-

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<sup>4</sup> The 1951 Status of Refugees is the Geneva convention, also called the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and is considered the main legal device in the regulation of the actual international refugee protection (UNHCR, 1951).

64) believe that employers' lack of knowledge about the aspects of the refugee status (and the refugee seeking status) is another barrier faced by refugees\* in Brazil. Even though the law is clear in defining the refugee protocol as enough for identifying its holder, employers often dislike the fact that the refugee\* cannot show documents from her/his country of origin, and bother that the solicitor's working permit is valid for a limited space of time (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 63-64).

Rodrigues, Sala and De Siqueira (2017, p. 53), point that due to Syria's formerly strong educational system, most of the adult Syrian refugees that arrive in Brazil have had a tertiary level education. Also, the authors state that some Syrians are successfully working as entrepreneurs in small business (RODRIGUES; SALA; DE SIQUEIRA, 2017, p. 53). For Ishizuka and Brulon (2019, p. 64-65) is important to note that, even though the insertion in labor market happens, it is usually characterized by the refugee\* working in a different field of the one he/she acted before arriving to Brazil. A possible reason for this phenomenon, according to the authors, are the difficulties in proving previous work experience and validating the certificates (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 64-64).

In this context, Rodrigues, Sala and de Siqueira (2017, p. 53) explain that the Brazilian government has been taking measures to provide validation of tertiary qualifications acquired outside Brazil. Also, partial documentation and results from exams conducted by Brazilian universities (in order to certify the level of knowledge) have been accepted as proof of studies (RODRIGUES; SALA; DE SIQUEIRA, 2017, p. 53).

A specific difficulty that concerns Syrian refugees\* is the prejudice due to the automatic connection among people of arab origin, islamic religion and terrorism. According to De Souza and Zolin-Vesz (2018, p. 884) the arab migration, after the events that succeeded the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, is an important element of analysis. The authors state that after the terrorist attacks that happened on this date in the

United States of America, the islamic religion, usually associated to the arab people in a generalized way, seems to receive the stigma of terrorist (SOUZA; ZOLIN-VESZ, 2018, p. 85).

Souza and Zolin-Vesz (2018, p. 85) affirm that the growth of the terrorist movement caused a generic and rushed vinculation between migration and international terrorism, which was exemplified in the article written by Braga (2018, p. 214) about the so-called ‘fake news industry’. The work portrays messages spread through the application ‘whatsapp’, in which the intention was to alert the population about the supposed arrival of muslim refugees and the “dangers” that their presence would bring, such as violence against women and terrorism (BRAGA, 2018, p. 214).

#### 4.4 The Actions of Civil Society in Labor Integration

Campos (2016, p. 88), Moreira and Baeninger (2010, p. 48) explain that the civil society plays an essential role in assistance to refugees and asylum seekers principally through the work of NGOs. Brazil has almost 100 organizations in its support network for refugees, the largest in Latin America (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88).

In this sense, *Cáritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo*, *Instituto de Migrações e Direitos Humanos*, *ADUS*, *Missão Paz e Abraço Cultural* are civil society organizations that have specific programmes for assisting refugees in accessing the labor market (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89). They provide, among other activities, portuguese lessons, vocational courses and even guides in revalidation processes of university diplomas (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89).

The UNHCR also plays a very important role in the integration of refugees to the labor market through initiatives such as the Global Pact (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89). This action raises awareness in the private initiative about respecting human rights principles and the respect in the

working relations, incentivizing them to hire refugees\* (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89).

## 5. Discussion

Federal Law no. 9.474 of 1997 (also known as ‘Refugee Law’) is the main legal document that defines the rights and duties of refugees in Brazil (CÁRITAS, n.d.), but it lacks clarity in some aspects. Topics related to education, living, health and discrimination suffered by people in refuge\* situation are not clearly expressed in the Status of Refugees Convention (MOURA, 2016, p. 3). This fact contributes to human rights violations and limits the responsibility of the Brazilian government in addressing these issues (MOURA, 2016, p. 3).

Considering that Federal Law no. 9.474 of 1997 establishes arrangements for the implementation of the 1951 Status of Refugees Convention and related provisions, according to its own preface (BRAZIL, 1997), it is not understandable that it presents gaps in such subjects. This because the 1951 Status of Refugees Convention expressly deliberates about education and discrimination. It is worth noticing, about the Status of Refugees, that only one article of this law mentions (very superficially) the integration of refugees, considering that the legal text has 49 articles. It seems inadequate that the law that establishes the creation of CONARE<sup>5</sup> (*see* article 11), addresses this theme so briefly.

The answer to the question ‘who is responsible for the integration of refugees\* in Brazil?’ is controversial, and shows the difference between theory and practice. The Internal Rules of the National Committee on Refugees (CONARE) affirm clearly, in article 1st<sup>6</sup>, that the Brazilian

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<sup>5</sup> Public organ responsible for orienting and coordinating public policies in integration (Internal Rules of The National Refugee Committee 1998).

<sup>6</sup> “Article 1. The National Committee for Refugees - CONARE [...] has the following objectives: [...] IV - guide and coordinate the actions necessary for effective protection,

government is responsible for the integration of refugees\*, with the participation of civil society institutions. In a clear contradiction, a pronouncement made by the External Relations Ministry in the official website of the organ states:

The Brazilian Government does not provide a package of benefits, such as airline tickets, housing, employment, professional training, language lessons and financial allowances for would be refugees and their families. However, please note that, as done in all cases of asylum seekers in Brazil, civil society organizations associated to the Brazilian National Committee for Refugees (CONARE) and to the UNHCR office in Brasília/Brazil will seek to provide, within their means, some level of assistance (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 2015)

Besides the categorical denial of public policies on the integration of refugees\*, the pronouncement seems to show that the government relies deliberately on the civil society to fill this gap, as said in ‘within their means’ and in ‘some level of assistance’. It is possible to see through this excerpt that the public power seems to be neglecting the actions in integration of refugees\*, besides speaking of civil society assistance in a generic way, even making it sound like a discretionary will of the organizations.

It would not be correct, although, to declare that Brazil does not have policies for the integration of refugees\*. Some aspects of integration are addressed by public policies, such as documentation, health and education, as claimed by Ishizuka and Brulon (2019, p. 66). The CONARE provides refuge status to the seeker, and with the protocol of refuge seek issued by the Federal Police, its holder can apply and receive the Individual Fiscal Registration (*CPF*, in the brazilian acronym fro which this document is known), as well as the Work Permit and Social Security (*CTPS*, in the brazilian acronym fro which this document is known) (BRAZIL, 2014).

The access to the monthly income policy Bolsa-família is also assured by the government to the refugees as a means of combating famine for those

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assistance, local integration and legal support for refugees, with the participation of the ministries and institutions that make up CONARE” (BRAZIL. 1998).

families that find themselves in poverty or extreme poverty situation (ROSALINI *et al.*, 2019, p. 308). The Public Defender of the Union provides integral free juridical assistance to migrants and refugees, translations and orientation about public services (SANTOS, 2018, p. 143). The work of the government in this sense, although, is incomplete since the Brazilian public system has such bureaucratic complexity that refugees\* depend on the civil society organizations to understand and to have access to these rights (DE MORAES; DE AGUIAR, 2018, p. 101).

For Ager and Streng (2008, p. 604), employment is a factor that influences economic independence and most of the other spheres of integration. The access of refugees\* to living and employment in Brazil are still problematic, since in both cases there are no solid partnerships (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 66). The failure in these aspects harms directly the other components of integration (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 66).

At this point, it's worth commenting Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas (2015, 15) analysis on socio-economic dimension of integration. According to this idea, the individual is considered an accepted part of society depending on his/her participation in domains such as access to institutional facilities for finding work. The access of a refugee to these institutional facilities and the outcome received (in comparison with natives with the same qualifications) are means of analysing the depth of acceptance of an individual in a society (GARCÉS-MASCAREÑAS; PENNINX, 2015, p. 15). The lack of public policies for the insertion of refugees in the labor market is, then, an indicator that lowers the integration depth in Brazil.

For Uebel and Abaide (2018, p. 60), Syrian refugees are the group that has achieved more advances in what regards to access the labor market, when considering the South American and Brazilian contexts. The authors state that this happens because the situation in Syria before the war was of relative academic and professional expansion and of increasing

openness (UEBEL; ABAIDE, 2018, p. 60). It is, though, necessary to say that this group still face many difficulties in accessing the labour market, such as language, proof of professional qualifications and discrimination.

Silva and Fernandes (2017, p. 55) claim that one of the biggest barriers for immigrants to access the labor market is the language, and Uebel and Abaide (2018) fit the Syrian refugees in this situation. The difficulties in proving previous working experiences and academic qualifications (UEBEL; ABAIDE, 2018) is many times the reason why many refugees\* accept working in a different field of the one she/he worked before arriving to Brazil (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 64). This circumstance can bring frustration to Syrian refugees\* that already have a tertiary education, a very common qualification according to Rodrigues, Sala and De Siqueira (2017, p. 53). For Ishizuka and Brulon (2019, p. 59), public organs' lack of information about the specificities of the refugee\* condition and the applicable laws is also a reason why refugees\* face difficulties in accessing public services and the job market.

Even though Brazil is known for being a country of immigration, that receives all cultures and ethnicities, the fact is that there discrimination and segregation happen (MOURA, 2016, p. 13). For Moura (2016, p. 13), this discrimination can be caused by the lack of information about the refuge status, and reduces chances of accessing the labor market, damaging the generation of income and hindering their socio-cultural integration.

Among the difficulties the Syrian refugees\* face to access the labor market, the prejudice against religion/ethnic background might be particularly hard to address. In the text 'From hospitality to intolerance to the Arab migrant: discursive constructions about the same Brazil' De Souza and Zolin-Vesz (2018, p. 879) analyse a news report of 2017 made by a Brazilian newspaper, in which a syrian refugee who worked as an autonomous had the kiosk where he sold Syrian food destroyed by citizens of



Rio de Janeiro. The aggressors called him a terrorist and demanded him to leave the country (DE SOUZA; ZOLIN-VESZ, 2018, p. 879).

If the effort to combat the discrimination against religion/ethnic background is to concern the civil society, campaigns for awareness will demand financial resources which the organizations are already applying in measures such as raising awareness of employers about the refugee\* condition and rights, as well as language courses, for example. The raising of awareness about that specific type of prejudice would be a longer process, since this problem is encouraged by the already cited 'fake news' industry, and would most certainly demand the support of the government with, for example, providing access to the mass media.

These difficulties faced by refugees\* in integrating in the labor market in Brazil have been addressed by the civil society organizations (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88). It is worth noticing that almost all civil organizations that work in the integration of refugees in Brazil develop actions in insertion of refugees\* into labor. In this context, The Assistance Center *Cáritas Arquidiocesana de São Paulo* has been playing an indispensable role in the labor integration of refugees (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89). It is the main reference in the subject in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 58).

*Cáritas* maintains many partnerships in order to offer basic services, such as housing, health and feeding (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88-89). Their integration program helps the refugee in the elaboration of resumes and forwards them to work vacancies, provides orientation to university courses, vocational courses and *EJA* (acronym for Youth and Adult Education) and even guides in revalidation processes of university diplomas (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 107). Also, the organization acts in sensibilizing and conscientizing companies into refugee\* matters and rights of the refugees\* (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 107). In what concerns to assisting with language barrier, *Cáritas* forwards refugees\* to Portuguese courses in partner organizations, what

helps them overcome one of the main difficulties in accessing job market: learning the national language (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 107).

In São Paulo, Campos (2016, p. 89) cites other NGOs, such as *ADUS*, *Missão Paz e Abraço Cultural* that play an important role in the protection of refugees\* and in their access to the labor market. The Support Program for the Replacement of Refugees (PARR) aims to connect job opportunities to refugee seekers<sup>7</sup> (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88). It has reinserted nearly two hundred people in the job market, counting with the assistance of *Cáritas* (CAMPOS, 2016, p. 88). In Brasília, the capital of Brazil, the Institute of Migration and Human Rights acts offering workshops about empregability in order to assist refugees\* in the insertion into the labor market (IMDH, 2019).

A relevant partner of the civil society in Brazil is the United Nations High Commissary for Refugees (UNHCR) (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 59). It has its attributions defined in the Convention on the Status of Refugee (1951), and is entitled to care for the correct application of the international conventions that secure the protection to refugees\* (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 59). The UNHCR acts in cooperation with CONARE and the civil society organizations (ISHIZUKA; BRULON, 2019, p. 59).

The excess of responsibility that relies on civil society initiatives can be a problem. According to Carneiro (2018, p. 145), the integration of refugees in Brazil happens heterogeneously by the NGOs, which are composed by professionals and a large number of volunteers, that many times do not have deep knowledge about refuge. De Moraes and de Aguiar (2018, p. 110) believe that the lack of specialized professionals in the field can reduce the quality and efficiency of the work, and cite as examples situations of emotional imbalance in a refugee\*, or abuse situations suffered by a child, that could go unnoticed by an unprepared professional.

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<sup>7</sup> And refugees.

The need and factual use of non specialized labor is indicative of the overburdening of the civil society. If the workload was not overwhelming, there would be hardly the need for not specialized workforce. The large number of volunteers also indicate the lack of proper financing of these organizations by the government, condition already claimed by De Moraes and De Aguiar (2018, p. 102). Even though volunteer workforce is extremely helpful, sometimes the commitment with the work is not the same as the one from paid professionals, since volunteers usually work in other areas for their own sustaining, and can hardly dedicate themselves exclusively to the work at the organizations.

De Moraes and De Aguiar (2018, p. 110) state that, even though the role of civil society is extremely important in the integration of refugees\* in the labor market, their work lacks on more specific regulamentation. Also, these authors noticed that the civil society work in Brazil is not measured by quality control such as public policies, that are evaluated in Canada, or by MIPEX, for example, other 37 countries (DE MORAES; DE AGUIAR, 2018, p. 110).

## 6. Conclusion

The present work aimed to answer the research question *‘considering the lack of direct public policies for the labor integration of Syrian refugees\* in Brazil, what is the role of the civil society organizations in overcoming the barriers to their access to the labor market?’*. The main result of this research is the possibility of realizing that it is challenging for Syrian refugees\* to access the labor market in Brazil due to general circumstances (language barrier and difficult proof of qualifications) and particular ones (discrimination against origin and religion).

Also, the absence of public policies in this matter aggravates the situation, but civil society organizations do a valorous job in assisting Syrian

refugees\* to overcome those challenges. These institutions are clearly overburdened due to not having enough staff and financial resources. It is strongly recommended that more financial resources are invested in the programmes developed by these organizations in order that they can specialize the labor force employed and improve – even more – the quality of the service offered to refugees.

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