Repositório ISCTE-IUL

5. Maintaining Migration during a Pandemic

Having looked at the impact of the pandemic on the tourist industry in Portugal and the mobility of international students, in this chapter the authors turn their attention towards labour migration. This change of emphasis may appear strange to some readers, with migration traditionally seen as separate from what be considered 'softer' forms of mobility. However, while the experience of moving to another country for employment purposes substantially differs from other forms of global circulation, all three of these mobilities depend on the existence of a fully functioning international travel infrastructure, and relatively open national borders. We can therefore anticipate a certain amount of shared experience among people on the move, even if their experiences are fundamentally different in many other respects.

Another commonality might be the idea of expansionism the authors introduced in previous chapters. Contemporaneously with what was happening in relation to tourism and student mobility, we can say that in the years preceding the onset of the pandemic, levels of migration to Portugal appeared to have increased, although not reaching the same levels recorded in other European countries. Residents with a foreign nationality represented around 5.7 per cent of the population residing in Portugal in 2019, rising to 6.4 per cent in 2020 (Oliveria, 2022). This represents a major contrast with, for example, Luxembourg, which had an equivalent figure of 47.4 per cent, and Malta, with 20.1 per cent (Monteiro and Oliveira, 2021). The actual size of the foreign population in Portugal is, however, a difficult issue to assess due the ambiguities within recording systems, although we can say that there has been a growth in the visibility of foreign workers. Also prominent in our evidence are signs of what might be termed periodic migration, with people travelling to Portugal repeatedly, but for relatively short stays, coinciding with times during which they were needed by certain sectors of the economy. We might then see this as another example of the fractional or fluid migration

we discussed in Chapter 4. But again, due to a lack of adequate statistics, we do not really have a precise idea of the popularity of such circuitous practices.

Equally difficult to estimate is the exact contribution to that national economy made by these labour migrants, although we are aware of the value of these workers to strategically important sectors, including agriculture. Public discourse on migration in Portugal also recognizes the contribution made by these workers to social security, and this is reflected in relevant statistics. Foreigners constitute a much higher proportion of contributors (64%) than Portuguese nationals (45%), and a lower proportion of social security beneficiaries (52%) compared to nationals (83%) (Monteiro and Oliveira, 2021). While there was greater activation of social protection mechanisms during the pandemic, these disparities have largely been maintained at this time, albeit with a slightly smaller differential between the two groups (Oliveria, 2022). We can then say that labour migrants cannot be regarded as constituting a burden on the state, explain why their presence has been traditionally seen as unproblematic by the public.

Labour migration and the pandemic

Provisionally, we can say is that during the first year of the pandemic, the scale of incoming migration to Portugal seems to have decreased, although we will have to wait until the publication of a full range of statistics takes place before we can confirm this impression. But as the authors discuss later in this chapter, such figures does not necessarily take into account regional and micro level variations, especially differences between urban and local districts, nor does it recognize the dependence of sectors of the economy such as agriculture on migrant labour. Further confusing this picture is the important issue of internal or inter-regional migration taking place the national territory. This includes the movement of labour migrants who lost their jobs in one region at the start of the pandemic, and who then moved within

Portugal, and often between labour market sectors, towards the industries that had managed to remain more or less fully operational, a practice also noted in other European contexts at this time (see, e.g., González-Leonardo et al, 2022; Stawarz et al, 2022). The need to circulate at the height of the pandemic nonetheless created problems for these migrants, and created challenges for employers and local authorities, the latter of whom were charged with maintaining public health and, at the same time, keeping open what were deemed the most essential migration pathways.

This situation is also reflected at a national political level. On the whole, Portugal sought to maintain distance from processes that could be seen as strengthening nationalist or far right agendas, and from securitizing borders any more that was deemed necessary, with any closures framed as the erection of defensive barriers to stop the spread of the virus (Carlà, 2022; Dalingwater et al, 2022; Erayman and Çağlar, 2022). Attempts to maintain migration were also articulated by the authorities using humanitarian language (see Gorjão, 2020) but, as our evidence shows, economic imperatives were also persistent, reminding us of the potential profits at stake. This explains why, and echoing some of the arguments we discussed in Chapter 3 regarding tourist industry discourse at this time, attempts to maintain labour migration were grounded in financial imperatives. This also involved making reference to Portugal's economic vulnerabilities, given a relatively recent history of financial crisis, as well as the obvious need to feed the population.

While not overtly nationalistic, this debate still generated a clash of economic and epidemiological imperatives, creating tension in policymaking, and making visible some previously under-represented or ignored issues relating to labour migration with the potential to alter the positive perception of migrant workers. When these problems become visible, there was then the risk of generating opposition to labour migration among far right politicians in Portugal who had previously focused their ire on other groups due to their allegedly insanitary

living conditions, most prominently, the Roma population, a situation present in other contemporary national and international contexts (see especially, Erayman and Çağlar, 2022). This suggests that the problematization of mobility during the pandemic in Portugal has social, cultural and political consequences, as well as the more obvious economic and existential aspects.

The immediate response

In regard to what actually happened during the early months of the pandemic, while many countries in Europe called for regularization programmes for migrant workers at this time (PICUM, 2020; Pallarés Pla, 2020), less than ten days after the declaration of a national state of emergency in Portugal, on 27 March 2020, some undocumented groups of workers were granted time-limited residence permits. Mobilization among some civil society organizations, concerned about the situation facing labour migrants as the pandemic started, would seem to have contributed to the issuing of the order 3863-B/2020 (see also Benton et al, 2021). With it, the Portuguese government acknowledged the need for temporary regularisation for migrants with residence applications that had been made to the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF), and enabled them to access health care, the labour market and certain welfare provisions. However, civil society organizations and academic scholarship soon began to highlight the limits of this initiative, both for its temporary nature and for the restricted target group being addressed (Mazzilli, 2022; Wallis, 2020; Zandonini, 2020).

Alongside acknowledging the need to maintain labour migration during the pandemic and, with it, guaranteeing the ability to pass through internal and external borders, is the challenge of effectively managing the living and working conditions of migrant workers. This extends to becoming more aware of the complications surrounding their voyages to and stays within a country that has temporarily suspended most of its international travel links and

adopted a new discourse about the need to restrict practically all forms of population circulation, making migration ethically suspect. We can then view this situation as another example of flux in the moral economy of mobility, with workers and employers, and perhaps some politicians, allied together to give labour migration exceptional status, harking back to issues addressed in Chapter 2 (see also Thompson, 1963, 1971). Maintaining migration nevertheless had unforeseen consequences, with the public scrutiny of this exception making visible the objectively poor housing conditions that were being endured by many of these migrants, creating the need for interventions to enable them to comply with the health regulations during their seasonal stays in Portugal. We might then see this as a positive outcome from a humanitarian point of view, albeit referring to a situation that should not have arisen in the first place.

To explore this issue further in this chapter, the authors will focus on what has been described in Portugal as the 'Odemira case,' and the broader issue of migration linked to agribusiness in Portugal, the latter being an issue that has attracted much attention in prior studies (Carvalho, 2021; Fonseca et al, 2021; Pereira et al, 2021; see also Esteves et al, 2017; Taboadela et al, 2018). For now, we can say that Odemira is a municipality of the southwestern Alentejo region, in which agriculture is both a major employer and a wealth generator, with the local economy highly reliant on seasonal migrants from outside the European Union; some of them are the people who continued to work and move within Portugal during the times of mandated immobility.

Labour migration in the pre-pandemic era

In regard to the issue of labour migration, the authors' focus on Portugal as a destination for workers rather than an exit point is important to acknowledge as this change in emphasis challenges the traditional view of the country as a country of outward migration. Certainly, in

regard to academic studies, the most work in the past has concentrated on 'emigration' rather than 'immigration,' and perhaps still does, and this is also a view strongly re-enforced by public interest in diaspora communities abroad remaining strong, including an annual celebration day for migrants named after Portugal's most world-renowned writer, Luis de Camôes, celebrated on the day of the author's death, 10 June, each year. Taking a more balanced view, we might regard Portugal as having a mixed migration model, involving population flows in different directions, involving both temporary and permanent movers, and highly skilled workers alongside manual labourers (Peixoto, 2007), but with a greater emphasis upon incoming migration in recent years.

In explaining how the country's migration landscape appears to have changed so dramatically, we can take note of a range of developments, but fundamental to understanding how Portugal became a sending and receiving country of labour migrants is the ascension of the country to the European political community that evolved into the European Union in 1986. Joining this transnational entity meant taking on new norms and values in regard to geographical mobility, that in time evolved into a strong orientation towards free movement and circulation between national boundaries, including the diversification and multiplication of various forms of migration. Becoming part of the eventual EU meant more opportunities for Portuguese workers to move abroad, to countries including France, Germany and the United Kingdom, but also enabled foreigners from fellow member states to enter Portugal, including workers from some of the Eastern European countries. These labour migrants complemented those following existing migration routes, especially from Brazil and the Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, who continued to travel. Together, these trends seem to have shaped labour migration in Portugal during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and contributed towards making its cities multi-cultural environments (Corkill and Eaton, 1998; Pires et al., 2011).

At a more practical level, we can also say that incoming labour migrants became economically important in Portugal, with fluctuations in levels of incoming migration associated with the health of the country's labour market (Pires, 2019); for instance, the country became less attractive as a destination during the years of austerity that followed the 2008 economic crisis, particularly as there were fewer job opportunities, but became more appealing during the subsequent recovery period. These trends are broadly reflected in statistics published in national and international databases, including Eurostat and Pordata, the latter of which provides breakdowns on demographic change in the foreign population in Portugal in regard to citizens with legal resident status (Figure 5.1).

Insert Figure 5.1 here

Interesting to note in Figure 5.1 are the countries of origin of the more recent arrivals. This data suggests that new arrivals in Portugal are mostly from Asia, marking a contrast with the traditional picture of labour migrants being from other Portuguese speaking – or PALOP – South American and African countries such as Brazil, Mozambique, Angola and Cape Verde. These individuals may have been attracted by the demand for labour in the agriculture sector, a development that is in itself related to investment in more intensive forms of farming, especially in rural areas in the south of the country, leading to an economic, social and demographic 'reconfiguration' of these regions (Fonseca et al, 2021). The suggestion is that labour migration, particularly the recruitment of short-term low paid workers from overseas, is a potential driver of the economy in such areas, in contrast to other forms of migration, such as the attraction of international students and of highly skilled workers, which tends to be much more of an urban phenomenon, centred on the cities of Lisbon and Porto (see Chapter 4; see also Cairns et al, 2017).

An outstanding example of this 'new' migration to rural regions can be found in the municipality of Odemira, in the Alentejo region. Located just over ten kilometres off the Atlantic coast, and close to the Costa Vicentina Nature Park, it is an area renowned for its agriculture, including forestry and livestock, as well as tourism and culture, with the nearby village of Zambujeira do Mar hosting the annual Festival do Sudoeste, one of the largest rock festivals in Europe. Since the 1980s, the agribusiness sector has recruited seasonal workers from abroad due to their flexibility and low cost, as has been the case in other regions of Portugal (Esteves et al, 2017). While not homogenous in terms of national backgrounds, in the past, most of these workers travelled from Eastern Europe countries but, more recently, there has been a major influx from Asia. We should also mention that the owners of some of these agribusinesses are also foreign, albeit from Northern European countries and conforming more to the norms of lifestyle movers than labour migrants (Taboadela et al, 2018; Fonseca et al, 2021). This means that the Odemira case can be seen an example of a multi-faceted migration process, illustrating the different ways in which the circulation of people and capital expanded in the pre-pandemic epoch.

In regard to the potential size of the migrant population in the municipality of Odemira, figures presented in Figure 5.2 suggest that this phenomenon has expanded considerably over the course of the last two decades, especially in the years immediately prior to the pandemic, to the point of constituting a major demographic change in an area that was previously populated by an ageing population and a low birth rate. This confirms that we are look at a significant socio-demographic shift, reflecting the growth of the agribusiness section in the region at this time.

Insert Figure 5.2 here

A growing foreign population in a municipality that is in demographic decline implies that the potential dynamism of the former can compensate for the dependency on social security of the latter, and also meet the needs of the local labour market. This seems then, like a win-win situation, benefiting local businesses and the state, as well as the incoming labour migrants. Furthermore, the presence of these workers has not raised social unrest, perhaps due to the still recent history of Portugal as a country of outgoing migration and recognition that these workers are needed. We might then say that in recent years, the 'migrant' category did not attract the same degree of pejorative usage in Portugal compared to what appears to have happened in some other European countries during this time.

In understanding why labour migration has not been problematized, we should then remember that this is a location characterized by historically low levels of incoming migrants and the still fresh memories of Portuguese migratory experiences, which has helped mitigate against the development of the kind of xenophobia that has made 'migration' a site for proxy political wars elsewhere in the world (see also Koopmans and Statham, 2000; Erayman and Çağlar, 2022), as suggested by recent scholarship in the United Kingdom, France and Sweden (Dalingwater et al, 2022). Portugal's mainstream political parties, including the ruling Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista*) and the main opposition the Social Democratic Party (*Partido Social Democrata*), have tended to share a relative positive view of labour migration (Carvalho and Duarte, 2020), and while there have been concerns regarding the behaviour of certain individuals employed by the national migration and borders body, SEF, in recent years, documented incidents of violence against migrants have attracted censure rather than sympathy for the agency.[3]

Despite this relatively positive atmosphere, many seasonal migrant workers still face practical problems, as do other migrants and Portuguese citizens who lack access to social and

economic capital, albeit with additional concerns in regard to the process of regularizing their stays, including gaining access to local welfare services and finding appropriate housing.[4] The practical problems facing labour migrants appear to be particularly acute in areas like Odemira, with housing a particular concern in the municipality. It is not hard to see why. An expanded foreign population in the region has led to significant increases in the value of properties, whose sales value, according to one recent study, have grown more rapidly than the national average, contributing to reduced access to decent housing conditions for modestly paid workers (Fonseca et al, 2021). This issue was recognized before the start of the pandemic, and the need to respond to the challenges posed by a lack of access to decent housing and the wider integration of the migrant population into Portuguese society has prompted the mobilization of a broad spectrum of actors and various ad hoc interventions and structures (see also Comissão Municipal do Imigrante, 2015, 2019, 2020). Among these structures is the Local Support Centre for the Integration of Migrants (*Centro Local de Apoio à Integração de Migrantes* (CLAIM)), which has been in operation in Odemira since 2016, partly funded by the local municipality.

In regard to why such centres are needed, we can interpret the new wave of labour migration to Portugal as another form of mobility expansionism that, as with tourism, appears to have taken place without sufficient preparation or adaptation, with corporate considerations overriding humanitarian concerns. The political power of agribusiness enterprises in fact led to the creation of a 'special and transitional regime,' which authorized the placement of migrant workers in precarious housing on local farms (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2019). These residences are, in bureaucratic language, described as Removable Temporary Accommodation Facilities (*Instalações de Alojamento Temporário Amovíveis* (IATA)), and in common parlance, known as containers (*contentores*). Described as 'worthy' housing and 'temporary' practical responses by government actors, they have received strong criticism,

including allegations of political irresponsibility and human rights violations arising from increased exposure to labour exploitation and few opportunities for integration among the workers. In addition, this measure does not address the lack of actual housing for most migrant workers, who frequently end up crammed together in dwellings that lack the facilities needed to maintain an adequate standard of living (see also Fonseca et al., 2021).

Labour migration in the pandemic era

Moving towards the present, we now wish to look at the impact of successive waves of COVID-19 in regions like Odemira, having noted possible concerns with labour migrants' living conditions, and the potential difficulty they might have in adhering to pandemic protocols in what can be extremely cramped housing. In normal circumstances, potentially unsanitary conditions would be a concern, including the issue of overcrowding and a lack of access to basic facilities, even more so at the times when social distancing had become mandatory.

Equally concerning is the risk of a shift in the meaning of labour migration taking place as an outcome of the high level of publicity surrounding the situation: moving 'migration' away from being a relatively benign or even positive force, towards the presence of significant numbers of foreign nationals being seen as a problem. This is even more so the case when workers have travelled to Portugal during the times when international and internal travel was actively discouraged, creating the impression that these workers were selfishly ignoring the public health guidelines and becoming potential vectors of virus transmission. We might then say then that the expansion of labour migration followed by an unanticipated pandemic has implications for migration narratives in Portugal, the labour migrants themselves and other Portuguese residents concerned about contracting COVID-19.

This is a debate the authors return to, at a theoretical level, in the next chapter of this book, but for now we want to look at some of the practical measures that were taken to manage

this situation, building on insights from empirical research conducted in the late winter and early spring of 2022. In regard to research subjects, this involved conducting interviews with experts in the migration field, all of whom had direct knowledge of the Odemira situation, being representatives of relevant government departments and civil society agencies in Portugal.

One important finding of our research confirms the position we asserted early, that labour migration has not – until now - been seen as a major problem among local politicians in Portugal, or by the public, and that the positive contribution migrants make to society generally recognized. This is certain the view of the following interviewee, a representative from a government agency working in the migration field, who confirmed that the positive view of labour migrants extends to the very top of the Portuguese political establishment:

In Portugal we need migrants. Migrants contribute to social security. Most of the migrant population in Portugal is active and we need more migrants to work. The Prime Minister and the President of the Republic want migrants to be treated as well in Portugal as the Portuguese abroad and, therefore, we have this progressive attitude.

These words are consistent with the position on labour migration introduced previously, which can be considered a hegemonic position, shared between the main political parties in Portugal, despite their ideological differences, although this obviously does not extend to the much smaller far right parties. From this account, we can also see that this is not a position grounded in sentimentality, or even humanitarian concerns. It is rather a pragmatic acknowledgment of the social and economic importance of labour migrants and the value of the contribution that they make to Portuguese society. This is then a nice summation of the position that has helped prevent migration from become a site of cultural and political conflict,

since inviting foreign workers to Portugal is seen as way of filling the state coffers, as well as benefiting migrants themselves, whether they are labourers, entrepreneurs, students or lifestyle-oriented travellers. If we are being more candid, we might also admit that such positivity is needed in order to attract such people to Portugal, given the country's relatively remote geopolitical position, far from the European centre, and with an economic profile that is seen as less attractive compared to other countries, even neighbouring Spain. As we as being pragmatic, this position reflects a remarkable degree of maturity at official level, and a refreshing contrast to the unimaginative, tired and often racist discourse that has become part of mainstream politics in so many countries.

The geographical and economic marginality of Portugal also seems to deter potentially illegal entrants from entering the country. For example, the kind of small boat Mediterranean crossings from North Africa, seen as a problem in neighbouring Spain and in Italy, are rare in Portugal. On the few occasions when people do arrive by such means, their presence creates confusion rather than hostility, and it is assumed that they have made a navigation error, and that the real destination was somewhere else. This is a situation explained in the words of a representative of a non-governmental organization as follows, making reference to one such event that took place during the pandemic period:

> Portugal is not a direct port for [undocumented] migrants, even if there was a recent exception, when a hundred migrants from Morocco landed in the Algarve region. This created some excitement: it seemed that we were starting to be invaded, but many of them had barely arrived when they fled to Spain. Even if they were earning less money here, they could have some stability due to the lack of manpower in certain economic sectors such as agriculture, construction and fishing, which due to difficult working

conditions, are not popular with Portuguese workers. They also had the prospect of seeing their situations regularized, but they already had families in Spain.

The view of Portugal not being the preferred destination for undocumented migrants is further re-enforced by another interviewee, who emphasised that, 'they are here today, a month or two and then they are gone. They go to other countries because Portugal is not an attractive country, not even for the Portuguese, let alone for migrants.' Looking at this position from a slightly different point of view, it might also be argued that incoming migrants have more leverage in Portugal, compared to other countries, due to their relative rarity,[5] and the dependency of Portugal on foreign workers also gives them a certain amount of political protection against being problematized, particularly considering the need for labour migration in crucial sectors such as agriculture. Even during the pandemic, farming had to remain operational to feed the population, meaning that the flow of migrants needed to continue even if there were risks to public health being generated.

This still leaves the challenge of ensuring that the workers' stays could be safe and compliant with the new public safety requirements at time were there were numerous practical obstacles. Housing was obviously important, but following the correct sanitary protocols was not the only concern. Complications extended to coping with the interruption of regularization processes due to the closure of the public offices of SEF, with the pandemic deepening existing bureaucratic backlogs, meaning that migrants' paperwork could not be processed rapidly during the long periods of lockdown. Nevertheless, the previously cited government representative stated that:

We took great care of those who stayed here: with immobility, ensuring that they all had the same support during the pandemic as the rest of the people. As soon as the

confinement started, after about a week, we knew that many migrants were not regularized, that is, they were waiting for regularization by SEF and some had not even managed to submit their request. We immediately issue an order for the migrants who had submitted their requests to be considered as documented and given access to support the same as other Portuguese citizens.

This may have been the aspiration, but the practical implementation of these measures seems to have been somewhat incomplete. Other interlocutors, especially those with close proximity to the migrant workers, recognized the importance of these interventions but remained more critical of how the measures taken at this time were implemented, and of the procedures themselves; for example, the following NGO representative explained that:

The government say that this measure allows access to all public services but this is not the case. The first thing it allowed was the issue of the health service user number. It is not a mandatory number, but without it there is a risk of paying more at the time of a consultation, and you cannot have a family doctor, assuming you can find one. It gives access to social benefits, to the unemployment subsidy. However, migrants contribute more than they receive, and it is rare that they ask for a subsidy of unemployment as they just look for another job.

This debate over the issue of regularization opens up further questions regarding labour migrants' status within Portugal, and the extent to which foreign workers are actually being treated the same as Portuguese citizens. As another interviewee, also an NGO representative, added:

The government has regularized the 'permanence' in Portugal of all migrants. 'Permanence' does not mean 'residence permit' but it helps people to access services, albeit on a temporary basis. It was a matter of public health, of social emergency, and it was necessary to take these measures, as […] people were scared. They had emotional needs and required answers to questions that were not translated into foreign languages. People came here looking for it, taking up the whole block. There were people who came from catering - one of the most affected sectors, even when the restaurants re-opened, they were empty - who found work in agriculture. There were also workers who went to Europe in search of work. People don't stand still. When migrants don't have work, they go looking for work, even outside the borders. There were people moving within the country and others leaving the country.

We can see that positive political rhetoric does not mean that managing problems on the ground is easy, and that in fact, many practical challenges remain. Learning from this account, alongside making the requisite bureaucratic matters difficult to deal with, there was a shift in migration patterns, arising from the need for migrants who had lost their jobs in one place to move to another were their labour was still required. This situation created the need to maintain circulation within the country at a time of mandated immobility between and within regions. More conspicuous exceptions therefore had to be made to accommodate the wishes of these migrants, especially where there was an alignment between their immediate needs and economic imperatives in areas such as agriculture.

The case of Odemira

This chapter closes with a return to the debate about Odemira from the vantage point of one year later, in the spring of 2022, when academic studies engaging with this subject have started

to emerge, some of which acknowledge the interaction between the immobility of the pandemic and pre-existing problems (see, e.g., Mazzilli, 2022). As noted in the preceding discussion, to analyse the values and norms that guided interventions at the moment of crisis, and the broader question of how to manage labour migration before, during and after an unprecedented time of immobility, we entered into dialogue with stakeholders in the migration field in Portugal. With the help of these interviewees, the authors are able to explore the moral economy of this migration episode, acknowledging how the Odemira case affected our ways of thinking about forms of labour migration that were previously been considered unproblematic and beneficial to the national economy, but created a new range of social obligations.

Out of this fieldwork, we can see that the pandemic rapidly changed the lives of many labour migrants, and the public perception of various non-essential forms of mobility. In addition, there were practical problems, affecting how people worked and lived at this time. As noted in the previous section, many people employed in sectors such as hospitality suddenly lost their jobs, and had to find alternative employment in other occupations. This required them to move from one region to other in Portugal while the pandemic lockdowns were in force: from the closed down cities to rural regions were labour was still required in agriculture. In regard to those who moved to Odemira, according to some local interlocutors, agricultural enterprises, in articulation with local authorities, now had the task of managing the new influx, and securing the living conditions of these migrants at this time, with unexpected costs and complications:

Agricultural companies were the only companies that did not stop during the pandemic. But, in order not to stop working, they had to take some measures to avoid having outbreaks: mass testing, workers were all tested twice a week, for example. This increased costs. If we had to reinvent ourselves in order to stay connected and help

migrants - for example by video calls - companies had to do the same. They had to reorganize all their work so that work teams would not cross paths in the fields, in cafeterias, on transport. They had to change their own organization inside the container.

Despite the efforts to keep labour migration operational in Portugal, we can see that practical, and possibly political, some problems remained. Not only did workers have to cope with poor working conditions, their highly visible presence in the country came at time when all forms of non-essential mobility were discouraged, risking inflaming the kind of anti-migrant sentiment that has spread within many other European countries. These inconsistencies were noted by a representative of a non-governmental organization with experience of interventions related to the employment of migrant workers in the agricultural sector, with an awareness of the health risks associated with their mobility during the pandemic:

> The internal mobility of migrant workers remained high, even if they had not entered from outside the country. The first migrants to show up with COVID in the Algarve region, in Tavira, left Serpa in March and arrived in Tavira in April. They were the first 20 to be confined that I had news of. Then, in Odemira, an Indian who had come from Lisbon, infected all the people in the house where he lived, 20 or so, and the place where he worked. We immediately advised that it was not the migrants who were the problem. The situation, namely the degraded housing conditions, the large number of people sleeping in a room or a house, already existed. Migrants were a risk group. It wasn't because they were Asians or Africans, but because of their living situation.

These insights confirm the idea that since the start of the pandemic, different factors have converged to complicate labour migration in Portugal, putting working migrants and those

with whom they come into close contact with at risk. Importantly, it is not the migrants who are seen as the problem, but rather their lack of appropriate living conditions, particularly at the more intensive periods of lockdown and at the start of the pandemic, when there was a lack of knowledge about how to control the spread of COVID-19. Nevertheless, an association has been made between migrants and the virus, threatening the integrity of the positive narrative about labour migration in Portugal, necessitating interventions in order to maintain the country's attractiveness for migrant workers.

The moral economy of pandemic mobility

To end this chapter, the authors return once again to the idea of moral economy, and the ability of strategic alliances to redefine societal norms; in this case, apparent alignment between labour migrants, their employers and state authorities in Portugal with a view to maintaining open labour migration pathways. This is obviously quite a different scenario compared to the historical struggles of the English peasantry described by E.P. Thompson, or even the alliance of holidaymakers and tourist industry suggested in Chapter 3, but it is no less interesting, and represents an important aspect of the 'immobility turn' that recognizes changes in migration discourses.

We might hypothesize that allowing labour migration to continue led to a clash of completing imperatives, with the importance of the work to be undertaken by agricultural workers enabling migration pathways to remain open at a time when many other forms of travel were discouraged. What seems to have been under-appreciated are the practical issues, most prominently, the need to adequately house these migrants, with their precarious living conditions making the process of complying to health and safety strictures extremely difficult. Furthermore, that the special dispensation granted to labour migrants was not effectively managed started to bring into question the idea that labour migration was a positive force in

Portugal, since it was now being reported as a problem, becoming a staple of the news cycle in Portugal in the spring of 2021. That the surge in Covid-19 infections in the Municipality of Odemira sparked heated debate nevertheless brought to light these precarious living conditions. If there is a silver lining in this dark cloud for migrant workers in the agricultural sector it is the fact that their problems became a focus for interventions from the state and various enterprises. In fact, some of the workers ended up being housed by government authorities, first in the gymnasium of a local school in São Teotónio, then a private eco holiday resort on the Costa Vicentina to enable them to better socially isolate.

This was obviously not the end of the matter, with consternation generated within the region from agriculture and local tourist industries, who did not welcome the extra expense and perceived financial damage to their properties. The civil requisition of the Zmar Eco Resort also raised complaints among property owners, although the enterprise had been closed to the public at this time, and some compensation was eventually provided. More tellingly, as one of our interviewees from a relevant NGO stated, 'Odemira only made the news because it appeared on television, but the country is full of Odemiras.' The implication is that this was not a unique case, and Portugal is obviously not the only country with precarious and marginalized migrant workers, giving this debate wider resonance.

To address the issue, in the period following the publicizing of this emergency, the Portuguese government has intervened further, with a new resolution issued by the Council of Ministers to request state support for the placement of new containers near the workers' greenhouses. The local council in Odemira has also been active at this time, with existing and new initiatives made in relation to housing, as another interviewee explained:

Since the end of 2019, we have started working with the council of Odemira. It still did not have a local housing strategy, which was the main measure to obtain financing for

decent housing. At the same time there was the resolution of the Council of Ministers for the installation of temporary accommodation which was not being implemented. […] What was achieved in 2021 is that the council finally presented the local housing strategy and there was a new resolution by the Council of Ministers so that, in addition to the installation of temporary accommodation, there could be other strategies such as renting houses in Alentejo, half an hour away, in an empty village. For this you need transport - either from the council or from the press.

At the time of conducting our research, the formation of a migrant organization in Odemira is also been reported by government interlocutors. This opens up the prospect of further change in migration management, suggesting more participation from migrants themselves in regard to improving their living conditions. For now, we can say that this complicated situation opens up a new range of factors that serious affect the meaning of various mobilities, including labour migration, initiating an apparent conflict between established norms and the attempt to enforce a new mobility etiquette with a view to controlling the spread of the virus, an issue that we continue to explore in the next chapter.

Summary

The Odemira case is a highly convoluted situation, and the pandemic clearly made labour migration more complicated, while also confirming its importance to Portugal. But harking back to some of the theoretical ideas explored in Chapter 2 relating to 'moral economy,' the impression is that at a time when there had been a major re-definition of mobility norms– aimed at effectively suspending internal and international migration - these new 'rules' were upended to serve the needs of agribusiness and, by association, migrant workers, and ultimately the state, constituting an alliance of interest groups. Together, these forces were able, as the title

of this chapter suggests, to maintain migration within Portugal, albeit not without generating a new range of problems in relation to the image and the reality of labour migration.

It is also important when discussing these matters at a theoretical level to remind ourselves of the human impact of these machinations. The authors have observed is this chapter that labour migrants - people who want to make a living, and who are also making a vital contribution to the agriculture industry – were placed in unsanitary conditions then subject to extensive media scrutiny at a time when they were under considerable stress due to the epidemiological situation and their own pre-existing precarious economic positions. This has been the reality of labour migration during the pandemic for thousands of people in Portugal, and millions more worldwide. Therefore, when we talk about an 'immobility turn,' we should remember that this is more than a temporary interruption in tourism or the placing on hold of ambitions to study abroad, but the heightening of tensions among a section of the population who deserve recognition for their efforts at this time.