

## Immigration, Emigration and Policy Developments in Portugal (ARI)

*João Peixoto and Catarina Sabino\**

**Theme:** Due to the economic crisis, from the beginning of the new century many of Portugal's former immigrants have moved on to Spain and other European countries, in parallel with the increase in Portuguese emigration.

**Summary:** In the context of Southern Europe, Portugal faces a singular situation. Similarly to Spain, Italy and Greece, the country registered a strong immigration in the late 1990s. However, in the early years of the new century immigration has decreased. At the same time, emigration has continued and a new wave of emigrants has left the country, mostly directed towards Spain. As regards government policy, admission and integration have been addressed but emigration has not seriously been looked into.

### Analysis:

#### *Introduction*

As in other southern European countries, in recent decades Portugal has undergone a rapid transition from net emigration to net immigration. The migration turnaround occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, following the same trend as in Spain, Italy and Greece. Similarly to most of its southern counterparts, the bulk of the inflow has occurred since the late 1990s –although in Portugal they decreased shortly after–. Many of the underlying factors of this profound social change are common to the southern European context, including a strong labour demand, an extensive informal economy, higher aspirations of the local population and limited State capacity to deal with inflows and welfare. A number of other factors were specific to Portugal, such as its status as a colonial empire until the 1970s and the lower pressure of direct immigration from bordering countries. Another striking peculiarity is that, in tandem with immigration, emigration from Portugal has never entirely ceased, having resumed since the mid-1980s and, especially in the early years of the new century.

#### *Immigration*

Immigration to Portugal was initially confined to citizens of Portuguese-speaking countries, namely the African ex-colonies and Brazil, but later became progressively diversified. Today, Portuguese-speaking immigrants are still in the majority and are mainly from Cape Verde and Brazil, but other national groups are becoming more numerous, especially Eastern Europeans, particularly from the Ukraine.

---

\* Researchers at SOCIUS, School of Economics and Management (ISEG), Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal.

---

The short history of immigration to the country can be divided into four periods. The first phase occurred between 1975 and the mid-1980s. The revolution of 1974 was a turning point for immigration. The collapse of the Portuguese empire brought Portuguese returnees and other immigrants from the former colonies. The largest flow came from Cape Verde, continuing a trend that had already started in the late 1960s; other significant flows came from Angola and Guinea Bissau.

The second phase, which started in 1986 with the entry of Portugal into the EU and continued until the end of the 1990s, was marked by an increase in immigration based on historical, linguistic, cultural and colonial links (PALOP<sup>1</sup> and Brazil) and by the persistence of emigration to Western Europe.

The third period started in the late 1990s, when there was a massive inflow from Eastern Europe, which had no previous cultural, historical or linguistic relations with Portugal, as well as a stronger and renewed immigration from Brazil and a continued diversification of national origins, particularly from Asia. The volume of immigrants greatly exceeded the previous phases and lasted until around 2004, when the overall number of foreigners reached a peak.

Finally, the fourth phase began in the first years of this decade, marked by the economic recession, and has continued until the present day. The overall number of foreigners living in the country declined slightly after 2004, with a significant drop in Eastern Europeans, the stabilisation of African immigration and only Brazilian immigration going strong, with new entries offsetting exits. As confirmed by the decrease in the number of immigrants renewing their legal permits and some sporadic evidence, it is known that many individuals have left Portugal, opting for more dynamic labour markets, including Spain, or returning to their home countries. The recent worldwide economic recession may have stabilised this scenario but not aggravated it, since no alternative re-migration destinations are available.

In 2007 there were around 435,736 foreigners legally living in Portugal (Figure 1), accounting for around 4% of the total population<sup>2</sup> and around 5% of the labour force (not including irregular workers). Brazilians (15.2%) and Cape Verdeans (14.7%) comprise the most numerous groups, followed by Ukrainians (9.1%). This is a drastic change from the situation in last few decades. In 2000 foreigners totalled 207,587, having risen from only 107,767 in 1990. The ranking by nationalities is also completely different from earlier immigration phases: Africans lost their predominance, whilst Brazilians and Eastern Europeans became more numerous.

---

<sup>1</sup> Portuguese-Speaking African Countries.

<sup>2</sup> The number would rise to 446,333 if new long-term visas are included.

**Figure 1. Foreign population living legally in Portugal, by nationality, 1990-2007**

Nationality	1990 (a)		2000 (a)		2007 (b)	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>107,767</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>207,587</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>435,736</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Europe</b>	<b>31,412</b>	<b>29.1</b>	<b>61,678</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>179,040</b>	<b>41.1</b>
<i>EU (c)</i>	<i>29,901</i>	<i>27.7</i>	<i>56,850</i>	<i>27.4</i>	<i>115,556</i>	<i>26.5</i>
Germany	4,845	4.5	10,385	5.0	15,498	3.6
Rumania	–	–	–	–	19,155	4.4
Spain	7,462	6.9	12,229	5.9	18,030	4.1
UK	8,457	7.8	14,096	6.8	23,608	5.4
Other EU	9,137	8.5	20,140	9.7	39,265	9.0
<i>Other Europe</i>	<i>1,511</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>4,828</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>63,484</i>	<i>14.6</i>
Moldavia	–	–	15	0.0	14,053	3.2
Ukraine	–	–	163	0.1	39,480	9.1
Other	–	–	4,281	2.1	9,951	2.3
<b>Africa</b>	<b>45,255</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>98,769</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>147,959</b>	<b>34.0</b>
<i>PALOP</i>	<i>43,297</i>	<i>40.2</i>	<i>93,506</i>	<i>45.0</i>	<i>136,694</i>	<i>31.4</i>
Angola	5,306	4.9	20,416	9.8	32,728	7.5
Cape Verde	28,796	26.7	47,093	22.7	63,925	14.7
Guinea Bissau	3,986	3.7	15,941	7.7	23,733	5.4
Mozambique	3,175	2.9	4,619	2.2	5,681	1.3
São Tomé Príncipe	2,034	1.9	5,437	2.6	10,627	2.4
<i>Other Africa</i>	<i>1,958</i>	<i>1.8</i>	<i>5,263</i>	<i>2.5</i>	<i>11,265</i>	<i>2.6</i>
<b>America</b>	<b>26,369</b>	<b>24.5</b>	<b>37,590</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>83,592</b>	<b>19.2</b>
<i>North America</i>	<i>8,993</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>10,195</i>	<i>4.9</i>	<i>10,446</i>	<i>2.4</i>
Canada	2,058	1.9	1,975	1.0	1,849	0.4
USA	6,935	6.4	8,022	3.9	8,264	1.9
Other	0	0.0	198	0.1	333	0.1
<i>Latin America</i>	<i>17,376</i>	<i>16.1</i>	<i>27,395</i>	<i>13.2</i>	<i>73,146</i>	<i>16.8</i>
Brazil	11,413	10.6	22,202	10.7	66,354	15.2
Venezuela	5,145	4.8	3,494	1.7	3,199	0.7
Other	818	0.8	1,699	0.8	3,593	0.8
<b>Asia and Oceania</b>	<b>4,509</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>9,272</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>24,855</b>	<b>5.7</b>
China	–	–	3,281	1.6	10,448	2.4
Other	–	–	5,991	2.9	14,407	3.3
<b>Other</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>0.1</b>

(a) Residence permits.

(b) Residence permits (provisional data), extended stay permits and extended long-term visas. Data on new long-term visas not included.

(c) From 1990 to 2000: EU-15; 2007: EU-27.

Source: INE and SEF.

Similarly to Portugal's southern European counterparts, most immigrant inflows are labour related. Immigrant activity rates, both male and female, are higher than for natives. Moreover, most of the recent inflows moved directly into low-skilled jobs in sectors such as construction, hotels and food service activities, services to companies and domestic service. The high economic growth registered until the early years of the new century, often based on labour-intensive sectors, generated a high labour demand and exerted a strong pull factor for immigration.

Immigrants are also over-exposed to flexible arrangements, and the informal economy has always been a typical route for their incorporation to the labour market. Despite a scarcity of data in this respect, a large proportion of immigrants have entered the country

---

irregularly or overstayed, easily finding a job, often in the irregular labour market. Only with time does their legal and social condition improve.

### *Immigration Policy*

Since the 1980s the Portuguese government has launched various policy initiatives to regulate immigration and promote the integration of immigrants. The process has been tentative and sometimes problematic. Immigrant inflows vary in their rhythm and characteristics and many contextual factors change over time, such as the entry of new members to the EU.

During the 1980s and early 1990s immigration policy mainly focused on the regulation of flows by the Aliens and Borders Service (SEF), dependent on the Interior Ministry. The pressure of irregular migration, together with the country's membership of the Schengen Agreement, forced the government to tighten its regulation mechanisms in 1993 and launch the first extraordinary regularisation in 1992-93.

In the mid-1990s the scope of immigration policy was extended. There was a shift from a policy based exclusively on the regulation of flows to a policy aimed at integration issues. A second extraordinary regularisation was launched in 1996 and a new immigration law, approved in 1998, adopted a less restrictive approach. Regarding institutional aspects, a decisive step was the creation in 1996 of the post of High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, the first governmental position especially focused on the immigrant population. Later, this entity has been expanded with the creation of the currently designated High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI).

New developments in Portuguese immigration policy were introduced in 2001, when immigration pressure was at its highest. For the first time, a system of quotas was envisaged for the recruitment of immigrants based on a report on domestic labour shortages. To work legally in Portugal immigrants had to apply for a work visa at the Portuguese consulate in their country of origin. The number of visas had to match the job vacancies identified in the various economic sectors (ie, quotas were set), as defined by research carried out annually by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), a department of the Ministry of Labour. Besides, the new law created 'stay permits' (*autorização de permanência*), a status that corresponded in practice to a new regularisation process.

After a further law in 2003, based on some of the regulating principles of the previous one, and two specific regularisation processes in 2003 and 2004, a new orientation was approved in 2007. In order to regulate immigration, the 2007 law introduced a new system, known as 'global contingent', which sets out the country's total annual labour requirements. As regards regularisation, there are now provisions to allow the 'ordinary' legalisation of formerly irregular situations. The requirements for benefiting from this procedure include, among others, having an employment contract or labour relation, being registered with the social security and being a third-country minor born in Portugal who has had pre-school, basic, secondary or professional education.

On the whole, the attempts to regulate immigration have not fulfilled their promise: the mechanisms for immigration control until the late 1990s have not been successful and the quota system for labour market recruitment launched in 2001 has not been very effective. According to researchers and many public officials, the process is too complex, bureaucratic and ineffective. In fact, formal quotas have not been fulfilled and foreign

workers continue to enter the Portuguese labour market irregularly. As a result, the number of irregular immigrants has always been considerable. Between 1992 and 2004 five extraordinary regularisation programmes have been implemented, followed by an ordinary provision in 2007 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Regularisation processes, 1992-2007**

Year	1992-93	1996	2001	2003	2004	2007
Successful applicants	39,166	35,082	183,833	16,173	NA	NA
Legal title	Residence permits	Residence permits	Stay permits	Work visas	Work visas	Residence permits

Source: SEF.

Policies as regards integration seem to have been much more effective. The fact that Portugal is highly placed in a recent comparative migrant integration policy index (MIPEX) confirms the relative success of its policies.

### *Emigration*

During recent decades, the persistence of out-migration is one of the most prominent singularities of the Portuguese case. In the new century there has been a significant volume of re-emigration of foreign immigrants (mainly directed to Spain), as suggested by the decrease in the number of legal permits renewed each year. The country's sharp economic expansion at the turn of the century soon ground to a halt, giving place to low job creation and rising unemployment. At the same time, the out-migration of Portuguese nationals has never ceased. The limited statistical evidence for emigration suggests that permanent emigration (departures with an intention of residence for periods longer than one year) had stabilised at low levels since the 1980s, but that temporary emigration (departures for less than one year) registered a strong increase until the mid-1990s, maintaining a considerable volume from then on. Comparing permanent to temporary outflows, the latter acquired soon moved ahead and accounted for more than two-thirds of the total in the early 2000s.

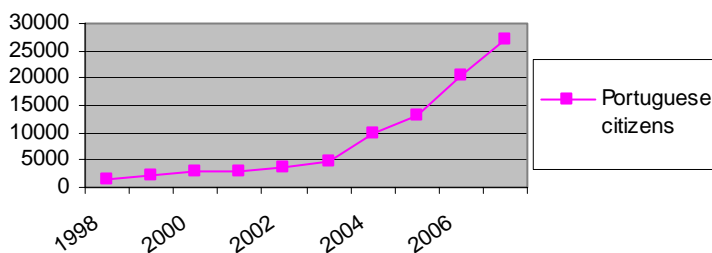
Official data on Portuguese emigration are subject to serious limitations. The main source of information is an indirect survey of emigrants' dwellings and data are only available from 1992 to 2002. However, episodic research carried out since the 1990s confirms the persistence of emigration and its renewal in specific periods. In most cases, research is based on statistics available at the countries of destination. The latter might not be totally reliable, but are the best way to measure international migration in certain cases, particularly in the intra-EU context.

Recent research confirms that, over the past few decades, Portuguese out-migration saw a first upsurge between the mid-1980s and late 1990s. In that period, emigration to Switzerland was considerable, with a significant flow also going to Germany, the latter linked to the construction boom after reunification. The German case is interesting since it confirmed the importance of the mechanisms of free provision of services inside the EU and the correlated importance of posted workers (employees posted by enterprises to work temporarily in another Member State). This case highlighted the fact that national interests tend to mobilise against immigration, including intra-EU flows, with German institutions, particularly trade unions, imposing obstacles to limit the growth of inflows. Most of this new Portuguese emigration was strictly temporary, although some became permanent since temporary permits could be transformed into permanent ones.

More recently, in the early 2000s, a new upsurge of Portuguese emigration took place. Again, most of these flows seemed to be directed to EU countries such as the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain. Whether it is temporary or permanent is still to be determined. Again, the most useful source of information are statistics in the countries of destination, which confirm a gradual and strong growth of inflows from Portugal, including Portuguese citizens.

The case of Spain is particularly telling. According to data from the Spanish *Padrón Municipal*, the number of Portuguese citizens increased dramatically in the new century, rising from less than 2,000 per year in 1998 to more than 25,000 in 2007. The links between Portuguese outflows directed to Spain with the movement of former immigrants to Portugal to the latter country is due to the contrast between the poor economic situation in Portugal in the early years of the new century with the fast-growing economy in Spain in the same period. This migration trend also highlights the effect that an open EU border policy can have on labour flows. The recent world economic crisis, which has hit Spain hard, might have put a halt to this flow.

**Figure 3. Emigration from Portugal to Spain, 1998-2007**



Source: Padrón Municipal (Spain).

Very little is known about the character of recent Portuguese emigration and emigrants. Moreover, very few policies have been adopted in this regard. Academic research has largely focused on inflows and government attention has been directed to the more stabilised Portuguese diaspora. The country seems to have put its faith in modernisation and the concomitant turnaround from emigration to immigration. But the traditional economic fabric of many regions, the periods of economic restructuring (with, for instance, the textile and footwear industries in the northern regions having been hard hit by globalisation), the economic downturn, rising unemployment and the State's scant provision of financial support have all led to renewed emigration. It is not surprising that the new emigrants are mainly low- to medium-skilled workers who do the same type of jobs abroad that foreign immigrants do in Portugal.

**Conclusions:** In the southern European context, Portugal is in a unique position as international migration. Foreign inflows started rapidly after the decolonisation process, grew gradually until the late 1990s and boomed afterwards. The countries of origin of immigrants, which were mostly Portuguese-speaking African former colonies and Brazil in the 1980s, diversified afterwards to include Eastern European and Asian countries with no former significant connections to Portugal. After the early years of the new century immigration decreased, with even some departures, following the economic downturn and better job prospects in other European countries such as Spain.



---

During this period there was a tentative process of designing effective admission and integration policies. As in other southern European countries, numerous policies were enacted which tried to regulate inflows, control borders, integrate immigrants and regularise irregular situations, but the efficacy of regulation attempts was limited and large-scale irregular immigration persisted, which was subsequently addressed by several regularisation programmes. Integration mechanisms proved to be more reliable.

At the same time, however, Portuguese emigration quietly continued its course. It first resumed after the mid-1980s and was mainly directed to Switzerland, but it later diversified to other EU countries, such as Germany, benefitting from the EU's freedom of circulation and provision of services. In the new century a surge in emigration again became evident. This time Spain was the favoured destination. Emigration has persisted but no significant attention has been given to it at the public, academic or policy levels.

*João Peixoto and Catarina Sabino*  
*Researchers at SOCIUS, School of Economics and Management (ISEG), Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal*