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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2022-12-06

Deposited version:

Publisher Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Pires, R. P. & Cândido, A. (2019). Emigration and development in the European periphery: Portugal's case. In Constança Urbano de Sousa (Ed.), *The relevance of migration for the 2030 agenda for sustainable development: The global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration*. (pp. 71-89). Lisboa: Universidade Autònoma de Lisboa, EdiUal.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.26619/978-989-8191-95-3

Publisher's copyright statement:

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*Emigration and development  
in the European periphery:  
Portugal's case*

In the literature on the relationship between migration and development, it is common to assess the impacts of migration on countries of origin and on destination countries separately (see Goldin, Cameron and Blarajan, 2011: 162-210). Strictly speaking, this differentiation tends to correspond to another one, made in practice but rarely specified, which involves the overlap between country of origin and developing country, on the one hand, and between country of destination and developed country, on the other. Transposing many of the conclusions of this literature to analyse the impacts of emigration in a country of origin classified as of high human development, like Portugal, is often difficult, requiring a careful selection of what is or is not applicable and analytical readiness to identify and explain particular dynamics of this type of countries: developed countries of emigration.

Portugal's case is not unique, and its study may allow future wider generalizations. In fact, today's international migrations involve all regions of the world (Massey et al., 1998: 2, 4-7; King, 2010: 40-41), with migrations between developed countries being the same in terms of numbers as those between developing countries and from the latter to the former (Goldin, Cameron and Blaranjan, 2011: 122).

## 1. Migration and development

The most common position on the relationship between migration and development emphasizes the benefits of immigration to destination countries and problematizes the effects of emigration in countries of origin. In these countries, it is suggested that emigration would have positive effects mainly through remittances and the increase in relational resources resulting from the formation of diasporas, but that it would have ambivalent effects on the transfer of skilled human resources. This ambivalence is most visible in the wake of the contributions from transnational perspectives which, by highlighting the relevance and longevity of relations between migrants and their societies of origin, have questioned the possibility of examining, separately, migrations and their development impact on the countries of origin and destination (de Haas, 2008: 33-34).

In the case of remittances, as well as in the diaspora-based transnational spaces, there is now a consensus that the benefits largely outweigh the possible costs they generate, so the debate tends to focus on identifying the means of maximizing the desired positive effects. In the case of the migrations of skilled people, the controversy is greater. At first, the focus was on the negative effects of the so-called “brain drain”. Afterwards, the emphasis was placed on the positive network effects and emulation processes supported by the dynamics of transnationalization associated with “brain circulation”. It is recognized, however, that for such circulation to occur, and for the positive effects to overcome the negative effects of the “brain drain”, conditions that do not emerge spontaneously must arise, since they depend on intentional collective decisions and actions that make them possible. We will return to these questions in the next sections.

This type of evaluation of the relationship between migration and development is relatively recent. It followed a pendulum course in which a positive logic of migration as development was emphasised, only to be contradicted by theories that saw international migrations as a means to extend underdevelopment (de Haas, 2012). In this second variant, migrations would benefit only the (central) countries of destination and would contribute to the underdevelopment of the (peripheral) countries of origin. In other words, international migration would stem from social and territorial inequalities at global level and would contribute to the reproduction of these same inequalities (Castles, 2007).

It is true that inequality between countries is still, today, the best predictor of the social position of individuals on a global scale. There is, as Milanovic points out, a citizenship prize, which benefits those born in more developed countries, and a citizenship penalty, which affects those born in less developed countries (Milanovic, 2016: 128-132). The same author points out that, in this context, migration between less developed and more developed regions is a direct consequence of the enormous inequality between countries.

However, there is a growing tendency to assume that, overall, emigration can be a factor of development for the countries of origin, more than a reproduction factor of the underdevelopment that caused it. However, in a country such as Portugal, whose population has been migrating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that sends out more emigrants than the number it receives, the public and political perception of the effects of emigration, when it is intensified, is very different. The positive effect of remittances is acknowledged but underplayed and the effects of the departure of young people are perceived as negative, both when the emigration of low-skilled workers is concerned and, above all, when the most skilled persons emigrate, leading to the “brain drain” image<sup>1</sup>. The possible relational gains resulting from the constitution of an active Portuguese diaspora tend to be replaced, in public opinion as well as in political practice, by a focus on encouraging the return of emigrants.

Are these perceptions partially or totally wrong or true? Are we, at least in part, faced with erroneous but rational cognitive beliefs because those who share them have good reasons to have them (Boudon, 2003: 57-98)? And in that case, what are these reasons? In the next sections, we will attempt to outline an answer to these questions.

## 2. Remittances and development

Remittances to developing countries now account for more than three times the amount of development aid: about \$ 466 billion in 2017. They also represent roughly the same amount as foreign direct investment in those countries, or rather more if we exclude China from the analysis (KNOMAD, 2018: 3). If we consider global remittances as a whole and not

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<sup>1</sup> Namely in Gomes (2015). For an approach more influenced by the alternative theses of transnationalism, see Peixoto et al. (2016).

only those that are transferred to developing countries, their total amount rose to \$ 613 billion in 2017, according to World Bank data (KNOMAD, 2018: v). In countries with weaker economies and large emigration, remittances have a strong economic impact and may account for more than a quarter of the GDP (for instance, 28% in 2017 in the case of Nepal).

The sending of savings by emigrants to their countries of origin is one manifestation of the intensity and longevity of the social bonds between them and their original social environments, highlighted by the transnational perspectives (Castles et al., 2014: 44; de Haas, 2008: 38; Vertovec and Cohen, 1999). The fact that these ties often involve the transposition into a transnational space of family networks that do not disappear with the physical separation, justifies the arguments presented by the theorists of the new economy of migrations, who emphasize the importance of family and community strategies in the constitution of decisions and emigration pathways (Portes, 2016: 81; de Haas, 2008: 36; Massey et al., 2007: 44).

The remittance flows through the relational channels between origin and destination societies generated by the transnational networks between migrants and their original social environments are one of the most visible contributions of emigration to the development of countries of origin (Massey et al., 2007: 222). The visibility of these flows and their growth, particularly in comparison with other external financial flows between developed and developing countries, has given rise to growing optimism about the importance of remittances as a central element in the relationship between migration and development. In particular, it is argued that remittances are not only the most stable source of external financing for many emigration countries, especially those with the most fragile economies, but also play a crucial role as “social insurance” in these countries, particularly in times of crisis (Kapur, 2004).

Since remittances are private transfers, their impact is generally achieved by means of increase in household consumption (Skeldon, 2008: 8), although, particularly in rural areas, part of what is recorded as consumption may, effectively, be productive expenditure on “livestock, education, housing and land” (Massey et al., 2007: 262). In any case, whether they are used for consumption or productive expenditure, remittances, unlike development aid, are not financial flows to support the collective action of the states as resources to be used in the scope of public policies. Here, the effects of remittances are more indirect, acting mainly through the expansion of the states’ ability to act in the exchange rate plan, the tax revenues they generate, as well as the constitution of

savings that can be directed to investments considered more relevant through the creation of incentive systems, particularly in the tax field. Also indirectly, the multiplier effect of the increase in households' consumption can boost local economies, and therefore investment, regardless of the greater or lesser success of public interventions aimed at the creation of savings and their selective application.

In this context, the debate on the relationship between remittances and development tends to focus on ways of maximizing the effects of remittances on two levels. On the one hand, in terms of reducing the costs of their transfer and the promotion of formal channels regulated for that purpose. On the other hand, in terms of creating incentives for supra-individual methods of raising, saving and applying reserves (Massey et al., 2007: 239-242).

These supra-individual modalities, which allow to maximize the effects of remittances, include the cooperative transfers, called "collective remittances" (Portes, 2016: 82-83). They usually result from the organization of migrants in associations in the diaspora, whose purpose is to help the integration of migrants into host societies and the development of investment activities at their societies of origin, the so-called bottom-up transnationalism (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999: 221). Thanks to the horizontal social capital that characterises these associations, migrants are able to carry out projects in their community of origin, fostering local development. Several studies have shown that collective remittances have enabled many communities to overcome capital constraints by financing public projects for the construction of parks, churches, schools, electrical grids, roads, and sewers, etc. (Massey et al., 1998: 260).

The support for these associations can be part of public policies that seek to encourage supra-individual types of funding, saving and investment of reserves. There are several examples of state intervention with this objective, mainly in developing countries, such as India, Armenia, Argentina and South Africa, among others (see Kuznetsov, 2008), as well as in China (Portes, 2016: 87) or in Mexico (Iskander, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Similar policies have also been applied in developed countries such as Scotland (Kuznetsov, 2008) and Ireland (Irish Abroad Unit, 2015, 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> In Mexico, one of the most well-known programs is the "3x1" or Citizen Initiative 3 by 1. Of non-governmental origin, it was set up in the 1980s in the Mexican state of Zacatecas, and 25 years later adopted by the Mexican government and generalized to the other states of the country, being the origin of several hometown associations (HTA) and bringing together immigrants from the same city or region of origin who sought to assist the development of communities in these cities or regions (Iskander, 2012).

Remittance flows, such as the migration flows of people who originate them, are not part of a self-regulated system that tends toward a balance (Portes, 2016: 76). In addition to the positive effects for the development of countries of origin, remittances also cause problems, particularly where they have significant economic consequences in the countries to which they are transferred. These problems include an increase in inequality.

Remittances are a financial symmetrical movement of the flow of people involved in emigration. As has been pointed out by several authors, the emigration of a country tends to be concentrated in a small number of regions and social segments (see, in particular, Faist, 2000).

That is, remittances do not affect evenly the populations and regions of the countries of origin of emigration, benefiting mainly part of the regions and families. On the other hand, since emigration is selective, it often involves regions and people who are more capable, not the poorest (Skeldon, 2008: 8), so the remittances they generate will not benefit the most socially and economically disadvantaged regions and families. Finally, it should be noted that in the case of lower income countries that are highly dependent on the contribution of remittances, economic vulnerability may increase because of their exposure to cyclical fluctuations in major destination countries (de Haas, 2012: 17).

In part, the new benefits from remittances compensate for the inequalities that generate emigration itself and those that resulted from its implementation and, ultimately, the inequality effects eventually generated by remittances are not clear. More visible are the multiplier effects of the emigration itself, at the origin, by the diffusion of an image of success of the emigrants that the transfer of remittances would prove, at least in terms of perceptions. These multiplier effects do not have just a symbolic origin. The flow of remittances can induce a logic of cumulative causality. Transfers of monetary and social remittances can be the origin of cumulative causal processes, contributing to the development in the countries of origin and the capacitation of those who receive them, in the sense that the term has in Amartya Sen (2003), or benefit from this development, which will be able to mobilize new resources such as money, knowledge and ties. The migratory capacities thus enlarged can be the source of new migratory aspirations and of an intensification of the migratory flow (de Haas, 2008: 17).

In Portugal, the total value of remittances received in 2016 was 3.3 billion euros, which represented around 1.8% of the GDP, and rose

to 3.6 billion in 2017, remaining stable as a percentage of the GDP due to the economic growth in the country in that period (see Pires et al., 2018, and Vidigal and Pires, 2014, for data on remittances to Portugal). In comparative terms, Portugal was the 32nd country in the world that received the most remittances, standing in an intermediate position that reflects both its relatively small population size and the fact that it is, in relative terms, the country with the highest emigration rate in the European Union (more than 20% in 2011). This relative position rises quite a lot when the amount of remittances is evaluated in terms of percentage of the GDP, with Portugal standing among the countries with the highest remittances received in terms of amount and in the top 20 with the greatest impact of remittances on the economy. Here, Portugal's position is once more intermediate. It is far below that of low-income and high-migration countries, such as Nepal, El Salvador, Lebanon, Guatemala, or the Philippines, where the value of remittances measured as a percentage of the GDP varies between 28% and 10%. But it is also clearly above the position of the majority of the developed countries that receive the most remittances, where they normally account for less than 1% of the GDP (France, Spain, Italy, Germany or the United Kingdom).

That is, the value of remittances received in Portugal is significant when evaluated in comparative terms. However, this fact is not reflected in the playing down, in terms of public and political perception, of the impacts of emigration on the country. This is probably one of the consequences of Portugal's position in the European context as an EU recipient of funds. In 2016, the total amount of European funds transferred to Portugal was 3.4 billion euros (European Parliament, 2016), slightly higher than the amount of remittances (3.3 billion). This similarity of amounts, greater than that observed in middle-and low-income countries between remittances and international development aid, contributes to underplaying, in the public and political perception, the contribution of remittances to the country's economy, which, unlike European funds, cannot be used to fund public policies to support development. Europe, not emigration, is now the reference when it comes to identifying and valuing external financial contributions to the country's development.

In summary, in Portugal's case, the usual public underestimating of the contribution of remittances to the economic development of the country originates in the smaller weight of remittances in the GDP than in less developed countries with strong emigration, as well as in the attribution



of greater importance to the European transfers as collectively usable and useful resources. It is not a false assessment, though it is exaggerated for two reasons. First, because despite all, the weight of the remittances in the GDP is higher than in other developed countries. Second, because this assessment does not incorporate the relative weight of European remittances and funds when measured in net terms, i.e. when discounting the amounts of remittances sent abroad by immigrants living in Portugal, as well as the country's contributions to the European Union's budget. In net terms, the value of remittances, 3.0 billion euros in 2016, is much higher than that of European contributions, which were 1.8 billion in the same year. These net values are, however, less publicized and, because they are slightly more complex in their meaning, they are less effective as a basis for public and political discourse.

In Portugal, the relative underestimation of remittances as a development factor and, therefore, of the contribution of emigration itself may still be part of the explanation of the surprising underestimation of the amount of remittances. This, in turn, facilitates, in retroaction, this underestimation. In fact, the analysis of the time series of remittances received in Portugal since the late 1990s shows a sharp fall in their amount between 2001 and 2002, coinciding with the entry into circulation of the euro (on 1 January 2002). This drop essentially corresponds to problems in identifying transfers between countries in the same monetary area as transfers of remittances, rather than to a real variation of the observed phenomenon. It is therefore very likely that the amount of remittances has since been underestimated in about € 1 billion, which would bring Portugal upwards in terms of the weight of remittances in the GDP, closer to 3% and therefore similar to what is observed in countries such as Mexico and India.

The missing academic and political focus on the remittances of Portuguese emigrants also partly results from the fact that some of the problems that affect their reception in less developed countries, with more incipient banking systems and less coverage of the territory, are absent. The fact that Portuguese emigration takes place today, essentially in European countries, does not, in fact, raise the problems associated with the costs of remittance transfers and the promotion of their movement through regulated formal channels. The debate on these problems tends to focus on remittances transferred from Portugal to developing countries, such as Guinea-Bissau (Có, 2004) or Brazil (Rossi, 2004), not on remittances received in Portugal.

### 3. The “brain drain”

In their consequences, migrations can be defined as transfers of human resources, regardless of the type of factors or reasons at their origin. In abstract terms, these transfers represent a loss to the countries of origin and a gain for the countries of destination. However, in the literature on the relationship between migration and development, the focus is placed not on the general loss of human resources but on the particular loss of skilled human resources.

It is therefore as if, in demographic and in unskilled labour terms, the countries of origin had abundant resources, so the impact of migration on these plans would be reduced – or even positive, by allowing a better adjustment between (high) labour demand and (reduced) supply. Conversely, in terms of skilled work, the reasoning is the opposite: skills at source are defined as scarce while needs (but not necessarily supply) are considered high. In this case, migrations would have had negative consequences as a result of the loss of resources necessary for economic modernization, which is supposed to sustain development. Therefore, the qualification of these migrations as “brain drain”. This pessimistic perspective, as it has been described (de Haas, 2008: 28-30; Portes, 2016: 84-85), tends to be incorporated into theories that emphasize the reproductive dynamics of underdevelopment through mechanisms such as unequal exchange, debt and migration, following Wallerstein’s theory of the uneven development of the world-system (Massey et al., 2008: 36), or Myrdal’s cumulative causation (Portes, 2016: 77).

The “brain drain” problem was aggravated by two sets of reasons. First, because the scarce skills that are lost have a high training cost. Second, because the probability of emigration tends to be higher when qualifications are higher, that is, on average the more skilled migrate more than the less skilled (de Haas, 2008: 17). Briefly, there are three reasons for this higher probability of emigration among the most skilled, attributable to the properties of their social position: first, because “the more skilled the potential migrant, the more possibilities he will have to use coded, impersonal, technical information to identify opportunities for migration”; secondly, because “the higher the skills, the more likely it will be for the migrant to mobilize organizational means to support the move and possibly the initial setting in at destination”; and finally, because “it is among those who are more skilled that the emergence of

cosmopolitan orientations favourable to strategies of broader territorial mobility will occur” (Pires and Pereira, 2018: 339).

At relational level, this greater willingness to emigrate is reinforced by the current predominance of selective immigration policies in destination countries, which favour the recruitment of skilled migrants. This selectivity is a clear expression of the states’ ability to directly determine migration opportunities through migration policies supported by the operation of selection-distribution mechanisms (Özden, 2006; Russell, 2010: 32; Massey et al., 2008: 238).

These policies of developed destination countries aim, simultaneously, to create barriers to immigration for the less skilled (Milanovic, 2016: 135), and to attract skilled immigrants, either through favourable admission processes, more generous concession of rights or through bilateral agreements (Czaika and Parsons, 2016: 10-15). In the end, either because of the properties of the agents or because of the selective policies that favour them, the emigration rate of skilled persons tends to be higher than the overall emigration rate.<sup>3</sup>

The debate on the consequences of skilled migration to the least developed countries began to highlight the resulting loss of resources (brain drain). However, this debate has evolved, and the growing centrality of the network concept in the explanation of empirically observable migratory dynamics (Massey et al., 1998: 42-50; Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2014: 39), as well as the contributions of the perspectives of transnationalism were decisive in transforming the way of thinking the relationship between migration and development.

The results of studies on migratory networks has shown that migrations are not simply absence/presence movements, but relational channels between local spaces at the origin and destination(s), crossing two or more national borders. Migrations are not zero-sum games. The exit of migrants corresponds to the creation of communication relations between origin and destination that allow the transfer of information from the destination and enable the transformation of unidirectional paths into circular paths along the migratory trajectory (Faist 2000: 96-123). Thus, if, in the first instance, emigration results in loss of human resources,

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<sup>3</sup> The emigration rate of skilled persons is usually calculated by dividing the number of emigrants from a country of origin with an academic degree by the number of residents in that country of origin with the same level of education. This calculation formula leads to an overestimation of the value of the rate, since some emigrants with a higher level of education obtained this qualification already in the destination country, especially if they emigrated at an early age with their families. This bias leads to an overestimation of the numbers of the so-called “brain drain”.

then it may have inverse consequences, either because of the transfer of the migrants' competences by means of communication, despite the fact that migrants remain emigrants or because of the possible movement of migrants between origin and destination, facilitated by the persistence of updated transnational links (de Haas, 2008: 39).

The creation of what is called "transnational spaces" has come to be understood as a crucial mechanism to enhance the developmental effects of migration, both in the area of remittances and in the movement of information and people. Several authors pointed out that monetary transfers were not the only relation of migrants to the society of origin, drawing attention to the "social remittances", knowledge transfers and cultural practices disseminated by the migrants, both individually and collectively, through migrant associations (Portes, 2016: 83), with impacts on the societies of origin. In short, it can be said that the permanently up-to-date persistence of relations between origin and destination favours orientation towards remittance transfer, cooperation at a distance and access to markets and to sources of investment and experts (Kuznetsov and Sabel, 2006: 3-12). It also favours the movement of migrants between destination and origin countries, as well as, ultimately, the reactivation of return projects often abandoned after the initial stages of emigration. According to several authors, the maximization of the transnationalization effects of migrant spaces is associated with the transformation of migrant populations into diasporas by processes of cultural construction and representation (Monteiro, 1994; Vertovec, 1999), with a growing political weight in the definition of policies in the countries of destination and, above all, in the countries of origin.

The substitution of the "brain drain" for cooperation processes, circulation and possibly partial return of the "brains" is facilitated by the observable fact that migratory movements and transnational relationships are greater among the more skilled migrants than among the less skilled. In particular, because the migratory processes of the most skilled persons are more often integrated into new forms of structuring the international market, which includes the internationalization of socio-professional categories such as those of specialists in intellectual and scientific activities (Iredale, 2001: 8; Salt, 1992).

This relationship allowed the emergence of compensatory transfer mechanisms from destination to origin, such as transfers of skills by emigrant scientists or economic investments by emigrant entrepreneurs (Meyer, 2001). Ultimately, it may also allow a particular form of

“brain gain”, when skilled migrants at destination, especially when they migrated very young, return to countries of origin that invested nothing in their training (Skeldon, 2008: 10-11).

The transformation of migrant populations into diasporas is not a spontaneous process, requiring a work of identity construction and representation mainly carried out by emigrants, but also with the intervention of the migrants’ states of origin. The emergence of compensatory transfer mechanisms requires, above all, specific public policies at the origin and strategic synergies, in which the “creative action of governmental organizations can foster social capital; and the link of already mobilized citizens to public bodies can increase the effectiveness of governance” (Evans, 1996: 1130). These policies include measures to support the establishment and activation of networks between origin and destination<sup>4</sup>, the intensification of diaspora effects and the facilitation and institutionalization of circulation and transfers of financial resources and knowledge (Massey et al., 1998: 253-254; Portes, 2016: 86-87; Skeldon, 2008: 13). More common in developing countries of emigration, such policies can also be defined and implemented by development organizations and destination countries governments (see, for example, Hein de Haas's 2006 analysis of policies carried out by the Netherlands, United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain). Whatever the context in which they are applied, these policies will only have the expected effects if, at the origin, there is an environment of economic growth and social and political stability (de Haas, 2012: 19).

In Portugal, in the public and political space and in the media, there is the idea that emigration is an obstacle to development, perceived to have a new and increasing component of “brain drain”. This view ignores the fact that the skilled emigration of Portuguese people has a much longer invisible history, which can be mapped at least back to the 1960s (Pires and Pereira, 2018: 341-343). It is true that the phenomenon not only increased throughout this century but gained greater visibility. This is not a false perception. The new Portuguese emigrants are more educated today than those who emigrated in the XX century. In 2011, 33% of the Portuguese living abroad for a year or less had a tertiary degree, a percentage that fell to 9% in the case of those who had been emigrated for more than 20 years. This is a significant variation and reveals that

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<sup>4</sup> For a good example of public policies designed to make the most of the diaspora effects, in particular by supporting the constitution and activation of networks between source and destination, see Irish Unit Abroad (2015, 2018).

Portuguese emigration tends to be a more skilled one today (Candido, 2018: 13), not only reflecting but broadening the growing qualification of the Portuguese population in general. On the other hand, and as has already been shown, the emigration rate of the Portuguese population with tertiary qualifications is about double that of the population with secondary education and four times higher than the rate registered for the population with basic education (Pires and Pereira, 2018: 347).

This pattern follows the general trend observed throughout the world and is not specific to the Portuguese situation. Its greatest public impact results, in particular, from two reasons. Firstly, it became visible when the recovery of the historical backwardness of the Portuguese population's skills deficit (Rodrigues 2017)<sup>5</sup> began to take shape. That is to say, when developmental consequences were expected as a result of the increase in the schooling of the Portuguese population, there was the realization that these consequences would now be hampered by the emigration of what in the public space is called as "the most skilled generation ever". Secondly, because, contrary to what is observed in other countries, there is a marked negative balance in skilled migrations from and to Portugal (Pires et al., 2011: 95). These facts make us forget phenomena convergent with the theses of "brain circulation", as was the case with the role of Portuguese scientists in the modernization of the country's scientific system, either by their return or by the close and regular relations that those who emigrants maintain with the Portuguese academic environment (Delicado, 2008 and 2010).

#### 4. Demographic impacts

The analysis of the demographic impacts of migration tends to focus on the contribution that the former can make to mitigate ageing in the societies of destination and, in particular, the reduction of the number of those engaged in work when compared with the number of inactive elderly. In some cases, international migration may contribute to at least partially counteract the population decline in countries of destination.

This focus on demographic impact on destination countries assumes that, as a rule, the main countries of origin of international migration

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<sup>5</sup> This historical backwardness has a clear indicator: according to Portuguese census data, in 1970 the percentage of the population aged 20 and over who had completed tertiary education was less than 1% (PORDATA, Base de dados Portugal Contemporâneo – Contemporary Portugal database).

are in a backward stage of demographic transition correlated with their level of development, and therefore have young and growing populations, while countries of destination are undergoing a phase of demographic change characterized by low fecundity, ageing and, in some cases, negative natural balances and even global population decline. In this context, the demographic impact of migrations would have positive effects at both points of the flow. In the countries of origin, because they would replicate the original transition in Western Europe in the nineteenth century, where migration served as a buffer when population growth was faster than employment generated by industrialization. In the countries of destination, because it would counteract the social and economic effects of the population recession. It meant reciprocal gains and a win-win situation.

However, whereas emigration has positive effects on young demographic systems, it has depressive effects on ageing demographics. Although uncommon, this is the situation in Portugal, particularly at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Portugal has had a negative natural balance since 2007, of about 24 thousand people in 2017. This balance is the result of a marked declining birth rate and fertility in the last decades. Between 1960 and 2017, the number of children per thousand inhabitants decreased from 24.1 to 8.4 per thousand. In the same period, the number of children born, on average, for each woman of childbearing age fell from 3.2 to 1.4. In 2016, Portugal, with Spain and Italy, was one of the three countries with the lowest fertility rate in the European Union and EFTA countries as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

In the 2007-2017 decade, migratory flows, instead of counteracting, have widened these recessive demographic dynamics. The Portuguese migratory balance has been negative since 2004, from a positive figure of around 35 thousand people in 2001 to a negative maximum of 102 thousand in 2013. With the economic recovery that started the following year, there was also a recovery of the balance due to the combined effect of the decrease in the number of outgoing migrants and the increase in the number of immigrants. However, in 2017, the migration balance still had a negative number of 53 thousand people. Despite the economic recovery, the total immigration, that is, the flows of nationals plus those of foreigners, did not yet compensate the exits. The maintenance of high

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<sup>6</sup> The demographic data on the Portuguese population used in this section are from the National Statistics Institute accessed through PORDATA, Portugal Contemporary Database.

emigration values since 2007 has resulted in the departure of women of childbearing age, which has broadened the more structural trends of birth rate and fertility reduction.

The consequence of all these processes has been the decrease of the resident population since 2009. Between that year and 2017, Portugal lost more than 280 thousand inhabitants, equivalent to 2.7% of its population. A similar recessive moment in the recent history of Portugal was the other peak of emigration at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, which was halted by the arrival in Portugal of high numbers of the population repatriated from the former colonies after 1974 (more than half a million, equivalent to 5% of Portugal's population at the time) and with a young age structure (Pires, 2003: 199-218). Today, with no prospect of a similar compensatory move, the demographic effects of a new emigration peak are much more recessive. In fact, since then the ageing of the Portuguese population has been accentuated: in 1970, the ageing rate was 32.9, and in 2107 it was 153.2. Likewise, the number of individuals engaged in work per senior citizen (or potential sustainability index) fell from 6.6 in 1970 to 3.0 in 2017, putting a new strain on the sustainability of the public pensions' system.

In short, in Portugal today, as in the 1960s, international migration is expanding rather than counteracting recessive demographic trends. It would require a very large increase in immigration so that international migrations would again have an anti-cyclical effect on the demographics (Peixoto et al., 2017). In the absence of this effect, the perception of emigration as an obstacle to development is reinforced in Portugal, depriving the country not only of human resources but also of conditions of social and demographic sustainability.

## **5. Conclusion: emigration and development in a central periphery**

In current debates, the idea that emigration only contributes to the development of the countries of destination has been contradicted, perceived as being neutral or even negative for the countries of origin. For this re-evaluation, it was fundamental to pay more attention, theoretically, to network dynamics and, at analytical level, to the creation of transnational spaces. As a consequence, the consensus on the positive effects of emigrant remittances on countries of emigration was reinforced by the new concepts of "brain circulation" and by the new models on the



potential benefits of the diaspora effects. In demographic terms, there is consensus on the idea of a double gain for countries of origin and destination due to the relief of the demographic pressure on employment, in the case of young populations, and by resolving demographic deficits and labour market needs, in the case of aged populations.

In general, these conclusions point to a double coincidence: underdeveloped/origin countries, on the one hand, developed/destination countries, on the other. When this coincidence does not take place, the debate has to be continued, further qualifying the conditions of the positive emigration/development relationship in the countries of origin.

In demographic terms, it is relatively easy to identify the conditions of that positive relationship, which depend on the demographic system and the migratory balances prevailing at origin. The positive demographic effects of emigration only exist if (a) the populations of the countries of origin are young and growing or (b) if, in the case of ageing and declining populations, migration flows have a significant positive balance. None of these conditions are present in Portugal's case, so the developmental effects of emigration will not only be negative in instrumental terms, but will also be perceived as such in symbolic terms. These are good reasons behind the public perceptions of the negative effect of emigration in Portugal, which are further reinforced by the centrality, in the recent collective memory, of emigration as one of the negative results of national underdevelopment in the period of the *Estado Novo* authoritarian regime.

In terms of skilled emigration, the emergence of positive effects at origin depends on the absolute minimum of skilled non-migrant human resources at origin (Doquier and Marfouk, 2006: 173-174). They also depend on the promotion of transnational relations with the diasporas from their origin. In Portugal's case, the first condition is the one that is not met, more than the second. However, multiplying the few initiatives to create diaspora effects, both by public and private entities, would require greater public acceptance of the potential positive effects of emigration. And it is this recognition that, in symbolic terms, faces difficult conditions to be achieved. Firstly, due to the objective recessive consequences that emigration today has on demography. Secondly, due to the historically based association between emigration and underdevelopment, in a double sense: emigration as a response to development obstacles and as a factor of aggravation of those barriers. Thirdly, due to the symbolic effect currently associated with statistical-based international

comparisons, which function as multiple spontaneous developmental rankings (Thornton, Dorius e Swindle, 2015).

Emigration and qualification are two of the domains of these comparisons in which the image about Portugal seems to be relegated, for which reason no political actor dares to take a position other than to associate emigration growth with failure and emigration of skilled human resources as an aggravated failure. It is these same adverse conditions on the symbolic side that constitute the reasons behind the underplaying of emigrants' remittances.

Additional adverse conditions, political in nature, at national and European level, make it difficult to take advantage of the huge margin of progression for immigration that exists in Portugal, as a result of its reduced values in terms of stock and flow. This progression is, however, a fundamental condition for the recessive effects of emigration on demography to be counteracted.

In the field of migration, public policies in Portugal now face dilemmas of symbolic origin, which make it difficult to define and apply measures that enable transforming the relationship between migration and development into a positive one. The origin of the dilemmas is symbolic; their consequences are mainly instrumental.

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