



(teaching and learning)

mobilities, migration and identities

catarina sales
(ed.)

DATASHEET

Title

(Teaching and Learning) Mobilities, Migration and Identities

Editor

Catarina Sales

Publisher

CIES_Iscte, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026
Lisboa (Portugal)

Graphic Design

Diana Machado

ISBN

978-972-8048-98-3

DOI

10.15847/CIESIscte_MobilitiesMigrationsIdentities

Covilhã, 2025

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Abstract

Portugal has been a colonising country and nowadays it shows a multicultural demographic structure as a heritage of its past. Is this demographic diversity on the national continental territory accompanied by a general tendency towards integration or is it linked to foreign communities' isolation and marginalisation? The international students' category at school and higher education level has been examined to answer to the question: Is social cohesion affected by the growing incoming flows of international students in Portugal and how?

Through a literature and data analysis this paper argues that education is crucial for young immigrants' integration but policies struggle to manage these flows potentially leading to a racism increase.

Keywords

Social integration, immigration, education, students' mobility.

IMMIGRATION TO PORTUGAL: AN EDUCATION SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The immigration landscape in Portugal has changed radically in recent decades. The country in fact has been transformed from a traditional country of emigration into a country of immigration, with evident adaptation difficulties of the incoming communities. Among the many challenges, the most relevant is integration, a process that should go through education, from the basic to the higher level. There is no doubt that schools and higher education institutions play an important role as an engine for the integration of immigrants. The Portuguese education system had to face many difficulties in building the capacity necessary to accommodate the diversity resulting from the mass presence of migrant children at school. Moreover, the attention has been focused on the emerging of global knowledge-based economies as a relevant phenomenon which

has led to an important increase in international students' mobility. In the education context, a certain importance is devoted to students from the Lusophone space (a geopolitical area of the world formed by Portugal, Angola, Brazil, Cabo Verde, East Timor, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and S. Tomé and Príncipe). This is not a coincidence, as Portuguese-speaking countries have deep historical and cultural links with Portugal as former colonial metropolis spreading in the colonised countries cultural elements aspects and particularly the language.

It is essential to investigate on how immigration, particularly from Portuguese-speaking countries, is viewed by the national community and, on the other side, how it is perceived by those who move to Portugal. In this perspective, various fields of integration must be considered, and in particular,

the prominent education sector which plays a fundamental role in the development of a society open to cultural differences. Starting from an analysis of the immigration flows from 1990 to nowadays, this essay has deepened various integration dynamics related to national identity. As the relevance of the schooling policies is evident, the situation of foreign pupils at school level has been examined. Then the situation of international university students has been observed especially referring to the two main areas of provenience which are the European Union and the Lusophone sphere. Moreover, it was studied how the students' international mobility affects the urban development in Portugal and especially in Lisbon region. Finally, Portuguese international students' data have been compared to the Italian ones and some conclusions on the different situation of these communities have been described. This last section has been included as a case study.

The essay, moving from the analysis of some background documents and statistics, has revealed that integration of young immigrants in the continental Portugal is possible and education plays a crucial role in fostering it. In fact, second-generation immigrants and those born abroad but studying in Portugal are less vulnerable to discrimination. However, integration is not always perfect, and lower and higher education policies often struggle to manage student immigration. Additionally, studentification can have a significant impact on city residents potentially leading to racism increase.

Immigration in Portugal from the 1990s to nowadays

Portugal has experienced migration from the Lusophone area for decades, but the "new

waves" have two distinct characteristics. In the past, there were a few immigrants, most of whom were political refugees, Portuguese descendants, or highly educated people. This list included mainly members of the upper and upper-middle classes. In the early 1990s, immigration in Portugal began to be problematic due to two main factors: the large numbers of people arriving and their less privileged backgrounds (often considered as poverty in the host society). This posed a challenge for Portugal's public policies and new social questions. The government and private sectors were challenged by the growing segmentation of the labour market for immigrants and by the composition of immigration itself (Reis Oliveira, 2021).

The importance of these migratory flows is evident if we analyse some related statistics. In Portugal, out of the 662.095 foreign residents, 183.993 are from Brazil (27.8% of total foreign residents), 36.603 are from Cabo Verde (5.5%), 24.449 come from Angola (3.7%), 18.886 are from Guinea Bissau (3.2%), and 10.241 are from S. Tomé and Príncipe (1.7%). For clarity, if we combine all these groups, we can see that they make up 41.9% of the migrant flows (Reis Oliveira, 2021). Moreover, it's important to underline that among all the foreign residents, 49.1% are young people from 0 to 34 years old¹. Hence, we can assume that a significant number of these foreign Lusophones are young and therefore have been integrated into the educational system or have recently left it.

It is possible to identify some common general reasons for leaving the home country (known as "Push-Pull Factors" (Lee, 1966) that explain part of the migration flows, even if a great part of the immigrant population is highly individualistic. These push-pull fac-

¹ Data from GEE (Gabinete de Estratégia e Estudos) of 2019 updated on 2021-08-26.

tors in the African ex-colonies are, mainly, low socioeconomic standards as well as political instability in the home countries. It is also important to underline that the creation of the Portuguese-speaking Commonwealth (Comunidade dos Povos de Língua Portuguesa, or CPLP) in 1994 has created a favourable climate for designating Portugal as the door to the promised land which is the European Union. The same conclusions may be drawn in the case of Brazil, where slow economic progress did not eliminate the trend toward greater emigration. The image of Portugal in Brazil has grown positively since the early 1990s, together with knowledge of the European Union's advantages for immigrants (Casqueira Cardoso, 2007).

Integration Models

As reported by Casqueira Cardoso (2007), there are three main dynamics tied to the level of adaptation and integration of immigrants in Portugal. The first is the 'integration-separation' dynamic, common to those who live in Western European countries who are in some way 'equal but different' and relatively distinct from Portuguese citizens although they share with them the European citizenship. This phenomenon seems to apply only partially to the recent immigrant population of Eastern European citizens. The second is the "integration-reception" dynamic. This is generally the case for immigrants from lusophone Africa. It is a group that has been integrated into Portuguese society, but at the same time has been accommodated and not fully integrated (Casqueira Cardoso, 2007). Additionally, it is possible to identify a residual dynamic referred to the recent immigration from North Africa characterized by a generalized negative attitude (Vala et al. 2002). The third is an "integration-assimilation" dynamic applicable to Brazilian citizens. This is largely due to the penetration of Brazilian culture in Portu-

gal, especially through television and music, which has helped Portuguese citizens gain a better understanding of the Brazilian lifestyle. Consequently, the Portuguese population is now better disposed towards Brazilians considering them citizens as well (Casqueira Cardoso, 2007).

This does not mean, however, that immigrants cannot be subjected to racism or discrimination. There is a new form of racism that is associated with ethnic prejudice, which can evolve into discrimination.

In fact, Brazilians, especially since the 1990s, have been associated with the so-called "Third World" and are therefore perceived as poor and uneducated. Despite that, data shows that Brazilian immigrants tend to be young between 20 and 35 years old; women (55,8% against 44,2% of men) (Reis Oliveira, 2021); and most of them have completed high school or started university. Even so, although having a profile that makes them a resource for Portuguese society, it is interesting to note "that most Brazilians (75%) believe that immigrants are discriminated against in Brazil" (Padilla, 2005, p. 7). Even though only a minority suffered discrimination, the perception of the issue is magnified since they live in a bounded community and many have a relative who has suffered such treatment. (Padilla, 2005).

In addition, it is important to note that Portuguese natives share the same perspective. In fact, 67% of respondents in 2019 expressed their perception that ethnic discrimination was common or very common in Portuguese society, while the evolution of the EU-28 (European Union) was around 59%. However, it is also true that in the same year, Portugal was the seventh country in the EU-28 with the highest percentage of respondents, and this is an indicator of interest in the topic. Moreover, only 2% of respondents

said they felt “totally uncomfortable” having a “black-race” workmate, a strongly positive result if compared to the 7% observed in EU-28 (Reis Oliveira, 2021). Furthermore, North Africans (31%), Roma (26%), and immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa (24%), according to research conducted in 2016, suffer the discrimination based on their ethnic origin (Reis Oliveira, 2021). This study also demonstrates that the second-generation respondents feel, and indeed are, less discriminated against than first-generation respondents. What explains this? A possible reason might be the common educational background that second-generation immigrants and native Portuguese share.

An Intercultural School System

A pedagogical analysis of the problem makes it clear that “education in intercultural relations” is one of the most effective ways to achieve the full integration of others in a society facing globalization and multiculturalism challenges. This educational model rejects any form of determinism in favour of a focus on the individual in their diversity and cultural specificity, to provide them with a critical tool for analysing their way of thinking when they are aware of the human culture relativity. Therefore, a model of education that is not only inclusive but also intercultural is supposed to call everyone to give up something in the name of the search for shared values and integration (Santerini, 2017). However, this is a recent perspective. In fact, regarding the concept of “intercultural education” in previous decades, two opposing models of managing cultural diversity can be identified. The first one is “assimilation” (typical of the French model), which presupposes the assimilation of minorities into the prevailing ethos and the second one is “multiculturalism” (typical of the British and Dutch models) which

sought to give official recognition to minorities, perceived as internally homogeneous “cultures” (Pratas, 2010).

By looking at the primary and secondary education statistics in Portugal, we can understand the importance of the issue. The number of foreign students enrolled in school for the academic year 2019/2020 was 68,018. This showed a positive trend and an increase of +29.2% from the previous year. Brazilian students made up the absolute majority. Around 49.1% of foreign students enrolled in basic and secondary education in Portugal were from this country. Followed the students from PALOP (Portuguese-speaking African countries), who made up 23.2% of foreign students (Reis Oliveira, 2021). Moreover, education for intercultural inclusion has also been considered a fundamental value at the European level; in fact, the “Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” stated that intercultural education started from the recognition that our identity is what makes each of us unique and stressed the importance of dialogue (Council of Europe, 2008). This principle was shared by the Portuguese state, which, since 2008, having become aware of the multicultural composition of Portuguese schools, particularly in urban centres, has launched a campaign to promote the teaching of Portuguese as a second language as well as the promotion of education in the use of the mother tongue for foreigners and bilingualism (Council of Ministers Resolution No 63-A/2007 of 3 May, measures 52-53) and the strengthening of teacher training in the field of interculturalism (Council of Ministers Resolution No 63-A/2007 of 3 May, measures 55 -59).

Portugal is no stranger to these issues, as inclusion in education and intercultural education has been recognised within the fra-

network of educational policies through the creation, as early as 1991, of the “Between Cultures Board”, a coordinating body for multicultural education programmes that aimed to promote education that enhanced the human condition, increased opportunities for social success and promoted civic and democratic education. In this context, a study on education for active intercultural citizenship, entitled “INTERACT,” (2007) stressed the need to cooperate with higher education institutions to develop contents related to intercultural education and to promote their inclusion in teacher training, addressing issues related to some specific children’s communities most prone to discrimination such as East Timorese, Roma, and Cape Verdean. Another initiative worth mentioning is the “School Twinning and Exchange Programme” (dispatch, 28/ME/91) which aimed to promote school exchange programmes and school trips to foreign countries to stimulate an education that encourages citizens to be free, responsible, autonomous, and capable of communicating with each other, to promote intercultural relations, and to create an awareness of the European Space. Finally, mention should be made to the “Programa Escolhas”, which has been running since 2001, a social inclusion measure aimed at children and young people aged between 6 and 24 who came from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (such as descendants of immigrants and ethnic minorities). The programme sought to promote equal opportunities and strengthen social cohesion through projects that included activities in four complementary areas: school inclusion, vocational training, civic participation, and digital inclusion. The programme received the European Crime Prevention Award in 2003, an honourable UN mention for social inclusion and it was selected as best practice in the “Handbook for Integration by the European Commission” in 2007.

In other words, we can observe two main approaches to intercultural education in the Portuguese education system. The first aims to develop a European dimension in the school curriculum and through school exchange projects. The second seeks to address the increasing diversity of the student population. However, a major limitation of the Portuguese case is that both lines of action are generally considered as part of extracurricular or subsidiary programmes. Only the offer of Portuguese as a second language to students with a different mother tongue partially overcomes this critical issue. While education policies are theoretically quite virtuous in Portugal, the picture is different when it comes to the results of these policies. There is an evident gap between public rhetoric and actual practice. Indeed, it appears from the above mentioned “INTERACT” study that few teachers were familiar with the expression “intercultural educator”, often not knowing its meaning or normative framework. In other words, while there seemed to be a general concern for the integration of immigrants, there did not seem to be a clear and structured school strategy to facilitate their introduction and integration into school life with few exceptions of successful experience only. The problem becomes fully evident when we look at the average results obtained by immigrant or foreign-born students. These results are on average lower than their Portuguese counterparts, also due to a lower socio-economic status. Moreover, it must be said that national policies often fail to consider that immigrant children are far from being a homogeneous category, and therefore, more emphasis should be placed on analysing targeted responses to the needs of different communities. The emerging pattern of exclusion reveals the fragility of schools as a structure of opportunity. Indeed, in this context, social inequalities may be reproduced rather than their potential effects minimized (Marques et al., 2007).

International University Student Mobility

Portugal established the status of international students by Decree-Law No. 36/2014. The Portuguese government considers non-national students as international students. Citizens of the European Union are excluded from this category. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of foreign students in Portuguese higher education. In the 2019/2020 academic year, there were 62,629 foreign students, with a 10.3% increase over the previous academic year and almost three times the number of international students enrolled compared to the beginning of the decade. Now they make up around 16.5% of students enrolled in higher education. There are 172 nationalities represented by these students (5 more than the previous academic year), but the CPLP countries play a dominant role, with about half of the students coming from those countries (Reis Oliveira, 2021).

“The dynamics of international student mobility are influenced by two competing forces, Europeanisation and Lusophony” (França et al. 2018, p.5). Former Portuguese colonial students arrived historically in Portugal to get higher education degrees. A post-colonial perspective may provide a useful analytical lens to understand the dynamics of international student mobility within the Lusophone space. Among these fields, higher education has been structured asymmetrically between the former metropolis and its former colonies. Thus, colonialism had a major effect on the relations between knowledge and power embedded in educational organizations, almost in the form of “neo-colonial practices”. The practices were naturalized due to long-standing historical, political, cultural, economic, and diplomatic relationships between states. There are many forms of “neo-colonial” practices in higher education: the training of new elites

from former colonies in the former metropolis, using colonial language, implementing a similar curriculum, and facilitating students’ visa processes. By defending colonial knowledge relations to attract students from former colonies, the ex-metropolis benefits from the past. Portugal aims to compensate for its peripheral position in Europe and maintain its influence over former colonies by assuming a leadership role. Former colonies are, however, simultaneously seeking to benefit from international student mobility to build their own higher education systems and to enrich their international networks by developing new relationships (Thais et al., 2018).

Following this perspective, it is possible to highlight a common lifestyle among international students. Mobile and cosmopolitan, these young people possess the economic, social, and cultural capital necessary to be considered an elite, a true “elite within the elite” in higher education. Studying abroad, especially at a “world-class” institution, results in social distinction and upward socio-economic mobility for international students and their families, in other words, they function as a mechanism for the social reproduction of elites. However, we should be cautious about referring to international students as a homogenous group. Additionally, it is important to underline that international students in Portugal are seen as a middle ground between foreign students and immigrants, rather than an elite or cosmopolitan group. This is particularly true in the cases of Angolan and Cape Verdean students in international mobility. Indeed, both before and after the independence of the African colonies in the mid-1970s, there were large migration flows to Portugal, particularly to Lisbon, and, to a lesser extent, to other major Portuguese cities. These workers entered the lower end of

the Portuguese labour market, doing work in industry, construction, services, and care work. This created the prejudice that all black Africans, including students, were poorly educated (Alves & King, 2021).

International Mobility and Urban Development in Lisbon

According to the distribution of foreign students in the country, most of them are in the Lisbon region, followed by the North and Centre regions. This also reflects the areas with the greatest concentration of higher education institutions in Portugal. The Lisbon region had 38.8% of the foreign students present in Portugal during the 2019/2020 academic year. On the other hand, the North and Centre regions had 32.2% and 21.2%, respectively, for the same academic year (Reis Oliveira, 2021). Due to the relevance of these flows of international students in these areas, it is interesting to analyse the processes of urban change that followed this growing trend towards international mobility in the post-industrial era. Indeed, in the context of globalisation, cities began to compete to attract foreign visitors, “creative classes” and financial activities as a means of increasing their relevance in the global market. Based on the idea of a knowledge economy, modern urban policies sought to attract a “creative class” of young professionals who were working and studying; people who appreciated urban culture and sought a balance between leisure opportunities and personal development. This is a category in which international students can also be included.

An example of this phenomenon is Lisbon, where international students have been recognised by local authorities as an ideal type of transnational urban consumer be-

cause of the positive impact they can have on local economies. They are at once consumers and providers of housing, food, international bank transfers, culture, nightlife, and services. This has determined a series of policies aimed at making urban space itself part of the educational experience. Lisbon presents itself as a multi-interest city where each incoming student can find his or her personal consumption preferences. Such a strategy, while successful in its objectives, poses new challenges, e.g., the rising cost of living and housing. These are negative aspects that, if not responsibly managed, have a greater impact on the lives of the city’s residents. It is not a coincidence that there are also problems with the reception of international students that go far beyond housing, and in recent years there have been frequent incidents of racism, which affected mainly black students from Portuguese-speaking countries (França et al., 2021).

In the literature on studentification (which examines the effects of student populations on urban change, specifically affecting the neighbourhoods around university facilities and, more generally in the case of Lisbon, processes of gentrification at the city level) it has been pointed out that international students consumed tourist goods and participated in the knowledge economy that others have planned for them. But they do not simply function as consumers, they have also created and spread new urban lifestyles that have become characteristic of the places they “colonise”. On the one hand, Erasmus students constitute a richer group of international students (compared to their local peers), and consequently, because of their economic power, they have a high capacity to induce processes of urban change through their consumption and socialization practices. The situation for other inter-

national students, particularly those from Portuguese-speaking countries, is quite different. If Erasmus students mainly function as “consumers” in the urban environment, on the contrary, Portuguese-speaking international students (such as, for example, the numerous Brazilians) act more as “producers”. Consequently, a considerable number of them are either fully employed or, at least, have a part-time job. In this context, we should keep in mind that the type and intensity of the process of urban change are highly dependent on variables relating to individuals’ national and cultural identities (Malet Calvo, 2018).

A Brief Comparative Perspective: The Italian Case

When comparing the situation of international students in Portugal with the Italian case, we can observe that in 2019/2020, there were 710,450 foreign students enrolled in primary and secondary schools, a number that is close to the one of foreign students enrolled in Portugal if we relate it to the total amount of country’s school population. However, a first important difference with the Portuguese case concerns the origin of the students. In fact, 45.4% of foreign students in Italy come from a European country. Students of Albanian origin and those of Romanian origin represent respectively 17.9% and 13.5% of the total number of foreign students in Italy. They are followed by students of African origin, particularly Moroccan, who account for about 12.4% of the total. As far as school performance is concerned, it should be noted that foreign students, similarly to what happens in Portugal, fail more frequently the school year than Italian students. However, this population is indeed characterised by bilingualism or multilingualism. In contrast to the Portuguese case, only a very small propor-

tion of foreign students (68,000 and mostly Romanians and Albanians) already possess adequate knowledge of Italian when they are enrolled at school. Intuitively, this could be linked to the weak heritage of Italian colonialism and therefore to the reduced diffusion of the Italian language abroad (Borrini, 2021).

As far as international mobility in higher education in Italy is concerned, the latest available data for the two years 2018–2019 showed that 117,173 foreign students were registered in 97 different university institutions. It should be noted that, unlike the case of Portugal, more than two-thirds of international students in Italy were enrolled in bachelor’s degree programmes, rarely planning to access further education. Leaving aside the students participating in the Erasmus programme, the prevalent geographical area of origin was Asia (26,313 students) and most of them were Chinese. This area was followed by the African continent (13,116 students) mostly from Morocco and Cameroon. Finally, the presence of 9,241 students from the American continent, mainly from Peru and Ecuador, should be noted. What we can observe is that in the Italian context, international mobility plays a secondary role compared to Erasmus mobility. In fact, as many as 59 % of foreign students on national soil can be included in the category of “Erasmus students”. It should also be stressed that in Italy, unlike Portugal, there is only a marginal relevance of “Italophony” in the structure of international student flows (Borrini, 2021).

In other words, we can conclude that although both countries are EU members and take part in the Erasmus programme, there are relevant differences regarding the immigration flows for educational purposes.

Concluding Thoughts

As conclusion, it should be emphasised that the topic of immigration for educational purposes in Portugal is very controversial because on the one hand, the country demonstrates great openness towards foreigners, on the other hand, it suffers undeniably from the cultural and ideological influence of the colonial era. This duality is evident if we consider the growing flows of incoming international students and the virtuous policies in this regard compared to the difficulties in managing these flows and ensuring the integration of foreign student communities.

Going back to our initial question, on the effects of the growing incoming international students flows on social cohesion in Portugal, this essay has tried to frame in a broad perspective whether and how social cohesion is affected by the growing flow of international students. As we have seen, the answer is that integration of young immigrants from Lusophone countries is possible and that education at all levels actively plays a fundamental role in fostering this process (Pattison-Meek, 2007; Pratas, 2010). In fact, we have noticed that second generations and people born abroad but who have studied in Portugal are less vulnerable to discrimination or isolation if compared to other types of immigrants (Reis Oliveira, 2021). However, as reported, this does not imply that integration is always perfect, and while policies in the field of lower-level education have proven to be very virtuous in theory, the school system has often not been able to manage them successfully. The same applies to higher education, which allows young immigrants to acquire high skills (which can be used in their countries of origin), but at the same time suffers from “neo-colonial” logic of a historical-political nature. Furthermore, as we have analysed, student immigration represents a big challenge for cities

such as Lisbon, which is the most common destination for students in Portugal. For this reason, we can talk about studentification in which international students as community members act both as “consumers” and “producers” of goods, services, and culture (Malet Calvo, 2018). A process that, if not responsibly managed, has a greater impact on the lives of the residents of the city and can lead to a rise in racist phenomena. Finally, what we have observed is the importance of the theme analysed in the Portuguese context concerning Italy, another EU country that is part of the Erasmus programme, but which is not particularly affected by more far-reaching student immigration phenomena at an intercontinental level. For this reason, given the importance of the topic, further analysis would be desirable, as well as using some interviews to enrich this perspective with some qualitative analysis.

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