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# A COUNTRY ON THE MOVE: *A profile of internal migration in Timor-Leste*

This study **analyses the impact of internal migration on human development in Timor-Leste** and, in accordance with the initial objectives, provides: i) a typology of internal migration in Timor-Leste; ii) a map of internal migration patterns in the country, briefly characterizing the factors (economic and non-economic) that motivate migratory movements; iii) a summary of the impact of migratory flows whether on the regions of origin or on the regions of destination, at various levels of human development; iv) a collection of recommendations, with the aim of defining strategic policies in respect of internal migration.

In terms of methodology, **theories of migration intersect with theories of development**, presenting a conceptual state of the art. Timor-Leste's recent history is approached as an explanatory basis demonstrating the existence of different phases in recent internal migration, namely: a) up until 1975; b) 1975–1999; c) 1999–2006; d) after 2006. Presenting phases of different types of internal migration enables the development of a typology that shows the complex nature of this phenomenon and identifies recommendations for the definition of differentiated public policies.

It is recognized that, in Timor-Leste, and apart from purely economic aspects associated with the expected growth in productivity (due to employment within the labour market, even though informal), migration is also explained by other factors – such as education opportunities and access to essential social services, forced migration (such as post-conflict migration) or induced migration such as migration due to barlaque<sup>1</sup> or marriage – and is encouraged by extended social networks and by support from the Church and from the State<sup>2</sup>. It is clear that the **decision to migrate is not always taken freely and rationally by the individual (at a micro level), or even by the household, as this decision is often inextricably linked to the context of the social group or community to which the individual belongs**. This aspect must not be ignored when analysing migratory flows in Timor-Leste.

The **typology referred to can be summarized as the following types**: 1) A first type of internal migration is that resulting from subordinate labour migration or independent labour migration; 2) A second type of migration is directly correlated to the gender of the migrants. In other words, it is a type of internal or interregional migration (of variable distance) linked to gender (as a result of marriage); 3) A third type is that of migrants based on family reunification resulting from migration of family members following the previous migration of a relative (usually the man). This type includes children and other members of the nuclear family, but also members of the extended family (parents-in-law, cousins, siblings-in-law, nephews and nieces, etc.); 4) A fourth type, linked to the recent development of Timor-Leste, is that of internal migration of students and their displacement to the main education centres in the country; 5) A fifth distinct type is the result of temporary migratory flows in the past and involves a flow of former internal migrants and refugees. At various points in the past they have caused a combination of migratory flows as revealed by the statistics and the history of Timor-Leste.

The recommendations made by the authors include the following:

1. The importance of creating an integrated monitoring, screening and information system for internal and international migration of Timorese seems to emerge as the first recommendation. Information systems must be established that focus on migrants, both their origin and destination, migration processes, programmes aimed at migrants and the

1 Barlaque ( barlake in tetum) is a Timorese tradition consisting on offering good or money as a dowry before marriage. Barlaque is paid by the family of the future husband to the family of the future wife. Husband and wife are normally not involved in these negotiations.

2 For example, the Timorese State encourages or favors internal migration through a centralization policy attracting students towards Dili.

difficulties experienced within the migratory process. Without a migration monitoring centre, it is impossible to anticipate solutions to potential conflicts or difficulties. Charting the development of migration must be considered a political priority in terms of the demographics of Timor-Leste.

2. Another recommendation must be made in relation to the need to create research and training structures for students and technical staff. The interlinking of knowledge already gained with the training of more capable experts and policy-makers must be a priority in the development of Timor-Leste. This project represents an excellent pilot project for gauging the potential capacity that already exists in Timor-Leste and that now needs to be sustained in the medium term. The creation of development structures for an infrastructure of research and of research and development can be achieved in conjunction with international institutions.
3. It is recommended that a development strategy is implemented for training projects - in both the migrants' regions of destination and regions of origin – in a way that promotes immigrants' ability to be autonomous and their ability to develop their own projects, and/or that improves their employability. The target audience must be broad, but the empowerment of young people should be a priority.
4. The creation of an entity that facilitates, in a first phase, the mapping of existing structures and, in a second phase, the building of mechanisms for planning synergies and for reducing the duplication of costs associated with these populations should be a public policy priority. The recommendation we are making here is to combine State, local authorities and civil society (e.g. non-governmental organizations or the Catholic Church) in order to promote development based on effective networks capable of empowering those who are able to realise projects at a local level more effectively.
5. The implementation of integrated regional development programmes (health, education, housing, environmental development, etc.), based on encouraging populations to settle in their territories of origin, should be pursued as a national strategy. The creation of multiannual integrated development programmes, with precisely measurable objectives, will make it possible to respond to regional imbalances and to lessen the attraction of Dili as the key destination for internal migrants, thus addressing the current imbalance in social and territorial cohesion.

See the report for references

