A Nation of Emigrants or Immigrants?
The Challenge of Integration in Ireland and Portugal

By Claire Healy

Portugal and Ireland are often overlooked in the search for international best practice in migration policy. Both situated at the Western Atlantic periphery of the European Union, the two countries have experienced distinct historical trajectories. In the past, Ireland was settled, conquered and governed through various means by its larger neighbour. Portugal, on the other hand, despite its small size, presided over an international trade and colonisation network that spanned the globe, encompassing at various times islands in the Atlantic Ocean, parts of South America, West Africa, India and Southeast Asia (Oliveira e Costa & Lacerda 2007). Today, both Portugal and Ireland are experiencing unprecedented levels of inward migration. While the economic and social reality of immigration is a *fait accompli*, the transition in identity from countries of emigration to countries of immigration is far more fraught.

During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a significant level of migratory movement between Portugal and Ireland, largely related to trade networks and fishing enterprises. In present times, travel between the two countries is characterised by the settlement of Portuguese migrant workers in Northern Ireland, commencing around 2000 (Holder & Lanao 2005), and by Irish tourists returning year after year to holiday resorts in the Algarve. This article does not seek to examine movements between the two countries, but rather to compare the recent immigration histories of Ireland and Portugal.

The heady days of the mass trans-Atlantic migration of the nineteenth century left their mark on Portugal and Ireland (see, for example, O'Sullivan 1992-97; Garcia *et al.* 1998). There are significant Portuguese and Irish communities in the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, among other destinations, whose origins date back to Europe's 'age of migration' in the nineteenth century (Bade 2000). Portuguese migrants in the nineteenth century often followed the pattern of colonisation, settling in Angola, Mozambique and the Atlantic Islands, as well as in Brazil. Irish migration generally followed in the wake of British colonisation, with Irish migrants showing a preference for Anglophone countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain itself.

The twentieth century saw a marked shift in migratory flows from Portugal and Ireland, which - particularly from the 1950s onwards - were directed to more prosperous countries within Europe. Portuguese migrant workers moved to Germany, France and Belgium, while Irish emigrants made the short trip to the industrial cities of Great Britain. Regardless of their destination, however, the experience of emigration was associated in the national imagination with heartbreak, exile and *saudade* (roughly translated as homesickness), and was expressed in cultural forms such as *fado* songs in Portugal and *sean-nós* songs in Ireland. The demographic watershed in the 1990s, when the two countries began to experience a sustained period of positive net migration, required therefore a dramatic reinterpretation of national identities and government policies alike.

Mass emigration from Ireland and Portugal continued until the 1980s. In an actual as well as an emotional sense, the experience of emigration has been hugely significant to the histories of Portugal and Ireland, and to contemporary perceptions of identity. Remittances sent back by migrants, as well as skills acquired by returning emigrants, have been hugely significant to the Portuguese and Irish economies. The Portuguese economic recovery has been more gradual than the Irish 'Celtic Tiger' economy of the 1990s and 2000s, yet the salience of inward migration in both cases should not be under-estimated.

In terms of the contemporary immigration experience, the two countries share many similarities, and even the most cursory examination of their immigration and integration policies demonstrates the potential for mutual learning. Portugal and Ireland experienced the transition from net emigration to net immigration in 1993 and 1996 respectively, and were the last of the fifteen pre-2004 European Union member states to do so. The immigration policies - and to a lesser extent, integration policies - of both countries are significantly influenced by those of their larger neighbours, Spain and Great Britain, with which they share land borders.

Table 1. Foreign-Born Populations in Europe (EU/EEA and Switzerland), 2005

Country	Size of foreign-born population, 2005 (thousands)	Foreign-born as share of total population, 2005 (percent)	Share of foreign-born with citizenship of country of residence, 2000-04 (percent)*
EU-25			
Austria	1,234	15.1	41
Belgium	719	6.9	41
Cyprus**	116	13.9	
Czech Republic	453	4.4	80
Denmark	388	7.2	40
Estonia	202	15.2	
Finland	156	3.0	42
France	6,471	10.7	53
Germany	10,144	12.3	46
Greece	974	8.8	42
Hungary	316	3.1	71
Ireland	585	14.1	45
Italy	2,519	4.3	
Latvia	449	19.5	
Lithuania	165	4.8	
Luxembourg	177	37.4	13
Malta	11	2.7	65
Netherlands	1,638	10.1	
Poland	703	1.8	96
Portugal	764	7.3	66
Slovakia	124	2.3	84
Slovenia	167	8.5	
Spain	4,790	8.5	31
Sweden	1,117	12.4	63
UK	5,408	9.1	
Subtotal	39,790	8.6	
Other EEA and Switzerland			
Iceland	23	7.3	
Liechtenstein	12	33.9	
Norway	334	7.4	48
Switzerland	1,660	22.9	29
Total	41,829	8.9	

Note: * Latest available year (2000-2004). ** Greek part of Cyprus only. **Source**: OECD Database, UN Migration Database (2005)

The populations of the two countries are small by Western European standards, though the population of Portugal - 10.6 million - is over twice that of the population of the Republic of Ireland - 4.2 million. Together with emigration, the Roman Catholic religion has played and continues to play an important role in both Portuguese and Irish society, with about 90% of the populations of each country classifying themselves as Roman Catholic - though less than a third attend mass regularly in both cases.

Yet in some significant respects, there is a divergence in the histories and current situations of Portugal and Ireland. Contemporary immigration to Portugal, like historical emigration from Portugal, is to some extent conditioned by the country's colonial past, with a significant proportion of immigrants hailing from Brazil, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde islands. Portugal's immigration history was indelibly marked by the collapse of the European colonial powers in Africa in the mid-1970s, leading to a mass migration phenomenon known in Portugal as 'the Return of the Caravels.' This was fictionalised within the magic realism tradition by the acclaimed writer António Lobo Altunes (Altunes 2000 & 2002).

Ireland's position with the British empire was more ambiguous, and immigration is largely unrelated to a colonial past. This is qualified, however, by the significance of Irish missionary endeavours in parts of the developing world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, which may evince a migration link that has not been hitherto researched. This is particularly the case in relation to Nigerian migration, where Irish missionary activity in the sub-Saharan African country dates back to the 1860s, and as recently as the 1970s, there were 2,000 Irish missionaries active in the country (Irish Aid 2004).

Ireland's geographical position furthermore positions that country at the margins of south-north movements from Africa to Western Europe and east-west movements from Eastern to Western Europe, while Portugal is at the frontline. Portugal therefore, like Spain, is faced with the daily human tragedy of perilous boat trips from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula. Immigrants from Lusophone countries in Africa, and from Brazil, benefit from better rights than other immigrants. Nevertheless, the number of Ukrainian immigrants has also increased substantially in recent years, demonstrating the characteristics of a classic chain migration. Due to Ireland's immigration policies (which generally parallel those of the United Kingdom), rather than its geography, migration from Eastern Europe has been dramatic since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (Doyle, Hughes & Wadensjö 2006).

Largely due to the remarkable success of the Irish economy, the extent of overall migration to Ireland in proportion to the existing population has been more dramatic than in Portugal. Currently, the proportion of people living in Ireland who are not citizens is over 10 percent, while the proportion of people born outside Ireland is about 15 percent. In Portugal, the foreign proportion of the population is just 4.2 percent, though the country has a higher proportion of naturalised citizens (see www.acidi.gov.pt).

Many academics, journalists and politicians cite the chronology of Irish immigration as a reason for the lack of administrative infrastructure to deal with the phenomenon. Immigration to Ireland, so the apologia goes, has been so sudden that the country simply has had neither the structures nor the funds to deal with it. The Portuguese example belies the usefulness of this explanation, as the Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue was established just nine years after Portugal began to experience net immigration. Ireland has been experiencing net immigration for over ten years now, and still no governmental structure is in place to address issues arising from it. This situation has been ameliorated somewhat by the recent appointment of a Minister of State (or Junior Minister) for Integration by the Irish Government in June 2007.

In an era of increasing European political integration and cooperation, it is clear that national policies on trans-national issues such as migration and integration can no longer be made in isolation. Furthermore, European countries do not merely share a common political future, but can also look back to a shared past. Portugal and Ireland experienced large-scale emigration in previous centuries, yet the twenty-first century has seen the two EU Member States become receiving countries for intra- and inter-continental migrants. Increased mobility within the European Union requires that European countries work together on migration. Furthermore, the commonalities and parallels between the experiences of immigration among Western European countries indicate that there is much to be learned through improved communication and exchange of best practice.

Countries such as Ireland and Portugal are accustomed to looking to their larger neighbours for lessons on policy-making. This short article posits that it is in comparing and sharing the experiences of smaller countries currently undergoing the transition from emigration to immigration and from economic failure to economic success - two interrelated phenomena - that real progress can be achieved. As mentioned elsewhere in this edition of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America,* there is a mine of historical information linking Ireland and Portugal that has yet to be exploited. Perhaps the examination of links and comparisons in the contemporary migration experience of the two countries will also lead scholars back to previous centuries in search of what unites these Atlantic outposts, and what the future holds in store.

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