

**PhD Project Overview – Doctoral Program in Migration Studies –
Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning – University of Lisbon**

**Intra European Mobility and the Welfare State: The role of social protection
on Portuguese migrants' careers and aspirations**

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Marked by a past of departure for new and diversified destinations (Fonseca, Esteves and McGarrigle, 2009:6), later shifting, by and large, to an important immigrant receiving country, Portugal has once again reacquired its emigration status. In the time between 2002 and 2009, emigration almost doubled (Peixoto, 2012:4), with a noteworthy permanent character and a more diversified socio-professional profile.

The destinations of Portuguese migrants are mainly European expanding beyond the traditional receiving countries – United Kingdom (U.K.), Spain, France, Switzerland and Germany (Malheiros, 2011). However, aside from macro-economic factors namely the country's current economic situation and high unemployment rates, other variables shaping the aspirations and decision-making processes of recent migrants have yet to be explored. Despite the increasing intra-European mobility of Portuguese citizens, the importance of social protection, in terms of access and transferability, has not gained the attention of Portuguese academia.

With seldom exceptions (Almeida and Silva, 2007; Pereira, 2009; Peixoto, 2011; Silva, 2013; Oliveira and Gomes, 2014), which have mainly focused on the relationship between immigration in Portugal and the Welfare State, or the attitudes towards the latter, there is an undoubted analytical silence on this matter.

This PhD project aims to address this gap and deepen our understanding of the role of social protection—in the origin *and* destination (Kureková, 2011) – on the decision-making processes, perceptions and aspirations (micro level) of Portuguese migrants with distinct trajectories at diverse stages in their life courses – young migrants, parenthood, return, retirement. A comparative analysis will be conducted between France and the U.K., two European countries that provide examples of the most important destinations in Portugal's migration history – France as a traditional country of emigration (namely since the 1960's), and the U.K. as one of the most emergent destinations today. The main research objectives include the following.

- To understand the role of social protection – origin *and* destination – in the migration decision-making process and on perceptions and aspirations of migrants;
- To achieve a deeper comprehension of the impact of factors such as age, stage in life course, migration background, level of education or job situation for migration careers and aspirations;
- To highlight the importance of a micro-level analysis within this framework, focusing on factors such as the migrants' identity traits, personal circumstances, values and experiences and how these help shape different perceptions, aspirations and strategies;

- To identify eventual constraints regarding the access to benefits in different Welfare State regimes in the European context and how migrants overcome these barriers;
- To explore the different channels (formal and informal) by which migrants access information on social benefits;
- To investigate which Welfare areas/domains (e.g. childcare, health...) and related benefits are more relevant to migrants' aspirations and perceptions, in which life stage, or at what phase of the migration process they are taken under consideration (e.g. decision-making, settlement, return...)
- To identify different forms of Welfare arrangements, focusing on the informal aspects and how these affect migrants' decisions, aspirations and perceptions,
- To understand how migrants achieve a *sense of place/place utility* in their destination countries, and what is the role of social benefits in the process of settlement;
- To explore the role of the transferability of social benefits from migration decision-making to return migration.

Methodological Aspects

While taking into consideration meso and macro-level contexts based on existing data from national and European sources, this research study will mostly follow a qualitative approach. The goal of the study is to understand the abovementioned challenges on a micro-level, focusing on the individuals as key actors within this framework. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with different groups of migrants in the abovementioned countries, exploring their background, life trajectories, migration histories and processes, life in the destination and future aspirations. In order to capture a breadth of welfare concerns the target groups consist of: young migrants (aged 18-35), recent parents, retired migrants and migrants who have returned to Portugal.