



Overview on South-South Migration and Development Trends and Research Needs in Timor-Leste

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Introduction

The lack of data and studies on migration, remittances and development in Timor-Leste makes it difficult to grasp the migration and development reality and consequently devise adequate policy responses.

During Timor-Leste's period of Indonesian occupation (1975-1999) and UN transitional administration (1999-2002), more than a quarter of a million people are estimated to have fled to West Timor, Indonesia, Australia and Portugal (Hamilton, 2004). Research has also pointed out, conversely, that a relevant fraction of migrants left the country between 2002 and 2003 for economical reasons relating mainly with unemployment, setting aside the idea that violent episodes during the transition to independence were at the origin of the motivation to migrate (Shuaib, 2008). While 80 per cent of international migration seems to occur within the region or neighbouring regions (UNDP, 2009), it continues to be an expensive and unrealistic option for the majority of the particularly young East Timorese population (Shuaib, 2008). In addition to this, given the lack of policy addressing migrants' remittances, the high fees being charged are hampering the potentially positive impacts in the recipient households and the society at large.

In contrast, the country seems to be rather appealing in terms of immigration, including irregular, in much higher numbers than the neighbouring countries (Hamilton, 2004). Moreover, Timor-Leste has recently submitted the application to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its free movement of people agreement. Borders will thus be opened to ASEAN's members' citizens, challenging Timor Leste's migration management policy and institutions (MoFA TL, 2010).

On the other hand, in 2006 an estimated number of 150,000 people were displaced as their homes and property were seized or destroyed during the breakdown in national security, political instability, chronic poverty and land disputes. This figure fell by two-thirds in 2008 and at the end of 2009 only a few hundred IDPs remained (IDMC, 2009 and 2010). In the aftermath, there is the need to address the shortage of housing, improve the living conditions (access to clean water, sanitation, food, basic services) and create new economic opportunities in areas of return.

1. Context: Data and key migration and development trends

It is generally agreed among organisations and researchers in Timor-Leste that, being a new country, little information is available on national migration trends and patterns and no quantitative data is available on the issue. Most of the information accessible was gathered by international organizations or research centres (United Nations, World Bank, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Foundation for Development Cooperation, University of Sussex Centre for Migration Research, etc.) based on numbers shared by national authorities with them and there is scarce academic research analysing the existing facts and figures. The national census that took place in July 2010 will be able to provide statistics on internal migration and on foreigners living in the country but its preliminary information will only be available in October 2010 and the final report will not be made public before April 2011 (UNFPA TL, 2010; NSD TL, 2010) The information found is analysed and presented in tables below, mostly relying on few sources providing estimations of figures, which are sometimes outdated or disparate.

1.1 Population and immigration

According to the UN Population Division (2009), the percentage of migrants Timor-Leste is expecting to host in 2010 reaches 1.2 per cent of the total population of 1,135,000 (Table 1). This percentage is significantly lower than the 3.1 per cent of the world's share of migrants, putting into perspective the importance of migration in the national context.

Disaggregated by sex, 52.6 per cent of the immigrants in Timor-Leste are women (Table 1), a share slightly higher than the percentage of female migrants worldwide, estimated at 49 per cent (UN PD, 2009).

2010	Population	Stock	Share of Population	Number of Females	Share of Females
Migrants (1)	1,135,000	13,620	1.2%	7,164	52.6%
IDPs (2) (3)		400	0.04%	-	-
Refugees (4)		1	-	-	-

(1) UN PD, 2009; (2) IDMC, 2009; (3) Only 30 according to UNDP, 2009; (4) UNHCR, 2010

As for the countries of origin (Table 2), the only official statistical data available are the amounts of entries and exits of the country, taken at major entry points, including the airport and land and sea borders. However, because most border controls are still manual and the border with Indonesia is reported to be porous and susceptible to irregular entries, this data is not entirely reliable (ILO TL, 2010). Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that most of the immigrants living in Timor come from the neighbouring Indonesia or from the Asian region, especially China.

Countries of Origin	Number	Percentage
Indonesia	1093	20.6%
China	1016	19.1%
Malaysia	499	9.4%
Philippines	385	7.3%
Total number of Immigrants	5307	

Migration DRC, 2007

As regards internally displaced persons (IDP) estimated in 150,000 in 2006 (IDMC, 2009), the largest reported return movement in relation to the size of the displaced population took place in Timor-Leste, where the IDP figure fell by two-thirds in 2008 (IDMC, 2009). Up to 2009, the Government distributed cash compensation for IDPs to leave the camps. By August the same year the camps had all been closed down and at the end of the year only a few hundreds of IDPs remained in transitional shelters (IDMC, 2010, Table 1). Out of the 16,000 families that registered in early 2008 to take part in the Government return programme, by the end of the year 11,700 had received the "return package" and left the camps set up in the capital Dili to return home (IDMC, 2009).

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2015	2020
Rate of Urbanization	26.46	26.86	27.27	27.69	28.12	-	-
Rural Population	756.63	778.33	798.90	819.72	841.81	962.55	1,079.72
Urban Population	272.28	285.81	299.49	313.90	329.35	422.47	537.79

UN ESCAP, 2010; UN PD, 2010

The Government considers the issue of internally displaced persons essentially closed and a successful example of its policies. However, the returns are still fragile and gains might not be completely sustainable, given the added pressure from rural-urban migration (Tables 3 and 4) and slow progress in finding solutions to land disputes, especially in urban areas (UNMIT, 2010).

	2000-2005	2005-2010	2010-2015	2015-2020
Rural Annual Growth Rate (%)	3.43	2.77	2.68	2.30
Urban Annual Growth Rate (%)	5.36	4.84	4.98	4.83

UN PD, 2009

1.2 Emigration

The emigration rate in Timor-Leste is estimated at 2.6 per cent (UNDP, 2009). Given the limited, unreliable and disparate data on emigration, it is hard to compare and analyse the emigrant population of Timor-Leste. Nonetheless, it is possible to conclude that 39.5 per cent of the migration movements occur within the (Asian) continent, 41 per cent within the neighbouring (Oceania) region, with only 18.2 per cent concerning Europe as a destination (Table 5).

	Share of Stock
Africa	0.8 %
Asia	39.5 %
Europe	18.2 %
Latin America and Caribbean	0.2 %
Northern America	0.2 %
Oceania	41 %

Migration DRC, 2007

According to OECD numbers (2009), more than 11,000 emigrants from Timor-Leste moved to OECD countries, of which only 12.4 per cent are high skilled workers and 4.5 per cent of those are unemployed (Table 6).

Stock in OECD Countries	Labour Force Participation Rate	Tertiary educated	Unemployment			
			Total	Less Than Upper Secondary	Upper-Secondary or Pos-Secondary Non-Tertiary	Tertiary
11.100	62.6%	12.4%	12.1%	14.8%	11.6%	4.5%

OECD, 2009

Dili airport was portrayed as the main exit and entry point for all international travel to and from Timor-Leste, though the data collected, as mentioned before, seems not to be entirely reliable. Therefore the data does not allow drawing conclusions in terms of migrations flows or patterns. It can be grasped, nonetheless, from the data presented, that the major countries of destination of East Timorese migrants are Australia, the Philippines and, to lesser scale, Portugal and Indonesia (MPI, 2010; Migration DRC, 2007, Table 7).

Major Countries of Destination	Number of Emigrants	Percentage of Emigrants
Australia	9,389	41%
Philippines	7,380	32%
Portugal	2,241	9.7%
Italy	1,044	4.5%
Indonesia	829	3.6%
Total number of emigrants from Timor-Leste	23,001	

Migration DRC, 2007

International movement amongst students, Government officials and businessmen has also been reported. Most students are travelling to Portugal, Indonesia, Australia, Brazil and Cuba to study on scholarships, such as the approximately 650 medical students studying in Cuba as part of a bilateral agreement between the two countries (Earnest and Finger, 2006; IRIN, 2010).

1.3 Labour migration

More than 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25, with an unemployment rate of 18.4 per cent among youth nationwide and 35 per cent among urban youth. The latter figure is likely rising as a consequence of the country's high population growth rate of over 3 per cent and rural to urban migration (Tables 3 and 4). Unemployment rates in 2007 were 8.5 per cent and 23.1 per cent for the younger population. Youth unemployment in the region of Dili was, in 2007, 43 per cent (Shuaib, 2008). An estimated 15 to 17,000 youth enter the job market each year, surpassing the number of jobs created (which in 2008 was estimated at 9,500) and vacated by pensioners, thus increasing the unemployment rate (UNMIT, 2010).

Broke down by sex, ninety per cent of all female employment is in agriculture. Due to increased male labour migration to urban areas women in rural areas are particularly at risk of marginalization with respect to land ownership rights, participation in household and community decision-making processes (UNMIT, 2010). These gender aspects need to be considered more in policy and practice.

In his research, Shuaib found that there was a significant gender disparity in the migrant workforce, with men constituting nearly 90 per cent of remitters. Over 80 per cent of remitters have unskilled jobs and only 14 per cent were employed in skilled categories (Shuaib, 2008). In addition to this, Shuaib also found that two thirds of the remitters migrated in 2002 and 2003, only 8 per cent having migrated prior to 2002 and 26 per cent after 2003. The fact that the majority of remitters migrated after independence in 2002 suggests that migration was impelled by economical reasons, a response to persistent unemployment, and not a result of the violence during the struggle for independence (Shuaib, 2008).

Since independence in 2002, one of the biggest challenges for Timor-Leste has been rebuilding the health sector in order to meet the needs of the growing population. Under the bilateral agreement signed in 2003 with Cuba, the latter agreed to allow hundreds of Timorese medical students access to their education system, who currently amount to 78 per cent of the Timorese medical students (of a total of 845). While their return to Timor-Leste is hoped to relieve the strain on healthcare facilities, 250 other medical students are in their home country, studying and working under the supervision of over 200 Cuban health professionals in the nation (INRI, 2010).

There was also an official initiative attempting to create a Knowledge Transfer Programme from the East Timorese diaspora to the country. This programme would work on a voluntary basis but the East Timorese living abroad who were asked to participate did not show particular interest, resulting in the cancellation of the project (UNDP TL, 2010). The Government has also drafted a regulation relating to formal programmes promoting the migration of labour, with a strong emphasis on worker safety nets and social protections. While this regulation has not yet been enacted, an overseas worker unit has been established within the Ministry of Labour and Community Reinsertion which is coordinating a programme of migrant workers sent to South Korea. As the aim of this project to gain evidence-based data on the impact of remittances, the incentives offered are namely the salaries more than 15 times the local average, of which, in return, 85 per cent should be remitted to the country of origin (FDC, 2007).

In contrast, Timor-Leste is the only American dollar based economy in the region and is attracting Asian economic migrants and entrance of unqualified foreign labour force could be perceived as depriving national workers of potential employment opportunities. On the other hand, investment is particularly needed, encouraged and supported, but investors often import their own workers (Hunzinger, 2004). As follows, the immigration framework includes conditions particularly restrictive for migrants (i.e. visa fees, means of subsistence) and entails the patronage of a third party to successfully enter the country (Hunzinger, 2004).

1.4 Irregular migration

Timor-Leste shares a 228 km long border with Indonesia and has several Indonesian islands near its coastline, making its border porous and difficult to monitor (Hamilton, 2004). The posts of the Timor-Leste National Police (PNTL) Border Patrol Unit lack resources, office facilities and other logistics to address illegal border crossing and human trafficking (UNMIT, 2010).

Although the scale of human trafficking in Timor-Leste cannot be compared with the situation in Cambodia, the Philippines, or Indonesia, the potential in trafficking within and from the country is reportedly on the increase (UNMIT, 2010). According to the United States Department of State (US DOS, 2010), the country is a destination for women from Indonesia and China subject to trafficking in persons, specifically non-consensual commercial sexual exploitation. To a lesser extent, it is also a destination country for men from Burma subject to forced labour in construction and other fields, and recently for men from Cambodia and Thailand subject to forced labour on fishing boats.

Despite this, the Government of Timor-Leste is making significant efforts to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. During 2010, the Government created specific prohibitions of human trafficking in its newly established Penal Code and enacted the Witness Protection Act, informally referred victims to NGOs for assistance, arrested suspected trafficking offenders, and offered foreign victims relief from deportation (US DOS, 2010).

1.5 Remittance flows from and to ACP countries

As previously mentioned, there is scarce research on the impact of remittances in Timor-Leste and the total level of external remittances is unknown due to lack of empirical studies and poor data availability (Shuaib, 2008). Although of presumably limited importance to the national economy (Carling, 2005) and relatively small in comparison with other receiving countries, inward remittances received from migrant workers overseas are estimated to be around USD 5 million per year or around 1.4 per cent of 2006 non-oil GDP, making labour the second largest export of the country after coffee (Shuaib, 2008).

Despite this fact, the Government has no overarching policy on inward remittances and microfinance institutions have limited direct involvement in the flow of remittances (Shuaib, 2008). The majority of the remittances (about USD 370,000 per month) are sent through Western Union, the only licensed foreign exchange dealer, with transaction costs far above the international average (Shuaib, 2008). Informal remittances are thought to be negligible in value but increasing use of mobile phones and intermediaries to organise transfers between Timor-Leste and Indonesia has been reported (Shuaib, 2008).

Remittance flows to Timor-Leste are based in economic (and not cultural) links and will only continue over the long term if there is direct contact between migrants and their immediate families in the country of origin. As a result, unless there is a continuous stream of economic migrants from Timor-Leste in the

near future, the sustainability of remittance flows could be threatened (Shuaib, 2008). According to the Ministry of Development and Environment, an average of 800 young Timorese are leaving the country each year looking for further education and/or employment and this may have a significant impact on future remittances (Shuaib, 2008). There also appears to be some correlation between the frequency of remittances and the occupational categories of remitters: unskilled migrants tend to remit more frequently than skilled migrants, suggesting the use of remittances for day-to-day consumption in low-income households (Shuaib, 2008).

As also mentioned in the chapter of Labour Migration, the Ministry of Labour and Community Reinsertion has established an emergent migrant worker programme to South Korea in which the workers should remit 85 per cent of their base monthly salary through BNU-Timor bank (Shuaib, 2008). The results of this programme will provide data and insight on the impact of remittances in the households and communities in the country of origin.

2. The impact of migration on human development

In Timor-Leste, research has shown that households with one or more members who have migrated overseas to work and send home remittances are better off financially than households pursuing employment in the local market (Shuaib, 2008). According to Timor Leste's profile in *Leveraging Remittances with Microfinance*, remittances have contributed to improve living standards and financial security in many households, which are spending more money on education, food, household improvements, clothing and increasing their monthly saving allocation. In addition to cash remittances, households receive as well in-kind remittances such as telephones, clothes or jewellery (Shuaib, 2008).

Remittances are therefore an important contribution in realising the human right to an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, according to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Remittances are also used for funding other household members to migrate and in business expenses/investment, indicating the significant potential for development of the microenterprise sector based on remittances, particularly in the context of high urban youth unemployment (Shuaib, 2008).

3. Recommendations: Possible research and capacity building priorities

Capacity building activities

The Timorese institutional capacity seems to remain weak due to shortage of technical expertise and equipment in collecting and analysing data, especially at the borders, in dealing with irregular migration, trafficking in persons and IDPs. Through capacity building efforts focusing on enhancing the capacities of experts and academics by means of training, the creation of a common research methodology and a network sharing data and data analysis, the ACP Observatory on Migration aims at developing and improving the quantitative and quality data collected, strengthening national capacities and promoting the successful implementation of research activities that foster the positive impacts of migration in sustainable development and poverty reduction.

More concretely, there is a need to strengthen the capacities of experts, Government officials, and localities to systematically collect and process harmonized data at the borders and during possible displacement of population. The propensity for displacement is also likely to be aggravated by the detrimental effects of climate change on the occurrence of floods and droughts to name a few. Capacity building activities in data collection are particularly needed for IDP camps which will be key when preparing the population for relocation, reconstruction and stabilization in the aftermath of natural and environmental disasters, and will enable involved actors to offer protection and guarantee basic human rights to the population at stake.

Research activities

By creating a network of experts and experts' training tools, identifying and discussing at the national level research gaps and needs and developing a common methodology for data collection, the ACP

Observatory on Migration, will provide for a platform that both exchanges and increments knowledge and expertise on migration and development.

The data harmonised will provide a tangible basis for the preparation of adjusted and holistic policy recommendations that aim at maximising the understanding of positive effects of migration in the development of both countries of origin and destination and their citizens and at improving the living conditions of migrants in and outside of Timor-Leste. In this sense, this report has identified three particular areas where policy-oriented research will be most beneficial in fulfilling that goal.

1) Irregular migration, irregular entry and trafficking in persons, including assessment of existing policies and frameworks.

In order to understand the migration trends and population at stake, research should, at a first stage, focus on international and internal migration, in particular through analysing entry-exit data at the borders and at engaging at the local level with the *xefe suco*. Research should moreover focus on irregular migration and trafficking in persons to and from Timor-Leste. The data should then be analysed in terms of significant migration patterns and flows to and from Timor-Leste, aiming at assessing the existing policies and identifying obstacles in its implementation and making suggestions for improvements of legal frameworks and regulations for research.

2) Impact of migration on human development beyond remittances, in particular internal migration

A comprehensive study on the link between migration and development, including internal migration, should be undertaken, looking not only at the impact of remittances (including schemes to promote inward migrant worker remittance flows and reduce transaction costs faced by migrant workers and remittance-receiving households) but also other social, cultural and human capital effects.

3) Labour migration

In addition to assessing the labour migration policy framework, further research should focus on “brain gain” by exploring how higher educational programmes and programmes facilitating access to study abroad can increase the skills of Timorese workers, in order to promote continued access to the domestic as well as foreign labour markets. Moreover, the impact of initiatives promoting temporary working schemes abroad should also be assessed in terms of skills gain, human development and the role of remittances. This is of particular importance in the Timorese context given, on the one hand, the high rate of youth unemployment and, on the other hand, the importance of inward flows of international remittances.



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Meetings in Timor-Leste by the ACP Observatory on Migration

International Labour Organization in Timor-Leste (ILO TL)

2010.07.09 Meeting with Mr. José Assalino, Chief Technical Advisor & Liaison Officer

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Timor-Leste (MoFA TL)

2010.07.08 Meeting with Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Zacarias da Costa Albano

National Statistics Direction of Timor-Leste (NSD TL)

2010.07.09 Meeting with Mr. Frederick Okwayo, Chief Advisor UNFPA

Secretary of State for Security of Timor-Leste (SSS TL)

2010.07.08 Meeting with Mr. Augusto Barreto, Advisor on Planning

United Nations Populations Fund in Timor-Leste (UNFPA TL)

2010.07.08 Meeting with Mr. Pornchai Suchita, Country Representative

United Nations Development Programme in Timor-Leste (UNFPA TL)

2010.07.08 Meeting with Mr. Mikiko Tanaka, Country Director