

Demographic Projections for Argentina as a Basis for the Design of its Migration Policy

Proyecciones demográficas para Argentina como base para el diseño de la política migratoria

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ABSTRACT

The world is aging as the population has fewer children and lives longer. This situation poses numerous challenges in several countries, not only to maintain stable population levels but also the standards of economic growth. In this context, migrations are presented as a possible solution by collaborating in maintaining welfare systems and growth balances of the increasingly aging countries. Argentina is no stranger to this reality. Projections show that the country has started to move towards this demographic scenario and that it will reach the end of the century seeing its population reduced. This article analyzes the country's migration policies and some concrete measures that could strengthen the opportunities that migration presents in this demographic horizon.

Keywords: 1. migration, 2. demographic projections, 3. migration policy, 4. Argentina, 5. Latin America.

RESUMEN

El mundo está envejeciendo a medida que la población tiene menos hijos y vive más años. Esta situación ha comenzado a plantear numerosos desafíos en varios países no sólo para mantener estables los niveles de población sino también los estándares de crecimiento económico. En este contexto, las migraciones se presentan como una posible solución al colaborar en el sostenimiento de los sistemas de bienestar, así como en los saldos vegetativos de los cada vez más envejecidos países. Argentina no es ajena a esta realidad. Proyecciones indican que el país ha comenzado a transitar el camino hacia un escenario como el planteado y que llegará a fin de siglo viendo a su población reducirse. En el presente artículo se analizan las políticas migratorias del país, así como algunas medidas concretas que podrían potenciar las oportunidades que la migración presenta ante este horizonte demográfico.

Palabras clave: 1. migraciones, 2. proyecciones demográficas, 3. políticas migratorias, 4. Argentina, 5. América Latina.

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INTRODUCTION

Arguably, no other country in the New World was so profoundly transformed by the great migration cycle of the 19th and 20th centuries as Argentina was (Maier, 2015). From then until today, Argentina has been characterized as a country with a long tradition in attracting migrants from various regions around the globe. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, however, the economic, political and social instability that the country experienced slowly transformed Argentina into a country not only of immigration, but also of growing emigration (Jachimowicz, 2006).

This process of reconversion of the Argentinian migratory dynamic is expected to continue in the coming years with a progressive reduction in the number of immigrants, particularly due to the aging of the population in the countries of origin, as well as worse projections in the evolution of the country's economy (Campos, 2017). With this, other demographic indicators add to this discouraging scenario in terms of migration.

The sustained fall in the fertility rate, together with a greater life expectancy at birth, are leading the country to experience a decline in the demographic growth rate which, if it continues like this, could lead the Argentinian population structure towards a similar composition to that already observable in European regions. This is a scenario in which the labor force will not be enough to compensate for a rapidly growing pool of retirees and may result not only in a slowdown in economic growth, but also add severe pressure to the already overstretched social security systems.

Therefore, the challenges that Argentina faces may be analyzed in the light of the attempt by several States, mainly more developed ones, to reverse the increasingly afflicting demographic situation they are experiencing. In this sense, although the pronatalist policies promoted by these countries are not sufficient to counteract the negative growth balances of their populations (Gauthier & Hatzius, 1997), migration is presented as a possible solution to the extent that it would be helping in the slowdown of their aging population, increasing the fertility rate and collaborating with the costs and maintenance of the welfare system³ (Eberstadt, 2019).

Along this line of thought, unlike what happens in many developed countries regarding the implementation of restrictive migration policies, the changes in the objectives pursued in Argentina have meant an important advance towards the recognition of migration as an essential and inalienable right of all people, as well as the contributions that it has in the social, economic and cultural development of the country. In this sense, the demographic goals that this policy originally pursued, and which in the last two centuries have been losing strength in the field of Argentinian migratory governance, shall be of vital importance in the face of the challenges that the country will face in the coming years. This article systematically presents the results of an in-depth research carried out on the subject.

³ Just to cite an example, in 2019 Spain registered a growth in its population as a result of a positive migratory balance that has managed to reverse the trends in the negative growth balances that the country had been experiencing.

At the beginning of this document, a space is dedicated to describe the theoretical and empirical context in which the research is inserted. The analysis and discussion section is based on the case study of Argentina and has been structured in three parts. The first section addresses the evolution of migratory trends in Argentina in order to understand their impact on the population structure. Next, the various migration policies of the country are evaluated, the changes in the objectives pursued, as well as the impact that these have had on the migratory dynamics and, naturally, on the composition of the Argentinian population. Finally, in a third section the demographic projections for the country are assessed. The paper concludes with some recommendations on measures that could be adopted to adapt certain aspects of migration policy to the demographic challenges that the country will have to face in the coming decades.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT OF THE ARGENTINIAN DEMOGRAPHIC-MIGRATORY REALITY

Despite the fact that migration has represented a constant in the history of humanity and that it has remained relatively stable during the last half of the 20th century as a proportion of the world population, never before has it been given so much attention by political leaders and opinion makers (De Haas et al., 2020). We are currently living in a time when migration is presented as a structural feature of globalization. It is a time in which, in the words of Alberto Ares Mateos (2019):

migratory flows have become a great opportunity and also raise serious questions about our way of life, international relations, the management of diversity within our societies, and the way we have to give an effective response to the dramatic situations of many people who knock on our doors (p. 30).

Unfortunately, migrations have been used by certain sectors of society to explain the reasons for problems such as insecurity or job loss (Mármora, 2015). This has led to anti-immigrant feelings in many countries being translated into restrictive immigration policies that are increasingly dominated by a securitist perspective. In a demographic scenario such as the current one,⁴ the adoption of these policies could mean putting the social welfare systems of these States in jeopardy and the problem would no longer be the growing arrival of migrants but would be linked to the fact that there are too few (Kenny, 2019).

While these projections do not predict the future, they can provide a rough guide to emerging demographic challenges. They also report on the role that migration plays and could play in the coming years in various regions in order to stop the decline of their populations and their social security systems. In this sense, officials in charge of formulating and implementing policies that wish to plan for the medium and long term must pay special attention to demographic trends at the global level.

⁴ There are now a large number of countries globally that have begun to record fertility rates below the 2.1 level needed to keep population levels stable.

Given this scenario, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of the Argentinian demographic context, as well as to the identification of concrete measures that can enhance the opportunities that migration presents on this horizon. At the same time, it seeks to contribute to the increasingly necessary action of the State in the design, execution and monitoring of a transversal migration policy for all areas of government that contemplates the challenges that the country will have to face in the years to come.

Crossover Patterns Between Migratory Movements and Demographic Patterns at the Latin American and Global Levels

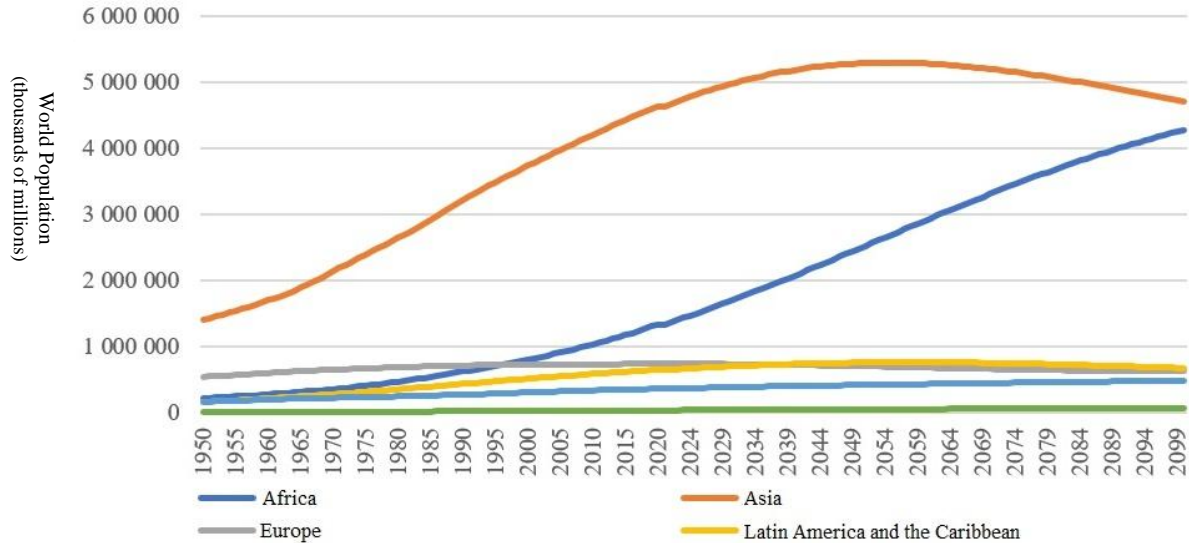
The world is aging. Over the next few decades, the current trend of falling fertility rates and increasing life expectancy shall lead regions of Europe, the Americas, and Asia to see their populations grow older and shrink. According to data provided by the United Nations Organization (UN-DESA, 2019b), currently the fertility rate in Europe is 1.6 and in North America it is less than 1.9, that is, well below the replacement level needed to sustain stable population levels.

Sustaining economic growth will be a major challenge for countries due to the low number of workers of economically active age compared to people in a dependent relationship. In addition, the pressure that this reality will exert on the States should be considered to the extent that spending must be increased in areas such as care, health and pensions for an increasingly aging population.⁵

Although the downward trend in the fertility rate and the increase in life expectancy ensure a drop in demographic growth in practically all populations on a global level, this will not occur homogeneously. Between 2019 and 2050, the number of people aged 65 and over worldwide is projected to double (UN-DESA, 2019a). In this sense, graph 1 reflects the situation described, evidencing that, except for the African continent—which is expected to continue growing by the end of the century—in no other region is a positive population growth projected, but rather, on the contrary, a sustained drop thereof is foreseen.

⁵ In the case of Spain, it is expected that the government will have to increase 10 percent of its GDP in health care expenses, attention to older people and pensioners between 2004 and 2050. Likewise, Japan—famous for its restrictive migration policies—has had to sign bilateral agreements in order to receive temporary migrants at a point where people in a relationship of dependency have doubled those of an economically active age, which means a significant pressure on its tax system and its economic growth.

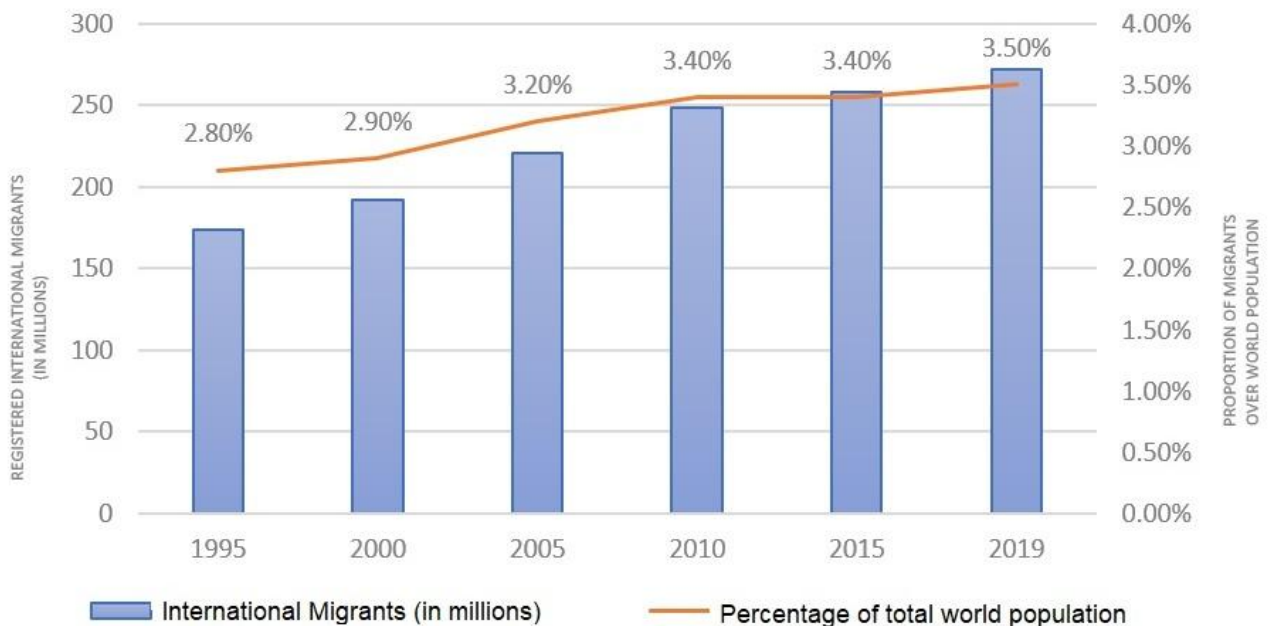
Graph 1. Evolution and Population Projections by Continent (1950-2100)



Source: Own elaboration based on the UN population projections (UN-DESA, 2019a).

Regarding migratory trends, as observed in Graph 2, although the number of international migrants worldwide has increased, it has remained relatively stable in proportion to the world population (Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [OIM], 2019). What has experienced an increase, however, has been non-migratory mobility mainly due to the development and improvement of means of transport (De Haas et al., 2020).

Graph 2. Percentage of International Migration in Relation to World Population



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the World Migration Report 2020 (OIM, 2019).

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the reality is not far from what has been described so far. A recent report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL], 2020) gives an account of how the region's population has begun to age rapidly, projecting that by 2040 the population of people over 60 years of age shall exceed that of those under 15 years old. However, the same report highlights a certain heterogeneity in the region in terms of the rate of aging.

The demographic transition is estimated to have started in Latin America around the 1950s when, in the region, there were significant improvements in life expectancy while the fertility rate began to fall (CEPAL, 2020). Due to this occurrence, and as observed in the more developed regions of the Global North, the demographic trend in Latin America and the Caribbean is beginning to have a significant impact on growth, leading to significant changes in the age structure of its population pyramid.

Regarding the demographic dividend, it is believed that it initiated its transformation process in the region during the 1970s while the dependency ratio began to decline (CEPAL, 2020) although, as the same organization indicates:

It is projected that between 2020 and 2025 the dependent population (under 15 years and 65 years and over) will grow more than the working-age population (15 to 64 years), which entails an increase in the dependency ratio and the end of the demographic dividend in the region (CEPAL, 2020, p. 18).

To the challenges presented by these demographic trends, we should add the change of course in the migratory dynamics that the region began to experience in the mid-20th century. From that period forward, Latin America and the Caribbean gradually went from being regions receiving international migration to an area with increasing emigration. Between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, this dynamic translated into, among other things, the departure of hundreds of young people of economically active age. This, when assessed together with the current demographic scenario, raises serious questions about how Latin American and Caribbean countries shall face the challenges in the short and medium term in order to slow down or even reverse the decline in their population growth rate.

Addressing the Link Between Argentina's Immigration Policy and its Impact on the Country's Demographic Trends

Migration has historically played a fundamental role within the Argentinian demographic patterns. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the Argentinian political theorist and scholar Juan B. Alberdi alluded to the fact that nations in the making that are vastly unpopulated, such as Argentina, have no other option than to adapt and be open to immigration (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014).

Although the history, characteristics, and policies aimed at managing migratory movements have been widely studied over time, certain aspects related to the study of both the contributions and the challenges behind migration remain insufficient. In this sense, there are not many studies that have addressed the case of Argentina and due to this, the present investigation seeks to approach the opportunities that migrations can offer in a demographic scenario such as the one projected for the country in the coming years. It is possible, however, to link the research topic to academic papers that have addressed, from various perspectives, the link between migratory trends and demographic dynamics in Argentina.

In a recent study carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) together with the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos & Organización Internacional del Trabajo [OCDE/OIT], 2018) on the contribution of migrants to the Argentinian economy, it is argued that:

The age structure of immigrants suggests that they may contribute little, but positively, to Argentina taking advantage of the demographic dividend (...) However, the inflows of young immigrants or those returning older immigrants who are in the country today would have to increase dramatically to help Argentina maintain a lower dependency ratio after 2040 (p. 56).

The latter is reinforced by a report on population projections for Latin America and the Caribbean prepared by CEPAL (2020), which provides an overview of the general situation in the region and foresees the end of the Argentinian demographic dividend by the year 2040, while mentioning the importance that intraregional migration has been acquiring in Latin American countries. In this paper, CEPAL emphasizes the need to constantly monitor and review population estimates given the dynamism with which demographic changes are taking place in the region, especially with regard to the decline in fertility and migratory movements.

Jachimowicz (2006), Nicolao (2010) and Mármora (2015) trace a journey on the contribution that migratory flows have had on Argentinian population growth. They also delve into the mutations that the country has experienced as it went from being a society that traditionally received migration to one increasingly characterized by its growing emigration. The authors also reflect the significant drop that has occurred in the representation of the foreign population over the total population in the country, which went from being 30% in 1914 to less than 5% today.

Likewise, works such as Susana Novick's (2008) cannot fail to be mentioned, where the author makes a historical analysis of the impact that the three major Argentinian immigration laws have had on the country's migration dynamics and considers the importance of studying migrations as a demographic phenomenon. Modolo (2016) for his part, contributes by deepening, from a historical-demographic approach, the study of migrations in Argentina. González (2015) also contributes to the field of study by making an assessment of the demographic projections for Argentina, predicting, like CEPAL and the UN, a drop in the arrival of migrants to the country which, in the author's estimates, by 2050 would be null.

A PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXERCISE
OF DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS IN KEY MIGRATION

In 2019, economist Charles Kenny published an article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine titled “The real immigration crisis.” In the text, the author presents a scenario in which low fertility rates, as well as the aging of populations in countries of the Global North, are leaving very few workers for each retiree, which could undoubtedly harm both the dynamism and the economic growth of these countries. According to the author, the increasingly aging populations will bring the social welfare systems of the countries to a breaking point as they will have to increase public spending on health, pensions and care for the elderly (Kenny, 2019).

In this context, the author presents migration as a great opportunity to reverse the population decline, as well as the economic decline of the rich countries of the Global North. He affirms that the attempts by States to stop or reverse these trends—even through the use of robots and artificial intelligence—are not having the expected results. His contribution accounts for a global scenario where the increasing opposition of several States towards immigration due to the unfounded fear of suffering security problems, as well as job losses, have led the countries of Europe and North America to be distracted from the real demographic problem that lurks over them: not that of the arrival of too many migrants but, on the contrary, that of their meager numbers.

Given the paradox that governments face when they cannot improve their fertility rates and need a new generation of workers to boost their economies, Kenny (2019) proposes only one solution to face the demographic crisis: open the borders of countries towards immigration. The author explains that migration has been shown to contribute to the social and economic development of destination countries by improving economically active population rates and increasing fertility rates.

Unfortunately, the picture has become even more complex as immigration has decreased not only to countries with securitist immigration policies, but also to countries with open border policies. These trends are a major cause for concern as more and more countries shall need immigrants; however, there will be fewer and fewer. This paradox will probably lead the various States to compete to attract more migration, for which they will undoubtedly need, among other things, to promote various migration promotion policies such as the opening of more and better legal entry channels, as well as the recognition of foreign professional titles.

The article by Kenny (2019) described so far enriches, for the purpose of being the theoretical framework of this work, what is exposed in the book *Culling the masses* by Fitzgerald and Cook-Martín (2014). This book reviews migration policies of American countries, such as Argentina, and the way in which they have influenced the arrival and composition of different migratory flows to their territories in various periods of history. In this paper, through a three-dimensional method, the authors assess the way in which laws and policies, in a broad sense, vary from the interaction of the national (vertical dimension) and international (horizontal dimension) to over various periods of time (temporal dimension). In this sense, the authors mention that studies focused on a certain country that ignore international trends, will hardly be able to explain the origin of certain patterns.

Fitzgerald and Cook-Martín also underline the idea that immigration policy is fundamentally shaped by perceptions of the effects that immigration can have rather than by its objective consequences. Although the authors mention that it is very difficult to know how various governments conceive of policies today,⁶ most scholars agree that yesterday's policies help shape today's policies. That is why fulfilling an analysis of the trajectory of Argentinian migration policy may be useful in order to carry out the country's adaptation to a new demographic scenario that is expected to affect it in the coming years.

Unlike the scenario proposed by Kenny (2019) in relation to the tendency of the countries of the Global North to close borders or to a migration policy of greater securitization, Fitzgerald and Cook-Martín (2014) propose that in the Latin American case the accessions to various human rights treaties have influenced policies, so it is unlikely that there shall be a new shift towards selectivity rules based on racial characteristics.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Evolution and Projection in the Migratory Trends of Argentina

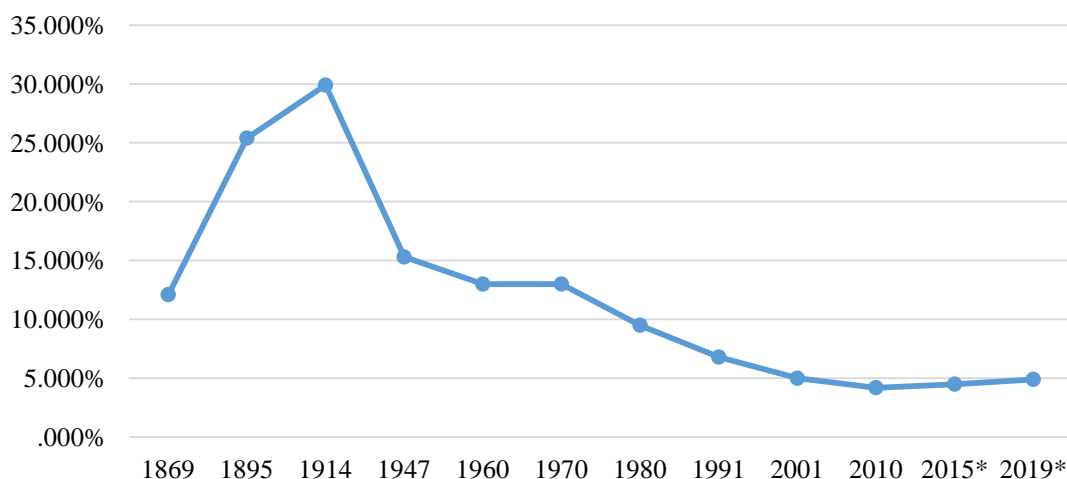
Since its origins as a State, Argentina's migration has played a leading role in the demographic dynamics. Already in the first national census carried out during the year 1869, migrants represented 12 percent of the total population, a percentage that, by the year 1914 would rise to 30 percent (Presidencia de la República Argentina, 1872). The battered economic and social situation in which a large part of the European continent was plunged at that time, together with the opportunities offered by a country in its formation with a wide demand for labor, were determining factors in the arrival of thousands of migrants to the Argentinian territory.⁷

During this period, Lattes (1974) identified three five-year periods in which migration even exceeded the natural growth rate of the Argentinian population. In the first five-year period (1885-1890) the net migration rate exceeded the natural growth rate by 22 points. In the second (1905-1910) the difference was six points respectively and, for the last five-year period (1910-1915) the difference was only 0.1 point.

⁶ This phenomenon is known within the social sciences as *Path dependency*. It is defined as “a theoretical-methodological perspective that is applied to the purposes of explaining current or future institutions or behaviors of a country or social group according to records, in identical springs, past or previous” (Biderbost, 2017, p. 75).

⁷ It is estimated that between 1870 and 1930 alone, around seven million migrants arrived in the country, mainly from Europe (Maier, 2015).

Graph 3. Evolution of the Percentage of Foreigners Over the Total Population in Argentina



* The data for 2015 and 2019 were calculated based on estimates from the UN-Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Source: Own elaboration based on data from National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censo [INDEC], 2020) and UN-DESA (2019a).

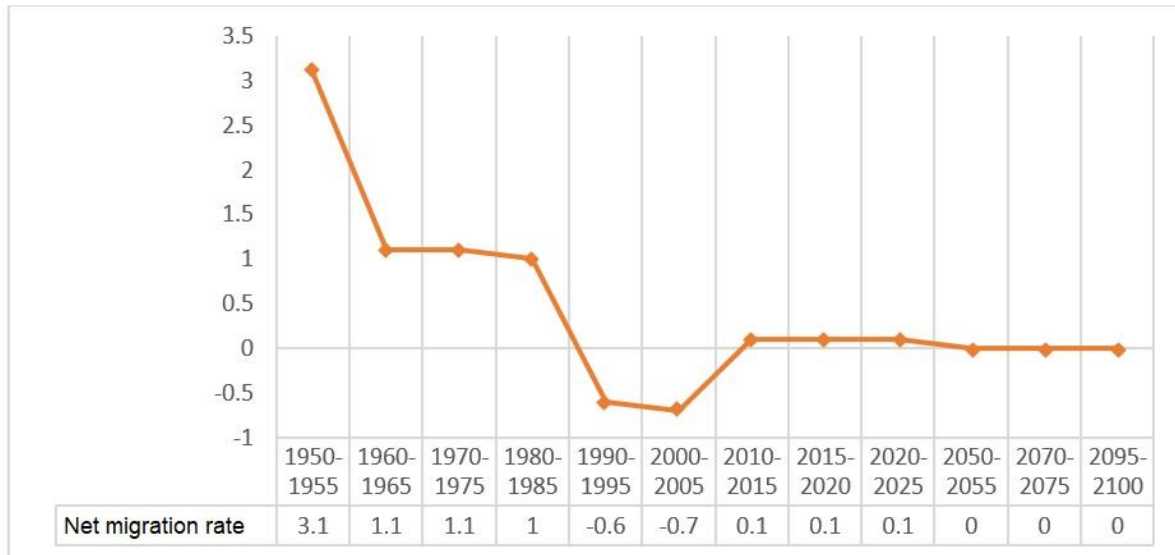
The percentages registered in 1914, however, would begin to undergo a sustained decline due, among other things, to the natural growth of the population as well as a pronounced drop in immigration to the country. By 1947, the national census showed that, although the foreign population in Argentina had not increased exponentially with respect to the last census in 1914, the proportion of the total population, nevertheless, went from 30 to 15% (Mármora, 2015) (Graph 3).

In the following decades, together with the changes that were taking place due to the arrival of migrants in the country,⁸ an increase in the emigration of Argentines began to be registered, mainly to the United States and Spain. The regimes that violated human rights established by the military dictatorships from the 1960s to 1983, together with the economic, social and political fluctuations that occurred throughout this period, were determining factors in the decision of many Argentines to leave the country.

The fall in the net migratory balance during 1960 deepened even more with the last dictatorship that Argentina suffered during the years 1976-1983, as well as due to the economic crisis that hit the country in the 1980s (already in a democratic period). During this period of time, it is estimated that close to 300 000 Argentines left the country (Jachimowicz, 2006), a trend that would continue to consolidate during the following decade and that would reach its peak with the Argentinian crisis that began in 2000 and would explode during the year 2001 (Graph 4).

⁸ In the mid-twentieth century Argentina received its last contingents of migrants from overseas, being a posteriori to the intraregional migration (Latin American) the one that would begin to gain greater prominence within the vernacular demographic dynamics.

Graph 4. Evolution and Projection of the Argentinian net Migration Rate (1950-2100)



Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by the UN-Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA, 2019a).

The Argentinian crisis of the early 21st century implied a socioeconomic collapse that also had an impact on the country’s migratory patterns. Between 2000 and 2001 alone, close to 120 000 people left Argentina, which implies that, as mentioned by Nicolao (2010), “in just two years, the same number of people emigrated from the country that usually did over the course of ten years” (p. 216). These trends support the idea that migratory movements in the region are sensitive to economic and political fluctuations, particularly due to the labor nature of migration in South America (OIM, 2017).⁹

The process of economic recovery that Argentina experienced since 2003 seems to have been one of the determinants in the rebound in migrant arrivals from various corners of Latin America, leading the country to reverse the negative migratory balances that it had been experiencing for some years. Despite the sustained recovery that occurred in the country’s migratory balance, projections indicated that this trend could reverse again as of 2020 due to several factors: the aging of the population of the countries of origin that migrate to Argentina and worse projections in the evolution of the country’s economy, as well as possible transformations in human mobility patterns due to the COVID-19 post-pandemic scenarios.

⁹ However, it should be clarified that the relationship between migration and economic development is not linear or unidirectional (Martin & Taylor, 1996).

This trend would partly confirm Kenny's (2019) projections regarding a drop in migratory flows, not only in countries with restrictive migration policies, but even in those with open-door migration policies, such as Argentina. According to the author, this is because it is young people who usually migrate, so as the world population ages, more people will choose to stay in their respective countries.

Evolution of Argentina's Migration Policy

The study of Argentinian migratory policies is not an easy task, although it is of fundamental importance to try to understand the repercussion that this could have had in different periods of time in the migratory dynamics. Doing so could identify patterns that serve to adapt certain aspects of Argentinian politics to the demographic challenges that the country faces.

The enactment in 2004 of the Migration Law (*Law 25.871 of 2004*) as well as the adoption of various international and regional agreements on migration earned Argentina a notable place within the elite of countries promoting the human rights of migrants. However, despite the great advances in its migration governance, it is possible to notice, even today, the existence of a certain distance between the rights guaranteed by the aforementioned legislation and the way in which they are implemented and impact the lives of immigrants residing in Argentina (Instituto de Políticas Públicas en Derechos Humanos [IPPDH] del MERCOSUR, 2014). With this, the innumerable laws, decrees, and administrative measures that characterized Argentinian migration policy for almost two centuries, became a policy dominated particularly by the discretion of the Executive Branch and the public administration associated with it, taking precedence over the legislative and judicial structures (Pacecca, 2001). This has often exposed migrants to situations of considerable vulnerability.

Argentina's policy regarding migration has historically been characterized by a fluctuation between policies with an open-door perspective and more restrictive models of the same, without implying a complete closure of the borders. The latter is evidenced, particularly, during the first years of the 20th century where, although migration policy tended to favor the arrival of a certain migratory profile and was characterized by having some restrictive nuances, migrants continued to be received in the country to the point that, during this period, the highest migratory balance in Argentinian history was recorded (Mármora, 2015).

Since its formation as an independent state, Argentina has had among its priorities to populate its vast territory. *The Constitution of the Argentinian Nation of 1853* already made explicit, in its Article 25, a preference for immigration from Europe, although it simultaneously prevented the government from limiting or taxing the entry of any immigrant into the national territory.¹⁰

¹⁰ This article has not been modified and is still in force in the current *Constitution of the Argentinian Nation Jan 1994*.

In this sense, according to what FitzGerald and Cook-Martín (2014) point out, Juan Bautista Alberdi, in the year 1853, made reference to the fact that nations in formation that are very sparsely populated have no choice but to be open to the migration, and this was complemented by arguing that countries begging for population could not afford to be selective regarding the migratory profiles that arrived in their territory. In 1869, Argentina passed the first citizenship law and in 1876, the first Immigration and Colonization Law, known as the “Avellaneda Law” (*Law 817 of 1876*). The demographic panorama that accompanies this period showed, according to data from the 1869 census, a total population of 1 800 000 inhabitants, the foreign population representing 12% of the total (Novick, 2008; Presidencia de la República Argentina, 1872).

The immigration policy of that time aimed to attract immigrants to the country in order to boost the development of the population and industry. Argentina encouraged migration to the country through programs that subsidized travel costs, as well as through tax exemptions and housing solutions for newcomers. With this eagerness, it also managed to get the same ships that traveled to Europe with Argentinian products to return full of European workers (Fitzgerald & Cook-Martín, 2014).

Economic instability, as well as a series of military dictatorships beginning in the 1930s, led Argentina’s immigration policy to become increasingly restrictive. The *Decree n.n. of 1932* that regulated the entry of foreigners, as well as *Decree 8972 of 1938* were based on restrictive criteria and hindered migration based on the origin of the migrants.

In the year 1946, an interesting milestone occurred with the presentation of the draft bill for the basis of immigration, colonization and population (Presidencia de la Nación Argentina, 1952). The law, although based on a restrictive perspective of migration, began to show signs of a change of course in the goals pursued by the country’s migration policy. In this sense, the aforementioned law made reference to the fact that, although the population constitutes one of the fundamental assets of the country, migration policies could no longer continue to be governed by analogies to the 19th century since, although populating continued to be a basic need, the migration policy should be considered for other purposes¹¹ (Mármora, 2015).

Other changes took place in the 1950s, when the de facto government of that time repealed the *Constitución de la Nación Argentina de 1949* [1949 Constitution of the Argentinian Nation] and reinstated the *Constitución de la Nación Argentina de 1853* [1853 Constitution of the Argentinian Nation], as well as during the 1960s when the growing need for a labor force experienced by Argentina led the government to sign the first bilateral agreements with countries in the Latin American region. Then, the importance of what intraregional migration meant for the country began to become visible and accountable.

¹¹ The demographic scenario of this period showed that during the year 1947, of the 16 million inhabitants in total that the country had at that time, foreigners residing in Argentina had a participation of 15%. This represented half of what had been recorded in the 1914 census, when in Argentina the foreign population represented about 30% of the total population in the country (see Graph 3).

The accentuation of economic instability together with increasingly restrictive immigration policies during the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to the first emigration of approximately 185 000 Argentines, which would have increased to an estimated 200 000 people in the following decade (Jachimowickz, 2006). The foreign population in the country also began to decrease during this period, a trend that continued and even extended for more than three decades, bringing net migration rates to their historical lows in the late 20th century and the early 21st century.

In the course of 1981, the General Law on Migration and Immigration Promotion known as the “Videla Law” (*Law 22.439 of 1981*) was enacted. This law was characterized by the imposition of various obstacles to obtaining residence permits, which resulted in an exponential increase in the number of foreigners in an irregular situation within the country. Along with the restrictions of a certain migratory profile, the law nevertheless relaxed the requirements in order to favor the arrival of highly qualified migrants, as well as those who could contribute capital to the country (Novick, 2005).

With the decline of the dictatorships, the country’s policy began a transition towards a human rights perspective, although at first it did not have a direct impact on migration policy, as it continued to present securitist overtones as in previous years. The Videla Law then in force, together with the profound economic, social and labor problems the country was facing, were sufficient reasons for the government to try to limit the arrival of immigrants to the country by sanctioning various decrees throughout that period.¹²

It was not until the dawn of the 21st century that Argentina began to adopt a new perspective of human rights and development in its migration policy. The signing of the Agreement on Residence of MERCOSUR¹³ in 2002 (Estados Partes y Asociados del MERCOSUR, 2002), the enactment of the Migration Law (*Law 25.871 of 2004*) known as the “Giustiniani Law” during 2004¹⁴ and the implementation of the program of regularization “Patria Grande” (*Provision 53.253 of 2005*) in 2005 constitute the normative instruments that, in the words of Alfonso (2012), give shape to a new orientation of public policy that channels immigration flows and places the migrant as a subject of law.

Unfortunately, Argentina has had advances and setbacks in the application of the Migration Law (*Law 25.871 of 2004*) as well as in certain discretionary measures approved after its sanction. An example of this is given with the enactment of *Decree 70 of 2017*, which implied a clear setback in immigration matters as it was based on a strong stigmatization towards immigrants.

¹² By 2005, the National Directorate of Migration (DNM) estimated that there were approximately one million in Argentina. of migrants in an irregular situation.

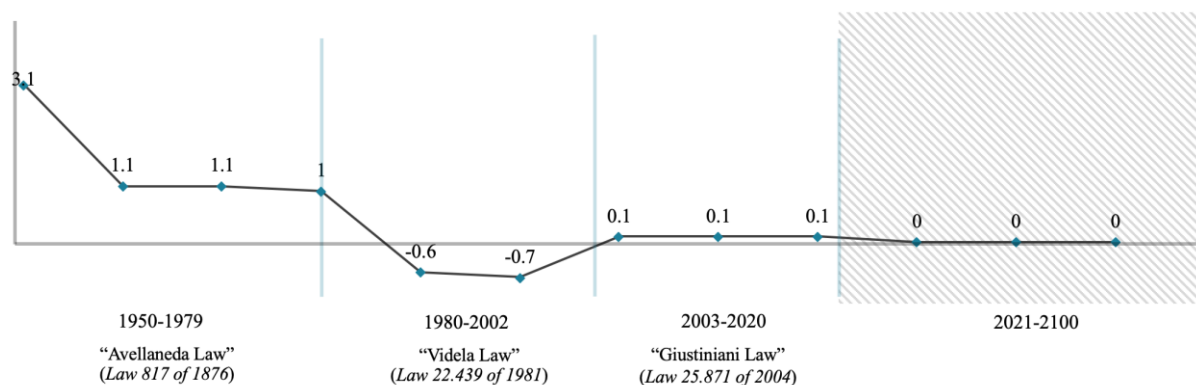
¹³ Southern Common Market, by its acronym in Spanish.

¹⁴ The Giustiniani Law has not only been recognized at the global level as an exemplary norm when considering that migration is an essential and inalienable right of the person by the mere fact of being such (Art. 4), but also stands out for the guaranteed access to social services for all migrants regardless of their migration status (Art. 6 et seq.) (*Law 25.871 of 2004*).

Within this framework, behind all the journey made so far through some of the most important milestones in the evolution of Argentinian migration policy, certain lessons can be drawn. A first lesson arises from the fact that, in recent years, the goals pursued behind the Argentinian immigration policy have undergone substantial changes. From being a policy that mainly sought to promote migration in order to populate the extensive and fertile national territory at the end of the 19th century and mid- 20th century, the country's migration policy, from the early years of the 21st century, began to prioritize actions to guarantee the rights of immigrants and strengthen ties with Argentinian citizens abroad, as well as take advantage of the opportunities that migration brings for the economic, social and cultural development of the country.¹⁵

A second lesson arises from the analysis of Graph 5 where it observes that, despite the fact that migration rates have already shown a drop since the mid-twentieth century, the lowest records coincided precisely with the periods when the most restrictive policies in terms of migratory were in force. It is not possible, however, to argue that the securitist perspective has been the determining factor behind the collapse of the migratory balance, nor that its recovery is due to the change in perspective of Argentinian migration policy so far in the 21st century.

Graph 5. Evolution and Projection of the Argentinian Net Migration Rate According to the Validity of the three General Laws on Migration (1950-2100)



Source: Own elaboration based on data from INDEC (2020) and UN-DESA (2019a).

Although the level of openness of the country affects both the volume and the migratory composition, there are variables that must necessarily be taken into account when analyzing migratory patterns in Argentina. An example of these variables can be the profound political, economic and social problems that Argentina faced in the first case, as well as the favorable economic and financial scenario at the international level that gave impetus to the country's recovery during the first decade of the current century, for the second of the cases. Finally, it

¹⁵ Although the new *Law 25.871* of Migrations Argentina mentions in its article 3, Subsection B that one of the objectives is "to contribute to the achievement of the demographic policies established by the National Government with respect to the magnitude, growth rate and geographical distribution of the population of the country", it is not possible to identify in the body of the standard measures that which explicitly promotes migration for demographic purposes (*Law 25.871 of 2004*).

should be noted that the sanction of *Decree 70 of 2017* that modified the Migration Law (*Law 25.871 of 2004*) implied a clear setback in the progress that the country had made in terms of openness and respect for the human rights of migrants. (Mussini, 2019). Despite this, it is too early to assess the true impact that the sanction of this Decree of Necessity and Urgency (DNU by its initials in Spanish), as well as other administrative measures adopted by the country in recent years¹⁶, may have on the Argentinian migratory dynamics.

In principle, the sanction of the aforementioned DNU did not seem to bring about a reduction in the arrivals of migrants to the country, nor did other restrictive measures on migration adopted during that period. Despite this, these measures account for a wrong turn in the perspective of Argentinian migration policy in the face of the demographic challenges facing the country, where the most important challenge is to attract migrants and not find a way to expel them.

Evolution and Demographic Projection for Argentina

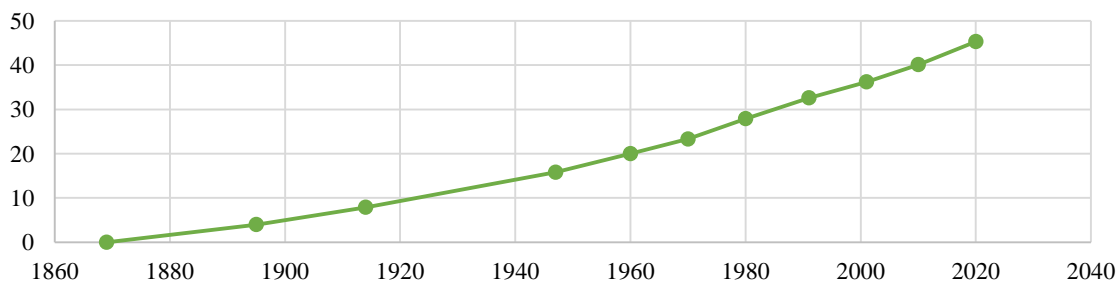
In the early 19th century, it is estimated that Argentina had only 600 000 inhabitants (Scobie, 1971). However, during the following century, the imperative to populate the vast territory of the country, the eighth largest in the world, led the Argentinian government to promote policies of openness and encouragement of immigration that earned it an important reputation internationally and led the country to receive, for a certain period of time, more immigrants than any other country in the New World (FitzGerald & Cook-Martín, 2014).

The exponential economic and social transformations that Argentina experienced during the late 19th century and early 20th century, together with the migration promotion policies that accompanied this scenario, led to significant demographic growth that translated into an increase since 1869¹⁷ to nearly 20 million people in 1960. That is to say, in the words of Cibotti (2004), “in 90 years, the country had multiplied its initial population by 10, while, in the same period, the world population had multiplied by five” (p. 2).

¹⁶ Some of these measures were, for example, that during the years 2015-2019 there were closures of DNM offices, as well as delays in filing procedures and increases in the cost of fees for immigration procedures.

¹⁷ When the nation's first population census had recorded a total of 1 877 490 inhabitants (Presidencia de la República Argentina, 1872).

Graph 6. Evolution of the Argentinian Population, 1869-2020



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Argentinian Republic 2018 (INDEC, 2020).

Immigration at that time (as reflected in previous sections) represented an important factor in sustaining and even increasing the Argentinian population. Just as the entry of migrants into the country in the mid-twentieth century fell sharply, the population growth rate also began to gradually decline. At the end of the 20th century, according to the data of INDEC (2010) for the 1980-1991 inter-census period, the country's growth rate was approximately 1.47%, while for 1991-2001 it had fallen to 1.01%, experiencing subsequently a slight recovery in the inter-census period 2001-2010, registering a growth rate of 1.14%.

The projections indicate a drop again thereof for the next census rounds. This trend can be largely explained by the demographic transition process that, like other countries in the region, began in Argentina in the mid-twentieth century.

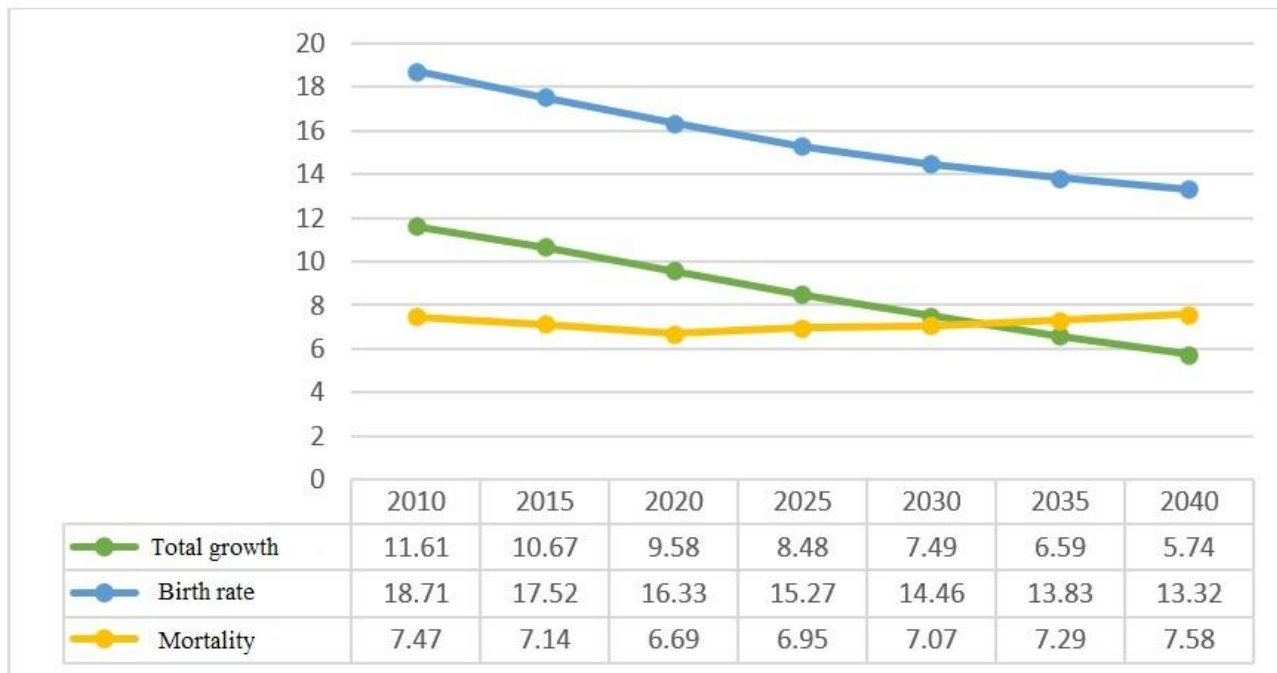
Demographic trends in Argentina present the country with important challenges to the extent that they can have a negative impact on aspects such as economic growth, the composition of the labor market, and migration, among others. Argentina is facing a complex scenario where various reports project that the country will suffer a progressive drop in the demographic growth rate that began in 2010 and that, if it continues, would arrive at the end of the century with a negative growth balance, that is, seeing its population reduce (Graph 7) (INDEC, 2020; CEPAL, 2020).

In this sense, it is valid to mention that population aging is the product of the fall in the fertility rate and the increase in life expectancy which, in the case of Argentina, has been improving steadily for several decades. Likewise, and as a consequence of the fall in the fertility rate¹⁸, the base of the population pyramid has been eroding, just as the population of

¹⁸ The fall in fertility can be explained by several reasons, among which is the precarious economic situation of the country that impacts the working conditions in which young people find themselves. It is also worth mentioning that the vindication of the productive role over the reproductive role of women and their consequent incorporation into the labor market has had important repercussions on motherhood, which is increasingly late.

economically active age¹⁹. The latter entails negative repercussions in areas such as the economy, since it results in a decrease in the rate of economic growth in the country while leading to an increase in public spending in areas of care for people in a relationship of dependency and health.

Graph 7. Demographic projections for Argentina (2010-2040)



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Statistical Yearbook of the Argentinian Republic 2018 (INDEC, 2020).

With everything said throughout this section, there is no doubt that the course of the Argentinian demographic structure will be framed in the one described by Kenny (2019) with respect to the countries of the Global North. For all of them, however, the arrival of thousands of migrants has postponed the reduction of their labor forces and slowed down the aging of their populations²⁰ (Eberstadt, 2019). For Argentina, the arrival of migrants, as well as the return of those who emigrated, can also become a political resource to be carefully explored.

¹⁹ During the second quarter of 2021, INDEC had registered, through its Permanent Household Survey (EPH) a fall of 0.5 percentage points in the population of economically active age compared to the same period in 2020 (INDEC, 2021).

²⁰ This phenomenon is known as replacement migration.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this article, the demographic transformations through which the world population has begun to transit since the mid-twentieth century and which are expected to become more profound at a constant pace over the coming decades have been briefly exposed. Referring to the scenario of the aging of the world population, Karabell (2019) argues that the various governments around the world have evolved to face the challenge of managing countries with more people and not increasingly reduced and aging populations, as demonstrated in the current demographic context.

This statement takes on special significance given the challenges that Argentina will have to face in the coming years to the extent that its population has fewer children and lives longer and longer. The country must propose strategic solutions to slow down or even reverse these trends based on measures aimed at promoting fertility, either through demographic policies of incentives that encourage the younger population or through reforms guided by a vision for development within of a framework of human rights and equality.

Within these strategies, migration promotion policies can also play an important role as this is, as has begun to be observed in countries of the Global North, an opportunity to alleviate not only population aging, but also, an important factor that helps mitigate the impact that this scenario could have on the welfare and social security systems.

Changes in the objectives and perspective of Argentina's migration policy since the beginning of the 21st century have meant advancing towards a greater understanding of the multidimensionality and multicausality of the migration phenomenon, recognizing migration as a human right and granting migrants the same rights as the citizens of the country. However, and as has been reflected throughout this work, the demographic goals originally pursued by this policy, which over time lost strength in terms of migration governance, will be of vital importance for the country in the years to come.

If there is one thing that can be stated with all that has been said so far, it is that past performance is not a guarantee of future results. Argentina should adopt a more proactive attitude in the design and implementation of transversal measures towards all areas of government that favor the creation of attractive scenarios for the settlement of foreign citizens. To this end, some suggestions are provided that could be useful in order to adapt migration policy to eventual demographic challenges:

- 1) Improve the systems for recognition of degrees and academic qualifications, promoting the recognition of skills not only of highly qualified migrants but also of those with medium or low qualifications.

- 2) Encourage the inclusion of migrants in the labor market, paying particular attention to the real demand for employment and reducing the risks of falling into the informal economy. This is achievable through the incorporation of the figure of self-employment, contemplated in art. 23 of the Migration Law, in order to benefit the initiation of the residence process. It is also

viable if initiatives such as hiring at origin are promoted in the sectors with the highest participation of the migrant population, such as agriculture, construction and the textile industry.

3) Promote the portability of social security based on the signing of bilateral, regional and international agreements.

4) Promote the arrival of foreign citizens to work in the country based on tax benefits during the first years, implement measures that favor their integration into the formal labor market and reduce the costs of commissions for sending remittances.

5) Reduce the discretion with which the country's migration policy is managed to increase its predictability and avoid sanctioning policies and measures that expel or dissuade migration such as those that have been approved in recent years. At the same time, the expressly recognized rights of all migrants must be fully guaranteed.

There is no doubt that an *evidence-based policy* that takes into account not only the national context but also the regional and international context, and that is guided by a perspective in favor of human rights and the development of migrants, will be essential to make the most of the opportunities that arise from migrations and, even more, when they are well managed. In this sense, Argentina will need a proactive and transversal migration policy that can collaborate effectively to face the next demographic challenges.

This, however, will not be an easy task to achieve. Without up-to-date statistics and without greater investment in research on the contributions and challenges behind demographic migration dynamics, any attempt by Argentina to promote efficient and effective policies in this area will be in vain. The country needs to have more tools inspired by *evidence-based policy* mechanisms that allow broadening and deepening the understanding of the contributions that migrants make to the economy, its population structure, and the maintenance of the welfare system. This will allow public managers to design and implement policies aimed to guarantee, as stated in the constitutional preamble, well-being for the present, for posterity, and for all the people of the world who want to inhabit Argentinian soil.

Translation: Berenice Martínez and Jennifer Shaw.

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