

Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2024-06-25

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Cairns, D. & Clemente, M. (2023). COVID-19 and the immobility turn. In David Cairns, Mara Clemente (Ed.), *The immobility turn: Mobility, migration and the covid-19 pandemic*. (pp. 1-20). Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.2307/jj.1357282.5

Publisher's copyright statement:

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1. COVID-19 and the Immobility Turn

‘The Immobility Turn’ is a book about transformations that have taken place in geographical mobility since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the impact of long periods of restricted access to international and inter-regional circulation, constituting the loss of a previously taken for granted liberty to travel. This extends to creating difficulties for industries that had grown reliant upon free circulation, most prominently, international tourism and businesses employing large numbers of migrant labourers. Such is the scale of these transformations that there may have been a change in the previously pivotal position occupied by mobility in many societies, leading the authors to hypothesize that an ‘immobility turn’ has taken place. This follows on from the preceding ‘mobility turn,’ which can be retrospectively seen as a way of theorizing the multiplication of mobility in social, economic and political life, taking advantage of expanded levels of global inter-connectedness.

Although the transformation in the fortunes of mobility is strongly associated with the pandemic, international travel had already attracted suspicion for other reasons, most notably the negative impact made upon the environment by aviation, and the difficulty of hosting large numbers of incoming tourists in popular destinations. It might then be argued that the ‘immobility turn’ is also a product of pre-pandemic issues, some of which the authors will discuss in this book. Nevertheless, it was the rapid shut down of societies and the curtailing of international travel in early 2020 that made many people aware of the fragility of free movement, creating the need to adopt more insular lifestyles. And while the turn towards immobility is not seen as a permanent change - although it may have felt so at times during the early months of the pandemic - the after affects are likely to be long lasting, creating an impetus for rethinking and re-examining some of the main assumptions that informed the expansion of geographical mobility in the pre-pandemic years.

In this introductory chapter, the authors provide a brief outline of this position and an overview of what is to come in this book, starting with a look back at what was described as the ‘mobility turn.’ This was accompanied by the emergence of a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ that aimed to capture the sense of boundlessness that accompanied the multiplication of mobility at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first. The intention in the discussion that follows is to look at some key aspects of this expansion, taking into account not only rising levels of human circulation but also the diversification and apparent democratization of international travel, popularized to the point that regularly spending time abroad became a commonplace experience.

‘The mobility turn’

The idea of an ‘immobility turn’ is not entirely original, and can in fact be seen as an extension, or modification, of prominent theoretical ideas expanded upon in Chapter 2. For now, we can say that our approach to analysing immobility has conceptual roots from before the pandemic, and that we are entering a research field populated by many influential studies by various eminent scholars. More imaginatively, in addition to describing a literal multiplication in the number of people travelling within and between countries, ‘the mobility turn’ also established a new vocabulary for social scientists; this was a discourse on mobility rebranded as ‘mobilities’ to reflect the expansionist outlook.

Although strongly associated with sociological theory of the 1990s, recognizing the societal importance of expanded mobility was not entirely new in itself, with the ‘mobility turn’ theorists drawing on pre-existing concepts, including the idea of a ‘spatial turn,’ an idea associated with the postmodern thinkers of the 1980s (see, e.g., Soja, 1989). Going even further back, the work of John Urry, discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2, also harked back to the urban sociology of Georg Simmel from the nineteenth century, including the idea of using

mobility to enhance individualization processes, and acknowledging the potential for generating social fragmentation (Urry, 2007, 20-6). We might then see ‘the mobility turn’ as a means of describing a paradigmatic shift in the consumption of mobilities, defined by an expansionist orientation: more mobility and more problems with mobility, enabled by new developments in information technology and transport infrastructure, and a greater reliance upon aviation (Cresswell, 2011; see also Sheller and Urry, 2006).

In simpler terms, many people were able to become more nomadic in their lifestyles and perhaps more global in their ways of thinking about the world, imagining themselves as inter-connected and inter-dependent on each other. But at the outset, we have to acknowledge that mobilities were both a source of liberation and alienation. This ambivalence is reflected in the breaking down of the geographical integrity of careers and lifestyles; a growing sense of fluidity and a lack of spatial fixity, enabled by the development of new modes of communication and faster, seemingly cheaper, forms of international travel (Faist, 2013). While this development may have created additional possibilities for business and pleasure, the downsides included the degradation of the natural environment and the tension generated by the presence of millions of international travellers in the most popular destinations (Urry, 1995; Urry and Larsen, 2011). We can then acknowledge that there were societal problems during the ‘mobility turn’ epoch especially in regard to the sustainability of developments, and a lack of foresight that ultimately created difficulties for many travellers, ranging from tourists to labour migrants, and for residents in the places visited most often.

The COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point

Moving on from this position, in regard to the main hypothesis of this book, the authors believe that the COVID-19 pandemic represents a turning point for mobility; a shift away from open-ended multiplication and towards the subtraction of various travel possibilities from our lives,

with this change becoming most evident during the first waves of COVID-19, and the abrupt stoppage of practically all forms of global circulation. While the authors are not arguing this change was permanent or irreversible – this is clearly not the case – it will be some considerable time before we return to the levels of global circulation that we had grown accustomed to prior to 2020 or feel that we can travel abroad in the same carefree manner as before. Additionally, even when most of us do decide that it is safe to take to the skies once more, there may be change in the constitution of mobile and migrant populations, particularly if the economic cost of international travel rises and the range of accessible destinations contracts. This is not to mention the understandable reticence of people with mental and physical vulnerabilities to engage in non-essential travel, particularly when even the most rudimentary of sanitary protocols have been abandoned. In the authors' own national context, Portugal, we observed that when full scale tourism resumed in the spring of 2022, many travellers were from other European countries, especially France and Spain, rather than further afield. Therefore, while it is important not to exaggerate the impact of the pandemic on mobility, we should not dismiss the long-term effects, especially as further impediments to resuming full scale international travel emerge, including consequences arising from Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

More concretely, we can define March 2020, the start of the pandemic for most people in Europe, as the turning point, with a massive decrease in international passenger numbers and the raising of many barriers to internal and external circulation within and between countries. Less conspicuously, there has been a decline in the value attached to certain mobilities. This is something the authors' reflect upon in regard to the global circulation of higher education students in Chapter 4, a practice that lost much of its lustre during the long periods of lockdown due to the loss of opportunities for engaging in culturally enriching social activities. International students obviously constitute a smaller population compared to

international tourists, but the practice of moving abroad among students nevertheless represents an important rite of passage and an integral element of the transition to adult, something that that went missing. We might then say that there are qualitative impacts arising from the ‘immobility turn,’ alongside the hard to ignore quantitative changes, and that these issues are in need of investigation.

Research context

In regard to the academic context of this book, as noted in the preceding section, the study of spatial mobility massively grew in popularity across the social sciences during the ‘mobility turn,’ most noticeably in Geography, Sociology and the inter-disciplinary field of Migration Studies, particularly but not exclusively within the European context, encompassing work on ‘softer’ forms of circulation – moves abroad typically short in duration and often episodic or circuitous - in addition to the long-standing interest in migration and demographic change (King, 2002). This explains why the mobility research field now includes a wealth of studies on what can be referred to as classical forms of migration - people moving to a foreign country with a view to improving their economic situations and/or seeking some form of settlement - alongside work on less well defined modes of circulation; not only holidays but also in education, work and training exchanges, with student mobility becoming an especially popular topic (see, e.g., Brooks and Waters, 2011; Feyen and Krzaklewska, 2013; King and Raghuram, 2013). We therefore have a situation in which mobilities, and the representation of mobilities, diversified, to reflect the expansionism of international travel that was taking place, including recognition of the more fragmentary and piecemeal forms of migration, wherein the dividing line between mobility and migration became blurred, with mobile individuals readily becoming migrants, and vice versa.

Continuing a line of inquiry from previous publications (see, e.g., Cairns, 2021a, 2021b), in this book the authors have attempted to engage with this situation in this book. This explains why we discuss different and over-lapping mobilities with a view to identifying contrasting and shared impacts arising from the immobility that has characterized the pandemic. In doing so, we focus mainly on three specific forms of mobility and migration. The most important in terms of numbers participating is international tourism, which somewhat ironically, and as discussed later in this book, is also one of the least well understood by social scientists, with the problems generated by growing numbers of tourists downplayed due to the apparent economic benefits, making many social scientists reluctant to challenge the status quo. More popular, and less controversial as a research topic, is the study of the international circulation of tertiary education students, with a myriad of studies having focused on student migrants and others participating in short duration exchange programmes like the European Commission supported Erasmus scheme. Also acknowledged in this book is the on-going importance of the more traditional forms of migration, including the practice of moving to another country with a view to entering its labour market. That we focus on these three mobility modalities in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively does not mean other forms of human circulation are less important, only that the authors feel that each of these examples provides us with an opportunity to look at different, and transversal, aspects of the ‘immobility turn’ without our Portuguese research context.

The immobility turn in Portugal

Another important aspect of this book relates to the geographical context of the authors’ empirical research, which largely focuses on Portugal. With a population of just over 10 million people, according to the most national recent census in 2021, and a location on the western periphery of the European continent, this might seem like a slightly odd choice to some readers;

why not opt for one of the core European Union countries, or focus more directly on international comparative perspectives?¹ The answer to this question is partly pragmatic, as we are both researchers based in the country's capital city, Lisbon, and have made the study of Portuguese society a major part of our work, and wish to build on our experience. Furthermore, during the pandemic we have been largely housebound like most people, limiting the geographical scope of our work, especially in regard to international collaborations. From a more positive point of view, we can however point out that Portugal provides multiple opportunities for studying different mobilities, including tourism, international student life and labour migration.

This is because Portugal is something of a twenty first century mobility success story, most apparent in regard to its popularity as a destination for international tourism. As the statistics cited in the following section of this chapter demonstrate, the number of foreign arrivals increased massively in the decade prior to the pandemic. The same can be said about internationalized higher education, albeit on a much lesser scale. After a relatively slow start, when relatively few students viewed Portugal as an academic destination, the country rapidly became a popular destination for learners from many different European countries and other global regions, including Africa, Asia and the Americas, as was the case in other Southern European countries in the pre-pandemic decade (Malet Calvo et al., 2020; Iorio, 2021). Less widely celebrated is the importance of Portugal as destination for employment-seeking migrants. Historically, a relatively remote geographical position and fairly weak economic situation made Portugal a second tier destination within Western Europe. However, in the years immediately preceding the pandemic, alongside there being a greater number of job opportunities, the country also offered foreign workers a relatively favourable reception compared to some other European societies (Azevedo et al, 2022; see also Peixoto et al, 2015). Nevertheless, while not generally problematized at a political level, labour migration to

Portugal shares some of the same precarious characteristics found elsewhere, including problems in regard to quality of housing for workers and issues with gaining full access to health and welfare services.

In looking at these three key forms of mobility in this book, the authors are to a certain extent looking at the ‘immobility turn’ in Portugal at a transversal level, especially in regard to the parallel impact of events as they unfolded during the first two years of the pandemic. However, while our analysis has a broad resonance, we do not make any claims towards representativity in relation to characterizing Portugal, the EU or the wider global situation at this time, and our views obviously reflect of our own opinions and experiences as researchers of various forms of human mobility.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal

The timeline of the COVID-19 pandemic also warrants a brief note. Like most European countries, the first wave of infections arrived in Portugal during March 2020, and the spread of the virus has continued until the time of writing, over two years later. While COVID-19 may have been circulating in Portugal, undetected, before this time, the spring of 2020 marked the point at which society shut down, including the placing of multiple restrictions on the freedom to engage in internal and international travel.

This first wave of infections, which lasted until May or June of 2020, was characterized in Portugal by relatively stringent sanitary measures, more so than other European countries, including domestic confinement, the curtailment of inter-regional circulation and prohibitions on international travel. Following a relatively calm summer, a second wave of infections started in early autumn, again lasting several months, reaching a peak in October and November of 2020. This was followed by three further successive waves, the spread of the virus associated with a number of factors including the arrival of new variants, the ending of lockdowns and

the hosting of several large scale events without adequate safety provisions. For example, the third wave was associated with the decision to temporarily lift restrictions during Christmas 2020, a time when the virus was still widely circulating, while two football-related events in Lisbon and Porto respectively contributed to the incubation of wave four in May 2021, an issue the authors will return to in Chapter 6.

Wave five of the pandemic, associated with the milder Omicron variant and taking place after the fairly comprehensive roll-out of a mass vaccination programme, was associated with fewer immediate fatalities, but there has been a greater cumulative impact due to this being longest wave in duration; not coming to a definite end since Omicron was basically ‘allowed’ to spread by the lifting of all the main sanitary precautions and the re-opening of some international travel. The winter of 2021 and 2022 was also the time at which most of our research was conducted, much of it between November and January, meaning that while we faced fewer legal restrictions, many risks remained and most people, including researchers, continued to conduct their work online even when this was no longer mandatory. The unstable epidemiological situation eventually provoked a sixth wave of infections during the time in which we were in finalizing this book, the late spring and early summer of 2022.

Statistical context

A more straightforward way of looking at the impact of the pandemic on mobilities is to take a more analytical point of view, in terms of the timeline and available statistics. As already stated, the turning point in Portugal, and many other European countries, was during the early months of 2020. We can then talk about an ‘immobility turn’ in quite a literal sense, in the form of lower numbers of people travelling, with the loss of international tourism being the most visible sign. Added to this is the loss of income from incoming tourists, with the pandemic

starting in Portugal at a time when record levels of revenue were being generated, at least according to the tourist industry's own statistics.

The expansion of international tourism

This impression is confirmed by recent trends in international tourism. In locating our empirical research in Portugal, we are very well placed to study this topic; the country is popular as a destination for foreign and domestic visitors, and experienced a period of unprecedented growth in international visitor numbers relatively recently, to the point where Portugal was alleged to have experienced a phenomenon referred to as 'overtourism' (Milano et al, 2019). In regard to developments during the period of expansion, the Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) compiles and publishes breakdowns of a range of different tourism related indicators, including the estimated expenditure levels of tourists while they are abroad, and indications of air and sea passenger numbers.²

Insert Figure 1.1 here

Insert Figure 1.2 here

Both these indicators – expenditure and visitor numbers respectively - are important to consider in contextualizing the pre-pandemic development of international tourism in Portugal, as the assumed relationship between the two can be used to justify an expansionist orientation. The trends illustrated in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2 show how receipts from tourists rose in tandem, suggesting a correlation between rising visitor numbers and profitability. It is also apparent that expansion ended at the start of the pandemic in 2020, with a dramatic fall in expenditure levels and sharp decline in the number of tourists making overnight stays in

Portugal: a drop of over 50 per cent in total international receipts, and a collapse in visitor numbers from the pre-pandemic high watermark of over 17 million overnight stays in 2019 to just over four million a year later.

In regard to the international picture, figures from the tourist industry provide some insight into what may have happened to visitor numbers in the first two years of the pandemic on a global basis. Data from the United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO) for this period gives an indication of the extent of lost business (see also Nhamo et al, 2020). The UNWTO ‘Tourism Recovery Tracker’ compiles data on international travel, including air traffic, accommodation occupancy and COVID-19 restrictions, with a view to informing governments and tourism agencies of the current state of play.³ We can in fact observe a quite catastrophic decline in the popularity of tourism from the UNWTO’s statistics, which recorded a 97 per cent drop in the number of international tourists just weeks after the start of the pandemic, in April 2020. This deep depression appears to have continued until April of the following year, when passenger numbers started to rise again, but never reached a point of even 50 per cent of the pre-pandemic peak. It is also notable that the recovery then faltered, coinciding with the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron strain of the virus in autumn 2021.

In regard to what we can infer, data from Portugal and elsewhere presents a quite bleak picture of the state of tourism at this time. We should however add that agencies such as the UNWTO have a stake in defending tourism, and it may suit the tourist industry’s needs to create a ‘bad’ impression, especially when lobbying for state support. We therefore need to be circumspect about the industry’s own claims, seeing their statistics as part of the marketing of tourism rather than providing evidence for social scientists, a complicated and convoluted debate which the authors return to in Chapter 3.

Student mobility and migration during the pandemic

Another popular form of mobility, the international circulation of students, was also subject to massive disruption during the early months of the pandemic. This is a topic we engage with in Chapter 4, noting the generation of new economic pressures in Portuguese universities and complications arising from the sudden switch to remote learning. For now, we can say that student mobility is another area in which the pre-pandemic years were marked by rapid expansion in Portugal, as was the case in many other European regions, with the growth of platforms like Erasmus, and recognition within universities that fee-paying student migrants represented a very important revenue stream. This means that when the pandemic arrived, academic staff members in Portugal had to manage an enlarged international student population, and face the prospect of losing income from overseas enrolments should the decide not to travel.

In regard to available statistics, unfortunately very little detailed information is available to the public – and to researchers – about participation in Erasmus during the pandemic. We only know, from the European Commission’s publicity materials, that in 2020, with a total budget of 3.8 billion euros, Erasmus+ supported around 126,900 organizations and funded in the region of 20,400 projects, which enabled almost 640,000 people to study, train or volunteer abroad.⁴ Participation trends during the timeframe of the first Erasmus+ mandate (2014-2020), also suggest incremental growth in Portugal, mirroring the pattern pre-pandemic expansion found with tourism.

Insert Figure 1.3 here

The trends in Figure 1.3 illustrate the apparent growth in numbers of Erasmus students staying at Portuguese universities, taking advantage of exchange visits funded by the

programme, although the ‘all participants’ figures also including those participating in vocational training, work placements or voluntary work. That we witness no drop-off in 2020 is curious, and suggests that what is being recorded is the number of enrolments, obviously made before the pandemic, rather than numbers of people who actually travelled, with the likelihood that many departures did not actually take place or became online learning exercises. It may also be the case that at the start of the pandemic, students underestimated the severity of the crisis and travelled not realizing the risks they were going to encounter, while others quickly returned home once it became clear that the pandemic was going to be a prolonged experience.

The authors’ own research with incoming Erasmus students in Portugal during the first year of the pandemic, and contemporaneous studies elsewhere in Europe, make note of these trends. This work also suggests that there was a major decline in the quality of the internationalized learning experience during the initial lockdown for those who did travel, to the point where these students were unable to experience life in their host country to any meaningful extent, undermining the interculturality *raison d’être* of the mobility exercise (Cairns et al, 2021a, 2021b; Malet Calvo et al, 2021 see also Czerska-Shaw and Krzaklewska, 2021a).

Looking at student migration, referring to individuals who have moved abroad to study for at least a year, we also have limited data, but some indicators are present in regard to pre-pandemic trends that make for interesting reading. In regard to making international comparisons, the OECD publishes breakdowns of the percentage of international students enrolled in tertiary education institutions on a country-by-country basis. The most recently published figures relate to 2019, albeit with some numbers missing in regard to the average percentage of enrolments in OECD countries between 2010 and 2021. This means that we

cannot yet assess the immediate impact of the pandemic on enrolments for degree programmes by overseas students at an international level, but can identify signs of expansion.

Insert Figure 1.4 here

As Figure 1.4 shows, in Portugal, the international student population grew significantly at this time, from a relatively low base of less than three percent of tertiary education level enrolments in 2010 to almost ten percent in 2019. As points of comparison, the authors include data relating to the country most traditionally associated with hosting overseas students, the United Kingdom, as well as the OECD average. We can see that Portugal actually outstripped the UK in regard to growth, and went from a position well below the international (OECD) average to slightly above it during this decade.

While the international picture remains unclear, figures from the Portuguese Director General of Statistics for Education and Science (*Direcção-geral de estatísticas da educação e ciência*) provide more insight into the national situation during the pandemic, compiling figures for both credit mobility (including Erasmus exchanges) and degree enrolments for international student migrants at Portuguese universities.⁵

Insert Figure 1.5 here

Figure 1.5 provides an overview of trends, covering the period between 2015/16 and 2020/21, with different recording systems having been used prior to this point. Unlike the OECD breakdowns, this table does present a picture of what happened in the pre-pandemic decade and immediately after.⁶ In regard to credit mobility, we can see fairly stable numbers of incoming students until the pandemic hits, when there is a dramatic collapse of over 50 per

cent. In contrast, degree mobility increased in popularity at this time, referring to students who moved to Portugal for the entire duration of an undergraduate or postgraduate course. What is interesting to observe is that not only did degree mobility expand faster than credit mobility, becoming a much larger population, it actually managed to thrive during the pandemic. This is a remarkable finding, and suggests a great deal of resilience on the part of people who can be regarded as student migrants, and perhaps also reflects the efforts that have been made by host universities at this time to not only retain numbers but to recruit more fee-paying students from abroad, a situation the authors explore further in Chapter 4.

Labour Migration

One final form of mobility explored in this book is what we refer to as ‘labour migration,’ meaning people who move abroad for employment purposes. In using this expression, the authors feel compelled to note some significant caveats, and acknowledge the reservations we have about the classification of people as ‘migrants.’ We recognize that while this can be a descriptive category, it is far from being objective, politically neutral or innocent, and has in fact been used to legitimize restrictive migration and citizenship policies, producing new forms of exclusion and control following neo-colonialist and neoliberal dynamics (see also Sharma, 2020), not to mention re-enforcing crude stereotypes. This ambivalence extends to migration statistics, the collation and interpretation of which is highly politicized, particularly in regard to the use of categories used as indicators of demographic shifts that have the power to inform discourses that challenge social, political and economic hegemonies. Therefore, while some forms of migration are seen as non-threatening, such as the attraction of fee-paying international students mentioned in the preceding section, other practices, including ‘labour migration,’ attract public and political controversy in some countries although, historically, not in our Portuguese national context.

Bearing in mind this position, and the likelihood that we may be criticized as authors for somehow appearing sympathetic towards people who have migrated for their own economic betterment, the authors still wish to consider the impact of the pandemic on this cohort. It is a valid aspiration for people to want to improve their personal and professional situations, and hence to travel for ‘the purpose of employment.’ (IOM, 2019, 123). This is an issue elaborated upon in Chapter 5, but for now we can say that in some ways our orientation mirrors that of Portuguese society rather than the broader European or global norms, where terms like ‘economic migrant,’ ‘labour migration’ and especially ‘immigrant’ have become pejorated to the point of becoming quasi-racist slurs, with the temporary or permanent movement of racialized ‘migrants’ subject to intense scrutiny and articulated as ‘*problematic mobility*’ (Anderson, 2017, 1532).

The authors nevertheless realize that other people do not share their views, and we are aware of the use of ‘migration’ discourse to construct artificial difference and create exclusionary social hierarchies. We also know that a racialized approach to labour migration perspective typifies the right wing populist political forces that have come to dominate public discourse on migration in many countries in Europe, and elsewhere, including Portugal to a certain extent. In less abstract terms, this discourse is also used to justify nation states’ inability or unwillingness to guarantee decent work conditions and grant access to public services to ‘labour migrants,’ an issue we return to in Chapter 5. For now, we can say that there is certain irony in the fact that certain governments appear eager to spend huge amounts of taxpayers’ money on creating the impression that they are stopping ‘migration’ but are parsimonious when it comes to providing support to incoming workers, many of whom provide valuable and essential services in their host countries. It should nevertheless be noted that research and analysis of the migration experience and its impact on societies does recognize some benefits arising from ‘labour migration,’ particularly in industries such as agriculture, not to mention

the economic and social contribution they make to social protection systems, especially in societies that are demographically aging (see also Oliveira, 2021).

We should also note that the migrant population in Portugal has traditionally been quite small in terms of numbers arriving and settling. For example, the ‘gross immigration rate,’ published by the official Pordata portal, based on Eurostat figures, suggest that in 2020, the permanent ‘migrant’ population in Portugal stood at 6.5 per cent of the total population, and the rate may be falling, perhaps due to the pandemic limiting international travel.⁷ The most recent available data produced by the Portuguese Immigration and Border Service (SEF), as part of its characterization of migratory dynamics and processes in Portugal, also suggests a decrease in labour migration from 2020 onwards, although variations are not easy to calculate. If we look at the resident foreign population statistics (described somewhat crudely as ‘migratory stock’), we can see that 2020 was characterized by an increase of 12.2 per cent in this cohort, but if we consider the number of new residence permits issued (referred to as ‘migratory flow’), the upward trend of new permits was broken, with a decrease of 8.5 per cent compared to the previous year (SEF/GEPI, 2021).

The surface impression created by this data is that migration trends in Portugal have not been as affected by the pandemic in quantitative terms to the same extent as tourism. This does not mean that the migration experience has not become more problematic, explaining why the authors’ approach in Chapter 5 is largely qualitative, looking at what happened to workers who continued to migrate, and circulate inter-regionally, at times when travel restrictions were in place and right wing populist had started to be imported into the country, reminding us of the importance of the migration of ideas, as well as of people.

Summary

This brief overview suggests that it is the shorter duration, and perhaps less essential, mobilities that have been most affected by the pandemic. Many people stopped taking foreign holidays or engaging in Erasmus exchanges, but others who had made significant investments in their education or were in need of work may have felt that moving abroad, or staying abroad if they had already travelled, was a risk worth taking. This implies that there are differentials within ‘the immobility turn,’ perhaps oriented around the divide between non-essential and essential mobility, the latter persisting in a manner that the former could not. Whatever the long-term outcomes, we however can say that the pandemic signalled the end of a sustained period of relatively untroubled expansion in various mobilities, although the subsequent trends emerging are far from being uniform.

Reflecting back on the opening remarks in this chapter, and the quantitative trends discussed, the lack of depth in these figures has led the authors to realise that there is limited scope for making sense of the ‘immobility turn’ through focusing only on statistical evidence and analysis of secondary materials. This explains why the subsequent chapters of this book focus mainly on gathering and analysing qualitative evidence. In doing so, the authors hope to add depth and understanding, and challenge some of assumptions about mobility that arose before and during pandemic.