

## Chile and its recent migration flows in a globalized world. Are we actually pulling or pushing population?

Claudio Arraño Santibáñez. Ms ©

*Universidad de Santiago de Chile*

### Abstract

According to the media in general and the Foreign Affairs Office (Departamento de Extranjería), Chile has turned into an attractive country to live and work for those willing to migrate and start a new life in a different place, above all, those in the neighboring area, that is to say, South and Central America. Migration flows have increased steadily, not only from neighboring countries, but also from more distant origins such as Dominican Republic, Cuba or Colombia to mention a few. Something happened that people from origins that until a few years ago were not typical sources of immigration towards Chile have decided to work and live here in order to make a better living than at home. But why not going to more developed countries? Why Chile and not Mexico, or Panama, or Argentina? And has this flow really turned us into a pulling immigration country? This essay tries to set things in the right place and dimension by pointing out that Chile is still pushing more population out than the foreign population it is pulling in, at the same time as it intends to respond to questions regarding the option of our country as a new destination based on facts and not impressions or media campaigns.

**Key words:** immigration flows - destination -Chile - trends- pushing – pulling–multiculturalism.

### Resumen

De acuerdo a los medios de comunicación y al Departamento de Extranjería, Chile se ha vuelto un país atractivo para vivir y trabajar para quienes migran y comienzan una vida nueva en un lugar diferente, sobretodo, los del área de Sur y Centro América. De hecho los flujos migratorios han aumentado constantemente, y no sólo de nuestros vecinos, sino también de orígenes más lejanos como República Dominicana, Cuba o Colombia. Algo ha sucedido que personas de orígenes que hasta hace unos pocos años no eran fuentes de inmigración relevante han tomado la decisión de asentarse en Chile para tener una vida mejor. ¿Pero por qué no emigrar a países más desarrollados? ¿Por qué Chile y no México, o Panamá, o Argentina? Y con esto, ¿realmente nos hemos transformado en un país de atracción migratoria? Este ensayo trata de dejar las cosas claras al señalar que Chile aún expulsa más población de la que atrae, a la vez que intenta responder preguntas relacionadas con la opción de nuestro país como un nuevo destino basado en hechos y no impresiones o campañas comunicacionales.

**Palabras clave:** flujos migratorios – destino – Chile – tendencias – expulsar – atraer – multiculturalismo.

There is a general perception that Chile has turned into a multicultural pulling-immigration country once we have returned to democracy in the 90s as the immigration flow towards our country has been increasing steadily since then. In accordance with this idea, the Foreign Affairs Office gives official support with the comments we can find in its web page by asserting we have turned into a host country for immigrants due to our political and economic stability, as well as the peace and security we project internationally. It is a fact numbers have been rising according to census data from 1992 and 2002, where immigration increased in the stunning figure of 75%, and as the Jornadas Migratorias 2014 point out between 2006 and 2014 the migration flow, once again, increased in another 78.5%, which nowadays amounts to around 440,000 people born abroad who currently live and work in Chile<sup>1</sup>. All these figures provoke the false sensation we have turned into a pulling-immigration country, but it should be added that during the period of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, Chile not only discouraged immigration due to its negative image in the international media by toppling down a democratically elected government, but also with its own extermination policy applied indifferently to nationals and foreigners, all of them tortured, or disappeared, or simply murdered without due process with the accusation of terrorism<sup>2</sup>. Some representative cases are: Charles Horman, American filmmaker murdered in 1973, whose case the movie "Missing" is based on; Joan Alsina, Spanish priest murdered in 1973; Sheila Cassidy, British doctor who was imprisoned and tortured for helping a fugitive; Carmelo Soria, Spanish diplomat murdered in 1976; Mónica Benaroyo, Uruguayan citizen who was buried alive with only her head on top of the sand in a beach near Arica. Soldiers kicked her till they beheaded her.

Under the criteria of National Defense of an internal enemy in the paradigm of the Cold War, the regional diaspora wound up being the most suspect maybe for being the most numerous or just for fitting into the parameters of class and ethnic the dictatorship hated the most due to the fact it was mainly indigenous and poor, both as synonyms of communism and underdevelopment, not to mention racism which was a trait regarding national migration policies since the nineteenth century. The Korean migration flow was the only one that increased its numbers during the dictatorship period, albeit they also suffered from racism in our country. The Censuses of 1982 and 1992 register the lowest percentages of immigration toward Chile<sup>3</sup> in the last eighty years of national history.

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<sup>1</sup> Xinhua.net. August 2014. "The figure was retrieved from the report of the summit Jornadas Migratorias 2014, organized in Santiago by the Instituto Católico chileno de Migración (Incami) and the Red Internacional de Migración Scalabrini, with participation of Chilean Government authorities".

<sup>2</sup> "The installation of dictatorial regimes in South America and the corruption of government-related classes, the political persecutions experienced by most of the countries of the region provoked big migration movements. The war that shook countries like Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala contributed to this phenomenon". Stefoni, 2001. P 6.

<sup>3</sup> 0.7% and 0.9% respectively.

## **1. Chile takes a stand**

Nonetheless, with the return to democracy in the 90s, the Chilean state assumes the challenges to progress on actions and initiatives in order to establish public policies to welcome and integrate immigrants into the public services network recognizing the human rights they are entitled to. Human rights that find a legal support on the Art 5 of our Constitution, which points out the due respect of such rights without a distinction of nationality, apart from signing up different international agreements and treaties from the UN in the same direction, such as: the UN Human Rights Declaration in 1948; the International Pact on Political and Civil Rights and the International Pact on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1966, with their corresponding protocols; Summit on the Statute of the Refugee in 1951; Summit on the Statute of the Stateless Person in 1954; the International Summit on the elimination of all ways of race discrimination in 1965; the International Summit on the elimination of all ways of discrimination against women in 1979; the International Summit against torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading penalties in 1984; the International Summit on Children's Rights in 1989; the International Summit on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and their families in 1990; the 105 OIT Convention on the abolition of forced work in 1999; the 111 OIT Convention on discrimination about work and occupation in 1971.

Nowadays, a pregnant foreigner has access to medical care and gets a temporary residence permit since 2003<sup>4</sup> and the newly born has the full rights as a citizen (*ius solis*); an underage has access to education regardless of his legal status or his parents' like any other boy or girl of the same age since 2003<sup>5</sup>. Actually this has concentrated groups of immigrants in certain areas and schools, which has turned into a segregation issue with the social perils it may bring. There are cases where more than half the student population is foreign born, which arouses problems of integration that must be dealt with in time to avoid segregation<sup>6</sup>; since 2008 all minors have access to public health regardless of their legal status or their parents'<sup>7</sup>; some others like legal and physical protection for the battered woman or for the abused child.

## **2. Our demography is changing**

On the other hand, we have the broadly spread perception that our country is changing its demography by just going for a walk in neighborhoods like Plaza de Armas, Puente Cal y Canto, Barrio Brasil<sup>8</sup>, among others, as we see groups of foreigners being part of our daily lives whether by tasting typical food of their countries of origin or by watching them toiling in restaurants or hair dresser's shops. All these facts are relevant proof that effectively in numbers Chile has more

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<sup>4</sup> Official Letter N°1.179, January 2003, Foreign Affairs and Migration Department. Letter ORD-A-14 N° 3.229 June 2008, Minister of Health.

<sup>5</sup> Official Letter N° 6.232 May 2003, Foreign Affairs and Migration Department. Letter ORD N° 07/1008(1531) August 2005 Ministry of Education. Legal Ruling N° 6.677 November 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Stefoni, in Generación de Diálogo Chile-Perú/Perú-Chile. 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Legal Ruling. N° 1.914 March 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Neighborhoods in Santiago that stand out for their communities of foreigners living in there.

immigrants than twenty or thirty years ago, which does not necessarily show that we are receiving more population than the one we are sending out, however it explains how relevant this topic has turned in our recent history. So, just to set things right, we need to clarify that to become a pulling immigration country we should be sending out fewer people beyond our frontiers than the ones we are receiving in our territory, which is not happening yet.

Spain pops out as an interesting similar case. During Franco dictatorship, they had really low levels of immigration, however, when democracy returned they became a host country for immigrants. They humbly started with figures of 1% and 2% of immigration, but in a few years these figures boosted up to 11% and above. A case like this just shows how dynamic this issue may turn in a globalized economy where you find pull and push factors that encourage people to undergo such a challenge, which is to leave your home, family, and friends in order to start a new life in a different country.

It is a fact that Chile has turned into an attractive place to live for many South-Americans, Central-Americans, and Caribbean simply because numbers are showing this trend. Dominican Republic is a good example. Dominicans have had very different destinations for their diaspora, such us New York, Spain, Puerto Rico, or Holland, but in the last three years something happened. They have decided they should come to Chile, to a very unequal and expensive country with low salaries as the OCDE points out. They have increased their numbers constantly up to more than twenty times what it used to be<sup>9</sup> in a period of six years. However, since 2012 the flow declined drastically due to a change in criteria from the Chilean state to accept this origin, so the Chilean Embassy in Dominican Republic started to demand proof of intentions to travel in the category of tourist before granting the corresponding visa, which provoked a drastic decline in the flow.

### 3. Global trends

The south-north migration flows<sup>10</sup> have reached a point of chaos internationally where we see people trying to cross a dessert that splits the poor latino populations from the developed United States which takes around 400 lives a year<sup>11</sup>. Or Africans crossing a turbulent sea in poorly conditioned boats trying to reach Lampedusa, a small island that marks the physical difference between a pauperized Africa and a developed Europe. Almost every two weeks we receive news from immigrants trying to reach a safe point in the north where they can have a decent life without violence, hunger, or blunt misery. Maybe the Evros river if you are coming from Asia; Lampedusa, Ceuta, or Melilla if you are African, no matter your origin, the problem is the same.

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<sup>9</sup> In 2006 Foreign Affairs Office registered 179 entries from Dominican Republic, and in 2012 it registered 4,364.

<sup>10</sup> When talking about migration flows, it is common to point out the origin and destination depending on the level of economic development the nation holds. Developed nations are considered to be in the north, and developing nations are considered to be in the south. So when talking about south-north flows it is a reference to a flow from a developing country towards a developed country.

<sup>11</sup>“ It is estimated that, during the last 12 years, over 4,000 migrants died crossing the “wall” (both physical and virtual) that separates Mexico from the United States, this is 15 times more the number of people who died crossing the Berlin Wall during the 28 years it existed.” (2008). International Federation for Human Rights. P 7.

People are putting their lives at risk, actually dying in order to leave their homes behind and find a better future for their families. Now this part of the topic would render quite another essay, but just as a symbolism of the human drama these flows are undergoing you should focus on the fact that Europe has extended its frontiers beyond its physical barriers to shun people from entering its land (Ceuta and Melilla).

When the north stiffens its migration policies and restricts entries, people tend to turn their looks in a different direction (Stefoni, C. 2003), at least for a while, expecting a better chance. And that is where Chile has entered the globalized migration flows. It is certain that our political and economic stability, besides a powerful serious state where the law rules and social peace and security remain in spite of the economic and social inequalities has turned our nation into an attraction factor. It is fair to mention that most of the immigrants we receive come from a much poorer background, so our inequality becomes subjective. If you are a newcomer and you start making more money than at home, you do not care if you are actually making less than you should according to the general level of incomes simply because your point of comparison is relative, at least, in the beginning. Besides, if you are young and healthy, you don't worry about free and public health or social security. You just work expecting to make enough money to go back home and pay your debts or start an independent business that yields more than you would make as a clerk back there. So why not going to more developed countries? The answer is they can't because the migration policies make it almost impossible. And they pick Chile, because we are a reasonable alternative in a period of recession<sup>12</sup>.

Now it may be understandable to run risks to reach the north, but why come to the south? The different migration flows show people do prefer the north, however, the *south-south* movement is not so small to ignore it. The north-north flows accounts for 22% of the total flow of immigration globally; the north-south flows for 5%; the south-south for 33%; the south-north for 40%<sup>13</sup>. Chile fits in the south-south flow for its physical location and stands out as an attractive destination for its very high human development and its income level<sup>14</sup>, which is higher than those immigrants' countries we are receiving. The 2013 Failed States Index Report locates Chile in number 152, which means we are a stable country, above others like Argentina, Italy, or Spain.

On the other hand, Chile has had a policy of open doors with different countries where many immigrants did not or do not need to ask for a visa from home before traveling. They arrive in the Chilean airport and declare their intentions to tour the country at Interpol, prove economic stability and can get a tourist visa. At the same time, agreements that fit into Mercosur and Apec immigration policies in order to facilitate free movement of population in the region as part of integration criteria. After that, the social networks pull others to do the same forming

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<sup>12</sup> During the 2008 recession period Chile was able to show good economic results thanks mainly to the exports to China.

<sup>13</sup> Four migration pathways, Gallup estimate of first generation adult migrant stock. Gallup World Poll, 2009-2011. Cited in World Migration Report 2013.

<sup>14</sup> According to the HDI 2013, Chile ranks in number 41, above countries like Portugal, Hungary, and Cuba; World Bank shows Chile with a GDP of \$15,732 in 2014, which is considered an average for a high income country.

communities to help the newcomer by using internet tools to communicate efficiently, cheaply, and fast.

#### **4. Our History**

Chile has a history of racism regarding its migration policy in the former centuries (Ulianova, O. and Norambuena, C. 2009); (Cano et al. 2009); (Stefoni,C. 2003), however, we were never very successful to appeal Europeans to settle in Chile. Our numbers in immigration were always very unsatisfactory compared to the efforts, or other countries in the neighborhood. We were not part of the regular pathways to migrate for the Europeans (Ulianova, O. and Norambuena, C. 2009). Actually, we have barely been over 4% of immigration population<sup>15</sup>, compared with other countries where they have reached 12% (the USA), or 30% (Australia). Nowadays, according to census data or other researches we should be in less than 3%, which is close to international standards (Cano et al. 2009); but we are still very far from pulling foreign population considering we are pushing around 5% or 6 % of our own population<sup>16</sup>. So, in simple words, Chile sends out more citizens than the foreigners we receive.

So why do we have the impression there are so many foreigners? Maybe the answer lies on the fact that certain cities concentrate great numbers of immigrants, like Antofagasta with 5.96% of the national total, Valparaíso with 6.14%, Santiago with the astonishing 64.8% (García-Corrochano. 2013). Consider the fact that our nation is not used to having so many new guests, so a person from a different skin color stands out, and not just Afro-Americans but also Caucasians, or mixed that differ from our dark skin color.

#### **5. What to expect**

What comes in the near future? The migration flows are very dynamic in a globalized economy despite the hideous restrictions for human moves. Something that differs from capital and goods that practically move freely and fast in a capitalistic world (you may try buying a digital camera from the USA with a debit or credit card). Then what we can expect is that at some point we will have an even balance between migration and immigration<sup>17</sup>, as long as we keep the pace of a growing economy. Chile is still an exporter of commodities which is a relevant factor for our economic vulnerability, so we should not be so confident and should not look down on our guests, above all, if we still expel twice the people we receive.

Finally, we have a long way to go to make immigrants' stay cozier and respect their social, human, and labor rights. If we start to believe slogans like we are the tigers of Latin America, or

<sup>15</sup> Teresa Rodríguez, Las migraciones internacionales en Chile, Buenos Aires, Secretaría General de la OEA, 1982; Jorge Martínez, Situación y tendencias de la migración internacional en Chile, Serie B-CELADE, N° 120 (LC/DEM/R.281), Santiago de Chile, CEPAL, 1997. Años 1854 y 2002: own elaboration of the author based on population and housing national census, INE Chile. Cited in Cano et al, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Some authors talk about 800 thousand Chileans living abroad, and some others talk about one million.

<sup>17</sup> INE. 2002. P 84, Tables 16B and 16C.

that we are better than others simply because we are going through a good economic phase, we could end up paying a price: to look ridiculous in front of countries which really have a long history in immigration with stable economies. On the other hand, do not forget that other countries have welcomed our citizens in dire straits in our recent history. Maybe it is time to pay our dues to the international community. Consider the control of the migration flows, the freedom to move from one country to another, the right to work, the respect of human rights like social security or health access, and the free movement of our pension money, among others, are issues to be dealt with at international debate from which all of us can benefit. After all, aren't we all looking for better opportunities in our lives disregarding the physical environment? In this globalized world even we may end up working in Dubai, or Shanghai, or New York, and then we would like to be respected as the human beings we are.

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