

## **SOCIAL PROBLEMS: THE DEMOGRAPHIC EMERGENCY IN URUGUAY**

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on Uruguay in a context of highly publicized external image through its recent former president Jose Mujica. It covers government policies related to the problems that all societies must face, addressing, in particular, the demographic problem it is experiencing, since it differentiates the country both in a regional and in the entire Latin American context.

### **Keywords:**

Uruguay; social problems; demography; emigration

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## **SOCIAL PROBLEMS: THE DEMOGRAPHIC EMERGENCY IN URUGUAY**

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### **I. Introduction**

Uruguay has been on the front pages of major international newspapers in recent years since the last government of Jose (Pepe) Mujica, either due to his high media profile or the three most progressive laws passed under his government, namely the equal Marriage Act, the liberalization of marijuana and the law allowing abortion. However, in the context of the country's external image, it is relevant to mention other government policies related to the problems that all societies must face, particularly the demographic problem it experiences and differentiates it both in a regional and in the entire Latin American context. The urgency is clear: a country without people lacks viable development. On the other hand, public policies and country indicators in general are elements that are difficult to measure in relation to its neighbours, since the latter are large countries with huge populations by comparison and very different policy implementation systems, as both Argentina and Brazil have federal administration systems. Thus we can say that Uruguay makes itself visible not due to its size (whether geographic, demographic, economic or all together) as happens to some regional powers, but due to its difference as described by Joseph Nye<sup>1</sup>, through soft power, and, in this case, based on a person with a high media profile, its leaving president, Mr. Mujica.

The speed with which information flows today justifies introducing a clear definition of globalisation in this analysis because of its influence on human groups, incorporating changes that are not always easy, either due their complexity or the speed at which they occur.

Anthony Giddens<sup>2</sup> wrote that

*“globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social*

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<sup>1</sup> NYE, Joseph. 2010. *The future of power*. United States. Public Affairs.

<sup>2</sup> GIDDENS, Anthony. 1991. *As consequências da modernidade*. São Paulo. Ed. Unesp



*connections across time and space. So, whoever studies cities today, anywhere in the world, is aware that what happens in a local neighbourhood tends to be influenced by factors such as global money and commodities markets operating in an indefinite distance from the neighbourhood in question”.*

Latin American economies suffer from globalisation in the form of vulnerability and external dependence. The advantages described by the countries that lead it, presented as a worthy phenomenon of equalization of benefits and opportunities, have not reached all latitudes, including our American Southern Cone.

We are facing a situation of international free market, but globalisation finds other ways to manifest itself through technological advances at an uncontrolled speed that have led to increasing social segmentation with its consequent labour, cultural and educational duality, for which reason the impacts of globalisation fall on the democratic systems of the societies that suffer from them, creating or highlighting various social problems that those economies must face and solve.

According to Baylis<sup>3</sup>, globalisation is dividing citizens between the educated and cosmopolitan inhabitants and the economic and social outcasts. It is in this new form of global behaviour that countries have had to seek common strategies to safeguard the real problems they face, including economic ones, social and class structure issues, political systems and parties, state format, social movements, the level of material development and social equity, professionalism and creativity of state elites and civil society, the configuration of the system of social actors, cultural models and the collective imagination, as well as several other issues, including, naturally, the new global reality.

## **II. Concept of social problem**

It is necessary to provide a theoretical framework to what is meant here by social problem that will justify the topics chosen for this work.

Thus, the doctrine defines social problem as the result of conditions or practices that lead to a lack of harmony with the social values of a given society.

Social problems exist when there is an imbalance in the forms of social organization that has negative effects on the group and also when their competence appeals to the responsibility of this group<sup>4</sup>.

To the question what is a social problem? Pablo Kreimer, Director of the Doctorate in Social Sciences at FLACSO Argentina, tells us that

*“a first level of answer refers to the existence of objective conditions that relate directly to human suffering (...) for example, malnutrition, illiteracy, poor sanitary conditions, lack of work,*

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<sup>3</sup> BAYLIS, John. 2011. *The globalization of world politics*. Oxford. Oxford University Press

<sup>4</sup> MONTENEGRO, Marisela. 2001. *Otredad, legitimación y definición de problemas en la intervención social: un análisis crítico*. Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.



*among others, are socially perceived as problems with no further requirement than awareness of the living conditions of the individuals involved. Problems that affect one part of the population are thus "social" by the mere fact of their emergence within a given society".*

For his part, Juan Sandoval Moya<sup>5</sup>, of the University of Valparaiso, Chile, adds that

*"the process of construction of social problems is symbolic and involves interaction of categories typical of a social psychology linked to subjects and social discourse, which are intended to account for the subjectivity and historicity processes which intervene in all human communities through the production of discourse in the definition, prioritization and characterization of what they define as social problems at a period of time".*

In short, the actual social history of peoples and their own identity define social problems and their priority according to their own characteristics.

In this line of reasoning, the problems that cross our societies, and specifically Latin America, emphasize the urgency that causes inequality, leading the trend in the use of resources on policies that work together to address these problems, giving priority to the social sectors in a condition of extreme poverty<sup>6</sup>. It should be noted that this poverty has various origins according to the sub-regions we refer to, taking into account the existence, or not, of indigenous communities, economic and development policies applied throughout recent history and the actions, in many cases, of dictatorial regimes that many of these countries have experienced, with marked differences in the Southern Cone. These are issues that go beyond the goal of this analysis but which we must not fail to consider as part of the context in which some of the social problems presented here arise.

Not only poverty and marginalization are part of what can be defined as a social problem, or can be perceived as such by a group. The issues related to them must also be mentioned, such as, illiteracy, hunger, health problems, education and child labour, in addition to abuse. Other examples of social problems include an ageing population, migration (in the case of Uruguay, as discussed below, particularly emigration), the social, economic and political consequences of these demographic problems; environmental problems (which in Uruguay is a social problem through the conflict with Argentina for the setting up of a pulp producing company on the margin of the Uruguay River); unemployment; HIV/AIDS; all sorts of violence, among others.

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<sup>5</sup> In his work "*Producción discursiva y problemas sociales*" published in the journal *Última Década* n 007-1997.

<sup>6</sup> OIT/Cinterfor. 1995. *Las Políticas Sociales en Uruguay*. Report prepared by Centro Interamericano para el Desarrollo del Conocimiento en la Formación Profesional  
The term "social policy" is used here as the political form that society (through the State) has to "solve" the social question, that is, social problems.



### III. Main social problems in Uruguay

Uruguay is a country located in a geographic context which, despite its 176.000km<sup>2</sup>, is of little importance. Its small dimension not only refers to territorial aspects, but also to its demographic and economic indicators.

It has just over 3 million inhabitants<sup>7</sup>, of whom 46% live in the capital, Montevideo, the smallest of its 19 departments. 38% live inside the city and only 16% in rural areas.

Figure 1 - Map of Uruguay



Source: [www.lahistoriadeldia.wordpress.com](http://www.lahistoriadeldia.wordpress.com)

Within Latin America, it is a country historically known for its egalitarian distribution of income, the strength of its democracy and level of social integration. In recent decades, however, "there have been cracks that manifest themselves through marginal behaviours, i.e. behaviours which are not governed by socially accepted patterns. The reason for such behaviour is understood as a cultural mismatch between cultural goals, structures of opportunities for achieving the goals and the creation of individual capacities to take advantage of them"<sup>8</sup>.

In the late 1950s, when Uruguay took advantage of the economic benefits of war (especially as an exporter of meat and wool) which led it to be called the "Switzerland of America", a decline started slowly but without pause, bringing it closer, even today, to the parameters of its Latin American context. A product of Europe's and global

<sup>7</sup> 3:285.877 according to the last census conducted in 2011.

<sup>8</sup> KAZTMAN, Ruben. (1997). *Marginalidad e integración social en Uruguay*. Journal of CEPAL n 62. Montevideo.



resurgence after the war, of the dwindling dependence of the belligerents on its primary products, Uruguay failed to reconvert, although the 11-year dictatorship (1973-1984) clearly also contributed to this scenario.<sup>9</sup>

According to this background, the main social problems facing the country can be identified as follows:

### **III.1 Poverty, inequality and social exclusion**

The indicators are not encouraging because the data tells us that poverty mostly affects young people. In a prematurely ageing society and with an overall very low birth rate, this constitutes a serious social problem, as child poverty is a serious challenge to any project one may want to carry out in the country. According to the UNICEF 2013 country report, 24.5% of children under six years live in poverty in Uruguay. Poverty affects 13% of the population, while 0.5% is indigent. With respect to inequality, although the country has historically stood out for having, in the Latin American context, a more even distribution of wealth than its neighbours, and has a still valid and important middle class, the gap has not stopped widening since the last crises of the late 1990s and the last one that affected it directly in 2002. While poverty has declined in the last five years, there has been an increase in inequality that manifests itself both in the distribution of income and access to social services. In this regard, the process of urban and residential segmentation, particularly in the city of Montevideo and its metropolitan area must be mentioned, where "neighbourhoods became increasingly more homogeneous within and more heterogeneous among themselves, thus losing a relative capacity for social integration that had been a distinguishing feature of Uruguayan society"<sup>10</sup>. "Poverty and inequality in Uruguay are closely linked to unemployment, which affects mainly people with low skills. According to the Human Development Report on Uruguay (PNUD 2005), in Montevideo the income of the better off is fourfold that of the disadvantaged. In terms of social exclusion, and in the definition proposed by Manuel Castells "the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically blocked from accessing positions that would allow them to have an autonomous livelihood within certain social levels determined by institutions and values in a given context. Exclusion situations vary depending on education, demographic characteristics, social prejudices, corporate practices and public policies, and can affect both individuals and territories. In this sense, it can be said that the most affected sector is that of women heads of household, who run 32.7% of households in Uruguay, of which 11.7% are poor"<sup>11</sup>. Another major problem that the country must solve in terms of inequality is the very high school dropout level: according to data provided by UNICEF, only 4 in 10 young people between 21 and 22 years of age manage to complete secondary education and only 37% of young people between 21 and 22 years completed upper secondary education, with the remaining 63% leaving before completing compulsory education<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, poverty

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<sup>9</sup> It must be pointed out and emphasized that in international terms Uruguay qualifies well but the grim scenario arises when the information and data are broken down as attempted in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> CEPAL. 2007. Serie Mujer y Desarrollo N°88. *Las metas del milenio y la igualdad de género. El caso de Uruguay*. United Nations. Santiago de Chile.

<sup>11</sup> Data from 2002, Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), gender statistics.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF. 2013 Annual Report. Available at [http://www.unicef.org/uruguay/spanish/InformeAnualWeb.pdf#Informe Anual 2013](http://www.unicef.org/uruguay/spanish/InformeAnualWeb.pdf#Informe%20Anual%202013)



and unemployment make it difficult to have access to decent housing, causing the appearance of irregular settlements, especially in the capital. There are 562 slums in Montevideo, with 61 000 households and an estimated population of 257 thousand people<sup>13</sup>. Most of the land occupied by these settlements is illegal. Over time these settlements have become true neighbourhoods but lacking the services that a neighbourhood should have. The previous government began a process of regularization, which continues today, providing basic services like electricity, running water and sanitation to the settlements where such measures are possible, which is not always the case. The problem is to move people occupying areas that for various reasons are uninhabitable, as they are not always willing to leave the places they occupy, and where to put them so that they improve their situation and abandon often criminal and clandestine activities. In this regularization process, it was found that many of these houses were built in unsuitable areas such as under high voltage aerials or exposed to high concentrations of lead. In this sense, lead poisoning is linked to the land and poverty, although it is not the only determinants factor, and children end up being the worst hit, with blood lead concentrations that exceed twice the tolerable amount, according to the Ministry of Public Health.

### III.2 Environmental problems

In the same vein, the serious problem affecting the country by exposure to high concentrations of lead must be stressed. For decades lead has been considered to be one of the most important environmental pollutants. In Uruguay, occupational exposure to lead is linked to the metalworking and the automotive battery manufacturing industries<sup>14</sup>. However, as stated earlier, lead exposure is also, above all, closely linked to poverty and land problems, where the slums are usually located, the most disadvantaged being the most affected. Settlements are often located in flood zones that have been filled with industrial waste, where underground cables are burnt and clandestine foundries are made, in addition to the population lacking hygiene education. The problem is severe in children and young people, because, depending on the level of intoxication, lead poisoning has irreversible consequences in all that relates to learning and psychomotor apparatus, especially when affecting people with a poor diet. The removal of leaded petrol from the market in December 2003 was an important first step but insufficient when dealing with this problem. Another environmental problem that has caused serious damage to the country is the one opposing Uruguay to the Republic of Argentina regarding the building of a cellulose pulp producing plant of Finnish origin called Botnia, UPM today, on the margin of the Uruguay River. This plant was set up in the Río Negro department, in a free trade area, opposite the city of Gualaguaychú in Argentina. While the conflict goes beyond the environmental issue and is now part of the political agenda, it began with the complaint made by Gualaguaychú citizens, with the approval of the government of Argentine President Néstor Kirchner, that the plant would pollute the river and the air. Despite assurances given not only by the Uruguayan government and the business itself, but by several international audits, these citizens organized themselves in what they call an

<sup>13</sup> Data from 2010, from Asociación Un Techo para mi País relevado por el Portal 180, available at <http://www.180.com.uy/articulo/13392>

<sup>14</sup> Revista Médica Uruguaya. 2006. Article: *Estudio epidemiológico de una población expuesta laboralmente al plomo*. Department of Toxicology, Faculty of Medicine.



"assembly" and cut the border crossing the international bridge linking the two countries, claiming for the plant location to be moved. BOTNIA started production on 12 November 2007 and although the conflict has lost strength, it reignites every time the company is allowed to increase production. The conflict had serious consequences for Uruguay with job losses in the Río Negro department and a substantial reduction in national tourism, which lasted at least five years, not to mention the costs for the regional economy, since tons of goods used that route per year heading to Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia, with a loss of millions of dollars. Although it is a one-off, and not a structural problem, whose solution does no longer depend on Uruguay, its timeliness, the dimension it has taken, opposing the two countries, their governments and their citizens, makes it mandatory to mention it, even though today for Uruguay it is probably more of an economic and political problem than a social one.

### III.3 Health

Uruguay has a health status whose indicators differentiate it in the region due to the low rates of infant and maternal mortality. However, as in the rest of the continent, the risk of dying, getting sick or cured is not evenly distributed. The main cause of death in the country is cardiovascular diseases, with 322 deaths per hundred thousand inhabitants, according to the Ministry of Public Health (2007).

However, again people in poverty and women are the most vulnerable<sup>15</sup>. Uruguay has a population with marginal rates of malnutrition, but it should be mentioned that it mainly affects children under two years of age and, according to data of the President's Office, 15% of pregnant women begin their pregnancy with low weight, this percentage increasing to 40% in teen mothers. In this sense, despite the low fertility rate and a downward trend (which, as discussed below, is now on the edge of the population replacement rate), an increase is detected in teenage pregnancies in disadvantaged sectors, with the social consequences involved in the risk of reproducing cycles of poverty. 17% of births in 2008 were to teenage mothers (15 to 19 years of age). The problem is that these young people are forced to abandon their studies early, which reduces their chances of entering the labour market with better conditions, retaining them in a poverty environment. Following this line of reasoning, the literature suggests that adolescent fertility and education are closely linked: 71% of teen mothers have completed primary education but only 6.4% completed secondary education<sup>16</sup>. Data from the Ministry of Public Health of 2011 indicate that 73% of these mothers do not work or study, 15% study and only 12% work<sup>17</sup>, so 88% of these mothers are not involved in any economic activity. In a country with few active young people, an ageing population and high emigration rate, where the ones who emigrate are mostly young people with high academic qualifications, these signs are alarming. Moreover, the HIV/AIDS issue should be mentioned, although it cannot be considered a social problem in the country under the given definitions. This is a topic that seems to be controlled and is not urgent as the other issues raised here. Uruguay has one of the lowest

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<sup>15</sup> CEPAL. 2007. Serie Mujer y Desarrollo N°88. *Las metas del milenio y la igualdad de género. El caso de Uruguay*. United Nations. Santiago de Chile.

<sup>16</sup> VARELA, María del Carmen. 1999. *La fecundidad adolescente: una expresión de cambio del comportamiento reproductivo en el Uruguay*. En Salud Problema. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco. México.

<sup>17</sup> MSP 2011. Report available at [file:///C:/Users/Virginia/Downloads/Informe\\_Embarazo\\_Adolescente.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Virginia/Downloads/Informe_Embarazo_Adolescente.pdf)



numbers of AIDS patients in the region, with a rate of 25.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, according to the Ministry of Public Health (2012). It does not even qualify for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. By the end of 2012, the cumulative number of AIDS cases totalled 8,000, of which 36.5% were women. According to data from the Ministry of Public Health, the age of highest incidence of the disease is between 25 and 54 years. Cases of perinatal transmission from mother to child fell sharply from 26% in 1995 to 4% in 2007 and to 2.14% in 2012, which is significant. The country has embarked on a major health reform, in force since 1 January 2008, which, among other things, extends the coverage of quality health care to all children under 18, children of active parents who contribute to social security. This reform aims to alleviate, if not eliminate, equity issues associated with access to health care quality differentials and inequities in funding. The new integrated health system aims to eliminate the existence of a "health for the poor" (public) and a "health for the rich" (private) through a mixed and homogeneous system in terms of accessibility with respect to quality care. It is an important matter in terms of health, which, if well managed, can help reduce some of the most pressing issues experienced in Uruguay. Unfortunately, what is conceptually presented as a good public policy did not anticipate that the most disadvantaged would eventually return to the public sector given that in the mixed sector, under the new system, they must face mandatory testing costs, such as paediatric costs, which public health offers them for free. Often, the mere transfer to the mixed system can be expensive in the light of the family income, so people choose to go to the neighbourhood clinic, which depends on public health. In short, in the mixed/private health sector, one notes a drop in the quality of service after the reform, due to the amount of people that the various services had to absorb without generating a real benefit to those who really need it most. Finally, with regard to health professionals, one perceives that a *feminization* of the medical career has occurred, leading to a massive expertise in paediatrics<sup>18</sup>, which has transformed Uruguay into a paediatricians "exporting" country, and an "importer" of doctors specializing in other areas, such as ophthalmology, and accounts for the lack of other such specialties, such as neurosurgery, which has only 32 professionals to serve the entire country.

### III.4 Violence and crime

To finish this brief summary of the main social problems affecting Uruguay, it should be noted that the main problem, and perhaps the most urgent, is related to domestic violence. In this country, one woman dies every 14 days at the hands of her partner, and if we add the deaths of children and adolescents as a result of violence the number of days is reduced to 9<sup>19</sup>.

These figures do not include suicides committed by victims of violence who could no longer bear it. Domestic violence brings with it serious consequences for the family environment and for society as a whole, and despite being a major social problem, there is no state policy that attempts to modify social and cultural patterns that are at the basis of this problem and somehow justify or allow the existence of domestic violence. It is a problem that does not distinguish between class, political or

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<sup>18</sup> A fact stressed by Romero Gorski in 1999 in his work *Caracterización del campo de la salud en Uruguay en Salud Problema*. Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco. Mexico.

<sup>19</sup> Data disclosed by the Uruguayan network against domestic and sexual violence.



philosophical beliefs, affecting the physical and psychological health of sufferers and which causes work absenteeism with the consequent economic cost, not only individual but also social. Regarding crime, the feeling of insecurity among citizens is increasing in recent years. The figures indicate that crimes against people increased by 8% in 2007 compared to the previous year<sup>20</sup>. In its 2013 report, the Ministry of Social Development stated that an estimated 54% of Uruguayans fell victim to a crime in the last five years<sup>21</sup>. One notes, above all, an increase in the violence of the crimes committed and a decrease in the age of offenders, which is somewhat driven by the increase in the consumption of drugs, such as crack, by children and young people.

#### **IV. One of the problems for analysis: the demographic problem**

The demographic problem is dealt separately because we believe that in all the serious problems Uruguay is facing, this is perhaps the most urgent.

As a conceptual introduction, demographics is defined as the social science that studies the events occurring to members of a population along their life. This study has two dimensions: measurement (how many there are, how many are born, how many die) and explanation (why so many children, why so many emigrants, why the increase in life expectancy)<sup>22</sup>. Thus, the demographic issue in Uruguay becomes an urgent and important problem due to two of its fundamental variables: the low fertility rate and the high emigration rate.

Uruguay has kept its demographic indicators low for an extended period, with growth and age structure similar to countries in Western Europe, which are different from the overall context of Latin America. In this sense, according to Varela Petit<sup>23</sup>, "the reconstruction of the historical process that explains the demographic behaviour of Uruguay in the Latin American context is complex. The available evidence allows ascertaining the main impact factors:

- a) the cultural impact of European immigration on a sparsely populated territory;
- b) early incorporation into the Western model;
- c) early urbanization that has led to 91% of the population living in cities today;
- d) an economic activity fundamentally based on livestock produced extensively;
- e) The form of land distribution in large estates, which has prevented the development of a rural population, which often have high levels of reproduction;
- f) A form of land use that does not require high demand for labour;
- g) The characteristics of the economic activity do not stimulate the growth of intermediate towns and consolidate the growth of the city's capital, which is the main exporting port".

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<sup>20</sup> Ministerio del Interior. Observatorio nacional sobre violencia y criminalidad. *Evolución de la violencia y la criminalidad en el Uruguay*. 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Report available at [http://www.mides.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/23497/1/reporte\\_social\\_2013.pdf](http://www.mides.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/23497/1/reporte_social_2013.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> ORTEGA Osona, José Antonio. 2001. *Revisión de conceptos demográficos*. In *Contribuciones a la economía*: <http://www.eumed.net/cursecon/colaboraciones/Ortega-demograf.htm>

<sup>23</sup> PETITO VARELA, Carmen. *Fecundidad En Importante pero urgente. Políticas de población en Uruguay*. 2007. Montevideo. UNFPA – Ed. Rumbos



These characteristics occurred because Uruguay is a country that was left with no indigenous population and was the recipient of significant numbers of Europeans in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mostly Italian and Spanish, but not only), with low population levels despite its territorial extension.

From the 1960s, in the words of Pellegrino<sup>24</sup>, "Uruguayan emigration turned out to be a growing issue and the departures became a factor of concern at all levels of national life". Whether due to the sluggish economy, as noted above, or due to repression and exile, emigration reached very high rates during the 1970s and early 1980s. The end of the dictatorship (1984) did not improve the situation because, although the first period of democratic transition meant a return to the country, emigration continued and increased again in the 1990s, above the number of homecomings in that period. After the crisis of the late 1990s and, especially, the 2001-2002 crisis, emigration became the most widely used tool to address the lack of opportunities and unemployment, although the balance of emigration had been negative since 1963. Data indicates that since 2000 an average 20,000 people emigrated each year in the country, a figure that peaked in 2002 with 29,000 departures<sup>25</sup> and reached 17,000 in 2007. Given the size of Uruguay's population, these are huge numbers that should get our attention: if we consider that our natural increase (difference between births and deaths) is 20,000 people a year on average, this means that we have barely grown and that, in fact, between 2000 and 2002 we have had negative growth. It is reckoned that the Uruguayan population living abroad represents 13% of the population. Therefore, in the words of Pellegrino, "the migratory phenomenon has a weight on Uruguayan society that must be among the highest in the world." Emigration in general has economic causes, especially at the beginning and during the crises mentioned earlier, and also political, mostly during the period of the coup d'état (1973-1974), but it is also caused by the lack of horizons and opportunities that are not always connected to strictly economic problems. Emigration ceased to be the quick reaction of the Uruguayan society to specific economic problems, becoming a target for young people when they complete secondary education. Emigration has become the most serious structural problem in Uruguay: 77% of *recent immigrants* (between 2000 and 2006) are aged between 15 and 34 years<sup>26</sup>. They are usually young people with skills or who continue their education abroad, whose biggest problem is the lack of opportunities they have in the country, where their skills are undervalued in terms of the wages they are offered.

In addition, there are the recruitment programmes offered by countries like Canada to bring human resources to Quebec, training (and taking) dozens of young professionals per year, or the recruitment programmes for specific professionals in the areas of technology and computing, as offered by Germany, which, along with India, takes on almost the entire supply of labour in this area through one of its major multinationals located in one of the free trade areas next to the city of Montevideo, training young graduates in the topics they need and sending them abroad; the technical emigration, for example in the area of health, to countries such as England and Switzerland, must

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<sup>24</sup> PELLEGRINO, Adela. 2007. En *Migración uruguaya: un enfoque antropológico*. UDELAR

<sup>25</sup> PELLEGRINO, Adela. 2003. En *La emigración en el Uruguay actual ¿el último que apague la luz?* UNESCO Report Montevideo.

<sup>26</sup> Data from the Report *Informe sobre migración internacional en base a los datos recogidos en el módulo migración* de la Encuesta Nacional de Hogares Ampliada 2006. UNFPA – PNUD – INE  
The same report states that the data confirms that 50% of emigrants in the period under study (2000 – 2006) had a job when they emigrated, which confirms and strengthens the argument advanced here that nowadays emigration is done for reasons other than economic or unemployment.



also be stressed. The destinations of Uruguayan emigrants are varied: initially they used to go to Australia, United States, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Sweden, and Spain, but today most young people continue to emigrate to Europe (mainly Spain and Italy) and the US (although this destination fell slightly once Uruguayans began to be asked for a visa to enter the country, after the 2001-2002 crisis).

Another point of concern is the increase in the number of entire family groups emigrating, parents who decide to join their children abroad, which happened a lot prior to the US starting requesting an entry visa, or adults between 30 and 45 years who lost their jobs and decided to emigrate with their children, in block. This is important because it affects the remittances that Uruguay could receive from the outside, further minimizing any benefit to the country that might be found in emigration. In this regard, we note that even for those remaining, remittances fail to be an incentive. Cabella and Pellegrino point out, using data from a 2006 study, that

*"among the poor classes the departure of a member abroad tends to deepen their vulnerability, rather than improving material and social living conditions. (...) The emigration of a member diminishes access to welfare, and sustained economic transfers do not offset this loss. Remittances received by these households are rather off-the-cuff and are sent when the household is facing extreme situations<sup>27</sup>".*

Moreover, there is the sense that the *country is becoming empty*, which Laura Pastorini mentions in her article "Not all of us are here and not all of us who are here are all of us" adding that "the massive exodus feeds emigration, because a country that is emptied of its younger population, who are more dynamic and more educated, becomes less attractive to the educated, dynamic young population. In the imagination of those social groups, Uruguay is becoming an ageing country, stagnant, boring and without prospects". And she goes further to say that "this is a country one should leave"<sup>28</sup>. The massive emigration of the last decade means that everyone has family or acquaintances living abroad, which, in turn, mean that at the time of leaving, emigrants feel less uprooted. These networks of family and friends abroad act as support and facilitate the decision to leave the country.

The charts presented in the Annex illustrate the population pyramid age and the age pyramids of recent immigrants. They show Uruguay as a country with an ageing population pyramid, with few young people and where most children are born in the poorest sectors of society, and that migration is concentrated in the 15 to 30/40 years belt, which is not a very bright future. With respect to the second variable under analysis, it should be mentioned that the general fertility rate (the number of children women have in the absence of changes in mortality and fertility rates by age, GFR) in Uruguay stood at 2.04 in 2005 and 2.03 in 2006 (latest available data), according to data from 2006 and 2007, respectively, of the National Statistics Institute. According to the same source, the growth rate for the whole country in 2006 was 0.284% and life

<sup>27</sup> CABELLA, Wanda. PELLEGRINO, Adela. *Emigración*. En *Importante pero Urgente. Políticas de población en Uruguay*. 2007. Montevideo. UNFPA – Rumbos

<sup>28</sup> In *Migración uruguaya: un enfoque antropológico*. 2007. UDELAR



expectancy stands at 75.72 years for the total population (72.12 for men and 79.52 for women). If we take the definition of *population replacement* as "the ability of a population to replace itself through the numerical replacement of women, the future procreators"<sup>29</sup>, and if it corresponds to a total fertility rate above 2.1 children per woman, we conclude that Uruguay has been under this capacity for at least the past 3 years. The decline in fertility and the ageing population is a global issue that applies to Latin America. The difference is that it is still a relatively new phenomenon in this continent, which started to be noticed in the 1970s, when Uruguay had already been experiencing it for two decades. The data indicate that in the 1950s, when the TFR was 5.9<sup>30</sup> in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Uruguay and Europe it stood at 2.7. This exceptional performance of Uruguay is linked to its own historical process. The level of social and economic development in the first half of the twentieth century made the country adopt early reproductive behaviour that generalized the small family model. At a time when the country was doing well and poverty levels were still low, this phenomenon did not catch anyone's attention (perhaps it was even considered to be *advanced*) and was perceived as being in line with developed countries in Western Europe. It must be emphasized that, in historical terms, the demographic issue in general was never part of any government's policy, neither general nor specific, as it was never considered or expected that it could be a problem.

However, the *golden age* has gone, and the general trend in the continent, to which Uruguay was no stranger, of resorting to an economic policy based on import substitution in an attempt to industrialize a country that did not have the resources (material or human) required for it, provoked a crisis that deepened political problems, enabling a dictatorship that left the country impoverished and in debt in just over a decade. Since then, the total fertility rate remained relatively stable between 1985 and 1996, above 2.4 children per woman. But the scenario was different, disparities and inequalities among the population had worsened, poverty rates had increased and births were very different depending on sector of the population that was taken into account.

Thus, in this period, it can be said that the low fertility in the richest quintile of the population was offset by rising teen pregnancy (whose maternity peaked in 1997 at 74.2 ‰ in women between 15 and 19 years of age<sup>31</sup>) and the number of children per woman in the poorest quintiles. From there on, the TFR falls again gradually reaching the below the population replacement rate milestone in 2004. This continuous decline is explained by two phenomena: on the one hand, despite the increase in teen pregnancy, the number of children fell (specifically from the third son onwards) per woman in the poorest quintiles and, on the other hand, the high emigration in the ages who reproduce the most.

The ageing of the population, given the high life expectancy in the country and the low fertility and population growth, coupled with high emigration rates, mean that we are facing a problem that cries out for governmental urgent action, especially in regard to emigration.

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<sup>29</sup> Definition advanced by Varela Petito in his article *Fecundidad*, in *Importante pero Urgente*. 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Data from CEPAL ([www.cepal.org](http://www.cepal.org))

<sup>31</sup> Data taken from Varela Petito in *Fecundidad*, after statistics of the Ministry of Public Health.



Although the State facilitated the return of those who, as a result of the 2009 crisis, lost their jobs in Europe or, due to their social situation, decided to return, this does not change the situation described above, as the country continues to provide few opportunities for qualified young people and the technological developments that can bring new challenges are not being implemented. Rather conservatively, the country rejects them for fear of changes, which is typical of an idiosyncrasy that has been anchored in the 1950s and the success which represented the Maracaná.

Births are few and almost half of them occur in the poorest sectors of society, with repercussions in education, which although still good in terms of access to early childhood education (3-5 years), has high rates of grade repetition and dropout, and very high dropout rates in secondary education (among the highest in South America, according to UNICEF Uruguay). Our demographic indicators also affect health because it causes diversion of resources to address the needs of the population at the expense of maternal and child health, although the sexual and reproductive health policies undertaken by the state since 2000 have been successful to the extent that it has succeeded in reducing the average number of children in the poorest sectors of society.

## V. Conclusions

In a society that historically looked outwards, mainly to Europe, in constant contact with its Spanish and Italian origins, whose migratory waves did nothing but reinforce those ties, it does not seem strange that young people, who are also the result of additional factors such as those described in this work, have as a natural goal to leave the country and emigrate. On the other hand, "it is a commonplace that in recent decades the globalisation process has accelerated and that we are witnessing a revolution in communications. Access to information has led to the homogenization of aspirations and values, raising expectations of lifestyles and consumption patterns like the ones present in developed societies. The impossibility of accessing these lifestyles was an additional stimulus to trigger the emigration potential. It is also true that the world is connected like one could never have imagined it in the past and that emigrants can communicate in real time with family and friends. In other words, while facilitating transfers, the new technologies reinforce the links and sense of belonging to the places of origin"<sup>32</sup>.

As we have seen, Uruguay suffers from many of the social problems that globalisation has exposed, for which reason it is perhaps no surprise for the unsuspecting reader of its history that until the mid-twentieth century, it was out of the parameters in the Latin American context. The social problems that the country must face arise as a result of the implementation of misguided policies and excessive dependence on erratic neighbouring economies, especially from the 1990s onwards with the creation of MERCOSUR. The high emigration rate and, as a result, the "brain drain", due to the fact that highly qualified young people are leaving the country, is leaving Uruguay without human resources capable of replacing the next generation that will retire, turning the environment into something mediocre, impoverishing the country and creating a scenario that allows the development of political radicalism and populist movements that have historically jeopardized the development of the region.

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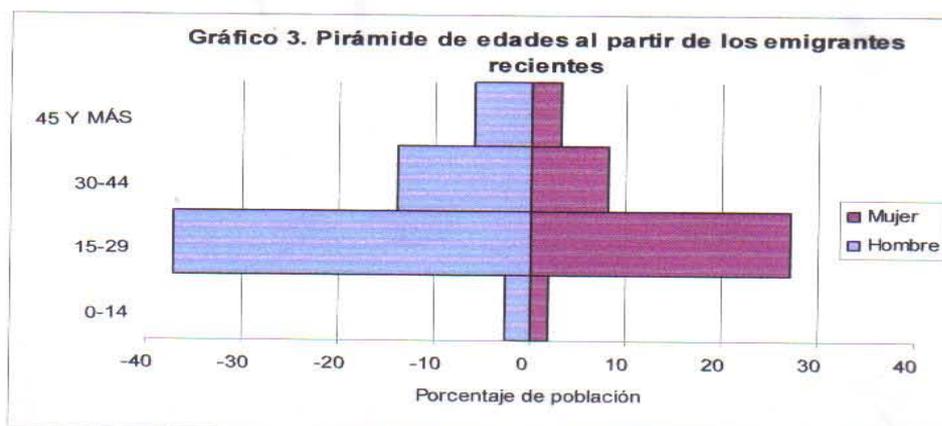
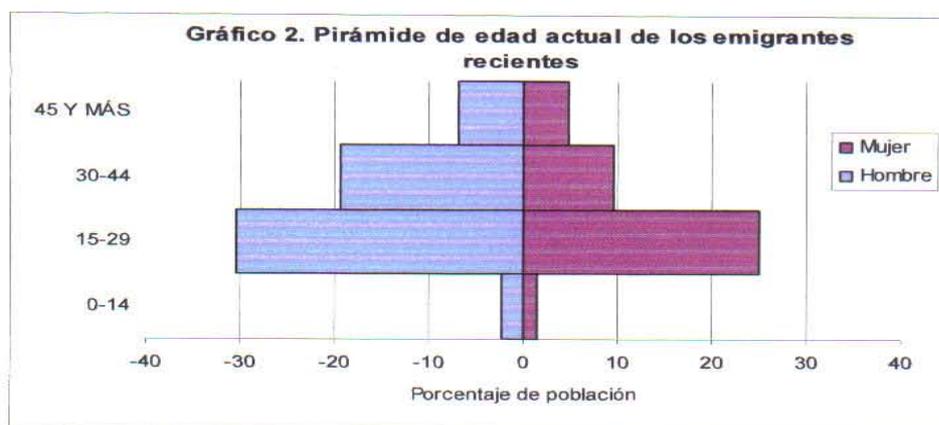
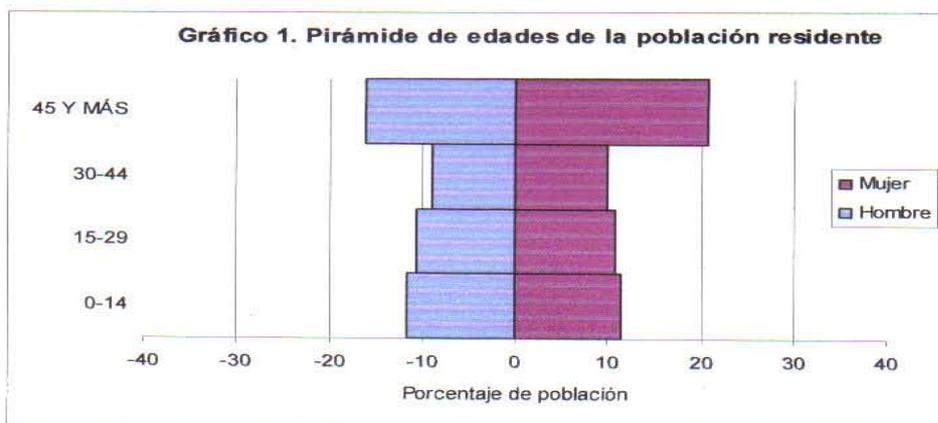
<sup>32</sup> Adela Pellegrino in the Prologue of *Migración uruguaya: un enfoque antropológico*.



It would appear that a small country like this, which once had a place in the world as the cutting edge in terms of its social policies and the first to organize a World Cup and win it twice, could have avoided getting back in the world, but this time to enter the list of countries worthy of international cooperation for development. However, the individual idiosyncrasy component of the Uruguayans has facilitated and still accounts for the path of decline the country has entered, and this fact should not be underestimated. However, what is important today is that the problems are there and that the state is delaying addressing them. What is worse, in some cases the state barely recognizes the necessity to address them. It is clear that beyond the social problems of poverty, inequality, health, education, etc., whose importance is not denied here, the demographic problem is the most urgent and important because without people, without capable young people, no project in the country can have sustenance.



**ANNEX**



Source: *Informe sobre migración internacional en base a los datos recogidos en el módulo migración de la Encuesta Nacional de Hogares Ampliada 2006*. UNFPA – PNUD – INE



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