

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



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LABOUR SOCIAL MARKET

Nuno Serra

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragilities of excessive investment in tourism, assumed in recent years as one of the main “engines” of development in the country. Even before the pandemic, this excessive burden raised important questions in terms of employment (namely precariousness and low wages), housing (with the steep rise in prices, gentrification and the expulsion of residents to the peripheries of large cities, especially Lisbon and Oporto) and in various activities not linked to the dynamics of tourism (which have also found it difficult to locate in larger urban spaces).

However, even the most optimistic prospects of a general economic activity recovery, once the pandemic outbreak is over, come up against the fact that tourism (travel, accommodation and catering) cannot be expected to recover at the same pace as other sectors. In fact, it is quite unlikely that we return – at least in the next few years – to the levels of tourism demand, mainly foreign, registered before the crisis. This, of course, limits the ability to reabsorb many of the jobs now lost.

Despite all the destabilising effects in various areas, the recent focus on tourism has been one of the main factors in employment recovery in recent years, which has reversed the

results produced in this domain by the austerity policies carried out between 2011 and 2015. In fact, the sector generated job opportunities for a significant number of inactive and unemployed people (namely the long-term unemployed), whose profile, in terms of age and qualifications, made their return to the job market difficult.

Today, given the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector, which is expected to last (longer than in other sectors, anyway), the absorption of this contingent of labour could be achieved, at least in part, with public investment in a number of services in which Portugal has a deep structural deficit: namely, the responses to demographic ageing and the growing demand for care, in a logic of proximity and diversification of support modalities (residential and health units, home support, community intervention, etc.).

These are, in fact, areas that require a very significant workforce, with a great diversity of profiles and a variety of qualification requirements. Therefore, investing in these areas in terms of employment will not only alleviate the current deficit of services, but also provide an opportunity for training and capacity-building of low-skilled assets.