



Sociological aspects of immigration in Spain. Impact and challenges

Carlos Pereda, Walter Actis y Miguel Ángel de Prada.¹

Colectivo IOE

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to give a socio-demographic dimension to immigration in Spain. Its main objective is to highlight the change which, over the last few years, has turned Spain, traditionally a country of emigrants, into one of immigrants. In addition to this, it highlights the very important positive effects that immigration has brought not only to the Spanish economy but also to its work, education and religious contexts. Finally, it analyses how the native Spanish population has changed its attitude to immigration.

Key words: immigration; impact; challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Spain, a centre of attraction for international immigrants

Over the last decade, Spain has become one of the main destinations of international migration, with an average annual intake of 575,000 people between 2001 and 2008. This incoming flow accounts for 81% of the dramatic increase in the total population, which has gone up from 41 to 46 million inhabitants. Moreover the low native birth rate, joined to the younger age of the new citizens explains their greater weight in the overall RNI (Rate of Natural Increase = crude birth minus crude death) growth in the population. 14.2% of births between 2001 and 2007 were to a foreign mother. To this figure needs to be added those births to a Spanish mother and a foreign father (2.4%). Therefore, their impact on Spain's demographic growth, that is, the total of the migratory and RNI (births minus deaths), needs to be placed at around 85%.

With almost 6 million people who have immigrated, that is, registered but born in another country, and 5.2 million foreigners or people registered but with non Spanish nationality as of 1 January 2008, Spain has become the tenth country in the world as regards the total number of immigrants; this overturns the long

historical tradition which characterised it as a country of emigrants. Even though around one and a half million Spaniards still live abroad, the figure was surpassed by that of immigration at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to the United Nations Population Division (2007), Spain was the third country in the world which had most increased the number of people who had immigrated in absolute terms since 1990, behind the United States of America and Germany, and the one which had had the biggest increase in relative terms. The OECD observed that in 2005, Spain had become one of the countries with the highest number of foreign workers, exceeding traditional countries of immigration such as France and the United Kingdom, and even exceeding the United States and Germany in relative terms.

Forty per cent of the foreigners registered at the beginning of 2008 come from one of the present countries of the European Union, 16% of them from the recent EU members, Rumania and Bulgaria, and less than 2% from developed countries. Therefore 58%, that is, 3.1 million people, originally come from the 'less developed' world. Among them, people from Morocco, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina, China, Peru and Brazil stand out, all of them with a contingent larger than 100,000. Chart 1 shows the difference between the number of foreign (nationality) and people who have immigrated (country of birth), which is very noticeable in countries such as Argentina, France, Germany, Italy, Colombia and Peru.

¹ Colectivo IOE www.colectivoioe.org. This article summarises and updates the book *Immigrantes, nuevos ciudadanos*, FUNCAS, Madrid, 2008, written by COLECTIVO IOÉ (IOÉ GROUP) in collaboration with Graciela Malgesini, Ana I. Planer and Daniel Wagman, and the article published by the same authors in *Papeles de Relaciones Ecosociales y Cambio Global*, 103, 95-104 (2008).

	Year	A Total population	B Immigrants	% B/A	C Foreigners	% C/A	D Residents	% (C-D)/C Illegal
Census	1971	34.117.623	365.376	1,1	183.195	0,5	148.400	19,0
	1981	37.723.299	625.907	1,7	233.082	0,6	183.422	21,3
	1991	38.846.823	840.594	2,2	350.062	0,9	278.696	20,4
Continuous register	2001	41.116.842	1.969.270	4,8	1.370.667	3,3	895.720	34,7
	2002	41.837.894	2.594.052	6,2	1.977.944	4,7	1.109.060	43,9
	2003	42.717.064	3.302.440	7,7	2.664.168	6,2	1.324.001	50,3
	2004	43.197.684	3.693.806	8,6	3.034.326	7,0	1.647.011	45,7
	2005	43.975.375	4.355.300	9,9	3.691.547	8,4	1.977.291	46,4
	2006	44.708.964	4.837.622	10,8	4.144.166	9,3	2.738.932	33,9
	2007	45.200.737	5.249.993	11,6	4.519.554	10,0	3.021.808	33,1
	2008*	46.063.511	5.995.962	13,0	5.220.577	11,3	3.979.014	23,8**

Table 1. Total immigrant and foreign Spanish population (1971-2008)

Source: Own research based on the population census and on the continuous population register carried out by the Nacional Statistics Office, Spanish Home Office, which regards legal foreigners as residents. The figures from the Home Office correspond to 31 December of the year indicated. Those of the municipal registers correspond to 1 January; because of this we have recorded the data from the Home Office as if they corresponded from 1 January of the following year.

(*) Provisional data, except for residents

(**) If the 626,000 European Union citizens who are registered but lack the certificate of residence are computed as regular, the proportion of illegal people decreases to 13.2%

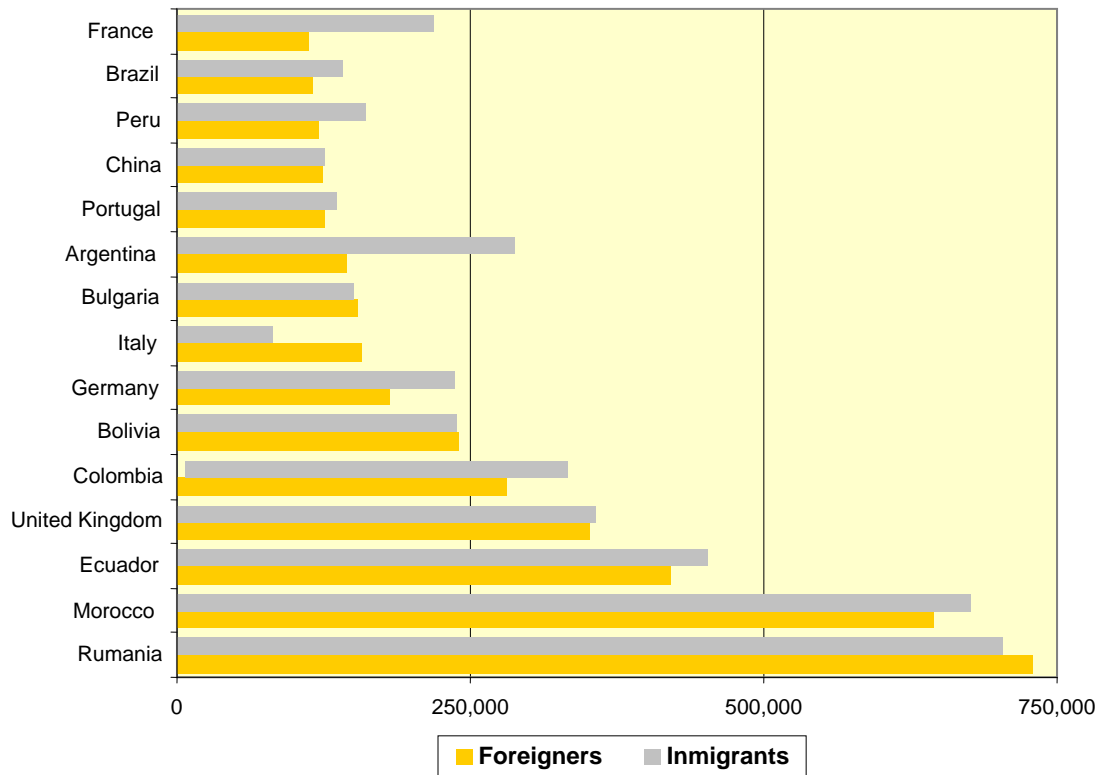


Chart 1. Main groups of foreigners and immigrants in Spain (2008)

Source: own research based on the 1 January 2008 *Avance del Padrón Municipal del INE* (Summary of municipal registers of the Spanish Statistics Office).

The North-South economic divide, which has increased over the last few decades on account of neoliberal policies and growing external debt, lies at the origin of the migration from peripheral countries towards countries in a more advantageous position within the hierarchy of the globalised world. These south to north emigrants are a part of the most important current international trend: whilst high income countries, according to the classification carried out by the World Bank, has increased stable immigration by 40 million people since 1990, going up from 72 million to 112 million, medium income countries maintain the same figure (50 million) and low income countries have gone down from 33 to 28 million. In relative terms to the world population, transnational migration has not surpassed the level of 3% over the last few decades. However, the unequal geographical distribution explains why Northern countries have the false impression that economic globalisation has sped up migration in the whole planet.

Over the last few years Spain has been in the centre of this wave of South to North migration, that with a growing labour market has increased the number of workers by more than 5 million between 1999 and 2007, 2.3 million of them foreigners. The restrictive frontier policy and the difficulties in getting legal permits, in spite of having a job, were the reasons for a dramatic increase of the number of people in an irregular situation. The comparison between the number of people registered (total of foreigners) and those with a legal residence permit ('legal' foreigners) indicated that the "sin papeles" (*paperless* people, in other words, those with no legal residence permit), numbered 1.7 million in 2004, that is, about 46.4% of the foreign population. The regularisation process introduced by the Socialist government in 2005 and the changes in the policy of access to job permits reduced that number down to 1.2 million people (20% of the foreigners). If we leave the citizens of the European Union out of the calculations, the number of really '*illegal*' people, that is, those likely to be forced out of Spain on account of their nationality and who can only work in the underground economy, is considerably lower (690,000) but still very significant (13% of the foreigners). As for the labour market during the first three months of 2008, 30% of the foreign workers registered in the Economically Active Population Survey, who amount to 868,000 people, had not been registered with Social Security (March, 2008).

Impact and challenges for social cohesion

The extraordinary contribution of immigrants, who represented 13% of the total population in 2008, has had important effects on the economy of the country. Specialist reports conducted by the Administration and the private sector coincide with the OECD and point out that immigration was one of the key factors in the extraordinary behaviour of the Spanish economy between 1995 and 2005 in terms of growth, employment and public finance. This group of both legal and '*illegal*' immigrants accounted for 30% of the GDP between these years and almost 50% of the employment created between 2000 and 2005. As for public finance, foreign residents supplied 6.6% of the public budget in 2005

(23,400 million Euros) and generated costs 20% lower than that sum. In the same year, the favourable balance to the public funds (4,784 million euros) represented 50% of the surplus registered by the whole of public administration. When part of the citizenry attributes to immigrants the saturation and degradation of some public services, such as health (Regidor, 2008)¹ or education, they do not bear in mind that such services increase at the rhythm of incorporation of new contributors (two million foreign contributors in 2007) who, furthermore, contribute to the public coffers more than they receive.

The new inhabitants have boosted the demand for goods and services, especially those related to housing and food, which has favoured the development of these economic sectors. In addition to this, the decisive role of immigrants can be seen in relation to city public transport and long distance travel (airline companies), to the logistic market (courier and distribution companies), sales for mobile phones and second-hand cars, and so on. Immigrants have revitalised rentals in housing and are the main pool of new purchasers. In the finance sector (banks, savings banks, money sending companies, among others) they represent the most recent customers that a good deal of advertising and publicity campaigns and new products are directed at. Interestingly enough, they also generate a new 'ethnic' economy which occupies both immigrants and natives and represents a net expansion of production and employment in Spain.

By means of the remittances sent to their relatives (8,130 million Euros in 2007, that is, 0.8% of the GDP), immigrants contribute to the development of their countries of origin. In a very short space of time, Spain has become the first remitter of funds in the European Union and the fifth one in the world. In 2006, the whole amount of the Ayuda Oficial al Desarrollo (the Spanish government's official aid for development) was less than half of the remittances registered by the Banco de España (See Chart 2).

As for the labour world, immigration has provided an abundant supply in sectors where beforehand manpower used to be lacking, such as domestic service and agriculture. Furthermore, its presence is increasingly greater in construction, the hotel and catering trade, commerce and transport. The changes in registrations in Social Security allow us to verify occupational mobility from the special sectors of agriculture and domestic service to the general sector, which has gone up from 55% in 1999 to 72% in 2008.

According to the Economically Active Population Survey, there is a pronounced polarisation among the foreigners in relation to their countries of origin. Whereas 91% of the non European-Union immigrant workers are employees, only 69% of the European Union immigrants are wage earners (among Spanish citizens the figure is 79%). The

¹ A recent study shows that the immigrant population uses primary attention services, specialised services and hospitalisation to a lesser degree; they more often use emergency services, partly due to their ignorance of how the system works (Regidor, 2008).

status and working conditions of the European Union workers are better than those of the Spanish population; in contrast to the non European-Union wage earners, who mostly belong to work sectors and

categories of lesser quality, with temporary contracts in 62% of the cases (twice as many as with native Spaniards) and, in general, with lower wages.

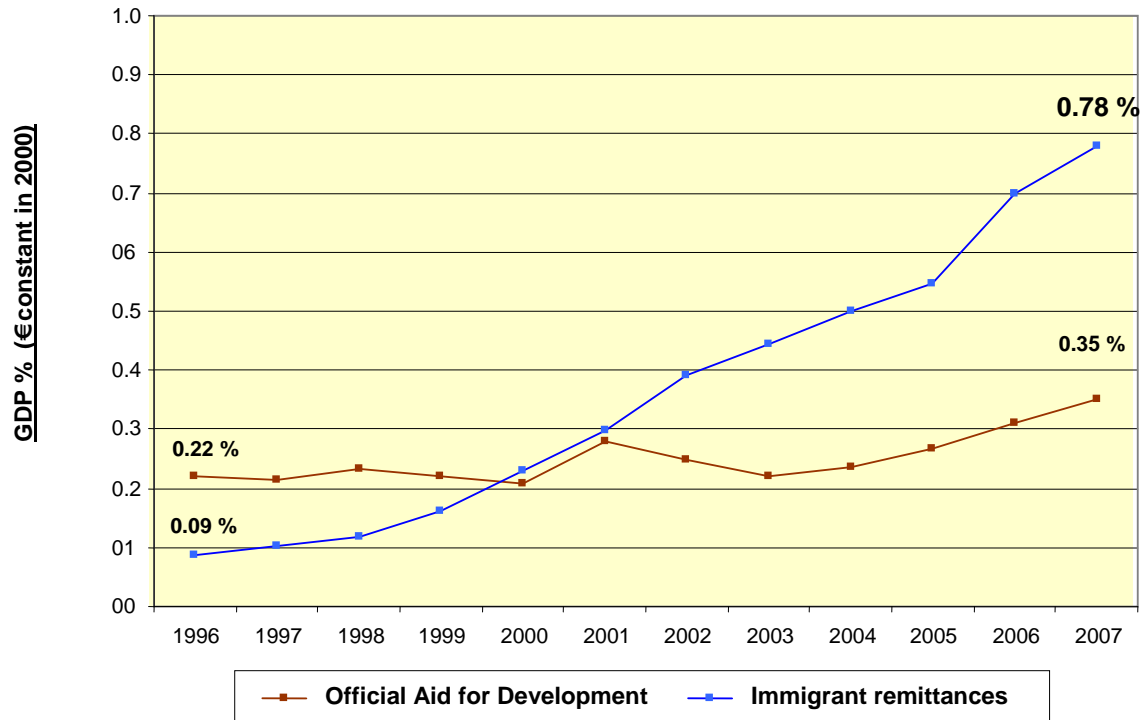


Chart 2. Evolution of immigrant remittances and Official Aid for Development in relation to the Spanish GDP (1996-2007)

Source: Own research from data of the Banco de España's *Balanza de Pagos* (Balance of payments, on www.bde.es) and the *Observatorio de La Deuda en la Globalización* (Observatory of debt in globalisation), en www.odg.cat.

The situation is even worse for immigrants from Africa and from outside the European Union (Rumanians and Bulgarians in this case are included until 2006) and somewhat better for Latin Americans and, especially, for Asians.

The work done by immigrants has sometimes facilitated the promotion of employment for the local population. In this sense, it is remarkable that a high number of foreign women (more than 300,000 according to the Economically Active Population Survey) do not take care of their own families in their countries of origin but do carry out this task in Spanish households. This allows local women to join the paid working world without substantially modifying their roles at home and so facilitating conciliation between work and family life.

The impact of immigration has also been important in primary and secondary schools. On the one hand, the students coming from other countries (608,000 registered in the school year 2006-07) have partially made up for the dramatic fall of almost one and a half million Spanish students during the last fifteen years, caused by the decrease in the birthrate. On the other hand, the attendance of foreign students, higher in proportion in state schools (8.9% of the student population) than in private schools (4.2%), has brought about a social and cultural diversity that raises questions about the traditional homogeneous model of education and has given rise to remarkable controversy in the pedagogic field. The strategies to pay attention to student diversity display a range that

goes from segregation to that of assimilating multicultural or antiracist education, and which goes through remedial education, and education for citizenship and human rights, tolerance and the promotion of cultural plurality. In spite of these strategies, legislative documents such as acts, laws or school regulations show ambiguity between the multicultural approach, which is seldom put into practice, and that of remedial education.

As for the field of religion, freedom of worship was established by the Constitution in 1978. However, as a social fact, pluralism of faith has come in later, due to immigration. The agreement between Catholics between the Spanish State and the Vatican was replicated in 1992 by the corresponding agreements with the Islamic, Evangelist and Jewish communities. However, these creeds find more problems to carry out their activities than the Catholic church and, above all, are subject to lack of sympathy and to prejudice by the original population. Islam is especially identified with fanatic activities and having values opposed to those of western culture. Catholic people often suspect and discriminate against them instead of starting from the premise of respect for religious diversity and dialogue in order to try and build a background culture common to all, which creates richness out of difference and not discrimination.

Prejudice against immigrants nurture the idea that immigrants are one of the major problems in present-day Spain. As a matter of fact, according to the latest monthly Barometers of the CIS (The

Spanish Centre for Sociological Research), immigration is perceived by the Spanish population as the fourth most important problem, after unemployment, terrorism and housing; they are especially blamed for increasing lack of safety on the streets, an idea in which alarmist or biased information comes from some of the mass media and some political parties. However, according to the Home Office², the number of crimes per inhabitant in Spain decreased 22.7% between 2002 and 2006, when immigration grew 86.5%, which therefore does not support this thesis of blame. In addition to this, the number of foreigners arrested by the police creates confusion, as they regard 46% of the people arrested in 2005 as criminals, including immigrants whose administrative situation is irregular, which is an offence, but not a crime³, and foreigners or tourists just passing through, normally drug couriers, who do not reside in Spain. This group of people amount to 40% of those accused of a crime. The same lack of rigor appears in the statistics on prisoners, when they are held in preventive custody, whose sentence has not yet been pronounced, and when dealing with visiting tourists and foreigners. Without counting these two groups, the proportion of immigrant prisoners gets reduced by more than 50 per cent and reaches a rate very near to its weight in the population.

The model of citizenship. A discussion

Until the year 2000, when the proportion of foreigners in Spain did not even amount to 3%, the surveys conducted by the CIS (The Spanish Centre for Sociological Research) and those promoted by the European Parliament agreed that the majority of the Spanish population favored or was ambivalent towards immigration. Less than 10% gave xenophobic responses. According to that year's Eurobarometer, Spain was the third most tolerant country in Europe, after Sweden and Finland. However, the surveys show that in the middle of the current decade, with three times more immigrants, 30% of people are intolerant, which surpasses the ambivalent group and approaches the tolerant, who still keep being the largest group. 'Intolerant' people feel that immigrants do not have a positive influence on society and living with them is a nuisance, for which reason they should be expatriated or accepted only selectively on condition that they get assimilated into the mainstream culture, that is to say, that they adjust to native Spanish customs.

According to opinion surveys, most xenophobes have a low educational level and low economic status, and see their future with little optimism. On the other hand, the groups with higher qualifications and income tend to show more tolerant positions.

Their optimistic family and social perspectives seems to have an effect on their favourable perspective of immigration. However, quality oriented studies, which openly explore social thinking, permit greater precision in the native population's attitude to immigration, which we have summarized into four basic positions and which give rise to further statuses of citizenship:

- *Xenophobic rejection.* Starting from mistrust towards those who do not share Spanish culture, its history and traditions, immigrants are accused of jeopardizing the local identity and habits, above all if the immigrants are many and are out of control. Xenophobes express their support for closing borders, for repatriating those immigrants with no identity papers and for confining the ones staying into ghettos and labour niches. The idea that Spain belongs to the Spaniards brings about the status of *denied citizenship*.
- *Subordinate insertion.* On the basis of the national preference principle, immigration is legitimized only in as much as it benefits the interests of the native population and is adjusted to the rules and current habits of the country. As for work, immigrants must accept the jobs that the Spaniards leave for them (complementary economy). If these conditions are met, the presence of immigrants is accepted, but with a second-rate status of *subordinate citizenship* ('Spaniards first').
- *Competitive integration.* A plural Spain is supported from the point of view of the defence of a liberal-democratic state, which includes not only various autonomous region nationalities but also an immigrant population with a number of cultural expressions. All citizens, either native or foreign, should have the same rights to perform and develop in life, in accordance with their own merits, and compete in the job market with equal treatment, ("there are no first-rate people and second-rate people"). This implies a status of *equally balanced citizenship*.
- *Institutional projection.* Starting from the recognition of the creative power which sees foreign groups as protagonists in social life, the contribution of foreigners is put forward as a means to cope with problems of economic inequality and cultural discrimination, both at the national level and in North-South relationships. The proposal consists in moving from individualism to an *active citizenship* which may be intercultural and projective, in other words, in 'doing things to bring democracy alive'.

It has been shown that the opinions about the immigrant population greatly depend on how the Spanish situation is perceived, which is also tightly linked to the social and economic situation of the subjects. To the best placed on the social scale, Spain is a country with good opportunities for personal development which allows for a good quality of life in spite of being subjected to strong tensions due to intense economic and demographic growth (immigration flux). On the other hand, from the perspective of the groups with the worst position on the social scale, the present-day model of development is making their lives and working conditions harder (problems of coexistence, loss of

³See COLECTIVO IOE, indicador 1 of the dimension of Safety and Justice, in the *Barómetro Social de España* (The Spanish Social Barometer), on www.cip-ecosocial.fuhem.es.

⁴ Without going to the Italian extreme, whose government intends to turn illegal immigration into crime, the recently passed 'shameful guidelines' authorise governments to hold those illegal immigrants in process of extradition in detention centres which often become substitutes for prison. Some politicians contribute greatly to the diffusion of a picture of immigration linked to the lack of safety.

purchasing power, difficulties in having access to housing, lack of safety on the streets, or deterioration of public services), which is accentuated by the arrival of a great number of immigrants, with whom living and working spaces have to be shared, and who are blamed by many for the worsening of the situation.

In this way the differences in the place of birth, which create the distinction between native and immigrant, and that of nationality, Spanish or foreign, overlap in everyday life not only with differences in economic position but also with those of cultural and religious adherence, ethnic background and gender and so on. Advocates of egalitarian coexistence play down these differences and emphasise what everybody has in common as a basis for a cohesive society and for an enriching cultural exchange. Other times, however, the differences are experienced in confrontation and perceived as a struggle for power between the two groups, with a discriminating pole and a discriminated one. In our case, many immigrants from the South have suffered the legal barriers of the Spanish immigration policy and have had to cope with the public opinion's ideological prejudices against people from other ethnic backgrounds, cultures and origin. As for workers, they are mostly found in unstable and marginal jobs, above all in their first stage of stay in Spain. The extra condition of being a woman adds one more possible reason for discrimination.

However, it may be misleading to identify the reason for rejection with such differences, since such a correlation does not often exist. The relationship is rather the other way around. As a matter of fact, it is preexisting power and inequality relationships that trigger a climate of confrontation and uses differences as an excuse to exert control or to keep the privileges of some groups over others, whether that be the alleged superiority of the white race, western culture, the male sex or the political and financial hierarchy in the North-South relationships, or the tooth and nail defence of one's own national privileges, even those of the "poor white", against those of the immigrants.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this data, it is worth pointing out that discrimination and inequality at base, in the economic, legal or educational fields, are sources of social and personal imbalance. In this sense, if the aim is cohesive coexistence, it is a must to promote measures to overcome national and international relationships of hierarchy and domination that currently prevail among states, cultures and social class.

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