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Research reports

Country context paper – Spain

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Migration Profile

At the start of 2011, the number of foreigners inscribed in the municipal population registers in Spain stood at 5.7 million, equivalent to 12.2 per cent of the total population. Of them, 2.4 million were nationals of other EU countries and 3.3 million of the rest of the world. Peculiarly, these figures include immigrants in irregular condition – as inscription in the population registers is not contingent upon the legal status --, but not persons born outside Spain who have acquired Spanish citizenship. Immigrants have come from a host of countries, especially from Latin America, Northern Africa and Eastern Europe, but also from Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the conversion of Spain to an immigrant-receiving society dates from the mid-1970s or early 1980s, the majority of today's immigrants arrived in relatively recent years. Indeed, between roughly 2000 and 2008 Spain experienced something akin to an immigration boom. In less than ten years, the size of the immigrant population increased from about 1 million in the year 2000 to over 5.5 million in 2009, without counting the half a million who naturalized in the same period. In these years Spain was the second largest recipient of immigrants in the OECD, only surpassed by the much larger United States. Sustained economic growth between the mid-1990s and 2007, at rates generally above those of the EU average, was the main driver behind the dramatic increase in the number of immigrants. Economic growth, which was labour-intensive in nature, resulted in vigorous employment creation. The increasingly shrinking cohorts that in a rapidly aging population entered every year the labour market took only half of the new jobs. As a result, the demand for foreign labour was very large. A sort of virtuous circle between economic growth and immigration took place: the former induced the arrival of a large number of immigrants and the latter decidedly contributed to economic growth. In turn, the settlement of millions of immigrant workers, increasingly accompanied by members of their families, made imperative the adoption of measures and policies geared to foster integration and social cohesion.

The financial and economic crisis which started in the summer of 2007 would finally put an end to the immigration boom, albeit with a time lag, as substantial flows persisted until the last part of 2008, thus aggravating unemployment. In 2009 the deceleration of incoming immigrant flows was clearly under way, pointing towards the stabilization of the size of the population of immigrant background that would take place in 2010. While the crisis has increased the number of immigrants who return home, there is no doubt that the majority have decided to stay, despite very high rates of unemployment. The explosion of the construction bubble that had been growing in Spain in the preceding years has largely contributed to high rates of joblessness. A sizeable proportion of the workforce of immigrant background was employed in the construction sector and related areas, the first and hardest hit by the crisis. As a result, male immigrants have been much more affected by job destruction than their female counterpart, reversing previous trends.

Immigration in Spain is above all labour migration. Most immigrants have come in search of employment, or as relatives accompanying migrant workers, and filling vacancies in the labour market has been the foremost justification for admitting immigrants. Coupled with the fact that the majority has come in relatively recent years, this explains the dominant weight of young adults in the immigrant population. Increasing family reunion flows, especially since 2000, are responsible for the increasing numbers of children and youngsters of immigrant background, but the size of the second generation, i.e. children born in Spain of Immigrant parents, is still limited. Asylum seekers and refugees have represented a very minor component of the flows.

Migration and Integration Policy

After a first legal framework – the 1985 Foreigners' Law --, whose main aim was to reassure Spain's European neighbours on the eve of its accession to the European Community, Spanish immigration policy has strived to come to terms with the structural mismatch between a generally vigorous demand for foreign labour and the inadequate legal avenues for its admission. The result of such

mismatch has been a persistently high proportion of immigrants in irregular condition. Employers could invite immigrant workers to come to Spain to fill a vacant job only if it was proven that no Spaniard or EU national was available to that effect. A first attempt to alleviate such mismatch and to reduce irregularity was the establishment in 1993 of a sort of labour quota to recruit immigrant workers at origin, known as the *contingente*. Yet it would soon prove to be a slow, bureaucratic and cumbersome procedure, hardly valid for small firms and households.

The wide political consensus that had prevailed until then was broken in 2000, and a very different orientation adopted. Indeed between 2000 and 2004 an attempt was made to curtail irregularity through a 'law and order' approach which made the 'fight against illegal migration' the foremost priority of policy. It met with scant success, as the number of immigrants in irregular condition grew dramatically. In 2004-2005 an ambitious attempt at immigration policy reform took place. Its basic thrust was to reduce irregular migration by widening the legal avenues for the admission of immigrant workers and at the same time to facilitate the satisfaction of the employers' demand for labour. Its cornerstone was a sort of 'shortage list', known as the 'Catalogue of hard to fill occupations'. Companion pieces of such reform were a failed attempt at fighting irregular employment through increased inspection and harsher employers' sanctions, a large regularization in 2005, and a greater emphasis on integration. The 2005 regularization was the largest and most successful one in a long series which counted six previous processes. The new policy was relatively successful in increasing legal migration, but it was less able in its aim to significantly reduce irregularity, and it may have had a number of unexpected and unwanted consequences. All in all, it can be said that, with the exception of the period 2000-2004, immigration policy in Spain has been primarily concerned with making labour immigration legal, more than with regulating its volume.

Efforts to promote the social integration of immigrants by public powers and by organizations of the civil society have been prominent in Spain since the 1990s. A national Integration Plan was adopted by the central government in 1994, and despite the fact that it was little more than a catalogue of principles and good

intentions, valuable instruments such as the Permanent Observatory of Immigration and the Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants resulted from it. In 2007 a more articulated and effective national triennial Plan for Citizenship and Integration saw the light, a plan that is due to be renewed in 2011. In addition, a national fund to support municipal integration efforts and to foster coordination across all levels of government was established by the central government.

Generally speaking, public powers in Spain have shown so far a decided commitment towards immigrant integration. Much the same can be said of countless organizations of the civil society. Spanish integration policies have ranked rather high in the three editions of the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX).

Attitudes to migrants

Its very rapid increase notwithstanding, immigration has met with a generally calm, quiet reception in Spain, without major turmoil. With the partial exception of the years 2000-2004, immigration policies have tended to become more open, and integration efforts more sustained and comprehensive. Spain has remained immune to the restrictive drive that has prevailed in much of Europe in recent years. The level of politicization has been low, with some minor exceptions in recent electoral campaigns. There are no populist, xenophobic right-wing parties at the national and regional level, except for a very small one that has made some strides in a few municipalities in the 2011 local elections, basically in Catalonia. Pro-immigrant, anti-racist groups have generally been more vocal than xenophobic ones. At least until the start of the current economic crisis, immigration impacts were seen as predominantly positive. The idea that the economy needed immigrants, and that they contributed to economic growth, was widely held. This notwithstanding, surveys indicated that some segments of the population were worried about the growing number of immigrants, while accepting that they were needed. Public concerns about immigration tended to rise in 2006 with what was termed the ‘*cayucos* crisis’,

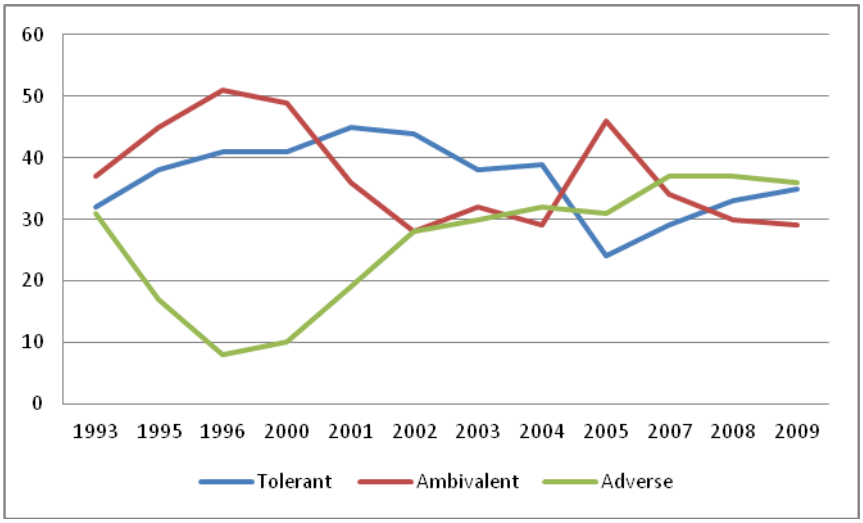
i.e. the sustained arrival to the Canary Islands of some 30,000 Africans in small or medium-sized fishing boats departing from Western African countries. Both the clandestine flows and the acute concerns they generated tended to subside after 2006, as the Spanish government reached agreements with a dozen of governments in the region to cooperate in the control of irregular flows in exchange for compensations.

Apparently, the preceding state of things has not been significantly altered by the crisis. A report on the evolution of racism and xenophobia in Spain published by the Ministry for Employment and Immigration[1] in 2010 points in that direction. The report included data on the attitudes of the Spanish population towards migrants from 1993 until 2009. Three major attitudinal groups can be identified: *tolerant, ambivalent,* and *adverse*. Along the first half of the 1990s *adverse* attitudes tended to decrease. In the following decade they increased from 8% to over 35%. That proportion has remained basically stable since the onset of the economic crisis. Yet, surprisingly, the share of *tolerant* attitudes increased from 24% in 2005 to 35% in 2007, while *ambivalent* attitudes decreased from 46% to 29%. According to Cea d'Ancona[2], *adverse* attitudes towards migrants are more likely among men, the elderly, the least educated, and those with right-wing political views, practising Catholics and people living in rural or semi-urban areas. No reliable and consistent data are available on regional differences in the matter.

Attitudes towards migrants, Spain (1993-2009)

[1] CEA D'ANCONA, M. A. and VALLES, M. (2010). Evolución del racismo y la xenofobia en España. Informe 2010. Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración. Observatorio Español del Racismo y la Xenofobia. [http://www.oberaxe.es/]

[2] CEA D'ANCONA (2009). "Filias y fobias ante la imagen poliédrica cambiante de la inmigración: Claves en la comprensión del racismo y la xenofobia". Revista del Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración. 85.
[http://www.mtin.es/es/publica/pub_electronicas/destacadas/revista/numeros/80/est02.pdf]



Source: The evolution of racism and xenophobia. 2010 Report

The same report contains data on attitudes towards different migrant groups in 2008 and 2009. Spontaneous answers to the question "Do you feel more sympathy towards any specific migrant group?" yielded a third of respondents not giving any answer and one fourth opting for "none of them". The most favoured migrant groups were from Latin America (22%), on account of their common language, history, culture, and religion with Spaniards. Latin Americans were followed by Sub-Saharan Africans and Blacks (8%), and European migrants (5%), while Chinese and Moroccans were mentioned only by 1.5% of the respondents.

Attitudes towards specific migrant groups, Spain (2008)

2008	MORE SYMPATHY	LESS SYMPATHY
None	25,3	21
Latin-American	21,9	3,9
Sub-Saharan African, Black	7,7	No reference
European	4,8	19,1
Chinese	1,5	1,1
North African, Muslim	1,4	22,4
Others	2,9	5,2
All	1,9	No reference
Do not answer	32,6	26,8
TOTAL	100	99,5

Source: The evolution of racism and xenophobia. 2010 Report (http://www.oberaxe.es/)

Spontaneous answers to the question “Do you feel less sympathy towards any specific migrant group?” were in line with the preceding results. In this case, Moroccans, North Africans, Arabs and Muslims had the largest proportion of negative feelings (22%), followed by Romanian and Eastern European migrants (19%). Only 4% expressed less sympathy for Latin American, Ecuadorian and Colombian migrants and only 1.5% mentioned the Chinese.

Qualitative surveys suggest that the functional reasons used by many to justify immigration may be undergoing erosion by the high levels of joblessness. In this case ambivalent attitudes seem to be on the increase, although more tolerant attitudes, both passive and active, still prevail. In the case of Catalonia, the crisis has created a context more propitious for the manifestation of anti-immigrant sentiments that were latent before. Beyond the case of the aforementioned tiny openly xenophobic party, two major parties - the Partido Popular and, to a lower degree, the largest Catalan party, Convergència I Unió – have been more daring in departing from the prevailing pro-immigrant stand and favoured a harsher one. In the opposite direction, a number of local governments, especially that of Barcelona, have launched initiatives, with the cooperation of NGOs, to improve the perception of immigrants and to fight rumours.

Governance structures

The Spanish state is a highly decentralized one. Devolution processes have been vigorous and sustained since the adoption of the 1978 Constitution. Immigration policies, including borders control, residence permits, work permits, family reunification and asylum, belong in the realm of the central government, that is also responsible for the integration of refugees, migrants stranded in the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and victims of trafficking. Conversely, the lion’s share of integration policies correspond to the regions and the municipalities, as these are the levels of government in which most capacities for social integration reside. The regions (called *Comunidades Autónomas*) are primarily responsible for education, health, housing, and care for dependent persons, but

the practical administration of these matters can be passed on to the municipalities, that are also responsible for cultural matters and the provision of social services.

Several *Comunidades Autónomas* and a large number of cities have put forth integration plans over the years. Sub-national governments have tended to foster the participation of organizations of the civil society in integration efforts, and relied on them for many endeavours. Indeed the strength of the 'third sector', working in close partnership with local powers, has been a defining feature of the integration landscape in Spain, as well as a valuable asset.

Local and regional powers foster integration and social cohesion both through general-purpose policies (education, health, employment, housing, social services, etc) and through specific ones (plans for social integration and citizenship, promotion of participation, etc.). The leading role that corresponds to them notwithstanding, the central government has taken an increasingly pro-active stand in the matter in recent years, lending financial support to local integration programs and promoting inter-governmental coordination.