



International immigrants in rural areas: the effect of the crisis in settlement patterns and family strategies.

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Abstract –The aim of this paper is to explore the social and territorial factors linked to the permanence of foreign born immigrants in rural areas after the burst out of the economic crisis in 2008. In the context of an inner, very rural and scarcely dynamic region of Spain, data show that certain family migration patterns –those linked to transnational families and to marriage with Spaniards- and certain labour models – those promoting non-agricultural employment and a high level of labour rural commuting- favour the stay of foreign born population in rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing arrival of foreign born immigrants in rural areas has been considered like an opportunity to stop or even reverse depopulation, especially in less dynamic regions in southern Europe. This migration wave began in the nineties and increased dramatically in the first decade of the present century, fed by the development of industrial agriculture, tourism and construction. Previous research has pointed out that only a reduced number of small municipalities benefit clearly of this rural renaissance, arising an increasing dichotomy between a few dynamic rural areas and the “deep rural”. Another effect of foreign immigration is the deepening of the already great gender imbalance of local populations, as the new arrivals are male in a great proportion. The way in which family regrouping may solve this effect in the long run is not well known. In fact the exploration of residential and occupational mobility of foreign immigrants suggests so far that rural areas and agricultural works –or other employments located in small villages- might be only a temporary station in a way to more rewarding jobs and living conditions in urban areas (Camarero et al., 2011). Another important issue is the well-known existence of very different patterns of spatial settlement, family migration strategies and labour activities in different national groups of foreign immigrants. Those differences result in the predominantly male or female composition of immigration flows, the more or less delayed processes of family

regrouping (Domínguez et al., 2011), and different tendency to rural dwelling or engagement in agricultural works. Research on this topic suggests that the potential of rural areas to retain this new population in the long run depends on both the characteristics of newcomers and rural settlements. The study of the consequences of the current economic crisis in different groups of foreign immigrants living in different types of rural municipalities may help us to progress in the knowledge of this issue.

This paper explores the presence of the main groups of immigrants coming from developing countries in rural areas of Castilla y León, an inner, very rural and depopulated Spanish region, from 2007 to 2014. The aim is to highlight the social and territorial factors linked to settle down in rural areas, with a special attention to their family migration strategies.

DATA AND METHODS

Data used come from the Spanish Register of Inhabitants in the period from 2007 to 2014, and from the Spanish Population Census of 2011. The data used refer to foreign-born population so that people who acquired Spanish nationality are included. Five national groups of foreign immigrants are considered in our paper: those from Bulgaria, Romania, Morocco, Colombia and Ecuador.

RESULTS

In 2007 foreign born population in Castilla y León were near 150.000, accounting for 5,9% of total population, a figure far below from national average (11.6%). The main groups by geographical origins were those from European Union (45%), from America (35%), and from Africa (12%). Five national groups –Romanians, Bulgarians, Moroccans, Colombians and Ecuadorians- accounted for 44.7% of total foreign born. These groups present a clearly different pattern of spatial distribution: immigrants coming from Eastern Europe are the most rural groups (51% of Romanians and 44% of Bulgarians live in non-urban settlements). People from Morocco have also a significant presence in rural areas (38%). Latin American people are the most urban groups: only 23% of Ecuadorians and 19% of Colombians

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live in rural settlements. Sex-ratio varies also dramatically depending on the country of origin: immigrants from Eastern Europe present the most gender balanced composition (90 Romanian women per 100 men; 88 Bulgarian women per 100 men). Immigrants from Morocco are a mainly male population (only 54 women per 100 men), and immigrants from Latin America are a mainly female population (153 Colombian women per 100 men and 108 Ecuadorian women per 100 men).

These figures reflect very different family migration strategies: people from Eastern Europe migrate in a highly "family" way: both men and women migrate, the family regrouping process is fairly quick and there is a high level of endogamous marriages. People from Morocco present a migration pattern that is characterized by crossover marriages and transnational families: males migrate and their spouses keep on living in Morocco. The regrouping of wives and children occurs afterwards when the position of the pioneer is well consolidated. As for the people from Latin America, the peculiar feature is the frequent migration of women, sometimes single mothers that eventually regroup their children and get married in the country of destination with compatriots or, much more frequently than other groups, with Spaniards. Data from Spanish Census 2011 confirm these different family migration patterns: high proportions of Romanians and Bulgarians live in family holdings –holdings where we can find a conjugal or parental relationship– in contrast with the considerable number of men from Morocco living alone or in non-family holdings. As for immigrants from Colombia and Ecuador, it is especially relevant the number of single mothers' holdings and the high proportion of women married with Spaniards. It is noticeable that immigrant women always live in family holdings more than men do whatever their country of origin, and that family holdings are always more frequent in urban areas than in rural areas. Data from Spanish Population Census show also a different pattern of economic activities of rural residents: both men and women from Eastern Europe have a high engagement in agriculture; Morocco men have too and important relation with agricultural works but a considerable relation with extra-local labour markets; women from Morocco and Latin America are mainly employed in tertiary activities.

As for the evolution of immigration in the years of the crisis we can observe a considerable drop of flows between 2007 and 2012, growth rates of foreign-born residents falling steeply. In these years immigrants coming from Eastern Europe and Africa increase their numbers (47% and 46%) more than those coming from America (30%) without any substantial variation in their spatial distribution. At the same time, their sex ratio evolves in a very different way: Moroccan population change towards a much

more balanced figures, especially in rural areas, suggesting family regrouping process; Latin American immigrants increase their female composition, what can be related with selective return of males; Eastern Europe groups do not vary their sex-ratio composition, as if the crisis would not have affected their migration behaviour. Nevertheless between 2012 and 2014 the effects of the crisis begin to be clear with absolute losses of immigrant population in the region (4.9%). Now the biggest reductions are suffered by Romanians and Bulgarians (12% and 17%) especially in rural areas. Moroccan population keep their numbers and increase their presence in rural municipalities. Colombians and Ecuadorians suffer a lighter decrease (3% and 7%). As for sex ratios, they vary in the five groups to a more female composition suggesting that single males are the ones who are mainly leaving, in the case of Eastern Europe and Latin American groups, and that family regrouping processes go on in the case of Moroccans.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The evolution of foreign-born residents in the last years of the crisis suggests that certain family migration strategies favour the permanence in rural areas: those that delay regrouping of transnational families until the position of the male pioneer is consolidated –used mainly by Moroccans–, and those that enhance marriage with Spaniards, characteristic of Latin American women. These family strategies are accompanied with a labour pattern of non-agriculture employment of women and high levels of labour commuting by men. In contrast, the family migration pattern of Eastern Europe immigrants and the high involvement of both men and women in agricultural works seem to be less resilient facing the effects of the crisis.

More research is needed to get further knowledge on the relation of family migration strategies and labour patterns with the permanent settlement of foreign immigrants in rural areas. Other elements intervening in social integration –namely cultural factors– should also be explored in a more detailed way.

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