

**The research paper: «Immigration from Central and Eastern Europe to Spain:  
a historical overview»**

**1. Introduction**

Spain has been for years a traditional country of emigration (especially, to North European countries, like Germany), but nowadays Spain can be considered as a new destination country for immigration flows, that is to say, Spain has evolved in recent decades from a country of emigration to a country of immigration<sup>1</sup>. For instance, after World War II Spaniards found labor opportunities in North and Central Europe where they constituted major industrial labor force for the post-war economic boom. Nevertheless, this pattern of labour emigration changed in the early 1980s due to high return of former emigrants to Spain between 1974 and 1980 and the country's inclusion into the European Union in 1986.

The migration transition took place from the 1970s and 1980s, when emigration decreased and return migration increased along with foreign immigration. Since Spain's entry into the European Union in the early 1980's immigration started to gradually increase, and in the beginning of the 2000s the average annual net inflow of migrants was close to 500,000 people a year, which made Spain one of the largest recipients of immigrants. Important to note, that the transition from emigration to immigration country occurred also during the consolidation of Spain's democratic regime and its significant economic growth, which took place between 1986 and 1990, when the Spanish economy experienced unprecedented levels of expansion and a great number of new jobs was created<sup>2</sup>. Meanwhile, the decline of immigration could be seen since 2008 due to the economic crisis, although annual entries remained still at high

---

<sup>1</sup> Agrela, B. (2002), 'Spain as a Recent Country of Immigration: How Immigration Became a Symbolic, Political and Cultural Problem in the "New Spain'. La Jolla: University of California-San Diego. P. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Calavita, Kitty (2007) "The Immigration Conundrum in Italy and Spain. Laws and policies in Italy and Spain reveal ambivalence about immigration", *America Immigration, Law & American Identity. Insights on Law & Society* 7, 2, pp. 7-10. P. 8.

levels, and the peaks of immigrants' arrivals were witnessed in 2015-2016 and 2017-2018.

As for the origins of immigration to Spain, the arrival of immigrants in Spain can be explained by an economic growth pattern based on the sectors dependent on manual and low-skilled labour<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, immigration to Spain is strongly related to immigrants' participation in a country's labour market along with high level of unemployment in general and shortage of national workers. The influx of immigration to Spain is also associated with the demographic factor, that is to say, a relative scarcity of population in the active age group.

## **2. The evolution of Spanish immigration patterns**

It is possible to distinguish the following immigrant arrival periods in Spain: 1) the first arrivals of immigrants (1975-1985); 2) the period of growth, when Spain was considered as an immigrant-receiving country as the number of immigrants had doubled at that time (1985-1995); 3) the period of a huge increase in the number of foreigners in Spain (1995-2007); 4) the continued arrival of immigrants, but to a lesser extent, which was partly caused by the world financial crisis and the European Union's restrictive political policies (2006-2009)<sup>4</sup>.

In the mid-1980s the migration patterns in Spain considerably changed. From the mid-1980s until the early 1990s first laws on immigration were adopted. For instance, in 1985 the first Foreigners Law, preceded by other related pieces of legislation such as the Law on Asylum and the Constitutional Court rule of 1984, was passed. However, Spain's full incorporation into the European Communities in 1986 was a more

---

<sup>3</sup> Fuentes FJM, Callejo MB. Immigration and the Welfare State in Spain. Social Studies Collection No.31, "la Caixa" Welfare Projects, 2011. Available at: [http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/StaticFiles/StaticFiles/670e2a8ee75bf210VgnVCM1000000e8cf10aRCRD/es/vol31\\_en.pdf](http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/StaticFiles/StaticFiles/670e2a8ee75bf210VgnVCM1000000e8cf10aRCRD/es/vol31_en.pdf). P. 47.

<sup>4</sup> Valero-Matas, J. A., Coca, J. R., & Miranda-Castañeda, S. (2010). The migratory flows in Spain: An analysis of the migration and immigration input from European Union. *Papeles de Población*, 16(65), 233–256. P. 244.

significant factor as at that time the number of Spanish returnees from abroad was higher than the number of Spanish emigrants<sup>5</sup>.

The 1990s were characterised as a birth of the next generation of immigration laws and the simultaneous adoption of the first immigrants' social integration policies. An annual quota or contingent system, which signified Spain's first attempt to establish a mechanism for the orderly regulation of migratory flows, was introduced in 1993. In 1994 the Law on Asylum was significantly modified: a restrictive view of asylum was instated. Moreover, in 1996 the new Royal Decree was adopted, which focused on the social integration of immigrants. At that time integration policies were for the first time considered and a national strategy was drafted (the Plan on Social Integration of Immigrants) along with the Forum on the Social Integration of Immigrants and the Permanent Observatory on Immigration (OPI). Moreover, in 1996 a new conservative government in Spain began to adhere to a more restrictive version of the immigration law (ley de extranjería) and the position regarding the tougher border controls, which was a part of a consolidated position within the European Union<sup>6</sup>.

Later, in 1999, significant changes to the Foreigners Law and integration policies were introduced. In 1999 a second Foreigners Law, which intended to change how the quota functioned and recognised a substantial number of immigrants' rights, was passed. In 2000 a liberal law, that granted immigrants equal rights to Spaniards in terms of public education, health care, housing, and social security protections, was adopted. Between 2000 and 2004 the immigration law was modified several times under a conservative government.

As for the migratory flow management in Spain, it is possible to define three periods<sup>7</sup>. During the first period (from 2000 to 2004) the first migratory management

---

<sup>5</sup> Bruquetas-Callejo, M., Garcés-Mascareñas, B., Morén-Alegret, R., Penninx, R., & Ruiz-Vieytez, E. (2011). Immigration and integration policymaking in Spain. In G. Zincone, R. Penninx, & M. Borkert (Eds.), *Migratory policymaking in Europe* (pp. 235–291). IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. P. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Agrela, B. (2002), 'Spain as a Recent Country of Immigration: How Immigration Became a Symbolic, Political and Cultural Problem in the "New Spain" '. La Jolla: University of California-San Diego. P. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Immigration and integration management in Spain. December 2018. Report prepared by Gemma Pinyol-Jiménez with the assistance of Sílvia Caraballo. P. 8.

mechanisms were established. The immigration policy was centred around two crucial issues: the needs of the Spanish labour market and border control. Furthermore, a first generation of bilateral agreements with such countries as Morocco, the Dominican Republic, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania, was concluded. Spain also under its presidency of the European Council in 2002 addressed the issue of irregular immigration. Between 2005 and 2008 Spain implemented new practices regarding the management of incoming migratory flows and the introduction of mechanisms for integrating resident immigrants into Spanish society, and immigration policy became increasingly related to foreign policy, that is to say, the government focused on the need to strengthen cooperation agreements with sending countries with emphasis put on development aid and technical assistance. Moreover, some efforts were made to foster the social integration of immigrants at the governmental and civil society levels. The third period began in 2008 when the financial crisis broke out. The migration discourse in Spain started to focus not only on immigration, but also on emigration due to reduction in incoming migratory flows.

At that time Spain was interested in developing coordination mechanisms with sending countries and instruments facilitating the contracting of workers in countries of origin to meet labour market demand. The following trends could be witnessed: continued migration related to family reunification (a high rate of first-time residence permits since 2014) and a rise in the number of applications for asylum being presented. At present irregular immigration continues to be a major issue in the migration discourse.

### **3. Romanian and Bulgarian migration to Spain**

Nowadays Romanian migrants represent the largest EU community in Spain. Among Eastern European migrants to Spain Bulgarians also constitute quite a large immigrant community after Romanians, that is why it is essential to consider the Romanian and Bulgarian migration patterns, which are quite the same.

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, which marked the first exercise of freedom for people from Eastern Europe, caused new refugee flows and other migratory

movements in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Algeria and the CIS. In this regard, it is important to point out the fact that Romania, in particular, experienced severe restrictions on the free movement of persons during the ages of communism, but after the fall of the regime, passport administration was liberalised despite the restrictive boarder passing rules during the 90s.

The post-communist migration of individual household members since 1989 from Central and Eastern European countries was characterised by short-term employment abroad and a high proportion of earnings being remitted or repatriated to the migrant's home country<sup>8</sup>. The first eastward EU enlargement in 2004 marked the new period in the outflow of migrants from CEE countries as the scale of flows increased significantly and the motives of migrants also became more diversified. The gradual inclusion of the CEE countries into the European Union migration system led to a relaxing of visa policies. Therefore, foreign workers could match the growing needs of Southern European labour markets in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy.

As for Romanian case, it is possible to define the following phases of Romanian migration before its accession to the European Union in 2007: 1) labour migration mainly to Israel, Turkey, Hungary and Germany (1990-1995); 2) westward migration of workers mostly to Italy and Spain (1996-2002); 3) continued labour migration with arrivals to Italy, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom, when the Schengen area removed visa requirements for Romanian citizens (from 2002)<sup>9</sup>. The most intense migration of Romanians to Spain (Madrid) took place between 2002 and 2009, when the phenomenon of circular labour migration appeared, that is to say, the mobility between the country of origin and the country of destination, which came about as a consequence of the evolution of European integration, which was stimulated by Romania's entry into the EU and the free circulation of labor.

The Romanian immigration pattern has the following characteristics: firstly, it is directed towards the countries of Southern Europe due to substantial immigration

---

<sup>8</sup> Okólski M. European immigrations: Trends, structures and policy implications. – Amsterdam University Press, 2012. – C. 286. P. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ciornei I. National Report Romanian Immigrants in Spain //Report Access to Rights and Civil Dialogue for All, Barcelona. – 2011. P. 8.

networks created in recent years; secondly, the migration process is temporal due to temporary labour and in this case, Romanian migrants are willing to return to their country of origin (return migration). The return of Romanian immigrants to their home country mostly has to do with the economic crisis affecting Spain in terms of unemployment rate, which reached 45% in 2010. Nevertheless, other factors may contribute to such decision: factor of religion; the importance of family in decision-making about return; the fear of losing or not finding work; language knowledge<sup>10</sup>.

Bilateral migration agreement between Spain and Romania was concluded in 2002 (Agreement on management and regulation of labour migration flows) as well as between Spain and Bulgaria in 2003. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that during the 1990s the Romanian migration to Spain was limited, but it increased its intensity in the beginning of the 21st century.

In 2003 an important Eastern European migratory movement, namely from Romania, began. The recent Romanian and Bulgarian migrant flows to Spain can be explained by the following factors: the countries' need of economic growth and their low levels of industrialisation; unemployment rates; relatively high earnings disadvantage; Spain's switch from emigration to immigration country and its economic growth between 1992 and the early 2000s, which made it favourable destination for migrants, and also the establishment of the Schengen Area and regulations regarding the free movement of people.

Important to note that between 2003 and 2006 there was a great increase in the transfer of humans from Romania to Spain. In 2006, there were around 500 thousand Romanian immigrants<sup>11</sup> and there were 751.668 migrants in 2009<sup>12</sup>. Due to the EU's expansion (inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria) in 2007, the number of immigrants arriving per year significantly increased as Spain opened its labour market to migrants from the new EU member states. The number of Bulgarian migrants in 2007 reached

---

<sup>10</sup> Marcu S. Romanian migration to the community of Madrid (Spain): Patterns of mobility and return. – 2011.

<sup>11</sup> SANDELL, R. (2008): A social network approach to Spanish immigration: an analysis of immigration into Spain 1998-2006, FEDEA, Banco Popular, Madrid. P. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ciornei I. National Report Romanian Immigrants in Spain //Report Access to Rights and Civil Dialogue for All, Barcelona. – 2011. P. 9.

18,8% of the total number of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens residing in Spain<sup>13</sup>. Between 2007 and 2009, a moratorium was imposed in Spain that prevented Romanians and Bulgarians from freely entering the labour market. However, after 2009, it was lifted and free circulation of Romanians and Bulgarians was allowed.

As for the labour market position of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in Spain, they constitute a second category of migrants that could occupy, in general, semi-qualified jobs. The main labor sectors in which migrants from Eastern Europe are involved are those related to construction, industry, agriculture and family care<sup>14</sup>.

#### **4. The integration policy model in Spain**

First of all, it is necessary to highlight the fact that immigrant participation in the labour market can be considered as a cornerstone of the Spanish integration policy. In this regard, the country's autonomous communities play a regulatory and instrumental role in such areas as education, training and health care services<sup>15</sup>. As for integration management, there is no standardised model in Spain, that was why regional and local authorities started to develop integration instruments and initiatives, which ensured positive outcome.

The Plan for the Social Integration of Immigrants was adopted in 1994, which signified public authorities' switch from border control to immigration management. The immigrants' integration as a crucial element of the Spanish immigration policy was firstly introduced in the Organic Law 4/2000 that specified the rights and liberties of foreigners in Spain and defined the Spanish government's commitment to social integration. The creation of the Secretariat of State for Immigration and Emigration under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour in 2004 and a government fund supporting integration efforts regionally and locally marked the broadening of the framework

---

<sup>13</sup> Ciornei I. National Report Romanian Immigrants in Spain //Report Access to Rights and Civil Dialogue for All, Barcelona. – 2011. P. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Valero-Matas, J. A., Coca, J. R., & Miranda-Castañeda, S. (2010). The migratory flows in Spain: An analysis of the migration and immigration input from European Union. *Papeles de Población*, 16(65), 233–256. P. 247.

<sup>15</sup> Immigration and integration management in Spain. December 2018. Report prepared by Gemma Pinyol-Jiménez with the assistance of Sílvia Caraballo. P. 32.

concerning integration. One year later, in order to channel supplementary funding to regions and municipalities with rapidly growing populations, the Support Fund for the Reception and Integration of Immigrants and Their Educational Support was implemented. The first Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration was approved in 2007 (until 2010) and was aimed at providing a framework for public sector and civil society integration initiatives.

The Law 2/2009 put emphasis on multi-level management of migration based on cooperation between central administration institutions, local governments and civil society. In 2014 the second version of the Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, which can be considered as a crucial document utilised by Spanish legislators, was adopted. In this sense, the Plan focused on immigrant and autochthonous residents, emphasising that integration was a matter of concern to all members of society.

What is also important to note is that another key element of the country's social integration policy is the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia (OBEAXE), which is responsible for analysing data on racism and xenophobia and facilitating the principles of equal treatment, non-discrimination and the fight against racism and xenophobia.

It is important to point out the fact that Spain has had for years a generally welcoming attitude towards newcomers, but now migration has become more politicised in comparison to previous periods<sup>16</sup>. That is to say, the growth of electoral support for anti-immigration policies can be witnessed in Spain. The anti-immigrant backlash can be explained by most immigrants' occupation in low-wage jobs in contrast to native workers, which traps migrants in poverty<sup>17</sup>. Substantial ambivalence towards immigration can be also witnessed in Spanish society. Moreover, there are

---

<sup>16</sup> Fine, S. und Torreblanca, J.I. (2019): Border Games: Has Spain found an Answer to the Populist Challenge on Migration? ECFR Policy Brief 296. P. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Calavita, Kitty (2007) "The Immigration Conundrum in Italy and Spain. Laws and policies in Italy and Spain reveal ambivalence about immigration", *America Immigration, Law & American Identity. Insights on Law & Society* 7, 2, pp. 7-10. P. 10.



certain integration and assimilation problems due to the emergence of very diverse cultural groups residing in Spain and their socio-cultural differences.

## **5. Conclusions**

It is evident that over the past three decades, evolving from the traditional country of emigration to the country of immigration, Spain has developed particular mechanisms and patterns for addressing increasingly diverse incoming migratory flows from Latin America, Africa and Eastern Europe such as bilateral migration agreements, the laws on immigration, the quota system, the national migration strategy, the integration policy model, and has made certain efforts to align its migration patterns with EU migration policy to design a comprehensive migration framework at the EU level.

As for labour migration from Romania and Bulgaria to Spain, this case is characterised by migration to the countries of Southern Europe due to substantial immigration networks created and temporality of the migration process related to temporal labour and willingness of Romanian migrants to return to their country of origin, which has to do with the phenomenon of return and circular migration. Economic immigration to Spain from countries with low- or medium-incomes has an ambivalent effect: it has led, on the one hand, to the creation of new employment niches for workers, but, on the other hand, to the displacement of native workers.

## **References:**

- 1) Agrela, B. (2002), 'Spain as a Recent Country of Immigration: How Immigration Became a Symbolic, Political and Cultural Problem in the "New Spain'. La Jolla: University of California-San Diego.
- 2) Calavita, Kitty (2007) "The Immigration Conundrum in Italy and Spain. Laws and policies in Italy and Spain reveal ambivalence about immigration", *American Immigration, Law & American Identity. Insights on Law & Society* 7, 2, pp. 7-10.
- 3) Fuentes FJM, Callejo MB. Immigration and the Welfare State in Spain. *Social Studies Collection No.31, "la Caixa" Welfare Projects*, 2011. Available at:

<http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/StaticFiles/StaticFiles/6>

[70e2a8ee75bf210VgnVCM1000000e8cf10aRCRD/es/vol31\\_en.pdf](http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/StaticFiles/StaticFiles/670e2a8ee75bf210VgnVCM1000000e8cf10aRCRD/es/vol31_en.pdf).

- 4) Valero-Matas, J. A., Coca, J. R., & Miranda-Castañeda, S. (2010). The migratory flows in Spain: An analysis of the migration and immigration input from European Union. *Papeles de Población*, 16(65), 233–256.
- 5) Bruquetas-Callejo, M., Garcés-Mascareñas, B., Morén-Alegret, R., Penninx, R., & Ruiz-Vieytes, E. (2011). Immigration and integration policymaking in Spain. In G. Zincone, R. Penninx, & M. Borkert (Eds.), *Migratory policymaking in Europe* (pp. 235–291). IMISCOE Research. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- 6) Immigration and integration management in Spain. December 2018. Report prepared by Gemma Pinyol-Jiménez with the assistance of Sílvia Caraballo.
- 7) Fine, S. und Torreblanca, J.I. (2019): Border Games: Has Spain found an Answer to the Populist Challenge on Migration? ECFR Policy Brief 296.
- 8) Okólski M. European immigrations: Trends, structures and policy implications. – Amsterdam University Press, 2012. – C. 286.
- 9) Ciornei I. National Report Romanian Immigrants in Spain //Report Access to Rights and Civil Dialogue for All, Barcelona. – 2011.
- 10) Marcu S. Romanian migration to the community of Madrid (Spain): Patterns of mobility and return. – 2011.
- 11) SANDELL, R. (2008): A social network approach to Spanish immigration: an analysis of immigration into Spain 1998-2006, FEDEA, Banco Popular, Madrid.