
Highs and lows of immigrant integration in Spain

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Theme

Spain can boast of having integrated a wave of migrants of singular size and intensity into its society, unaccompanied by social conflicts of any note or by the emergence of xenophobic movements. It is still, however, a long way from the countries where first-generation immigrants and their offspring have secured prominent roles in public life.

Summary

Spain can boast of having achieved the integration of more than 6 million immigrants in record time, without having witnessed the appearance of xenophobic movements, becoming in this respect an exception to the European norm. While the integration of immigrants has its positive sides, such as this, plus the full legalisation of their legal position and the absence of immigrant enclaves, it also has negative facets, such as the high burden of unemployment and low wages, the poor take-up of post-compulsory education among subsequent generations, the risk of Jihadist radicalisation and the scarcity of immigrant presence in public life. Spain is still far from those countries where first-generation immigrants and their offspring have succeeded in playing an important role in public life, like the recently-elected mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, son of Pakistani immigrants. For now, immigrants hailing from countries poorer than Spain occupy a secondary position both in the employment and wealth structure as well as in terms of social status.

Analysis

More than 30 years have elapsed since the first Immigration Law was approved in Spain, in 1985, and more than 20 since immigration started to figure prominently in public debate and be perceived as a new social reality. In this period Spain has gone from being a culturally and ethnically homogeneous society to one in which immigrants hailing from dozens of different countries, with widely differing religions, languages and physical characteristics, account for 13% of the population. The process has been managed by the authorities and society at large in the absence of any debate about how to ensure the integration of the immigrants. Particularly striking is the fact that there has been no significant debate in Spain –unlike many other European countries with longer traditions of immigration– concerning the cultural elements of integration, a debate that shuttles between two 'models', the multicultural and the assimilationist, and all the intermediate points in between. Perhaps because national identity in Spain as a whole is weak, opinion polls have consistently shown that immigration is not perceived as a cultural threat, unlike in a good deal of European countries. Only in Catalonia, where there is a

strong national-cultural identity, perceived as being endangered, has this aspect had any importance.

It could be said that both the authorities and the general public in Spain have adopted a pragmatic stance towards the integration of immigrants, one that aims at solving problems and risks of conflict without being based on any prior model. With the accumulated experience of two decades, and when the effect of the economic crisis on immigrants returning to their poorer countries of origin seems to have ended, now is a good time to examine the data concerning this pragmatic approach to integrating immigrants in Spain.

A report has just been published with the results of an interesting survey of Ecuadorean immigrants in Spain, carried out by the Ecuadorean Embassy, UPCO University and the Basque Immigration Observatory (Ikuspegi),¹ which reveals many positive but also negative aspects of the integration that has taken place in the country. Ecuadoreans, together with Romanians and Moroccans, account for the three largest groups of immigrants to Spain, lending added weight to the importance of the research. Using this report in conjunction with other sources it is possible to trace an outline of the highs and lows of the process.

Starting with the positive data from the perspective of integration:

1. Legal integration. Ecuadoreans, like the majority of other non-EU immigrants, have now achieved a status that gives them permanent residence in the country. More than half (53%) of Ecuadoreans have obtained Spanish nationality and another 25% have permanent residence status. The phenomenon of illegal immigration has virtually ceased to exist in this group, as in the wider immigrant population in Spain. Prompted by rising unemployment, in 2008 Spain stiffened its policy against illegal immigration, which had already seen substantial falls with Romania's entry into the EU in 2007 and the immigration amnesty of 2005. As a result of all this, the level of illegal immigration has become negligible, quite unlike the situation that existed at the dawn of the 21st century.
2. Sense of acceptance. The Ecuadorean immigrants surveyed do not feel discriminated against by the indigenous population. This was the response of 74% of the interviewees. Only 25% report having suffered some form of discrimination. The sense that rejection does not exist or is expressed by a minority is related to the fact that there is no xenophobic party or movement of any consequence in Spain, something that has often been highlighted as one of the country's achievements, particularly in light of the fact that no other European or Western country has received so much immigration per head during the period of greatest influx, between 1998 and 2007.² No convincing explanation has been

¹ <http://espana.embajada.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/La-poblacion-de-Origen-Ecuatoriano-en-Espa%C3%B1a.pdf>.

² Carmen González Enríquez (2015), 'Migración, trabajo y amenazas al sistema de pensiones: balance del período 1996-2014', ARI, nr 5/2015, Elcano Royal Institute, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/demografia+y+poblacion/ari5-2015-gonzalez-enriquez-migracion-trabajo-amenazas-al-sistema-de-pensiones-balance-1996-2014.

offered in answer to the question of why Spain has until now been spared a tendency that affects the whole of Europe, namely the spread of xenophobic parties and their electoral success. The commonest response to this question at the start of the century was the novelty of the immigrant phenomenon in Spain and the empathic way it was viewed from the perspective of Spain's own migration experience in the 1960s. Added to this was the historical legacy of Francoism, which with its rhetorical abuse of Spanish nationalism had turned society off the very idea of nationalism, which came to be identified with the dictatorship. Portugal, which under Salazar also endured a lengthy authoritarian regime, is another exception to the general rule in Europe in not having a xenophobic party. Now, however, with an immigrant population of 13% –which does not include the Spanish-born second generation– and the demographic preponderance of generations that have no experience of the Franco regime or past waves of emigration, such explanations seem inadequate. In any case, the risk of xenophobic movements emerging in the future cannot be ruled out: 19% of Spaniards believe that a party with a racist or xenophobic ideology would be well-received, according to the results of the latest immigration barometer published by the CIS Centre for Sociological Research, carried out in 2014,³ while 44% report having heard anti-immigrant remarks in the previous few weeks.

3. Plans to remain. The Ecuadoreans who are considering returning to their country or emigrating to another are in a minority (one third of the total), whereas the majority either plan to remain in Spain or have no specific plans for the future, which amounts to remaining by default. Young people are the most resistant to the idea advanced by their parents of returning to Ecuador. This reluctance to return on the part of second generations, which is a well-known aspect of migration processes, leads to a degree of stabilisation in the migrant population.
4. Absence of ethnic enclaves. Clearly the immigrant population is not distributed evenly across Spanish cities and towns, instead tending to be concentrated in particular neighbourhoods and districts. To date however there has been no sign of immigrant enclaves, neighbourhoods that the indigenous population have abandoned in the wake of the immigrant arrivals. There is no equivalent in Spain to the French *banlieues* with their concentrations of Arab and sub-Saharan immigrants, or the Brussels suburb of Molenbeek, with its predominantly Moroccan population. This could be the positive and unintended consequence of the absence of a strong social housing policy in the country. Faced with a shortage of low-cost public housing, immigrants have turned to the market in search of accommodation, dispersing themselves among Spaniards and thereby fostering social integration through neighbourly relations. Such geographical dispersion has led to a similar effect in the school system and has offset the tendency to form educational enclaves. It must be acknowledged however that the economic crisis and the consequent reduction of the immigrant population may have put the brakes on a process –the formation of residential and educational enclaves– that in all likelihood would otherwise have taken place. The non-EU immigrant populations from relatively poor countries tend to be concentrated in two types of urban district: peripheral areas characterised by

³ http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/3000_3019/3019/es3019mar.pdf.

cheap housing built in the 1960s and 70s and an ageing population (such as San Cristóbal in Madrid and Juan XXIII in Alicante), and districts in run-down city centres with abundant low-quality housing (such as Lavapiés and El Raval) that are undergoing a process of renewal and gentrification, pushing out the immigrants as well as the less affluent indigenous population. Such urban renewal counteracts immigrant concentrations building up in central districts, but there is no comparable effect in the outlying districts where immigrants have congregated and where the cost of housing has fallen compared to the rest of the city; here the homes occupied by the ageing indigenous population are acquired or rented by immigrants when they fall vacant.

5. Identification with the host country. Another good indicator of integration is the degree of identification with Spain expressed by the offspring of Ecuadorean immigrants. While adults predominantly identify as Ecuadorean and the Spanish identity is only marginal, among young people aged 15-24 there is a group in which both identities are shared (22%).
6. Islamist radicalisation among Arab immigrants is very low in Spain compared to what has been observed in Belgium, the UK, France and Germany. Relative to its population very few combatants have left Spain to join the ranks of the so-called Islamic State.⁴

Contrasting with these positive data there are also more negative aspects:

1. Unemployment, low salaries, job insecurity and poverty affect the immigrant population disproportionately. The unemployment rate in the case of the Ecuadoreans surveyed was 31%. Among other groups the proportion is even higher: 52% of Moroccans were unemployed at the end of 2014.⁵ Three quarters of the Ecuadorean women in work earned less than €1,000 a month, and the same was true of 64% of men. Up to 24% earn less than the minimum wage, now set at €649. Probably as a consequence of their lower income, combined with smaller networks of family support compared with the indigenous population, immigrants are taking greater advantage than their Spanish-born counterparts of the recovery in the job market that has taken place in recent years: in 2014 and 2015, the employment rate among immigrants grew by 10 points compared with only 4 points among those born in Spain.⁶
2. Residential evictions have hit this group especially hard: 13% of Ecuadoreans have been served with court orders to vacate the homes they purchased, having been unable to keep up with the mortgage payments as a result of the crisis. As a group, immigrants have been more affected than native Spaniards by eviction

⁴ Carola García-Calvo (2016), 'España concernida', Commentary, Elcano Royal Institute, 23/III/2016, www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/terrorismo+internacional/garciacalvo-espana-concernida.

⁵ Carmen González Enríquez (2015), *op. cit.*

⁶ FUNCAS (2016), 'Focus on Spanish Society', March; calculations by Luis Garrido Medina.

notices, owing to their relative economic precariousness and their lack of family support networks.

3. The integration of the Muslim population is not assured. Muslim immigrants in Spain continue to encounter obstacles to the practice of their religion on a range of fronts: the building of mosques; burials; harmonising some of their most important religious festivals such as Eid with the working calendar; and the teaching of their religion in classrooms. Only in places where there is a particular concentration of Muslims, such as Ceuta, Melilla and various municipalities in the South-East, have the local authorities drawn up specific integration policies in this regard. Although the Spanish State is officially non-denominational, in practice the Roman Catholic Church and faith enjoy privileges that the other faiths decry; these especially affect Islam, the country's second most important religion by number of adherents. The clearest manifestation of this discrimination is the building of mosques. Buildings devoted to religious worship are not granted any special status in town planning, but Spanish local authorities find no difficulties in earmarking land for the construction of Roman Catholic churches when designing new neighbourhoods. When a Muslim community sets out to build a mosque, on the other hand, it frequently runs into all manner of administrative hurdles and the opposition of a section of the local residents, with the not uncommon result that mosques end up being opened in industrial premises on the outskirts of cities.
4. The risk of Islamist radicalisation and violence. Although, as pointed out above, Islamist radicalisation in Spain is relatively minor compared to other European countries, it exists, and demands unstinting vigilance from the security and intelligence forces, focusing on three areas in particular: Ceuta, Melilla and Catalonia. The majority of Spanish Jihadists who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of Islamic State have originated from Ceuta and Melilla, cities that have become predominantly Muslim. The police in Catalonia have dismantled various networks that were allegedly preparing terrorist attacks.⁷
5. The offspring of immigrants, those who are entering working age in the midst of an economic crisis, face a worse job market than the one that greeted their parents when they came to Spain in the throes of a construction boom. Furthermore, only a small proportion of this second generation is going on to post-compulsory education and university;⁸ this brackets them in the group with the poorest employment prospects, the low-qualified, among whom long-term joblessness in Spain is at its most acute. The number of jobs available for people with low qualifications continues to fall in Spain, as everywhere else in Europe, and this entails a significant problem of social integration over the medium to long

⁷ Fernando Reinares & Carola García-Calvo (2015), 'Terroristas, redes y organizaciones: facetas de la actual movilización yihadista en España', Working Paper, nr 17/2015, Elcano Royal Institute, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/dt17-2015-reinares-garciacalvo-terroristas-redes-organizaciones-facetas-actual-movilizacion-yihadista-espana.

⁸ European Commission, 'Progress Towards the Common European Objectives in Education and Training Indicators and Benchmarks – 2010/2011', http://www.revistaeducacion.educacion.es/re2010/re2010_02.pdf.

term.⁹ Meanwhile, second generations have aspirations that differ from their parents' because they have a distinct frame of reference: rather than comparing their quality of life with their countries of origin, their aspirations are determined in relation to those of their contemporaries in the country where they live, in this case Spain. But if their educational results are worse than average, such aspirations run the serious risk of being frustrated and causing feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. If such relative academic underachievement is to be prevented it is imperative to obtain detailed information that would enable extra educational resources to be concentrated where they most needed; however, unlike the majority of OECD countries where the PISA tests are administered to 15 year-old students, Spain does not record the specific national origin of its students, so that the PISA results for Spain include the children of Britons, Chinese, Moroccans, Germans and Ecuadoreans in the same figure. There is no justification for this lack of information, and it is something the Spanish education authorities need to address.

Conclusions

Spain has now transitioned into a second phase of immigration, with a stabilisation of the immigrant population, most of which has either acquired Spanish nationality or permanent resident status. Eight out of 10 non-EU immigrants without Spanish nationality have permanent leave to remain, according to figures published by the OPI immigration observatory.¹⁰ The growth of the immigrant population is now basically accounted for by families reuniting, a phase that other European countries with greater experience of immigration reached years ago and that brings its own challenges, such as the greater rate of dependence among the newly-incorporated family members compared to the migrants who arrived originally.

Spain can congratulate itself for having successfully incorporating into its society an immigration wave of singular intensity and size in this period without witnessing significant social conflicts, or the emergence of xenophobic movements, even at a time of high unemployment when there is keen competition for jobs. It still has a long way to go, however, before catching up with countries where first-generation immigrants and their offspring have succeeded in playing a prominent role in public life, such as the recently-elected mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, son of Pakistani immigrants, the Spanish-born French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, and the Moroccan-born Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, the French Education Minister. For now, the integration of immigrants hailing from countries poorer than Spain takes place in the lower reaches of the occupational and social hierarchy, with an almost complete absence of high-profile figures to offset this lack of public protagonism. It remains to be seen whether the Spanish model is capable of producing such successful outcomes of integration as the ones cited above, a process in which the education system bears a major responsibility.

⁹ Luis Garrido & Rodolfo Gutiérrez (2016), 'El urgente rescate social: Recuperar para el empleo a los trabajadores menos cualificados', Círculo Cívico de Opinión, Cuaderno nº 16, <http://www.circulocivicodeopinion.es/download/pdf/cuadernos16.pdf>.

¹⁰ http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/es/Estadisticas/operaciones/con-certificado/201512/Residentes_Principales_Resultados_31122015.pdf.