

A new pattern in international mobility? The case of Spain in the Great Crisis

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Abstract

Our study models the international remigrations of immigrants in Spain due to the economic recession. This modelling reveals that it is essential to complement the traditional explanatory framework based on human capital theory with other variables that would attenuate the impact of the traditional economic variables. In particular, these variables refer to those related to the costs of losing acquired rights when the host country is abandoned, to the degree to which the immigrants are integrated and also to the immigrant trap related to the increase of poverty.

Keywords: International migration; economic crisis; remigration; poverty; immigrant trap.
JEL Classification: C20; C21; I30; J61.

Resumen

Nuestro trabajo analiza la re-emigración internacional en España debida a la recesión económica. Los resultados del modelo econométrico estimado revelan que la explicación tradicional de las migraciones basada en la teoría del capital humano debe ser completada con otras variables que aminoran el impacto de las tradicionales. En particular, nos referimos a las que recogen los costos de perder derechos adquiridos cuando se abandona el país de acogida y las ventajas del grado de integración de los inmigrantes, así como el efecto de lo que denominamos *trampa de la inmigración* en relación con el incremento de la pobreza.

Palabras clave: migración internacional; crisis económica; re-emigración; pobreza; trampa de la inmigración.

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INTRODUCTION

The downturn phase of the global economic cycle has generated a new pattern in international mobility. The crisis is severely affecting five European countries: Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Spain. According to the OECD (2012), these countries share two common characteristics in terms of migration: first, after the Second World War they all became major migrant-sending countries and second, they have all recently become host countries for immigrants. In fact, between 2000 and 2007 two of them, Spain and Ireland, have experienced the largest percentage increases in their immigrant populations with a rise of more than eight points, compared to an average of two points for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries as a whole. During this period, Spain received the most foreigners with an annual net average inflow of 528,000, according to the EUROSTAT. This is vastly different to the United Kingdom with an annual average of 253,000, Germany with 107,000 or France with 65,000. Not even the 286,000 net inflows of Italy come close to the Spanish figure and, of course they are much higher than the 55,000 or 47,000 corresponding to Ireland and Portugal. Even taking into account the divergences in the type of data¹, it is evident that no other country matches Spain in terms of the volume of new arrivals until 2007 (see Figure 1).

With respect to these intense inflow rates, both Spain and Italy have had to contend with an additional problem: the continual accumulation of large groups of irregular immigrants—based on the existence of informal migratory networks and on the relatively liberal immigration policy (Aja, Arango, and Oliver, 2008)—which the different governments have repeatedly addressed with large-scale regularisation programmes². In the case of Spain, once immigrants obtain a legal residence permit, it is easy for them to obtain Spanish nationality. As Spanish legislation provides that after two years of regular residence in the country, nationals of Latin American countries may apply for Spanish nationality. This explains why, for example, in 2013 Spain granted nationality

1 See details in EUROSTAT database or in Kupiszewska *et. al.* (2010).

2 Between 2000 and 2005, there have been three regularisation programmes in Spain in which more than a million immigrants obtained the authorisation to reside or work therein. In Italy, three such processes were carried out between 1998 and 2006, whereby around 1.2 million immigrants obtained authorisation (see Brick, 2011).

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