

21ST CENTURY MIGRATIONS IN EXTREMADURA: THE RETURN IMMIGRATION

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Emigration has been considered the most relevant historic phenomenon of the 20th Century in Extremadura. Although apparently exaggerated, this observation becomes relevant when it is estimated that about eight hundred thousand people emigrated from Extremadura between the end of the fifties and the mid-seventies (Pérez and Barrientos, 2006). Nothing trivial, in 1987, although the emigration flow of the previous phase had already stopped, the number of people from Extremadura residing within the country but outside their place of birth reached 729,532.

The preferred destinations of that massive and family exodus were places surrounding metropolitan industrialized areas. Móstoles, Alcorcón, Avilés, Baracaldo, Sant Boi de Llobregat, Sabadell, or Alacuás were populated with Extremadura colonies responding to the call from other emigrants who had arrived earlier. The other destination was Western Europe, preferably West Germany, France and Switzerland. Although evaluating this external flow is difficult due to incomplete data from the Instituto Español de Emigración, it is estimated that it would have affected more than 56,300 people from Extremadura (Cayetano, 1966).

But the economical crisis caused the industrial strike at the beginning of the seventies, and with it, the chocking of the emigration flow. Those who emigrated in the fifties and sixties were starting to feel a lack of satisfaction. They had aged and had become more nostalgic. Second residency policies were being imposed, and many of them still owned homes in their home towns. This caused the return phenomenon, somewhat intensified during the second half of the seventies, which would increase and experience important structural transformations in the years after that.

It was becoming an unusual situation: for the first time in the 20th century, migration numbers showed increases in return population during the five years between 1981 and 1986. All signs indicated a mayor change in demographic behavior within the region. The return phenomenon was magnified and coincided with symptoms of economic boom and social reforms.

The eighties should be characterized by the strengthening of new migratory patterns. For the first time in more than a hundred years, the regional migratory balance was positive in both Extremadura provinces, in 59% of the comarcas and in 48% of the municipalities. And, if these circumstances seemed unique, the new characteristics surrounding the return structure would have to be termed unusual. According to data from 1988-90, this return flow included only 13% people over 65 years of age originally from Extremadura, while 52.8% were between the ages of 15 and 44.

In the last decade of the last century, 93,267 people returned to Extremadura from other autonomous communities, and from abroad, while 92,633 people left toward identical destinations, leaving, thus, a slightly positive migratory balance of 634 individuals. In spite of the fact that these are gross data, the first thing to consider with respect to the volume of movement is that the migration phenomenon in Extremadura has not ended. Movements totaling 185,900 changes in residence in a region with a population of 1,069,429 in 2000, indicate a permanent flow that exceedingly affect the evolution, structural characteristics and spatial distribution of the population in Extremadura.

These are the conditions under which the return immigration to Extremadura must be analyzed. Between 1991 and 2000, this flow has included the return of 45,550 former emigrants, and frequently, the arrival of their spouses and children born outside this region. This volume of returnees has an annual average of 4,555 returns, an important number, if the population weaknesses of Extremadura are taken into account compared to the total number of entries recorded in the region, which total 32.9% of the population (Table 4).

From the second half of the eighties, the return migration to Extremadura insinuates a new model, considerably different from the former, in which the increasing number of young and young adult populations is substantial, to the point that it is greater than that of those over 65 years of age. From then until the end of the 20th century, this return of Extremadura natives has a median of 4,500 people each year, although within the total immigration flow its numbers keeps falling due to the convergence of two different circumstances: on the one hand, the decline in returns themselves; on the other hand, the reinforcement in immigration, both from within the country and from abroad. Nevertheless, the persistence of structural characteristics similar to those of the prior phase, allow us to corroborate the consolidation of new patterns in the return immigration to Extremadura.

The migration picture exhibited by the Extremadura region during the first years of this century suggests the presence of a few interesting changes in comparison to the period analyzed above. First of all, the increase in immigration, which has surpassed 93,267 people recorded for the period 1990-2000, compared to 154,748 recorded between 2001 and 2009, should be emphasized. The increase in emigrations should also be highlighted, both into other Spanish regions, as well as abroad, since it has increased from 92,633 in the first period to 127,853 in the most recent one. Finally, the increase in internal movement should not go unnoticed. It has reached 105,297 changes in residence among the different municipalities, far exceeding the 88,024 changes in the previous phase. Taking into account that the length of the two periods we are comparing is different, the immigration flow would have increased by 84.4%, and the one corresponding emigration flow would have increased by 53.4%, with prior migrations reaching 32.9%. Considering the weaknesses in Extremadura demographics, there is no doubt that this increase in migration flows is making more of a difference than the

vegetative dynamics in the population stabilization of the region, especially if we take into account that the migration totals include 26,985 individuals immigrating, which implies that it has increased by a factor of 42, when compared with the last decade of the 20th century.

In this general context, the return immigration has also increased by a total of 47,894 people, which means a median increase of 16.8%, when compared with the numbers recorded at the end of the last century.

With respect to its evolution, we should point out again that some of the fluctuations between years are due to the Residential Statistical Variations, which, as indicated in 2001, shows a lack of records for census years. However, a certain asymmetry could be observed between the first five and the last four years of the period, noting an increase in the annual average of those returning, from 5,003.8 between 2001-2005, to 5,718.8 between 2006 and 2009. Although it could seem to be a forced tactic, this distinction would allow us to relate the most recent return behavior to the worsening of the economic crisis. We must certainly wait until more data are available in order to confirm this hypothesis; however, in principle, an increase in the flow of returnees seems logical, facilitated by the elimination of jobs in the construction sector, the main destination for people from Extremadura looking for jobs, who emigrated during the past decades.

However, the returnee age structure would also allow us to point in the same direction, so that it could be pointed out that that same elimination of urban jobs that might explain the increase in the number of returnees, would also be causing an increase in the movement of males and an overall younger population (Table 7). In any case, we must insist in the need for a better perspective in order to determine that it is due not only to inherent fluctuations in the volatility of the phenomenon under study.

In fact, the structure by age of the period as a whole continues to adjust to the patterns reached during the second half of the eighties, so the balance in gender distribution and the higher number of returnees under 45 years of age continues to be significant.

However, the place from which they are returning generates significant variations in its structure. The age pyramids in returns from within the country and returns from abroad show significant differences. As is obvious, the returns from within the country are highly representative, with the first barely differing from the structure as a whole. The second, on the other hand, stands out due to its irregular composition and the many asymmetries in gender distribution in most of the cohorts.

The returns from within the country have an equivalent gender distribution as a whole, as well as within most of the cohorts. It is true that there is a slight dominance of males among those of working age, as well as a higher number of women in the more advanced ages. However, none of these circumstances is enough to doubt the regenerative effect that the returns from within the country must be producing in Extremadura demographics. In addition to this balance in gender, the return of emigrants from other Spanish regions implies an increase in population that in 54.6% of the cases is under 45 years of age, a situation that should be valued for its optimistic perspectives based on its undeniable demographic, social and economic consequences. On the other hand, only 19.6% of the returnees are older than 65, a rate similar to the proportion of elders as a whole in the Extremadura population (19.1%).

Returns from abroad are different, since the variations between gender, as well as age distribution are very distinct. However, we must remember that it only constitutes 1,829 people, which could not be attributed an incidence level with little comparison to the returns from within the country. In this case, returnees under 15 year of age represent 10% of the total, and the younger population between 20 and 24 years of age comprise 3.6%. Such small number indicates, on one hand, the significant demographic ageing of the overall Extremadura population living abroad, and as a result, its lack of new births. However, on the other hand, the refusal of the young to return should not be ignored, their desire to remain in the places where they grew up, were educated and have developed their relationships and social surroundings. This is why many emigrants abroad must postpone their return until their children become financially independent and decide to live on their own. Certainly, the family, social, and job composition of returnees from abroad is significantly different from returnees from within the country. In the first one, the obstacles are more frequent and varied, and the decision to return must be more carefully considered among family members.

In conclusion, the return to Extremadura seems to consist of two very different flows, in numbers as well as in composition: the returns from within the country, with an annual flow slightly above 5,118 people, distinguished by the balance between men and women and the marked preponderance of a young adult population; and the returns from abroad, much weaker (203.4 returns/year), represented mostly and mainly by men and an older demographic, with an index of 253.8%. Both become part of a defined migratory context with identical causes and similar decision-making processes. The root of their diversity, however, is due to the different size and socio-demographic structure of the emigrant Extremadura colonies that feed such flows. For that reason, the place of birth will keep making a marked difference on the rest of the socio-demographic features of those who return.

Similarly, the size of the destination city also becomes a conditional factor in the return structure. The proportion of young people increases as the size of destination city grows, so that returnees under 15 years of age represent only 4.8%, in towns with populations of less than 2,000, while this group increases to 13.8% in cities of more than 50,000 inhabitants.

In contrast, relatively speaking, the elder population returns are significantly higher in smaller towns, and it is less as the size of the destination cities increases: only 6.8% of those returning to Extremadura cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants is over 65 years of age. On the other hand, the overall number of elders comprises 27.7% of those returning to towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants.

The gender distribution is also different according to this same parameter. In towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants, the returns are comprised mainly of males, while there is a better balance, or even a feminine dominance, if the return is to larger cities. In both cases, this migratory return should be seen as a heterogeneous flow within its structural as well as spatial trends, a fact that also derives from very different motivations as factors explaining the returns to their place of birth.

Eliminating some of this data, it must be pointed out that 56.4% of those returning to Extremadura towns with populations of less than 10,000 is over 45 years of age; that only 13.8% is under 24 years of age and that 17.3% is over seventy years old, with an Ageing Index of 462.1 older than 65 for every 100 who are younger than 15. In the cases of Cáceres, Badajoz, and Mérida, the only cities in the region with more than 50,000 inhabitants, the

numbers continue to be 27.4% for those over 45 years of age, 24.8% for those under 24 and only 5.3% for those over 70 years of age. In this case, the Ageing Index is 66.7%, significantly different from that of the smaller towns.

It is really not difficult to explain these contrasts. The return to the cities has a much higher economic component than the return to smaller Extremadura towns. The return of the working-age population, whether motivated by positive factors, such as job-related problems experienced outside Extremadura, is mainly to find new jobs, start new businesses or restart businesses left behind when emigrating. There is no doubt that cities offer those returnees more job and socioeconomic possibilities than towns. Towns, however, are more attractive to returnees who have reached retirement age or who are ready to retire. In this case, family ties are especially relevant when explaining the return. As a priority, people return to their hometowns, regardless of size, location or situation and socioeconomic prospects. Only in very special cases, generally related to where the closest family members live, or for reasons of social and health-related dependents, the return of elders is toward places different than their place of birth and we have observed a preference toward larger cities.

