

Foreign retirees, municipalities and registration in Spain

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Abstract (up to 300 words):

The immigration and settlement of foreign retirees in coastal areas of Spain during the last decades has been an increasing and well-known phenomenon. The Population Census is the main statistical source to study this population, although the Municipal Register (*Padrón Continuo*) is the instrument used by the municipalities to register and collect the resident population as their number and basic demographic characteristics. However, the numerous problems related to the registration of this group of population in their municipalities of residence are leading to a significant and not always well known underreporting.

Causes and factors affecting the registration of foreign retirees in Spain before and after the recent economic crisis are analyzed. On the one hand, information comes from in-depth interviews with immigrant pensioners living in coastal municipalities of Andalucía during 2007, before the economic crisis Spain emerged; secondly, documentary sources from the European Observatory of Retirement Migration (OEG, in Spanish) referred from 2007 to date were also consulted. Along the time, this analysis will reveal the factors driving and restraining the registration of retirees in the Municipal Register, as well as the advantages and disadvantages associated with the register of these immigrants.

The municipalities affected by an important number of retired immigrants should make an effort to provide more truthful figures on its foreign population (volume, origin, age, educational level, etc.) to better plan and manage the facilities and services offered at the local scale. Therefore, it will be very useful to know and consider these aspects for the scientific research and for the agents responsible for management of municipal Padrón and local policies. Opinions of immigrants in Spain will help to understand this situation.

Extended abstract (2-4 pages):

1. Introduction

The international migration of retirees is an increasing phenomenon among the varied range of migratory movements in Europe. In a stable demography tending notably towards an aging population in Europe, many retired and pensioners tend to be mobile.

This is a specific group comprising not very old retired people, childless couples free of obligations to the rest of their families, family units with sufficient financial resources and assets earned through a working career based on a mid-high level academic education. They also generally enjoy good health and considerable free time. Without doubt, these are quite different conditions to those experienced by the currents of economic migrants who for decades have accounted for the bulk of European migration inflows and now aged at destination settings.

Although not very numerous, there are now enough studies on international migration among pensioners in Spain to ascertain the factors that drive this population to change their place of residence (temporarily or definitely) and their effects on their destinations and at the local level. Retired population is showing a mobile, flexible, temporary behaviour, marked by some individual and family constraints, benefiting from the low cost carriers (frequency, cheap fares, close airports, ...).

It is commonly understood that retired migrants contribute to the tourist sector generating new economic activities linked to the trans-national communities, and the wealth of social and cultural activities generated around them. More recently, it is also emphasized on the consequences of these flows in regard to the access, provision and planning of services and facilities in the municipalities where they live, and on the legal-political implications in relation to the application of voting rights in Europe.

Some studies have highlighted the difficulty of official statistical sources (the population census, municipal registers and other official records and sources) to adequately catch and record the considerable diversity of retired population residing permanently or temporarily in Spain. There are wide discrepancies between the figures provided by official Spanish statistics and the estimates by municipal governments, foreign consulates and foreigners' associations, although almost all sources do maintain a degree of consensus regarding the causes.

In fact, the retired foreign population tends not to sign onto the municipal government register (*Padrón Continuo*), as the basic instrument for planning and economic and political decision-making at the local level in Spain. Not all foreign residents are in the same situation, so registering depends mainly on their age, period of residence and the reasons for settling in Spain in the first place. In general, those at working age who settle in Spain to work, who live in a stable (or indefinite) manner with their families and, especially, who have children of school age, tend to register with the municipal government in larger numbers, because of the rights that being registered affords them with regard to education and social-health services, and even in relation to housing.

However, those others who settle temporarily in Spain, with no interest in working and of older age groups (pensioners), tend not to register at similar proportions, but nevertheless have access to certain services and social benefits. As pensioners, their refusal to register may stem from a desire to maintain access to services and rights in their countries of origin, in case they should return there one day.

This paper aims to analyze the causes and factors affecting the registration of foreign retirees in Spain before and after the recent economic crisis. On the one hand, information comes from in-depth interviews with immigrant pensioners living in coastal municipalities of Andalucía during 2007; secondly, documentary sources from the

European Observatory of Retirement Migration (OEG, in Spanish) referred from 2007 to date have been also consulted. Factors driving and restraining the registration of retirees in the municipal register, the advantages and disadvantages associated with the register of these immigrants as well as the retired migrant opinions about this process are also displayed.

2. The Migration of Pensioners to Spain

The official foreign population in Spain on 1 January 2014 was a bit more of 5.0 million (almost 5.6 million in 2009), 10.7% of the total registered population, and of them more than 2.0 million are from UE-27 countries (more than 1.2 million were from UE-15 countries in 2009). EU countries are the traditional 'senders' of pensioners to Spain, plus Norway and Switzerland. These 2.0 million represent in 2014 more than 40.9% of all immigrants in Spain (21% in 2009), and 89.5% of all immigrants from Europe.

There are almost 500,000 people aged over 55 (Table 1), accounting for one-third of all residents from the listed European countries (EU-27, less Spain, plus Norway and Switzerland), a proportion in clear contrast with the breakdown by age of the migratory inflows from less-developed countries, who tend to be much younger and who plan to work (those over 55 account for only 12.7% of all immigrants in Spain). Some countries exceed that figure: more than 40% of immigrants from Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the UK and Switzerland are over 55. The percentage of those over 75 from these countries is proportionately even greater: only 1.89% of all immigrants in Spain are in that age group, while among Europeans they account for almost 3.5%.

Table 1. Foreign population (aged +55 years) by nationalities in main Spanish Mediterranean regions, 2007 and 2014

| | Andalucía | Balearic Islands | Canary Island | Cataluña | Valencian (Com.) | Murcia (Region of) | Total 2014 | % (2014) | % change 2007-2014 |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|----------|------------------|--------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|
| TOTAL | 122 289 | 31 986 | 62 452 | 88 265 | 164 264 | 25 881 | 495 137 | 100,0 | 24,9 |
| Europe | 101 784 | 25 599 | 52 227 | 45 172 | 146 239 | 19 240 | 390 261 | 78,8 | 18,8 |
| EU (27) | 95 161 | 24 457 | 48 280 | 37 631 | 131 848 | 17 644 | 355 021 | 71,7 | 16,0 |
| United Kingdom | 51 036 | 6 989 | 14 318 | 5 138 | 67 979 | 11 963 | 157 423 | 31,8 | 11,6 |
| Germany | 8 304 | 7 970 | 15 363 | 5 304 | 16 417 | 1 238 | 54 596 | 11,0 | -18,2 |
| France | 3 989 | 2 255 | 1 962 | 6 729 | 6 601 | 739 | 22 275 | 4,5 | 20,7 |
| Italy | 3 925 | 2 562 | 6 309 | 6 113 | 4 334 | 383 | 23 626 | 4,8 | 50,6 |
| Netherlands | 3 835 | 762 | 1 243 | 2 111 | 9 418 | 456 | 17 825 | 3,6 | 17,7 |
| Belgium | 2 899 | 500 | 1 922 | 1 484 | 5 344 | 378 | 12 527 | 2,5 | 7,6 |
| Switzerland | 853 | 609 | 994 | 1 403 | 3 519 | 129 | 7 507 | 1,5 | -12,2 |
| Norway | 1 557 | 85 | 2 345 | 90 | 5 015 | 206 | 9 298 | 1,9 | 15,8 |
| Finland | 3 996 | 80 | 837 | 94 | 1 057 | 71 | 6 135 | 1,2 | 23,0 |
| Denmark | 3 084 | 182 | 404 | 230 | 939 | 73 | 4 912 | 1,0 | 4,8 |
| Portugal | 1 735 | 244 | 724 | 1 304 | 865 | 278 | 5 150 | 1,0 | 53,6 |
| Ireland | 1 915 | 161 | 840 | 243 | 1 839 | 212 | 5 210 | 1,1 | 53,8 |
| Austria | 423 | 283 | 1 098 | 220 | 500 | 61 | 2 585 | 0,5 | 7,3 |
| Luxembourg | 63 | 24 | 62 | 40 | 60 | 14 | 263 | 0,1 | 5,2 |
| EU (selected countries) | 87 614 | 22 706 | 48 421 | 30 503 | 123 887 | 16 201 | 329 332 | 66,5 | 8,2 |

Source: Spanish Institute of Statistics (INE), Padrón Municipal de Habitantes.

These immigrants concentrate in particular areas: more than 90% of European immigrants over 55 live in just six regions, and in just eight provinces (Almería, Málaga, Balearic Islands, Las Palmas, Tenerife, Gerona, Alicante and Murcia), the main coastal tourism-oriented areas, especially the Valencia region (Alicante) and Andalusia (Málaga and Almería), which account for two-thirds of the total.

This concentration is also evident at the municipal level. Although data available at the Spanish Institute of Statistics (INE) do not allow an in-depth analysis, a proxy analysis by using the total foreign population in municipalities when immigrants from the EU account for more than 15% is carried out. Again Alicante and Málaga show the

biggest concentration of EU immigrants in 2014, almost 18% the total in Spain; 44% of municipalities in Alicante had a population of EU immigrants of over 15% in 2007 while the figure for Málaga was 24%.

3. Method and Surveys

A fieldwork was developed in the provinces of Málaga, Almería and Granada in 2007 via mail with various sources of privileged observers. Besides, documents collected from the European Observatory of Retirement Migration referred from 2007 to date have been consulted.

Twenty seven in-depth interviews were conducted with people considered to be privileged sources because of their knowledge of or contact with retired foreigners: leaders of foreigners' associations (11), representatives from the media (9) and the municipal register departments of municipal governments (7). Informants really know that all residents in Spain are legally obliged to register in one Spanish municipality at a time, this latter being an aspect that the National Institute of Statistics has managed to enforce by cancelling duplicate registrations. In spite of this, it is common for foreign residents to be registered in their own countries at the same time as in Spain and this is not easy to detect, since there is no connection between the Spanish register and that of their countries of origin.

The European Observatory of Retirement Migration is collecting news and reports about retirement migration in Spain by using an exhaustive searching procedure. More than one thousand references can be found since 2007 in the database to be deployed, but only comments, debates and other types of news concerning the settlement and registering of retired immigrants in Spain will be used.

By means of qualitative data analysis a set of codes, networks and relations have been identified to built an explanation on what the immigrants think about being registered in Spain, how they behave to ground their stay in Spain and the municipal administration cope with this situation.

4. Results

Opinions about advantages of being registered are outstanding. Apparently, life is easier when immigrants plan to remain in Spain being registered, as it helps them to 'avoid legal problems' and makes easier 'to travel more freely between their country of origin and Spain' or to buy a car or house. However, these reasons are based on unsound information. Not being registered does not hamper mobility or make it more difficult to buy property or vehicles, in accordance with current Spanish and European legislation.

In fact, what are the fears? Those surveyed fear that being registered means that the police will have access to their data, which would (perhaps) imply that they would have to contribute to the Social Security and pay taxes in Spain, and accordingly lose certain rights and benefits in their countries of origin. There is a mixture of some truth, some disinformation and/or ignorance and some caution in regard to contact with the public administrations, as can be deduced from the reasons alleged by retired residents for not being registered.

It is known that permanent residents in Spain are more likely to be registered, and this tends to be linked to being the owner of a home and the consequences deriving from registering property at the municipal level. In contrast, temporary residence reduces the perceived need for individuals to be registered, especially if they do not own a home, so as to leave Spain open the possibility of their residency being seen as a long-term 'tourist visit', for example, of several months per year. So, the possibility of maintaining

social rights and links with their country of origin may be a decisive factor in the decision to not register in their destination.

Disinformation or a lack of interest in obtaining the right information is the basis of another set of reasons for European pensioners to think they do not need to register, and the fact that they are not registered in their own country makes them think they do not need to in Spain either. In addition to these reasons, people cite difficulties with the language and fears for the personal cost, in time and effort, of registering.

It appears to be confirmed that the transmission of information among residents for their registration stems mainly from the closest members of their family or social circle, as many of those surveyed reported. Some other people surveyed get their information from immigrant associations and from media sources in their own language.

The analysis of the reasons shows a considerable range of causes that influence the decision to register or not. Some of these reasons are cultural, related to administrative practices in their own countries, so they are difficult to overcome or change. However, it is possible to take action regarding some other causes in order to change the way this population behaves.

Recent debates and controversies appeared in newspapers and other local information sources report that the registration process of foreign retirees in Spain is far from solved because multiple factors and problems are hindering it. Some are grounded in strong motivations, others are simply reluctant and personal prejudices. However, it is also shown that pensioners' associations, media and municipalities are making a great effort to close the gap, with the sole purpose of reconciling interests and consolidate civil rights deriving from being officially residing, registered, in Spain.

5. Conclusions

Spanish municipalities with a sizeable presence of retired immigrants must make an effort to obtain more reliable figures regarding their foreign population (volume, origin, ages, education level, etc), to better plan and manage the facilities and services offered at the local level. The lack of accurate data has negative effects on the planning of municipal services and facilities, in particular social-health related services that are so in demand among this population group, and on municipality funds, which in part are calculated on the basis of the number of people registered there. On the political front, the non-registered foreign population cannot exercise any influence through their votes in municipal elections, implying some social and political marginalisation. However, being registered doesn't mean that people vote, as every foreign resident must register him/herself as voter to do so. The result, the turnout among the foreigners who are registered is very low.

It is necessary to improve the coordination and dissemination of information on registration, which must be provided not only in the municipal government offices themselves, but also in estate agencies (where people rent or buy a home) and by agents commonly in contact with these foreign residents (attorneys and consultants). Similarly, municipal governments must make an effort to convey clear information, and in various languages, regarding the advantages of registering, as well as the disadvantages of not doing so. In fact, many large municipalities are already publicizing the advantages of being registered among their residents (foreign and Spanish), such as being assigned a general practitioner in the public health network and obtaining discounts and benefits in certain sports and social-cultural services, municipal public transport, etc. Further efforts must be made by all municipalities to let people know just how quick and easy it is to register so as to encourage foreign pensioners to register as soon as they settle in Spain.