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Mobile families: family regrouping strategies and residential trajectories of rural foreign immigrants

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Abstract – The aim of this paper is to explore the social factors that may be related with the permanence -or the exit- of foreign born immigrants in rural areas after the 2008 economic crisis. For this purpose we analyze the evolution of the five main groups of immigrants coming from non EU-15 countries in rural areas of Castilla y León, one of the most rural and depopulated region in Spain. We focus especially in the patterns of mobility from rural to urban areas and in the family regrouping strategies. The paper highlights some results of the research project 'Crisis and immigration in rural areas in Castilla y León' (CSO2015-67525-R MINECO/FEDER).

INTRODUCTION

The arrival of foreign born immigrants in rural areas has been considered like an important opportunity to stop or even reverse depopulation, especially in less dynamic regions in Southern Europe. Far from being only a cheap and flexible labour force, they represent an opportunity to revitalise social and economic life of villages. Anyway foreign born immigrants suffer frequently the social inequalities linked to the so called 'immigrant condition', a social status that is not necessarily related with legal or administrative traits but with the lack of social recognition as full members of the community. In this context, the deep impact of global economic crisis in Southern Europe has produced since 2008 increasing levels of social inequality that frequently show a strong ethnic component.

The social integration of foreign born immigrants and the capacity of rural areas to keep them living there in the long run is therefore a very relevant question. Obviously this capacity has to do with the attitudes and expectations of both immigrants and native population and the ways in which settlement is conducted. Previous research suggests that rural areas and agricultural works –and other employments located in small villages- might be only a 'temporary station' in a way to more rewarding jobs and living conditions in urban areas (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva, 2011). But the potential of rural areas to retain immigrants in the long run depends also on the characteristics of the newcomers.

This paper focuses on the social factors that may be related with their staying or exit from rural areas. For this purpose we analyze the evolution of the five main groups of immigrants –those coming from Bulgaria, Romania, Morocco, Colombia and Ecuador- in rural areas of Castilla y León, an inner, very rural

and depopulated Spanish region. We focus specially on the patterns of mobility from rural to urban areas and the family regrouping strategies.

Previous research showed that immigrants coming from Eastern Europe are the most rural groups with nearly half of them living in non-urban settlements. Both men and women have a high engagement in agricultural activities. The population has a quite balanced gender composition that is linked with a highly "family" way of migration. Moroccans have also a significant presence in rural areas. This group is composed mainly by men with an important implication in agrarian jobs. This feature is related with a migration pattern that is characterized by crossover marriages and transnational families: males migrate and their spouses keep on living in Morocco. The family regrouping occurs afterwards when the position of the pioneer is well consolidated. For Latin American population the peculiar feature is the frequent migration of women, sometimes single mothers that eventually regroup their children and get married in Spain with compatriots or, much more frequently than other groups, with Spaniards. Latin American women, as women from Morocco, are mainly employed in tertiary activities.

The different levels of formal education are also relevant. For those coming from Morocco it is considerable lower than for people coming from Latin America and especially from Eastern Europe. These features add to different legal and administrative opportunities to reach a permanent and safe situation in the country and to diverse perceptions and stereotypes of native population among the different national groups of foreign immigrants.

DATA AND METHODS

Data come from Spanish Register of Inhabitants (2007

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to 2014) and the Spanish Residential Variations Statistics (EVR) -1998 to 2015-. The data used refer to foreign-born population so that people who acquired Spanish nationality are included.

RESULTS

Foreign immigration and rural repopulation.

After decades of demographic declining, rural areas of Castilla y León experience a repopulation process in the first decade of this century. Migratory balances become positive mainly as a result of the arrival of foreign born immigrants. This process is interrupted by the burst out of the economic crisis in 2008. We can observe a considerable drop of flows between 2007 and 2012. Growth rates of foreign-born residents falling steeply due to the halt of new arrivals more than to the return of current residents. After 2012 the crisis effects are clear and migratory balances become negative. Undoubtedly economic crisis expels population –nationals and foreigners– from rural areas. In this context the five national groups present a different evolution: groups from Eastern Europe reduced abruptly, Latin American groups experience a smaller reduction but Moroccans increase slightly.

Are rural areas 'temporary stations' in a way to urban destinations? First of all, rural areas are the entry point for a considerable number of foreign immigrants, especially for Romanians and Bulgarians that arrive directly to rural areas. In the case of Moroccans, Colombians and Ecuadorians, there is a redistribution from urban to rural areas that account for a good number of newcomers. On the other side, the main destination of people leaving rural areas is urban areas rather than destinations abroad. In the last years of the crisis immigrants from Eastern Europe are the only ones that seem to return to their countries or travel abroad more than move to urban sites. Regardless the intense flow of people coming from and going to urban sites, the migratory balance across the period shows that rural areas always loss population in favor of cities and that the rural is indeed a 'temporary station' for many immigrants.

How is the family regrouping occurring? Family regrouping is a crucial dimension of immigrants' social integration in the host society. For immigrants staying in rural areas the crisis seems to cause an intensification of family regrouping. This process

should be understood in relation with the different family migration strategies as said above. The arrival of women and children is especially intense in the Morocco case. Male pioneers are bringing their wives and children. The evolution of the population pyramids show a clear tendency towards a more gender balanced population in Morocco, Romania and Bulgaria cases, although in the first case the reason is the arrival of women, and in the second, the leaving of males. For Romanians and Bulgarians the narrowing of the pyramid base reflects also the leaving of whole families from rural areas and the halt of arrivals of new families to them. As we said before, crisis expels males. This is also the reason why the population pyramids of Colombians and Ecuadorians increase their female imbalance. In this case it is remarkable the increase of arrivals of people older than 45, what may be related with the regrouping of parents.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The ways in which different groups of foreign people face the effects of the economic crisis could highlight the social factors that favor or hinder the integration of immigrants in rural local societies. We can observe different patterns of family regrouping that are also linked with different residential trajectories. Some family migration strategies strongly related with rural-urban mobility seem to favour the permanent settlement of immigrants in the countryside while other ones reinforce the role of rural areas as 'temporary stations' in a way to more rewarding jobs and living conditions in urban areas. As one clear example of the first ones is the Morocco population's these family migration strategies seem to be a stronger factor of local integration than the so-called 'cultural closeness'. On the other side, taking into account that this is the national group with less economic, educational and symbolic capital, we could say that some sorts of mobility are a valuable resource to face social inequalities related with the 'immigrant' condition.

REFERENCE

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