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THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREAT SPANISH RECESSION ON EMIGRATION TRENDS TO LATIN AMERICA IN CONTEMPORARY SPAIN

The economic crisis began in Spain in 2008 as a part of the world financial crisis. There were many reasons responsible for the recession, but the most significant one, was the so called “housing bubble.”¹ A rapid growth of the real estate market brought changes in immigration processes. The citizens of Latin American countries discovered new opportunities offered by the Spanish job market. This resulted in a surge of Latinos coming to Spain.² However, when the crisis began, the process suddenly turned back toward the surge of Spanish emigrants fleeing to Latin America. The Spanish media warned that if the previous trends continued, at least at the same level, the Spanish economy would experience serious hardships in the close future.³ This article tries to

¹ N. Schofield, G. Caballero (eds.), *The Political Economy of Governance: Institutions, Political Performance and Elections*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland 2015, p. 128.

² E. Vidal Coso, D. Vono de Vilhena, *Entrapped as Domestic Workers? The Effect of Economic Context on Work Opportunities*, [in:] A. Domingo Valls, A. Sabater Coll, R. Ruiz Verdugo (eds.), *Demographic Analysis of Latin American Immigrants in Spain: From Boom to Bust*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland 2015, p. 84.

³ O. Sanmartin, *El flujo de emigración de la población de nacionalidad española aumenta un 15,5%*, “El Mundo,” 12.10.2014, <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2014/12/10/54882391ca47414a388b4579.html> (access: 14.10.2016); *La emigración hace que España pierda población por tercer año*, “El Periodico,” 26.06.2015, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/sociedad/emigracion-hace-que-espana-pierda-poblacion-por-tercer-ano-4305855> (access: 14.10.2016); *La emigración juvenil costará al Estado 57.000 millones de euros si continúa el actual desempleo*, RTVE, 2.12.2015, <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20150212/emigracion-juvenil-costara-estado-57000-millones-euros-si-continua-actual-desempleo/1098208.shtml> (access: 14.10.2016); T. Buck, *Migration: The Drain from Spain*, “The Financial Times,” 20.02.2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f7bdd5ce-995e-11e3-91cd-00144feab7de.html#axzz40EaG4Hjd> (access: 14.10.2016); T. Giles, *Spain's Lost Generation of Graduates Join Wave of Migrants in Search of Jobs*, “The Guardian,” 28.03.2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/28/new-europe-spain-graduates-emigrate> (access:

confront the news spread by the media with scientific research findings. It discusses the state of migration processes in contemporary Spain. The article also looks closely into the public discourse on the future of the Spanish society. It shows migrants' fears and hopes lying behind the decision of moving to a new place.

2007 was the year in which a worldwide property crisis began. It brought serious economic breakdown not only in Spain. The United States experienced the so called *subprime mortgage crisis*.⁴ The World Bank reported that the American crisis ranked among the most serious economic events since the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁵ Real estate problems also appeared in Western Europe and were followed by an economic recession, that affected many aspects of their economies. Reinhart and Rogoff as well as Schularick and Taylor stress, that banking crises are recurrent phenomena that often bring long lasting recessions.⁶ There were many reasons lying under the 2007 crisis. Ozlem Akin (et al.) notes, that the boom and the bust in the housing market, and the associated credit cycle, were the main drivers of the crises that hit Spain, the United States and other countries.⁷ A few years prior, Spain's economic situation was completely different. The country experienced a time of real estate prosperity, the housing and credit market was flourishing. It was an effect of the changes made by the Spanish government in 1998, when a new law was introduced. It was called Ley del Suelo ("law on the ground")⁸ and according to it, the land market was allowed to be privatized and sold to be built on. This situation brought an increase of new investments. In 1996, there were 288,034 housing starts. The number grew steadily and ten years later, in 2006, there were 760,179 housing starts in Spain. This meant a 260% increase in ten years only. Eugenio Burriel pointed that: "despite this enormous increase in the supply, the price of housing has not stopped increasing and the availability of affordable housing has been very scarce."⁹ Spain's building rate surpassed even those of Germany, France

14.10.2016); *Spain Emigration up Sharply in 2012*, "The Huffington Post," 17.07.2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/17/spain-emigration-up-2012_n_1679355.html (access: 14.10.2016).

⁴ H. Tong, S.-J. Wei, *Real Effects of the Subprime Mortgage Crisis: Is it a Demand Or a Finance Shock?*, International Monetary Fund, 2008, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2008/wp08186.pdf> (access: 14.10.2016).

⁵ D.M. Jaffee, *The U.S. Subprime Mortgage Crisis: Issues Raised and Lessons Learned*, Commission on Growth and Development, The World Bank, Working Paper no. 28, Washington, D.C., 2008, p. 11.

⁶ C.M. Reinhart, K.S. Rogoff, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2011; M. Schularick, A.M. Taylor, *Credit Booms Gone Bust: Monetary Policy, Leverage Cycles and Financial Crises, 1870–2008*, The National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper no. 15512, November 2009, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15512.pdf> (access: 14.09.2016).

⁷ O. Akin et al., *The Real Estate and Credit Bubble: Evidence from Spain*, Barcelona GSE Working Paper Series, August 2014, vol. 5, iss. 2, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13209-014-0115-9> (access: 14.09.2016).

⁸ *Economy of Spain – The Popping Housing Bubble 2007*, Barcelona Real Estate and Lifestyle Services, <http://suitelife.com/blog/barcelona-real-estate/economy-of-spain-housing-bubble-2007/> (access: 14.09.2016).

⁹ E.L. Burriel, *Subversion of Land-Use Plans and the Housing Bubble in Spain*, [in:] N. Benach, A. Walliser, *Urban Challenges in Spain and Portugal*, Routledge, London, New York 2016, p. 6.

and Italy put together. In 2006, Spain's annual average of 13.3 housing starts per 1000 inhabitants (Suarez says even about 18 housing starts per 1000 inhabitants in 2006¹⁰) more than double the normal rate of household formation in Europe. It is also important to note, that a significant increase in construction activity was observed all of Spain. However, there were differences of scale. In 2006, among 50 Spanish provinces the index of housing starts per 1000 habitants more than doubled between 1996 and 2006 in 19 of them. In 14 provinces it tripled, and in 4 it exceeded it more than six times. Murcia, Alicante and Valencia became the leading provinces, as these six provinces alone accounted for 41% of all the housing starts in Spain in the period from 1997–2006.¹¹

There were also evident benefits of the situation like the rising number of job offers for anyone willing to work. Young Spaniards¹² and immigrants experienced no problems when looking for a job. Many Latin Americans decided to migrate to Spain at that time. Data shows that between 1997 and 2007 almost 1,5 million citizens of Latin American countries decided to leave their homes and build their economic well-being in Spain.¹³ According to the data based on the National Immigrant Survey carried out in Spain, 63% of migrants living in Spain in 2007 admitted that the economic factor was the strongest incentive to migrate. 20.5% decided to move to Europe to improve their life quality, 11% were searching a job and 20% were searching for a better job.¹⁴ As a result, in 2010 there were 400,000 Ecuadorans, almost 300,000 Colombians, 210,000 Bolivians and almost the same number of about 120,000 of a group of Brazilians and Argentinians.¹⁵ Due to the growing need for a labor force, an unemployment rate dropped to an all-time level – 8.41%,¹⁶ while in 1995 it was 23.49%.¹⁷ Not only did the number of new investments skyrocket, their prices did as well. The housing cost rose from EUR 915 per square meter in 1990 to EUR 2,516 per square meter in 2005.¹⁸ This meant that the previous assumptions of the Spanish government were wrong. The Spanish authorities

¹⁰ J.L. Suárez, *European Real Estate Markets*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, New York 2008, p. 31.

¹¹ E.L. Burriel, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹² It is important to note that while describing migration trends from Spain to Latin America one have to remember that presented numbers can describe different groups of people. In works cited in this article the word *Spaniards* is used to describe people who are Spanish citizens. But researchers point that among them there are Spanish nationals born in Spain as well as naturalized. It should be remembered that for people of Spanish origin there is a “fast track” to Spanish citizenship guaranteed by the government of Spain. This article refers to data and works that use the general definition of *Spaniards* and follows this definition. Any time when it refers to Spanish nationals born in Spain it is cleared in the text.

¹³ I. Sirkeci, J.H. Cohen, D. Ratha, *Migration and Remittances during the Global Financial Crisis and Beyond*, World Bank Publications, Washington, D.C., 2012, p. 256.

¹⁴ V. Prieto Rosas, A. Lopez Gay, *Push and Pull Factors of Latin American Migration*, [in:] A. Domingo Valls, A. Sabater Coll, R. Ruiz Verdugo (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁵ *¡Ya me voy! Latinos and Locals Alike are Leaving for the New Continent*, “The Economist,” 6.10.2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21564255> (access: 14.09.2016).

¹⁶ *Unemployment Rate in Spain from 1st quarter 2005 to 3rd quarter 2015*, Statista. The Statistics Portal, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/453410/unemployment-rate-in-spain/> (access: 14.09.2016).

¹⁷ *Hiszpania, stopa bezrobocia*, Trading Economics, <http://pl.tradingeconomics.com/spain/unemployment-rate> (access: 14.09.2016).

¹⁸ *Economy of Spain...*

believed that new investments would meet the needs of young Spaniards. But the reality was completely different. Prices were rising faster than the Spaniards' salaries and not everyone could afford a new property. As a response to the growing needs, there was a simple solution offered by banks – attractive mortgages. They proposed a 40 or 50 year repayment period. As the real estate boom seemed to be endless at that time, many Spanish citizens decided to take out a loan. When the property bubble exploded in 2007, they realized how serious their situation was.¹⁹ They were left with properties, the value of which was significantly lower than at the time when they bought it.²⁰ They had to pay high mortgage installments while many of them lost their jobs.²¹ A steadily increasing unemployment rate (about 11% in 2008, almost 18% in 2009, 20% in 2010 and the highest level noted in 2013 – 26.94%)²² made many of them think about the necessity of looking for new opportunities. An economic recession that started in Spain when the property crisis exploded forced many people to leave. One of the first groups that decided to flee were the Latin American immigrants. In this situation, when it was difficult to get a job in Spain, when the Spanish economic situation was getting worse, and in the meantime the Latin American economies were gaining more power, reducing unemployment rates to only a few percent, their calculation was simple – to move back to Latin America. It was not only then that immigrants realized that migration was a necessity. According to Fundacion Alternativas, between 2008 and 2012 700,000 Spaniards left Spain. Additional figures from Spain's National Statistics Institute show that 547,890 people left in 2013. However, official statistics say, that only 79,306 of them were Spanish nationals born in Spain.²³ It is worth noting, however, that emigration from Spain has been increasing since the outbreak of the Great Spanish Recession. In 2005, just 3,700 Spaniards decided to leave the country heading mostly to Latin America. In 2011, there were 20,000 Spanish emigrants and two years later the number grew to 80,000.²⁴

Most of the Spaniards leaving the country decided to choose one of the Latin American countries as their destination. Among the different incentives researchers name a few that are more significant than others. Firstly, it is the level of unemployment in Latin America.²⁵ While the unemployment rate in Spain skyrocketed, growing to almost 30% in 2012,²⁶ it did not exceed 8% in Brazil, 6% in Argentina and

¹⁹ C.A. Brebbia, E. Beriatos, *Sustainable Development and Planning V*, WIT Press, Southampton 2011, p. 130.

²⁰ S. Boura, *The Social Impact of the Crisis on Youth Unemployment: Comparative Study Spain and Greece*, Anchor Academic Publishing, Hamburg 2015, p. 16.

²¹ F. Kennard, A. Hanne, *Boom & Bust: A Look at Economic Bubbles*, Lulu.com, Morrisville 2015, pp. 60–61.

²² *Spain Unemployment Rate*, Trading Economics, <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/spain/unemployment-rate> (access: 15.09.2016).

²³ N. Johanson, *Where Have all the Spaniards Gone?*, BBC, 3.11.2014, <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20141003-why-are-spaniards-fleeing-home> (access: 15.09.2016).

²⁴ *Going to Extra Time*, "The Economist," 16.06.2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21556953> (access: 15.09.2016).

²⁵ L. Bértola, J.A. Ocampo, *The Economic Development of Latin America since Independence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 250.

²⁶ N. Schofield, G. Caballero (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 128.

4% in Mexico.²⁷ Spanish citizens also benefited from the language challenge. A great deal of Latin America speaks Spanish; therefore there is no language barrier. It is also important to note, that the history of Spanish speaking countries in the western hemisphere has played an important role as an incentive bringing Spaniards to the region. Once it was discovered by Christopher Columbus, it was marked by three hundred years of Spanish presence. It resulted in cultural expansionism and Iberian heritage rooted in the Latin American culture. Spanish citizens who decided to migrate to South America often explained that their decision was easier to make because of these similarities. Between 2007 and 2011, the number of Spaniards coming to Brazil increased by 227%, Chile by 144%, Mexico – 129% and Venezuela – 114%. However, the most surprising data was noted in Ecuador. The number leaving for this Latin American country soared by 467%.²⁸ Until the end of 2015, Ecuador had a liberal immigration policy, which significantly influenced its situation. This resulted in a great deal of immigrants using their chance to come to Ecuador temporarily, looking for a job or just to use it as a transfer country on their way to the United States, for example. This solution has recently been used by Cubans fleeing their island.²⁹ An increase in the population with Spanish nationality residents living abroad in 2014 is shown in Figure 1:

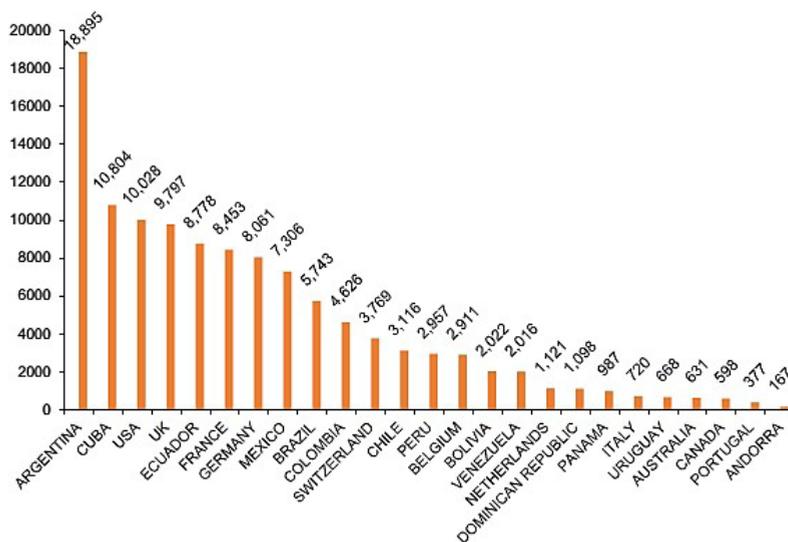


Figure 1. Increase in the population with Spanish nationality resident abroad in 2014, by country

Source: Statistics on the Register of Spaniards Resident Abroad at 1 January 2015, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 18.03.2015, http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/np898_en.pdf (access: 8.10.2016).

²⁷ ¡Ya me voy!...

²⁸ G. Stargardter, P. Day, *Reversal of Fortunes Sends Spaniards to Latin America*, Reuters, 31.10.2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-emigration-idUSBRE89U1C820121031> (access: 17.09.2016).

²⁹ O.J. Reich, E. Vazquez Ger, *How Ecuador's Immigration Policy Helps Al-Qaeda*, "Foreign Policy," 2.04.2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/02/how-ecuadors-immigration-policy-helps-al-qaeda/> (access: 12.08.2016).

After 2010, a debate over the future of the Spanish society became more intense. The media reported about a huge drain of the labor force, and what was more important, they were alerting about citizens' exodus, a brain drain and its negative consequences.³⁰ Employment Minister Fátima Báñez described the situation in Spain as "an unprecedented flight of talent."³¹ Moreover, data revealed by Adecco, an international leading provider of Human Resources solutions, found that "one out of two Spanish citizens would go abroad in exchange for a job with a similar or even slightly lower income than what they were earning in Spain."³² The media was citing Eurostat's data showing that in 2010, Spain reported the largest number of emigrants among European countries. According to stats, about 403,000 people decided to leave Spain.³³ Three years later the number increased to 532,000.³⁴ Considering these numbers, the situation did not seem to be good and it explained why the debate over the problem was developing. However, the problem turned out to be more complex and the media coverage was too simplified. When such piecemeal data, delivered from different sources, became a background of a social debate over the future of Spanish society, researchers agreed that the time had come to verify them. First, it was argued, that the basic mistake made by the media was the lack of distinction between the emigration of Spaniards (as Spanish citizens by birth) and non-Spaniards. The latter group consists both of immigrants and naturalized foreigners, who are Spanish citizens indeed, but they were not born in Spain, hence they are not native residents. This distinction was crucial because it gave a new perspective on the data presented above. After assigning such two groups, at least, it was clear, that there was no Spanish citizens' (born in Spain) exodus at all. According to researchers from the Elcano Royal Institute, only 2% of all Spaniards living outside Spain were those, who were citizens by birth and who migrated because of the crisis. It gave the number of about 40,000 which in comparison to the total number of 2,183,043 Spanish emigrants worldwide did not represent a significant number. Among the 1,383,626 Spaniards living in Latin America an important number were those who had migrated before the crisis began. It is also important to note, that the number of Spaniards in Latin American countries also includes a certain number of the so called *false migrants*. These are people, who cannot be classified as true emigrants, because they were born and they live in the same country. There are two groups of them. The first group represents Spanish citizens' descendants who had never been to Spain before. The second group gathers Spanish citizens' descendants who were born in Latin America, who at one point migrated to Spain and after obtaining Spanish citizenship

³⁰ O.R. Sanmartin, *op.cit.*; *La emigración hace...*; *La emigración juvenil...*; T. Giles, *op.cit.*; T. Buck, *op.cit.*

³¹ A. Kassam, *Spain Experiencing Brain Drain as Weak Economy Lingers*, "USA Today," 26.10.2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/10/26/spain-brain-drain/3015575/> (access: 23.09.2016).

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Statystyki dotyczące migracji i populacji migrantów*, Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics/pl (access: 1.05.2016).

³⁴ *Migration and Migrant Population Statistics*, Eurostat, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics (access: 1.05.2016).

there, they decided to return to a Latin American country. According to the data of Instituto Nacional de Estadística, in 2015 only 315,039 of Latin American residents of Spanish origin were born in Spain.³⁵

Surprisingly, despite the above mentioned facilitations, the process of acculturation in Latin America was not easy. Spaniards starting their life in Latin American countries reported problems connected with the overgrowth of bureaucracy. Obtaining a work permit was difficult and took much time to succeed. Therefore, many Spaniards were left unemployed. However, these obstacles did not discourage young migrants.

According to Instituto Nacional de Estadística, a majority of Spanish migrants were people between 25 and 35 years of age. They were a valuable part of the Spanish society, well educated professionals with a promising potential for the future. But the domestic labor market had nothing to offer. In 2014, one in two Spaniards between 16 and 24 years of age was unemployed. 14% of students in Spain were without a job in comparison to an average 5% in other OECD member countries.³⁶ What is more important, Spain was one of the leading countries with top levels of graduates. About 40% of students between 25 and 30 years of age graduated while in the European Union it was 34%.³⁷

As it was said in the paper, there were many factors that shaped Spanish emigration to Latin America. Among them, the Great Recession played a significant role. In a discussion over the problem of Spaniards fleeing abroad, there was a clear division. A part of the society was pessimistic, sharing a vision of brain drain and the diminishing power of the domestic labor force. There were also those, who noticed bright sides of the problem. According to them, a long term effect of contemporary emigration will be a returning wave of Spanish citizens – more experienced and more valuable for the domestic labor market. However, the current consequences of the post crisis emigration are significant. Spain's officials talk about "the lost generation" when referring to a young part of the society. Although the Spanish economy is getting better, it will take time to restore branches heavily harmed by the crisis. About 4 million job positions were lost in the real estate sector alone. According to the Spanish authorities, it may take even ten years to bring them back.

The most significant problem is not how many Spaniards (Spanish nationals born in Spain) are leaving Spain. Many researchers proved that the media was wrong, while alarming about the exodus of Spanish citizens by birth. In fact, in comparison to the total number of the Spanish population, only 0.1% of that number there were citizens born in Spain, who decided to migrate. The issue that arouses concern is those who migrate. "The Economist" cites a Spanish head hunter who says: "this generation of young people who are leaving are our best qualified ever. It is a huge loss of investment

³⁵ *Statistics on the Register of Spaniards Resident Abroad at 1 January 2015*, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 18.03.2015, http://www.ine.es/en/prensa/np898_en.pdf (access: 8.10.2016).

³⁶ *Spain Suffers Brain Drain as Youth Emigrate Abroad to Look for Work*, "Global Times," 3.02.2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/905580.shtml> (access: 8.10.2016).

³⁷ *Brain Drain in Spain as 1m Graduates Swell the Ranks of the Unemployed*, "The Guardian," 1.06.2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/01/europa-brain-drain-spain-graduates> (access: 8.10.2016).

for Spain. On average it cost us 60,000 euros to train each engineer, and they are leaving.”³⁸

Not only engineers, nurses and teachers are leaving Spain, but also scientists.³⁹ Research and development in Spain have been cut by around 40% between 2008 and 2013, and many scientists decided to leave Spain and take their work abroad. In the current situation, when the country needs innovative projects to overcome economic instability, a brain drain is a real challenge.

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³⁸ *The Brain Drain in Spain is Mainly to Spain’s Gain*, “The Economist,” 30.04.2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freexchange/2012/04/labour-markets-0> (access: 8.10.2016).

³⁹ *OECD Economic Surveys: Spain 2012*, OECD Publishing, 2012, p. 29; J. Stephenson, L. Ling, *Challenges to Teacher Education in Difficult Economic Times: International Perspectives*, Routledge, New York–London 2013, p. 81.

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