

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The sociodemographic impacts of visa controls on the Iberoamerican immigrants flows to Spain, 1988 to 2006.

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Introduction

In the last years, Spain has become one of the most important receiving countries of foreign immigration in Europe, and the second destiny of Iberoamerican citizens after the United States. Until the end of the decade of 1980, Spain was traditionally a sending country of emigrants. By 1996, foreign-born population represented 2.7% of the country's population. In 2001 it was 3.9% and in 2007, 11.6% of which 4.5% were born in some Iberoamerican country.

The rapid immigration grow was accompanied by an intense legislative activity to promote the reinforcement of barriers to entry in the country, which was characterized by its novelty under a scenario of increasing inflows of foreigners and by the direct influence of the European integration norms related to international migration. Among the restrictive measures, the Visa System is particularly relevant to study the effects of immigration policy in the changes of volume, socio-demographic structure and origin of the flows arrived.

In this context, Iberoamerican citizens are a paradigmatic example for our purposes in this article. First of all, they have presented the largest inflows compared with other non-communitarian origins. Regarding legislative facilities on immigration and nationality law, they have being considered the "favorite" immigrant group. Lastly, the diversity of the flows considering nationality, requirements of entrance to Spain and the different effective dates of visa requirement according to specific nationalities makes possible a substantial comparative analysis of the sociodemographic effects of visa controls.

Research Questions

Key questions that are addressed in this paper include the following:

- 1) To what extent the visa requirement might affect immigrant flows?
- 2) Are there significant changes in the volume and characteristics of Iberoamerican flows by nationality to Spain before and after the effective date of visa requirement?
- 3) Are there differences between the behavior of the flows that are required to have a visa for entry to Spain and the others that don't need it?

Data

This article explores the data provided by the **Residential Variation Statistics**, elaborated by the INE of Spain, for the period between 1988 and 2006. This statistical source registers the annual migratory flows from abroad based on new registrations and registry removals in the municipal registers of inhabitants due to changes in residence as well as their distribution by age group, sex, country of birth, country of origin and nationality.

The effects of visa requirement to enter in Spain on Iberoamerican flows.

The increasing enforcement of the immigration law in Spain, and particularly of the visa policy, generates three possible direct demographic impacts on the flows of immigrants: first, and the most expected by receiving countries, is that it reduces the annual number of arrivals, specially of those who intend to remain under an undocumented status. A second possibility, is that the previous announcement of the measure produces an anticipated and massive flow and, finally, it is possible that there are significant changes in the immigrants' characteristics like sex and age structure, basically because of growing movements derived by family reunification, labor and study reasons.

Until 2001, just Peruvian (since 1992) and Dominican (since 1993) citizens were required to present a tourist visa for entry to Spain, which allows to stay in the country

for 3 months. The exemption of this requisite for the majority of the other Iberoamerican nationalities allowed immigrants to arrive and remain in the country not only as tourists, but also as undocumented immigrants after the end of this 3 months. Although the volume of the immigrants' flows from Iberoamerican countries until the middle of the decade of 1990 was moderated comparing with the actual proportions, data reveals that the visa requirement didn't affect the flows of the two nationalities mentioned above. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the new century, the impact of visa controls in the movements is evident. In the year 2001, and according to the rapid increase in the volume of the flows from Iberoamerica, these nationalities are included in the Schengen list of countries not exempted from short stay visa, as well as the Colombians and Cubans. Ecuadorians are part of the list since 2003 and Bolivians since 2007.

In the case of Colombians and Ecuadorians, data reveals that since the announcement of the normative, there was an anticipation of the arrivals while from the effective data of the visa requirement, the movements decreased. On the other hand, Cubans, Dominicans and Peruvians -one of the most ancient nationalities from Iberoamerica with important presence in Spain- there are no evidences that indicate that visa requirement has changed the growing trend of the flows. Regarding the sex and age structure of the immigrants' flows, this study finds that, in all cases, there is an important change. After visa requirement, there is an increasing participation of minors and male adults in the collective.

Finally, data indicates that Iberoamerican nationalities that do not require a visa have presented a heterogeneous dynamic: while the oscillations in the flows from Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela are explained by the domestic economic and political context of these countries, others like those from Brazil and Paraguay, which are very recent, presented an increasing trend.

Conclusions

Overall the analysis provides evidence that as older the flows are, less significant the effects of visa requirement in their volume. The immigration control by visa requirement implies a decrease of some inflows and a selectivity of the immigrants.

Nevertheless, it also promotes an anticipation of foreign entrances in the country, especially of those who couldn't fill the requisites to obtain a visa.