

Spain

Even as it started to suffer the effects of the global economic downturn, inflows of foreigners to Spain in 2007 reached record levels. Statistics from municipal registers recorded more than 920 000 foreigners moving to Spain in 2007, up 15% over the previous year. The main source countries were Romania (174 000), Morocco (71 000) and Bolivia (46 000). According to registers, there were 5.27 million foreigners in Spain in early 2008, accounting for 11.4% of the population. The main nationalities were Romania (731 000), Morocco (652 000), Ecuador (428 000) and the United Kingdom (353 000). Inflows declined by 25% in 2008, to 692 000, largely due to the economic crisis, which struck Spain particularly hard.

The stock of permit-holders rose by 32% during 2007 to reach almost 4 million foreigners. Most of this increase (613 000) was due to newly registered residents from other EU countries, largely Romanian (+186% to 604 000) and Bulgarian citizens (+111% to 127 000), as Spain applied a transition period following their accession to the EU on 1 January 2007. Labour market access requires authorization and registration, although it is not subject to any restrictions. The other main foreign populations also saw increases: Morocco (+31% to 649 000), Ecuador (+5% to 396 000) and Columbia (+19% to 254 000). This rate of growth declined in 2008, to 12%, as the foreign population reached 4.4 million.

The Spanish labour force has grown significantly over the past decade as unemployment fell to a historic low of 7.6% in 2007. From 2005 through 2007, the proportion of foreign workers in the labour force rose to 14.5% and accounted for about half of the expansion in the active population. Total employment and the participation rate for Spanish citizens – especially women – was also rising in 2007, although not as quickly as for foreigners. In 2008, employment of foreigners continued to grow, but not as quickly as the foreign labour force, and unemployment rose to 21.3% by the end of 2008, compared to 12.5% for Spanish citizens.

Since 2005, Spanish labour migration management has allowed two channels: employer-nominated and anonymous recruitment (“contingent”). Most immigrants with renewable contracts came through the former channel: 240 000 in 2007 and 119 000 in 2008. Seasonal workers through both channels numbered 80 000 in 2007 and 87 000 in 2008.

As a result of rising unemployment and a slack labour market, the “contingent” channel for long-term recruitment was significantly restricted in 2008 and 2009. Similarly, the shortage list (“catalogue”) exempting employers from a labour market test has also been sharply curtailed.

Spain has offered a programme since November 2008 to encourage unemployed immigrants to return to their home countries. Eligibility is restricted to citizens of a number of non-European countries, receiving unemployment benefits. Applicants can receive their benefits in two lump sums on condition they and their families return home for at least three years. Participation in the programme has been limited, with 4 000 applicants by June 2009 out of more than 130 000 eligible.

A discretionary continuous regularization mechanism is in place for undocumented immigrants who demonstrate integration. From the start of the programme in 2006 through March 2009, more than 110 000 have been regularised.

Spain maintained its commitment to allocate EUR 200 million annually to its Integration Fund, to be spent largely on integration, reception and education.

Spain proposed some reforms to its immigration law in July 2009. On the one hand, the reforms add some flexibility to work permits in light of the economic situation, allowing more job mobility during the first year of stay and making criteria for renewal more flexible. On the other hand, the reforms stiffen the penalties for illegal migration, lengthening maximum detention time from 40 to 60 days and allowing imposition of a reentry ban. Family reunification conditions were also tightened for parents of immigrants.

Irregular migration to Spain by sea has been decreasing since 2007, a result of improved cooperation with Morocco and the decline in employment opportunities.

Further information:

<http://extranjeros.mtas.es/>
www.inem.es
www.ine.es