

# INTERNAL MIGRATION OF FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS IN SPANISH RURAL AREAS

Jordi Bayona-i-Carrasco

Universitat de Barcelona (UB)

Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED-CERCA)

[jordibayona@ub.edu](mailto:jordibayona@ub.edu)

Andreu Domingo

Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED-CERCA)

[adomingo@ced.uab.es](mailto:adomingo@ced.uab.es)

Osama Damoun

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

Centre d'Estudis Demogràfics (CED-CERCA)

[odamoun@ced.uab.es](mailto:odamoun@ced.uab.es)

## Introduction

Within the debate on depopulation and the "Demographic Challenge" in Spain, foreign immigration has often been seen as a lifeline (Collantes et al. 2014), limiting population losses and even reversing recessionary demographic dynamics. This immigration, which in the country as a whole totals more than 7.5 million people and 15.9% of the population, does not affect all rural municipalities in the same way, characterised by a high diversity in their socio-demographic characteristics (Recaño, 2023), and its arrival even acts by widening the gap between the most dynamic municipalities and those with more recessive dynamics (Gil et al. 2023).

Much of this international migration that arrives in rural municipalities does not originate in a migratory movement that comes directly from abroad, but is produced at a later stage, through internal migration from other areas of the country, in contexts of high mobility related to their precarious economic situation and employability (Sampedro and Camarero, 2020). Little is known about these dynamics, the characteristics of internal migratory flows and their evolution, nor about the characteristics of the migrants who finally establish their residence in these areas and their permanence. Within this framework, the main objective of this paper is to analyze the internal migration of residents of immigrant origin to these rural areas.

## Main objectives and hypothesis

This paper has three main objectives: 1) to analyse the internal migratory flows of foreign migrants to rural areas, focusing on their evolution and the composition of the flows; 2) to study the impact of these flows on the evolution of the rural population; and 3) to

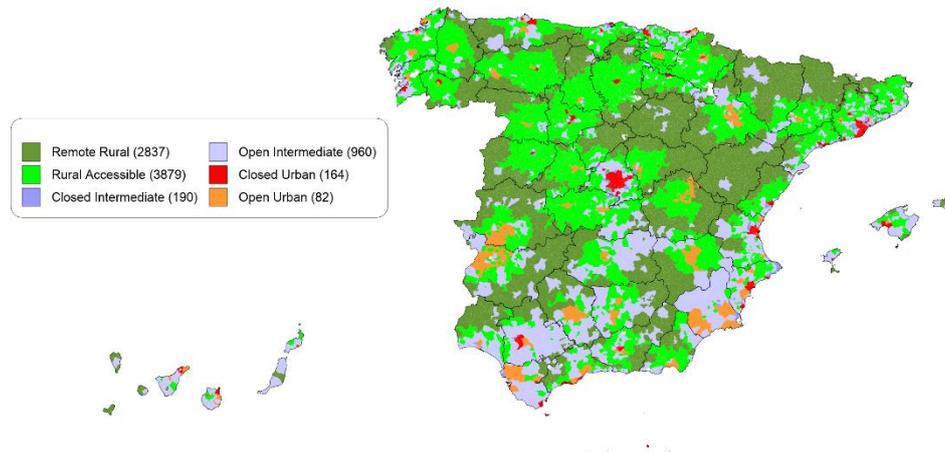
analyse the characteristics of the migrants who have arrived in these municipalities in recent years and who eventually remain living in them.

We start from the hypothesis that internal immigration is as important as international immigration in the arrival of foreign immigrants in rural areas of Spain. It is therefore necessary to know the characteristics of internal migration flows in order to understand the future evolution of the foreign population in rural areas.

## Data and Methodology

We consider using two statistical data sources. The first, the *Estadística de Variaciones Residenciales* (EVR), which collects the migrations registered annually in the Population Register, and secondly, the 2021 Population and Housing Census. With the analysis of the EVR, the annual evolution of internal migrations towards rural municipalities will be available. These are defined according to the criteria of Reig, Goerlich and Cantarino (2016), who classify Spanish municipalities into six categories (Open Urban, Closed Urban, Open Intermediate, Closed Intermediate, Accessible Rural and Remote Rural) using three criteria: population density (based on the distribution of the population in a regular geographic grid of 1km<sup>2</sup>) and size, land use and accessibility to cities. Foreign migrants will be analysed according to country of birth, distinguishing several groups among those born outside Spain (Old EU-15 and other developed countries, rest of Europe, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia). Temporally, the study considers the evolution since the beginning of the century, which makes it possible to distinguish the effect on migratory flows of the succession of various economic cycles (Migratory boom, Great recession, Economic recovery and the Covid-19).

**Fig. 1. Urban-rural typology of Spanish municipalities**



Secondly, and through the analysis of the 2021 Population Census, we will relate the migratory movements of population of foreign origin to rural areas with their socio-demographic characteristics, compared to those who do not migrate.

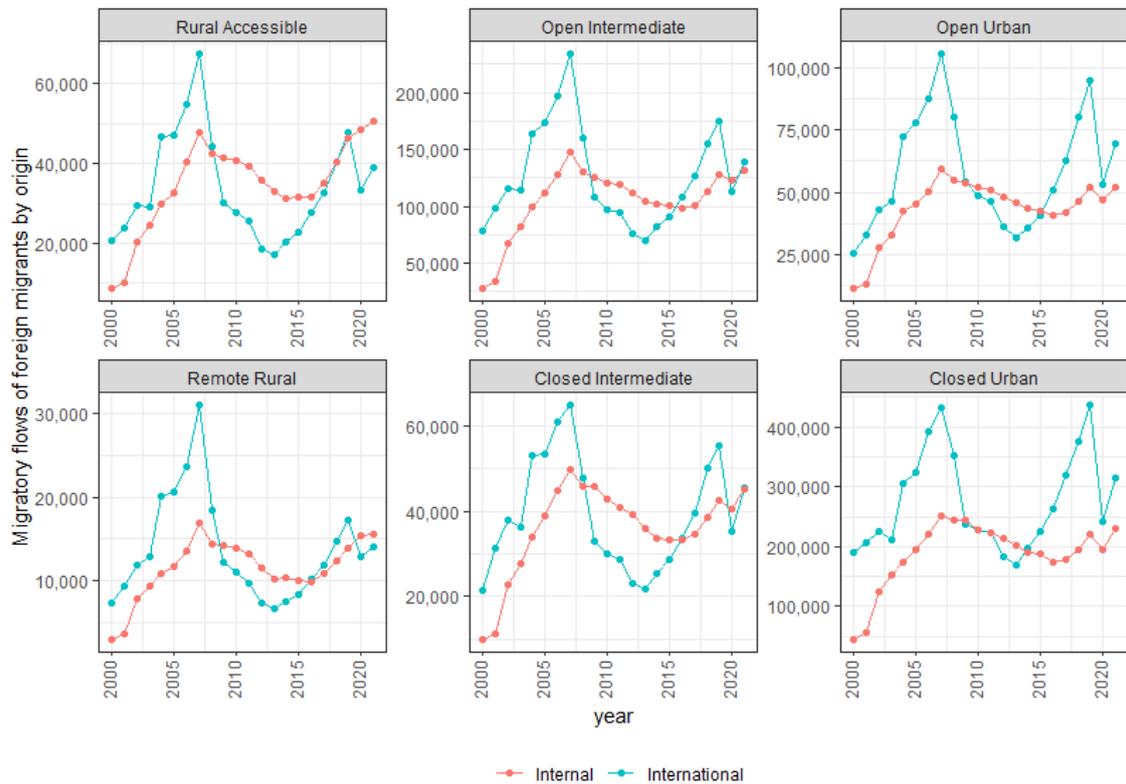
### First descriptive results: internal migration weight and migrant's characteristics

From 2000 to 2021 in Spain, 21 million immigration entries of foreign-born population are registered in the Spanish municipalities. Of these, 12 million were international

entries, while 9 were million produced within the country, meaning that internal migrations represent 43.4% of total mobility. In rural areas, up to two million entries are recorded, half of them (49.3%) being internal migration.

As can be seen in Figure 2, internal migration is currently the main source of migration in rural areas. The second migration boom does not have the same territorial impact as the first, and does not reach rural areas, especially remote ones, with the same intensity.

**Figure 2. Migratory flows in Spain of foreign immigrants according to origin (international or internal) and municipality of destination.**



Source: Own elaboration. *Estadística de Variaciones Residenciales (EVR)*, 2000-2021, with INE data.

In terms of the composition of internal migratory flows, rural areas are characterised by a lower weight of Latin Americans in internal migration (both Accessible and Remote rural). At the opposite extreme are urban municipalities (Open and Closed), where Latin Americans account for 51.8% and 60.4% of internal migration respectively.

### Expected Results

With the analysis of the 2021 Census we expect to learn about the characteristics of newly arrived migrants in rural municipalities, and the reasons behind their permanence there. Our hypothesis is that there is a strong selection based on origin and activity, which will determine who stays and who re-migrates.

## **Bibliography**

Collantes, F., Pinilla, V., Sáez, L. A. & Silvestre, J., (2014). “Reducing Depopulation in Rural Spain: The Impact of Immigration”, *Population, Space and Place*, 20, 606– 621.

Gil, F., Bayona, J. & Pujadas, I. (2023) “Is Spanish depopulation irreversible? Recent Demographic and spatial Changes in small municipalities”, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, v. 21, <https://doi.org/10.1553/p-9fd9-h7g5>

Goerlich F. J., Reig E. & Cantarino I. (2016). “Construcción de una tipología rural/urbana para los municipios españoles”, *Investigaciones Regionales – Journal of Regional Research*, 35, pp. 151-173.

Recaño, J. (2023) “La viabilidad demográfica de la España rural”, *Tribuna de Economía*, 931, 175-200.

Sampedro, R. & Camarero, L. (2020) Foreign Immigration to rural Spain: An Exploration of the precarious Rural Cosmopolitanism in the Post-Crisis Scenario, In: Döner, F., Figueiredo, E. & Rivera, M.J. (ed.) *Crisis and Post-Crisis in Rural Territories*, Springer, 9-29.