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The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the Romanian Communities from the Province of Ciudad Real, Spain. The Case of Villarrubia de los Ojos

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ABSTRACT

The consequences of the economic crisis that started in 2007 strongly affect the Spanish economy and increase the vulnerability of the immigrant population in Spain, in the context of the deepened deficiencies on the labour market and the changes in the migration policies of this country. The method of approaching this research involves the demographic and spatial analysis in Geographical Information Systems, at variable scales, starting from the national state level, with a focus on the Romanians' immigration in the Province of Ciudad Real and the Villarrubia de los Ojos locality. The spatial analysis is performed based on statistical indicators such as: the structure on gender and age groups of the Romanian immigrants from the Region of Ciudad Real, the unemployment rate of the immigrants and of the Spanish as well, the dynamics in the number of companies and of labour contracts from the sectors involving immigrants, the correlation between the number of immigrants and structure of agricultural areas, the structure of the immigrant school population, etc. The decline of the real estate market, due to the global economic crisis, has generated strategies of re-migration and re-orientation on the labour market within the immigrants' families. The Spanish migration policy increases the vulnerability of the Romanian communities in Spain by reintroducing restrictions for the Romanian workers on the labour market, starting with 22nd of July 2011.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spain has lately become the main destination for the migration flows from Romania. The scale of international migration of Romanians in this country had complex consequences for both countries that have strengthened their institutional cooperation in this direction, in recent years.

At a regional level both in Spain, which is the migration receptor space, and in Romania, which is the emitter area, there are many unclear aspects in connection with the social, economic and demographic characteristics of this migration.

Most of the studies were conducted by teams of researchers who have approached especially the situation of Romanian immigrants in highly urbanized

regions and metropolitan areas like Madrid, Valencia or Barcelona, where the largest Romanian communities are usually located.

However, the problem of the Romanian communities' situation from the rural space or less urbanized regions has not been debated enough. A series of territorial aspects have also not been clarified or studied due to the lack of geographic studies on this research theme. In the context of the global economic transformations in the recent years there are few scientific conclusions about the impact of economic crisis on the international migration of Romanians in Spain.

The present study aims to present the social and demographic consequences of the global economic crisis on the Romanian communities from the Province

of Ciudad Real in the context of gradual and simultaneous changes of the Spanish migration policy.

The specific objective of the research is to examine in closer detail the situation of the Romanian community settled in the locality of Villarrubia de los Ojos.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

A series of well defined scientific theories allow the study of international migration from different perspectives, but the choice of one theory depends mostly on the objectives of the research. Generally the researchers from the areas of destination of the migration flows approach the issues of migration through the consequences of migration on the receptor space, and the researchers from the areas of origin of the migration flows approach the issues of migration in the emitter space.

The methodology chosen for this research is in correlation with the theory of the dual labour force market, this theory being specific to research based on the issues of the receptor space. This theory neglects the factors from the area of origin of the migration flows, focusing on explaining the causes of migration flows from the area of destination.

The research is based on both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The most part of qualitative information is the result of participative observation, the author spending several years in Spain where he studied and worked during 2002-2012. He also performed an internship at the Hispano-Romanian Association of Castilla La Mancha within the PhD School in 2010.

Collecting data from the field was done based on questionnaires applied to the directorial staff of schools in Villarrubia de los Ojos, to Romanian immigrants and to the local people from the same locality. A series of interviews were held in Madrid, Ciudad Real and Villarrubia de los Ojos in the presence of government officials or researchers involved in migration issues. The demographic and economic data were downloaded from the portals: Eurostat, National Institute of Statistics, The Institute of Statistics for the Autonomous Community Castilla La Mancha and from other official sources such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

The spatial data were obtained by accessing the download centres of Spanish Spatial Data Infrastructure, "www.idee.es". Most of the spatial data were downloaded through "Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica" of the National Geographic Institute. A series of spatial data were also downloaded from the Spatial Data Infrastructure of the Autonomous Community Castilla La Mancha geoportale.

Based on the data obtained a GIS spatial database was achieved using ArcGIS Desktop 10

software, in this geo database importing also the table of economic, demographic and spatial data.

Through the spatial analysis and the representation of alphanumeric data, by using the already classical GIS technologies [1] a series of maps were implemented, representing the issues of the Romanians immigration in Spain, at a regional level in the Province of Ciudad Real and at a local level in Villarrubia de los Ojos.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the last 30 years Spain has gradually transformed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration and its migration policy has changed from a stage of inexperience before the year 2000 to a phase that promotes migration, and after the year 2008, once with the deepening of the economic crisis, Spain has initiated a restrictive immigration policy [2].

The period during which the Spanish immigration policy was favourable coincided with a wave of emigration from Romania. The year 2002 was decisive for the amplification of departures abroad, due to elimination the access visas for the Romanian citizens for the Schengen space.

Before 2007, the year that marked Romania's integration into the EU, the Romanians access to the labour market in the Schengen area could be largely characterized by the phenomenon of illegality. Most of the Romanian migrants were integrated on the black labour market in Spain, a phenomenon encouraged by the permissive attitude of the authorities.

The scale of the Romanian migration to Spain took by surprise the Spanish authorities, this mostly due to a much accelerated dynamics of the migration. This rapid increase in the number of immigrants from Romania was due to the development of complex migration networks.

After 2007, the Romanian citizens had the right to stay legally in Spain, and as of January the 1-st 2009 restrictions on the labor market have been removed.

Thus the year 2007 is reflected in the Spanish official statistics as a peak for the Romanian migration in this country. In reality, most of the records from these statistics in 2007 were of the immigrants who arrived in Spain before that date, but have not obtained residence rights only after Romania's accession to the EU. The end of the year 2007 brought a change in terms of global economic climate and also at a national level in Spain.

The financial crisis has turned into an economic crisis and affected primarily the real estate and construction domains, on which the development of the Spanish economy was based in previous years. The constructions sector was at the same time the sector of choice in which the male Romanian

immigrants had worked before the trigger of the crisis, and this aspect has affected directly the Romanian communities from Spain.

The unemployment rate in Spain has increased rapidly during 2007-2012, and the most affected were generally the immigrants.

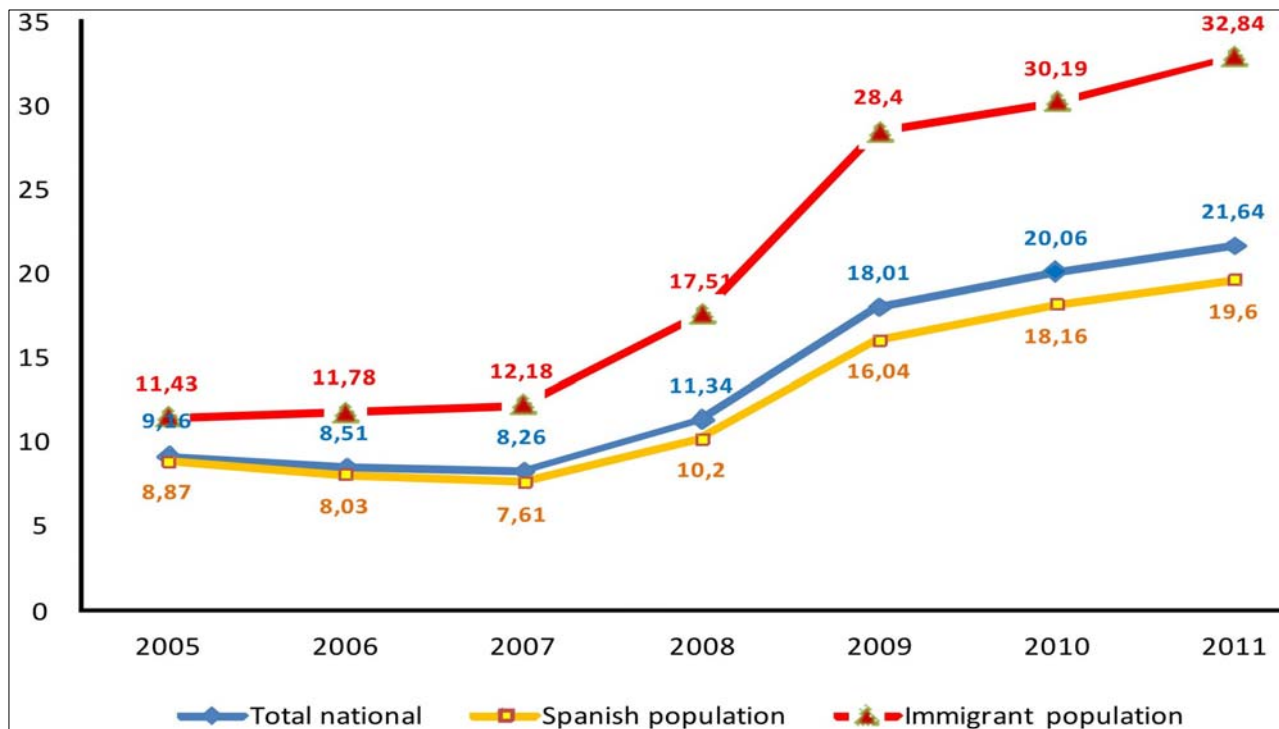


Fig. 1. Unemployment rate in Spain during 2005-2011.

As a consequence of the unemployment rate reaching historical peak levels, the Spanish authorities have tried to reduce the number of immigrants as much as possible through policies favourable to remigration in the countries of origin or by introducing restrictions on the labour market for the foreign workers.

3.1. The impact of the economic crisis on the Romanian communities from Ciudad Real Province

The dimension of the Romanian migration phenomenon in Spain is easily identified if we compare the number of immigrants by the country of origin.

Thus the Romanians from Spain hold the first place in a hierarchy of the largest immigrant communities in the year 2011, totalizing a number of 901,435 people, which represents 17% of the total number of immigrants in Spain, second place with 16% being held by the Moroccans and the third place by the Ecuadorians with 8% of the total immigrants.

In the Autonomous Community of Castilla La Mancha the number of Romanians in 2011 was of 98,880 people, representing 44% of the total immigrants.

In this autonomous community the second place as number of immigrants is occupied by the Moroccans with 16 % of the total, and on the third place are the Ecuadorians with 6 % of the total immigrants.

In the Province of Ciudad Real, in the year 2011, a number of 24,062 Romanian immigrants resided, representing 55% of the total number of foreign inhabitants in this province.

Regarding the other immigrant communities in the Province of Ciudad Real the second place is held by the Moroccans with 13 % and the third by the Ecuadorians with 6 % of the total immigrants number [3].

As it can be seen from the above mentioned data we can speak of a concentration of migration flows from Romania to certain regions of Spain. The Province of Ciudad Real is one of these regions, which holds an important number of Romanian immigrants.

It is important to analyze their location within the Ciudad Real region, the biggest Romanian immigrant communities and what was the dynamics of the Romanian migration in this province.

In Figure 2 we can see that the largest Romanian communities are located in the north-eastern part of Ciudad Real Province.

The number of Romanians grew steadily after 2003, the largest increase occurring in 2008, in almost all the localities where the Romanians settled in this province.

In the Province of Ciudad Real the economic crisis was manifested by rising unemployment due to restricted activities or disappearance of a large number of companies.

The Romanian immigrants worked mostly in the construction sector, this sector absorbing most of the immigrant labour force from the region in the period before 2007, and it was the most affected by the economic crisis. As a consequence of the major drop from the construction activities a large number of Romanians shifted to agriculture and especially to services. As a consequence of changing the conditions from the destination space of the migration flows, as it was the case of other ethnic groups, the Romanian communities from Spain have also experienced stagnation or even a slight decrease in the number of immigrants.

Another direct consequence of the economic crisis was the decrease of birth rate, the number of births given by Romanian mothers registering a peak in 2008 after which it began to decrease in the following years.

The situation of the labour markets, under crisis conditions, does not favour the immigrant population, who are being laid off more easily than the native population.

However, from a theoretical point of view the immigrants generally benefit from some advantages,

when searching for jobs, firstly a superior mobility being involved, secondly being more open to wages flexibility, and last being more open to occupational flexibility, the immigrants generally willing to accept jobs that the native population reject [2].

The continuous job recession of the immigrant population from the last years and the deepening of economic conditions in Spain had as consequence an increase in the role of Romanian immigrants associations and their involvement in the elaboration of projects for professional retraining or guidance on the labour market. In the Province of Ciudad Real The Hispanic-Romanian Association of Castilla La Mancha stood out in this direction, and implemented the project "Be Informed!" in partnership with: The National Agency of Labour Force Occupation from Romania (project leader), Consejería de Empleo y Economía din Castilla La Mancha (The Public Service of Labour Force Occupation from Castilla La Mancha) and Instituto de Formación Integral.

The Project was financed through the Sectorial Operational Programme of Human Resources Development 2007-2013 in Romania.

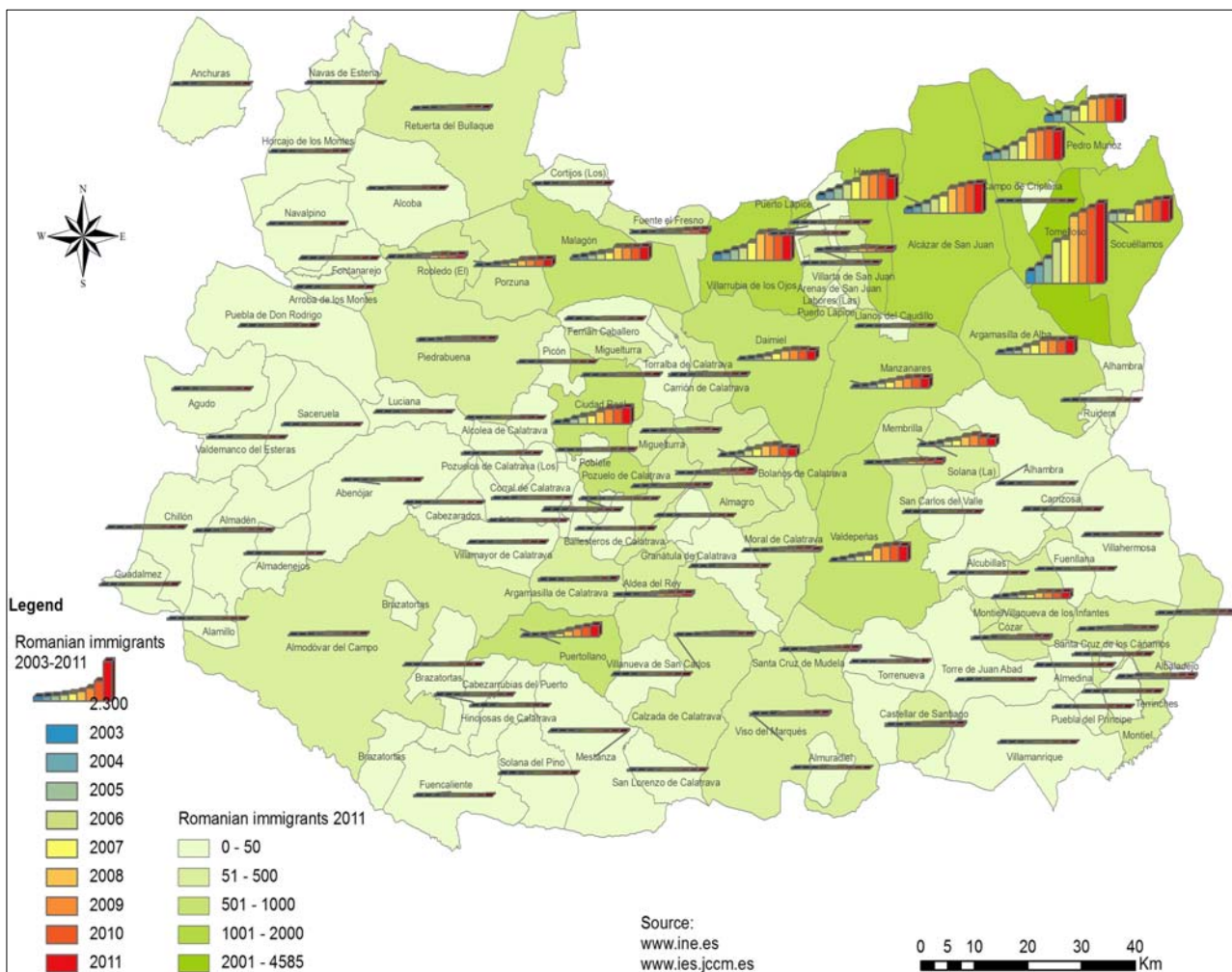


Fig. 2. The Province of Ciudad Real. Migration dynamics of the Romanians during 2003-2011.

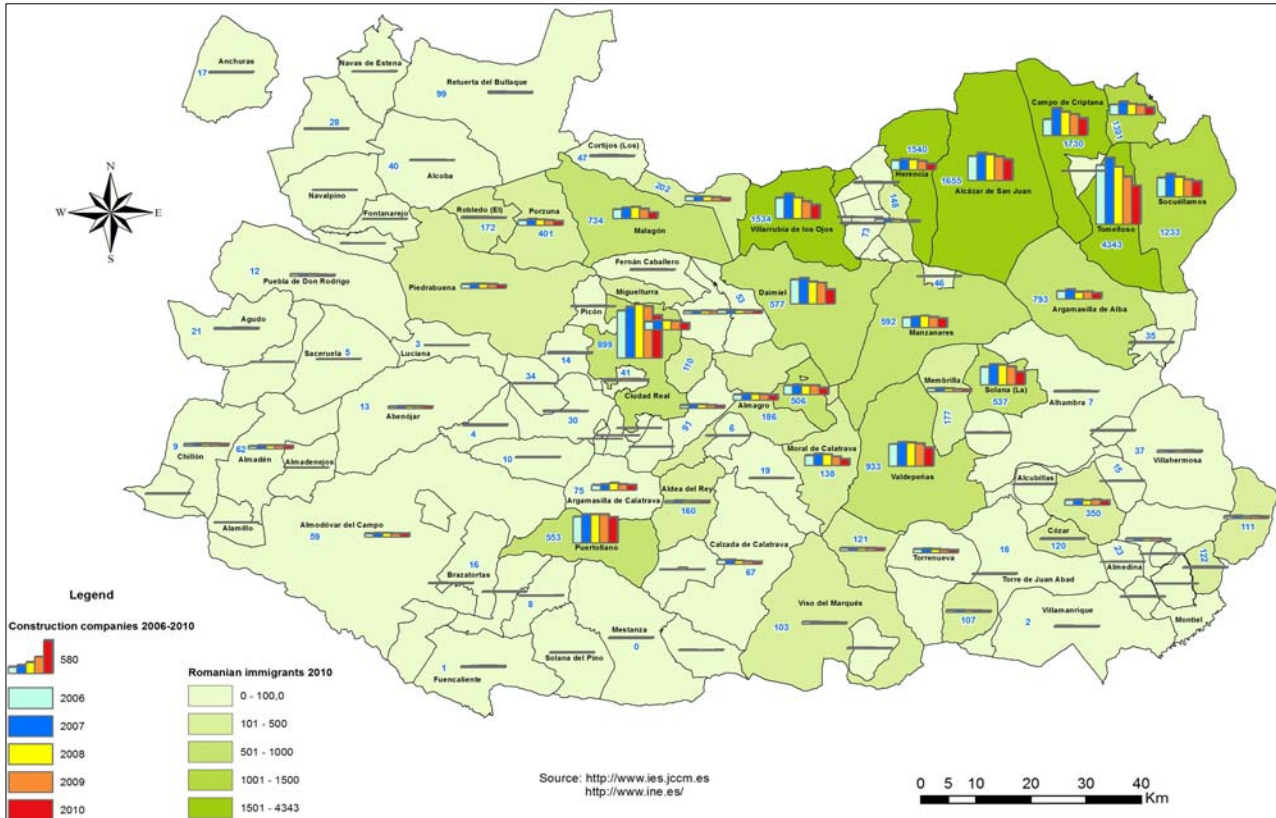


Fig. 3. Dynamics in the number of construction companies from the Province of Ciudad Real during 2006-2010.

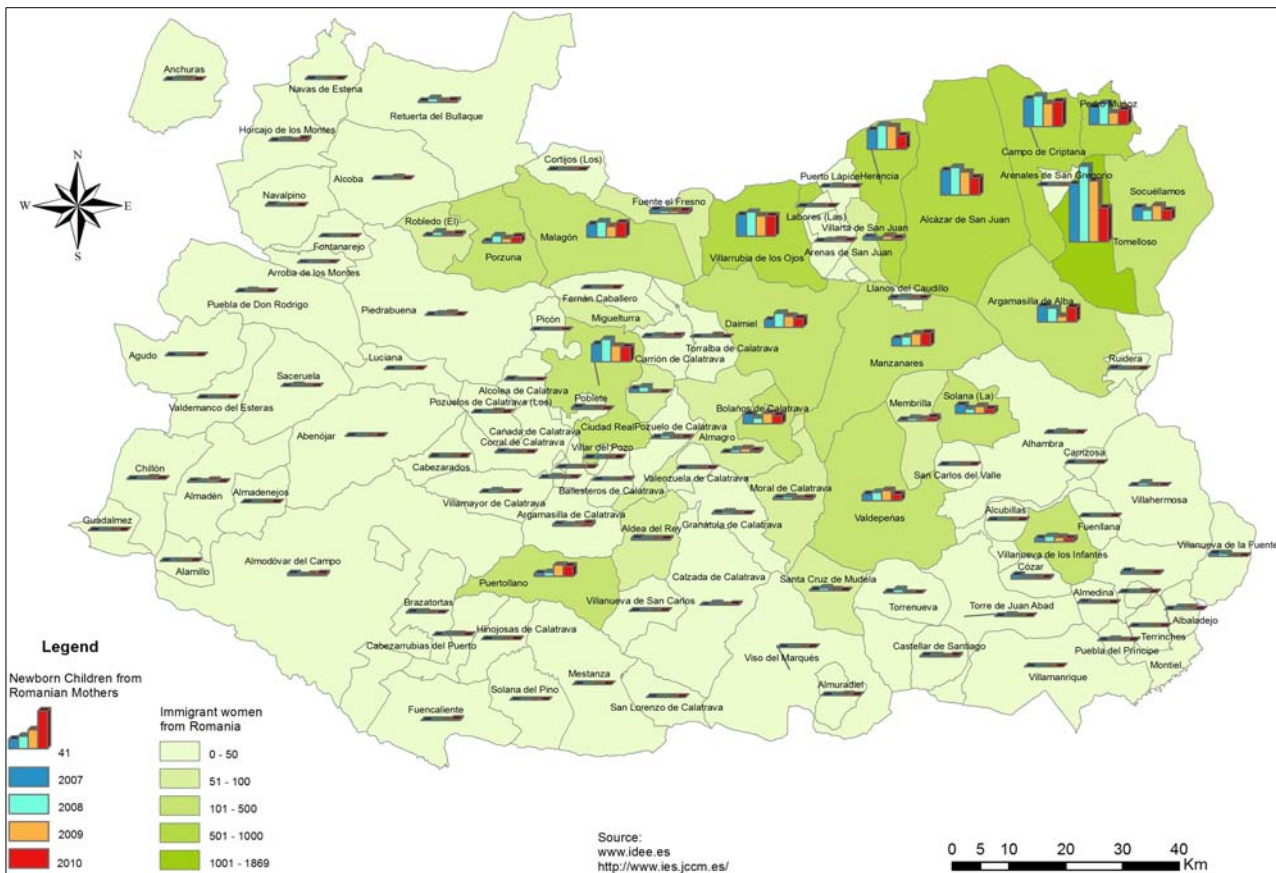


Fig. 4. The Spatial Distribution of Newborn Children from Romanian Mothers in the Province of Ciudad Real during 2007-2010.

3.2. The impact of economic crisis on the Romanian community from Villarrubia de los Ojos

Villarrubia de los Ojos is situated at the south-eastern extremity of the Toledo Mountains at the contact with Manchega Plains. Madrid City is situated north of Villarrubia de los Ojos at a distance of 159 km, and the City of Ciudad Real, the capital of the homonymous province, is located at a distance of 47 km to the south-west.

Villarrubia de los Ojos has a total administrative surface of 282 km², being crossed on an east - west direction by the rivers Guadiana and Gigüela, the locality being situated at an average altitude of 624 m.

The locality has mostly agricultural functions, but the services and industry sectors are also well developed. Several construction companies with activity in Madrid are based in Villarrubia de los Ojos.

The agricultural land area of 18,248 hectares is cultivated with the following crops: vine - 51.2%, olive groves - 18.9%, herbaceous crops - 29.6% and orchards with fruit trees - 0.3%. The mountains (with a maximum altitude of 1213 m on Alamillo peak), is mostly forested with Mediterranean pine and oak, but large areas of forest consist of scrub, forming plant associations of *matorral* type, specific to the Mediterranean region. In 2010 the locality had a population of 11119 inhabitants, 67% of the them fitting in the age group of 16-65 years, 16% being under 16 years and 17% exceeding the age of 65 (source of data: <http://www.ies.jccm.es/>). Beginning with the year 2000 Romanian immigrants, most of them coming from the following counties: Sălaj, Maramureş, Arad, Alba, Hunedoara, Olt, Vâlcea and Constanţa, began to settle in this locality. In 2003 according to official statistics in Villarrubia de los Ojos was inhabited by 309 Romanian citizens, and in 2009 their number exceeded 1,600 people.

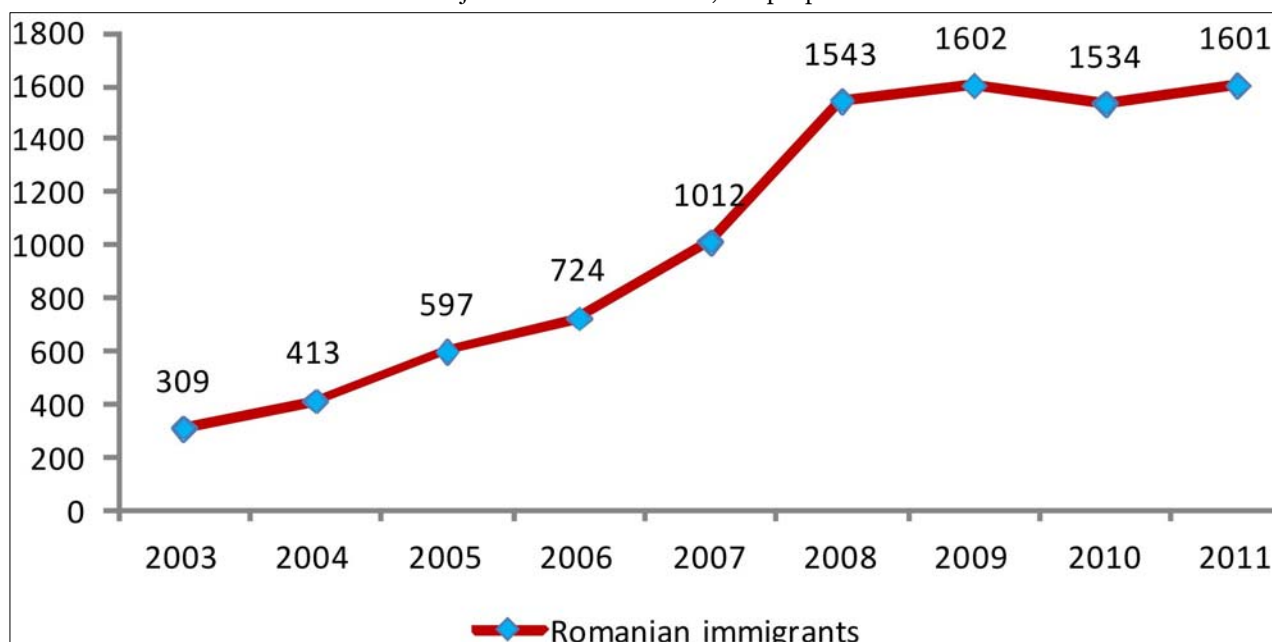


Fig. 5. Evolution in the number of Romanian immigrants in Villarrubia de los Ojos during 2003-2011.

This rapid evolution in the number of Romanian immigrants was due to the formation of migrant networks and to the favourable conditions of their settlement in Villarrubia de los Ojos.

Having the fact that the number of commuters that worked in the construction business in Madrid was very large, there were enough vacant jobs in agriculture on the local labour market.

The Villarrubia de los Ojos locality attracted important migration flows through the specific of its economy, the cultivation of vine and olives requiring a lot of labour force especially during the harvest period. A great part of the seasonal immigrants for work in agriculture settled here gradually taking advantage of

the availability of local companies to hire workers for agriculture or for constructions in Madrid.

Employment in agriculture is less well paid and most immigrants have tried to work in the construction business, thus determining a direct relationship between the development of local companies that worked in the construction sector in Madrid and the growth of immigrant population.

Every morning a large number of buses with workers used to depart from Villarrubia de los Ojos to Madrid.

The increase in the number of Romanian immigrants in the locality has also led to the development of the local real estate sector and to the

dynamization of other sectors such as industry or local trade and last but not least the revival of agriculture.

The structure of the nationalities of immigrants in Villarrubia de los Ojos on 01.01.2011 was the following: 90% Romanians, Moroccans 5%, 1% Ukrainians, Moldovans 1% and 3% other nationalities.

The structure by gender and age groups of the Romanian immigrants from Villarrubia de los Ojos at the same time was the following: 57% male as compared to only 43% female, the most numerous age groups being the males between 25 and 40 years.

These characteristics of the immigrant population influence the structure of the population at the locality's level, by increasing the percentage of the active population and the masculinisation of the population.

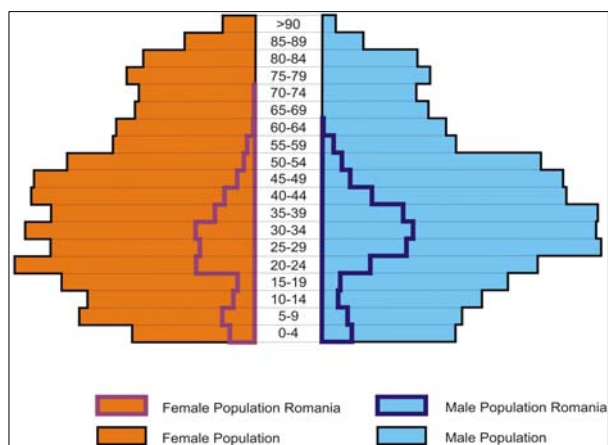


Fig. 6. Age structure diagram in Villarrubia de los Ojos in the year 2011.

Beginning with 2008 the crisis of the real estate sector and of the constructions sector in Madrid triggered a reorientation of the immigrant workers on the labour market, but also of the native people from Villarrubia de los Ojos. The disappearance of a large number of construction companies and the high levels of unemployment reoriented the native population to agriculture, thus the immigrant population have lost their jobs from agriculture and constructions as well, or from the local industry.

In the year 2008 in Villarrubia de los Ojos there were 367 construction companies, whereas in 2009 their number dropped to 302 and in 2010 only 240 remained.

The rate of the yearly variations indicate the fact that in 2009 there was a relative drop by 17,71% in the number of construction companies as compared to the previous year, and in 2010 there was a drop by 20,53% as compared to 2009. These percentage rates indicate a decreasing trend in the number of construction companies from Villarrubia de los Ojos, gradually, each year, beginning with the emergence of the real estate crisis in Madrid.

If we took into consideration the fact that most of the companies reduced considerably their activity, confirming the previous example in which we pointed out through the number of closed companies, we would be able to clearly understand the size of the phenomenon at the level of the analyzed locality and the consequences on the immigrant population.

The local industry in Villarrubia de los Ojos is in direct relation with the constructions sector, the most important local companies producing reinforced concrete components or metallic and aluminium parts.

Once the big construction contracts in the Madrid area were ceased, the other local companies in Villarrubia de los Ojos have reduced their activity accordingly. The agriculture sector also registered a drop in the job offers for the immigrants in the same period. In this respect it is relevant the evolution in the number of work contracts in agriculture, in September of each year during 2005-2011. It was the month of the vine harvest, in which activity a great part of the Romanian immigrants worked seasonally. Prior to the emergence of the economic crisis the grapes harvest was done without work contracts by the immigrants for the local vine owners, therefore the seasonal work fitted almost totally on the illegal side of the labour market.

The fact that a visa for entering the territory of Spain was not mandatory and immigrants could work illegally is one of the main reasons for the fact that the Romanian migration flows were directed towards Spain. After triggering the economic crisis the need to increase the income for the state budget has led to controls in the fields to find illegal workers, fact that immediately determined an increase in the number of work contracts at real figures, and the number of workers involved in the grapes harvest in Villarrubia de los Ojos.

After reintroducing the restrictions for the Romanian workers on the labour market, beginning with July 2011, the people who came seasonally to Villarrubia de los Ojos had no more labour rights, and with illegal work already cut off by severe controls, the number of work contracts decreased a lot as compared to 2009-2010.

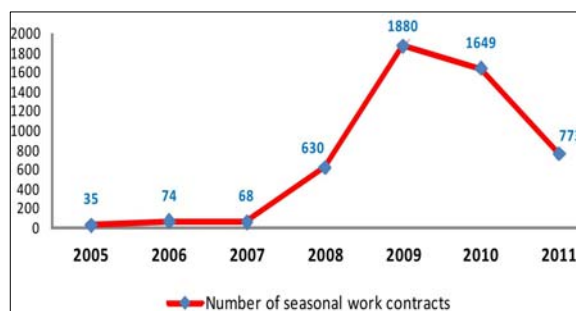


Fig. 7. Evolution in the Number of Seasonal Work Contracts from Agriculture in September, during 2005-2011, in Villarrubia de los Ojos.

Another explanation on the reduction in the number of temporary work contracts in agriculture is the fact that a large part of the native population had been laid off from the construction or the industrial sectors, and they returned to agriculture, most of the families beginning to cultivating their own lands without involving immigrants.

Due to the deepening of the crisis at a local level during 2007 - 2008 the percentage of female population looking for a job in Villarrubia de los Ojos

was higher than the male one, but as the economic situation worsened, the situation reversed in 2009 and 2010, and then in the following years an even larger number of women searched for a job to compensate for the low income of their families.

The lack of jobs for the local population has gradually caused the immigrants to lose more jobs including the service sector where most of the female Romanian population was hired, these jobs being taken over by Spanish women.

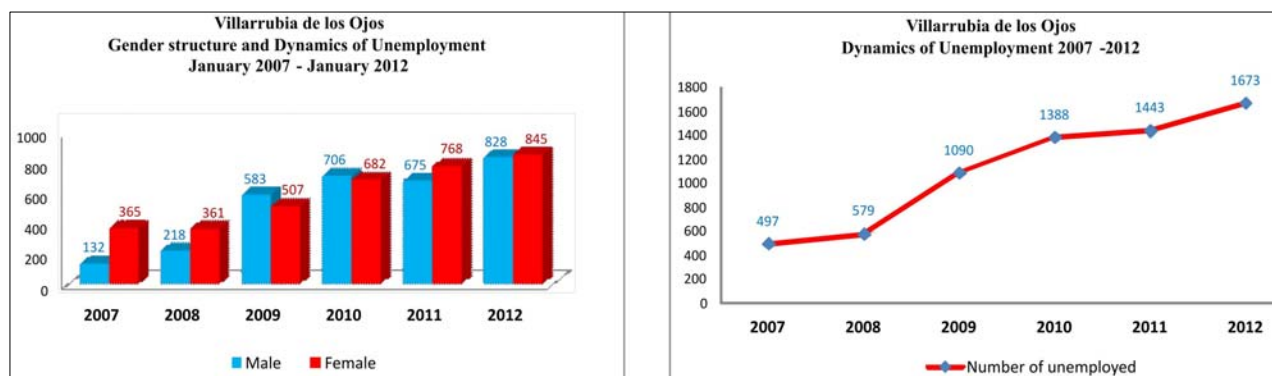


Fig. 8. Evolution of unemployment per gender in Villarrubia de los Ojos during 2007-2012.

These changes have lead to the stagnation or even decrease in the number of Romanian immigrants from Villarrubia de los Ojos, a great part of the unemployed people remigrating to Romania.

The differences between the social security systems and the mentality changes induced by the migration act have determined a great part of the Romanians to return to Villarrubia de los Ojos. Hence there came a period of searches during which the immigrants benefitted from unemployment payment and social security help from Spain.

The situation of the families that have brought their children to school and purchased a homestead in Spain is different, as they remained in Spain and continued to work sometimes on the black market in the context of the deepened economic crisis.

Relevant for this aspect is the fact that during 2006-2012 the number of Romanian pupils increased from 83 to 153 in the schools of Villarrubia de los Ojos. This demonstrates a tendency of transforming the temporary migration into a long term or permanent migration.

The second generation of Romanian immigrants is better integrated in the adoption country, yet having its own vulnerabilities connected to the integration on the labour market after the graduation of studies.

The deficiencies of the Spanish labour market and the context of deepening the economic crisis have encouraged some of the Romanian immigrants, who had no chance of finding a job, to leave Villarrubia de los Ojos. They chose to settle in the urban areas, one relevant example being the metropolitan area of

Madrid, where there are more opportunities on the labour market. Another part of the Romanians have chosen to remigrate to other west-European countries less affected by crisis or return to Romania.

The official statistics keep recording a high number of Romanians in Villarrubia de los Ojos due to the fact that most of the people who had left did not consider necessary to announce their departure at the local administration offices and thus they are still registered in the “Padron municipal” statistics, which overestimates, at present, the number of immigrant population in the locality.

3.3. Changes in the Spanish Migration Policy after the triggering of the economic crisis and the consequences on the Romanian communities in Spain

In the situation of deepening the economic crisis, the Spanish governments, both the socialist one before the elections from November 2011 as well as the one of the popular parties that followed after these elections, encouraged reducing the number of immigrants and released the pressure that the immigrant unemployed people exerted on the labour market and on the social security systems.

Thus the measures of encouraging remigration have started with the plan of voluntarily returning to the origin countries “Plan de retorno voluntario” that was approved on the 19th of September 2008. This plan, addressing immigrants of extra Community countries, offered financial facilities to those who would want to leave Spain.

Taking into consideration the fact that the largest immigrant community in Spain is represented by the Romanians, there existed a series of legislative measures that aimed concretely at diminishing the number of Romanian immigrants. Thus on the 22nd of July 2011 the Spanish Government reintroduced restrictions for the Romanian workers on the labour market. This measure reactivated the transitory period concerning free access to the labour market for the Romanian workers, which was established for a period of maximum 7 years starting from Romania's accession to the European Union.

On the 22nd of December 2006 this transitory period was approved by the Spanish Minister Council for two years starting with the 1st of January 2007. As a consequence, after January the 1st 2009 and until the 22nd of July 2011, the entrance, travelling and access on the Spanish labour market, for the Romanian citizens, was open.

New instructions concerning the regime of entrance and accessing the labour market for the Romanian workers and their families were adopted on the 22nd of July 2011 by the Decree DGI/SGRJ/5/2011, having as deadline of applicability the date of 31st of December 2012. After this date the Spanish Government has to assess the situation of the labour market and to establish the necessary measures to continue. After applying these regulations they practically returned to the situation before 2009, regarding the labour rights of the Romanian citizens in Spain.

The restrictive measures concerning the access on the labour market from Spain were also followed by restriction of the rights to access the national health insurance system through the royal decree-law 16/2012 from 20 April 2012. These requirements are valid for all the Community residents from Spain and state the loss of rights to national health insurance for the people who do not have work permits and are not registered as unemployed. The right to reside in Spain is also restricted for the people who do not have work permit and are not registered as unemployed in this country.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Beginning with 2002, the number of Romanians increased rapidly in Spain and the increase was based primarily on the development of migration networks and on the work under illegal conditions before 2009.

The economic crisis had a negative impact on the Romanian communities from the Province of Ciudad Real by increasing the unemployment rate and reducing the birth rate.

A positive aspect of the economic crisis was the increase in the role of the Romanian associations with activities on counselling and professional orientation

for the immigrants. These associations have brought their contribution to enhancing the solidarity of the immigrants in their destination country.

The Romanian community from Villarrubia de los Ojos was affected by reducing the economic activity especially from the construction sector. After a period of searches and adaptation to the new economic conditions, the general trend is favourable to migration towards the neighbouring urban areas or to other west-European countries less affected by the economic crisis.

Some of the immigrant families have remigrated to Romania whereas other families settled in this locality permanently. The people who decided to remain in Villarrubia de los Ojos are the ones that have kept their jobs, purchased a house or enrolled their children in the schools from the locality.

The Spanish migration policies have gradually become restrictive due to the world economic crisis.

As the economic situation grew worse, the legislative measures adopted by the Spanish governments, regardless of their socialist or liberal orientation, targeted the restriction of rights and liberties for the immigrants, specially adopted measures existing in order to stop the immigration from Romania.

The restrictive migration policies adopted starting with 2011 have as a main consequence the increase of vulnerability of the Romanian immigrants from Spain.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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