

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

SPAIN

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Date: 31/07/2023

Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?

The overall assessment of the quality of data on irregular migration in Spain is positive. The methods for estimating the irregular population use official, public and accessible data from administrative registers. The same apply for most of the different indicators on international protection, irregular entries and expulsions.

However, the treatment of these data and the dissemination of information by the administration is uneven, as it focuses on communicating especially some facets of the phenomenon while paying less attention to others. For example, the Ministry of Interior reports the number of irregular entries by sea and land (Ceuta and Melilla) on a fortnightly basis, but no official body estimates irregular stays.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

The utilization of irregular migration data in policymaking varies. Certain sources clarify that there exists a connection between the changes in the irregular population, economic trends, and regulatory modifications at the state level. However, governments do not always reveal how these factors have impacted the development of their policies. This disclosure is dependent on the government's political stance, the direction of their reforms, and whether or not they want to address these matters in public discussions.

Representatives of local municipalities recognize the importance of data in developing effective programs and measures to support both the general population and vulnerable groups with specific needs, such as migrants in irregularity. Access to accurate information about the number of people in this situation and their potential for regularization enables local administrators to plan and allocate resources more efficiently.

Civil society organizations benefit greatly from utilizing public information, both official and from their own intervention programs, to create recommendations and influence the

development and modification of policies. This is an important field of use for such information.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

The data collection process in the case of Spain is fairly straightforward. The availability of public and accessible databases allows researchers to produce estimates based on the residual method, albeit with some variations in their methodologies.

In this report, we have included the latest estimate of the irregular population in Spain for the period 2002-2019. The estimate is based on a working paper (Galvez-Iniesta, 2020) that uses the residual method, which was previously used by other researchers (González-Ferrer and Cebolla, 2008) but with some modifications. The paper provides a minimum-maximum range of the total irregular population for each year. Additionally, we have included some published data on the characteristics of the population for the year 2019. Access to microdata from these databases would allow for further disaggregation of the information for other years.

Spain meets its international obligations regarding indicators, and the National Statistics Institute responds to requests that contribute to the Eurostat database. The General Commissariat for Aliens and Borders of the National Police and the Asylum and Refugee Office, both under the Ministry of Interior, collect data on irregular entries, expulsions, and international protection. The information provided covers the period of 2008-2022 in most cases.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

One of the biggest challenges is finding reliable and rigorous methods to evaluate some data. Unfortunately, we have not been able to determine how the Ministry of the Interior produces its data on maritime and land entries. The Eurostat report on data quality in Spain is quite general and doesn't provide much detail. Similarly, information on expulsions is difficult to find, as there is no available methodological file and the data is only published on Eurostat, not the Ministry's website. However, there is more comprehensive information available on international protection, with a more detailed methodological document in place.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

The major lack of evidence in the case of Spain relates to the possibility of estimating the category of overstayers, which is the most important pathway into irregularity. These irregular stays are mostly the result of airport entries, however, only entries using false documentation can be identified and considered irregular. In this sense, any person authorised to enter without a visa, or who enters in compliance with visa requirements, cannot be considered irregular even if their itinerary results in an irregular stay.

Another information gap is identified in the lack of recent publications that analyse the evolution of the profiles of the population in an irregular situation in Spain. This information can be disaggregated by sex, nationality, country of birth, age, Autonomous Community and province. This project could be an opportunity to bring attention to these issues and offer valuable insight.

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.

No, we are in touch with the primary researchers who have provided estimates on irregular migration in Spain. Additionally, we have collaborated with representatives from organizations involved in the production and analysis of this data.

7. Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example?

When it comes to Spain, the possibility of estimating irregular migration, especially in relation to irregular stay, on the basis of public and accesible administrative registers, can be considered good practice.

To estimate the number of non-EU foreign nationals living in Spain without a valid residence permit, the Municipal Register of Inhabitants is used as the primary source of data. This information allows us to subtract the number of non-EU foreign nationals who have a valid residence permit, giving us an estimate of the population living irregularly.

Researchers are aware of the limitations of this registry. Essentially, not all individuals registered in the registry reside in Spain, and conversely, not all individuals residing in Spain are necessarily registered in this registry. However, it is assumed that the majority are registered since access to basic rights is derived from this registration, even for those in an irregular situation.

Although the register has limitations, it is assumed that the estimate produced is not exact but approximate and consistent over time, allowing the analysis of the phenomenon's evolution. Therefore, it is possible to study the trends of Spain's irregular migration over the past twenty years, which coincides with the country's emergence as a main destination for immigrants at the turn of the century.