

## **Family reunification, migration strategies and transnational marriage markets.**

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### **Abstract**

Legislation in many European countries usually entails a shared misunderstanding in the field of family reunification. These, used to take for granted that family formation took place before than the migratory movement of one of the couple members did. Nevertheless, Is well known that family reunification involve, not only families which were conformed before migration, but also those families created after the migration of one of its members. This difference becomes significant when, taking into account the specific migration strategies of some national groups, theirs family and migratory cycles, we attempt to perceive the possible emergence of transnational marriage markets. Our aim is twofold. Firstly, discriminate among the family reunification strategies throughout original administrative registered data in Catalonia between 2004 and 2010. Secondly, explore and characterize, trough Demographic Survey of Catalonia from 2007, those family reunifications that are non-reflected in the previous dataset, which are the ones conformed even after migration take place.

### **Introduction**

Family related migration has become one of the main inflows for non-EU migrants into the European Union. However, the rising numbers and the unprecedented potential for future family related migration in Europe has already clashed with the restrictive boundaries posed by the development of national policies by Member States and the EU Council Directive (2003/86/EC of 22 September) on the right to family reunification. There are two main reasons for the current state of conflict: First, immigration admission policies are almost exclusively designed to grant residence on the basis of labor contracts; and, second, little attention has been given to the family dimension of the

migratory process, an important issue exemplified by the almost invariability individual approach of most immigration admission (Kofman, 2004). In addition, the migrant's family is increasingly perceived as an obstacle to social integration, reinforcing under this perception, restrictions on family reunification (Bilger and Kraler, 2010). As a result, immigration policy ranges between the regulation of labor insertion of the dependant relatives and avoiding family reunification to become a source of future chain migration.

Within this context, a growing number of studies on transnational communities have placed a great deal of emphasis on the significance of gender and intergenerational relationships on the strategies of family migration (De Jong, 2000; Boyle, 2002; Raghuram, 2004). In addition, new research has shed some light on the importance of undertaking analysis of immigrant pioneers by sex, in order to examine the process of chain migration and family reunification (Thierry, 2007), emphasizing too on the labor insertion and economic activity of sponsors and dependants (Croes and Hooimeijer, 2009). However, little is still known concerning the implementation of immigration policy with regard to family reunification on the trajectories and sociodemographic characteristics of applicants and their family. This type of analysis would allow the assessment of family migration policies and their impact on channeling reunification for sponsors and dependants over time.

### ***Data and Methods***

Family reunification in Spain has never been studied before due to the lack of available data at the national level. Our research utilizes data, which until now, has not been previously analyzed. This administrative-based dataset is used under special license for the four provinces of the autonomous region of Catalonia, which is one of the regions in Spain with the highest rates of immigration (16% of non-national population in 2010). This 'original' data includes almost 200,000 entries recorded between January 2004 and December 2010, and each register represents a petition of family reunification for a relative –spouse, child or parent- of the pioneer migrant.

One of the special features of the dataset is that it contains the total

number of family reunification applications regardless of whether it will be approved or not. The data contains a wide range of characteristics of the administrative process as well as the sociodemographic characteristics of the dependants ('potential' unified immigrants). Nevertheless, it does not contain extended information about the sociodemographic profile of the immigrant's sponsor. Regarding the process itself, the most useful variables included are: date of application, date of resolution, date of entry, date of expiration and status (mainly accepted, denied or in process among others). With respect to demographic background, the available variables are: nationality, date of birth, country of birth, sex and family relation with sponsor. Moreover, due to the significant amount of information recorded, the dataset provides analyses of population subgroups separately.

We first provide a descriptive assessment of the differences between individuals who have applied for family reunification between 2004 and 2010. But considering that the administrative data is only covering 'legal' reunification, it is our aim to reach an overview of 'real' reunification through other statistical resources. Accordingly, by means of the data from the Demographic Survey conducted in Catalonia in 2007, we will approach the observed family reunification 'in fact' but also the desired reunification. In this case, we can distinguish between family reunification, when familial formation has been completed before and after the first migratory movement of at least one of the family members.

The Catalan Demographic Survey is a wide survey conducted by the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT) in 2007. This source is rich in biographical data, and allows for the reconstruction of familial union formation history in relation to the moment of arrival in Spain as well as full maternal history (for women). This allows us to explore the order of events and furthermore allows us to investigate possible family and migratory strategies. Foreign-born population represents 14% of survey's total sample (27,911 individuals).

### ***Expected findings***

Our research is applied on the basis of the following hypothesis:

1. Sociodemographic characteristics of sponsors and dependants are closely related to the gender relations within the migratory process, as well as with the immigrations admission policies.
2. The socio-demographic characteristics of migrants (sex, age and nationality) at the moment of arrival are usually related with when the family formations occurs, prior to or after migration. The timing of migration flows in relation to the emergence of new transnational marriage markets are factors linked to family formation as well.
3. Legal restrictions along with “alternative” ways of entry have led that a significant part of family reunification has been carried out on an irregular basis.

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