

SPAIN

- The Spanish population is rapidly ageing. Yet there is no comprehensive strategy on demographic change in spite of smaller initiatives with specific objectives.
- The regulation of pensions, the extension of working lives, and the promotion of active ageing are at the top of the policy agenda.
- Data about demographic change in Spain are of good quality, well accessible and harmonised with European statistics. Yet cross-disciplinary analyses remain difficult.



1. Demographic context

As of 1 January 2012, more than 16.5 million people, more than one-third of the total Spanish population, were over the age of 50, while 8.2 million (17.4% of the population) were aged 65+ and almost 2.5 million (more than 5% of the population) were aged 80+. Over the last 10 years the 80+ age group has grown rapidly, increasing by almost a million people.

Another indicator of the ageing of the Spanish population is increasing longevity, for both the population as a whole and for those over age 65. The average life expectancy in Spain is now around 82 years. A gap in life expectancy was observed between women (almost 85 years) and men (79 years) in 2010. Thus, the values and gender distribution of life expectancy in Spain are in line with those of other European countries with very old populations.

From an economic perspective, the Spanish population has undergone major changes, as the labour market participation of women is much higher now than it was in previous decades, even as the participation levels of the youngest age group (under age 25), and the population aged 65+ have remained very low (with the population aged 65+ having an activity rate of around 5%). This means that, after the age of 55, just two out of every

three people are active in the labour market. The adoption of early retirement schemes for those over age 50 has been the main driver for this change. In recent years, the difference between the legal retirement age (age 65) and effective retirement age (around age 61) has become firmly entrenched, and is now considered one of the main challenges the country faces in coping with an ageing population. Recently there has been a reform of the retirement system in which the retirement age was set to rise to age 67 in 2027.

Expenditures on social protection for the elderly in Spain have been quite stable (between 6 and 7% of GDP), and make up just 30% of social protection expenditures as a whole, which is low compared to the EU average. A substantial proportion of these expenditures goes to pensions, mostly within the general system (almost 6 million pensions).

2. Demographic change and policy concerns

In general, political action on demographic change is hindered for two main reasons in Spain: 1) There is a lack of co-ordination in Spain's public administration; and 2) there is a lack of compliance and harmonisation with European Union rules and practices.

Currently, Spain lacks a comprehensive policy on demographic change and its consequences, although there have been smaller initiatives with specific objectives, e.g. the Institute for the Elderly and Social Services seeks to implement specific public policies for the elderly, but it has no general future strategy or plan. It does, however, have a disability action plan, which is based on the European guidelines established in 2006, as part of the Council of Europe Plan to promote the rights and participation of people with disabilities in society. Recently, a “Statute of the Elderly” has been developed by the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality as an instrument to ensure the rights of older people, and to recognise the role they play in society. Its focus is on addressing the needs and concerns of the elderly in areas such as health and wellbeing, economic security, the provision of social services, intergenerational and family relationships, education and training throughout the life course, work and retirement, social participation, and the specific problems of the elderly in rural areas. Through this statute, the ministry aims to establish measures and proposals that respond to these concerns.

In the short term, the most pressing policy concerns related to demographic change in Spain involve the regulation of pensions, the continuity of working life among older workers, and the promotion of active ageing. There is a dual rationale for this approach. First, with demographic change occurring in Europe, it is understood that steps must be taken to ensure the viability of the pension system and welfare of the people. Second, it is acknowledged that the economic situation in Spain is affected by the country’s demographic structure, both now and in the future.

In terms of science policy, the politically defined lines for future research in Spain do not deviate from the agreements and decisions of Horizon 2020. Demographic change in Europe and in Spain has been recognised through the Spain Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation 2013-2020. While the official emphasis is on the social challenges related to health, demographic change and wellbeing, the strategy mainly focuses on physical health, with little attention being paid to improving the quality of people’s lives. In the Strategy Plan for the years 2013-2016, the six priorities mainly refer to biological and medical research, while the importance of health in the social and political sphere, and the need to address issues of inclusion and accessibility for people who are dependent or disabled, are only briefly mentioned. In short, efforts are made to develop a comprehensive policy on demographic change. Although they lack focus, many of these initiatives have great value. While future statistical operations may allow for a more

complete policy design, progress is currently slow and is likely to remain limited.

3. Data sources

General issues

The Spanish statistical system benefits from the broad recognition that public statistics is an essential instrument for Spanish society, providing the basis for the country’s most important laws. It is a decentralised and complex system. While it is governed by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the regional governments also control their own statistical offices, which serve the purposes and interests of their own territories and societies. The Higher Statistical Council oversees the alignment of resources, statistical operations and user needs.

The INE is therefore an agency of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness and has various functions, according to the Public Statistics Act, such as preparing the National Statistics Plan (PEN). The main goals of this plan are to develop, through its annual programmes, statistical operations to be carried out by the government in accordance with European Community regulations; and to call for changes in national legislation.

There are therefore several agencies in Spain whose functions include preparing statistical operations, mostly in different spheres of government action, with these operations being part of the Statistical Operations Inventory. Also of note is the role played by the Sociological Research Centre, an agency of the Ministry of the Presidency which conducts scientific research on Spanish society through its own opinion polls, or through joint efforts with other institutions (such as the Ministry of Health), including those arising from international projects (International Social Survey Programme, the Family and Gender project and the Health project).

Health and Performance

The coverage of health-related data in Spain is broad and diverse. There is no single statistical operation capable of covering all of the dimensions of this subject, but many of them cover at least one dimension. However, because each operation has a narrowly defined mission and set of objectives, it may not be easy to integrate the data.

Social systems and welfare

The opportunities for studying social systems and welfare offered by Spanish public statistics are not well defined, and this topic area is not adequately covered.

However, the Working Population Survey (through specific modules), the Spanish Survey of Household Finances and the Continuous Sample of Working Life cover some individual aspects of this area, such as work and pensions, quite well, and from various angles. Other social issues, such as health, social protection and access to public services, are addressed through the Health Barometer and Living Conditions Survey.

Work and productivity

The Economically Active Population Survey is hugely important to society, the academic world, the media and policy-makers in various areas because of its frequency (every three months and with annual results) and because of the wide spectrum of work-related subjects it addresses (e.g. health, conditions, family, learning, retirement, immigration). In general, it measures the human aspects of the Spanish economy, including analysis of the working-age population. Aspects, such as productivity, unpaid work, or transition to retirement, can only be analysed indirectly through a few questions from various sources, such as the Economically Active Population Survey, the Living Conditions Survey, or the Survey on Working Conditions.

Education and learning

For the topic of education and learning, the Survey on Adult Population Involvement in Learning Activities (AES) for the years 2007 and 2011 is the basic instrument. It is a specific survey which is part of the European Statistical System. It aims to measure education and learning among adults and elderly people (covering people up to the age of 75) in relation to their abilities, social and professional goals, and quality of life.

Housing, urban development and mobility

For studying issues related to the geographical distribution of adult and elderly populations, the (Continuous) Municipal Population Register and the Residential Variation Survey are the main instruments used in Spain. They provide up-to-date administrative records that can facilitate analyses at any geographic scale, while ensuring anonymity. Other issues related to the physical environment of housing, how housing is rated differently by different groups of people, and the importance of housing in daily life are covered in the Survey on Households and the Environment or the Living Conditions Survey.

Public attitudes towards old age

The CIS (Sociological Research Centre) surveys, such as the March 2008 and May 2009 barometers (and others that could be used very specifically), shed light on the Spanish population's views on a range of issues related to ageing and the elderly. The Disability Survey provides

a limited amount of data on discrimination arising from having a physical or functional disability.

Social, civic and cultural engagement

The broad and heterogeneous nature of this topic means it is not easily accommodated in Spanish statistical operations, although the Time Use Survey is likely the best source of information because it covers all of the activities individuals perform in their daily life, at different times of the week. The time accounting data from this survey can be used to create other indices structured by activity type (civic, social or cultural) which may include personal variables or the economic value of various activities. However, other surveys also provide information on informal social participation (Disability, Living Conditions of Elderly People) and on cultural activities (Adult Population Involvement in Learning Activities, Cultural Practices).

Uses of technology

As a rotating panel since 2004, the Survey on the Equipment and Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Households (ICT-H) is the most specific and up-to-date source on the uses of technology, which is a new subject in Spain. Based on a large sample, it not only covers the general availability and use of ICT equipment, but also its specific uses (e-practices).

Wellbeing

Individual wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construction that must be built from various data sources, and is therefore not easy to assemble. Nevertheless, a growing number of scientific publications have looked specifically at the ways in which social inequalities can generate social exclusion and poverty. From an economic perspective, the Spanish Survey of Household Finances provides sufficient data to allow researchers take a closer look at the economic dimensions of individual and family wellbeing in a comprehensive format. Meanwhile, the Survey of Living Conditions focuses specifically on individuals' income from employment and property and transfers between households.

Intergenerational relationships

Although this issue is addressed in several statistical operations and surveys, the subject of intergenerational relations is in a somewhat contradictory position: it is recognised as central to various social and financial aspects of people's lives (in terms of living together, the attention and care provided and/or received, financial support, etc.), but there has been no systematic and comprehensive exploration of this issue. Nonetheless, the ability of surveys (such as the CIS Living Conditions of Elderly People Survey) to explore the density of rela-

tionships, people's satisfaction with them, differences by gender and age, and their links with the household economy, is very high.

4. The data and the policy agenda: gaps and challenges

Given the INE's role as the cornerstone of the public statistical system and as the main body responsible for – either directly or by commission – carrying out the vast majority of Spain's national statistical operations, the scientific and political recommendations drafted by the Higher Statistical Council do not strongly advocate increasing the number of operations, as the current number is deemed sufficient. The Council does, however, strongly support increasing quality standards in connection with the European Statistical System and the statistical offices of the Spanish regions.

Therefore, according to a 2010 Eurostat report, the Spanish statistical production is clearly harmonised with European statistics, and was rated “highly satisfactory” in general, and especially in terms of the JPI-MYBL issue-related demographic and social aspects, in which no shortcomings were seen to exist. From an institutional and operational point of view, the Spanish statistical system, through the INE, is integrated into the EU system in terms of standardised data requirements (through the PEN), the monitoring of statistical operations and working methods, the sharing of standards, and participation in the general European statistical results.

In light of the intrinsic value of Spanish public statistics, a series of recommendations are being formulated that aim to enhance the quality of the data produced and the efficiency of statistical processes, and that will be legally enforceable mandates. Some of the recommendations that are to be implemented in the near future are extremely important in relation to the JPI-MYBL subjects, and others are important for overcoming some of the shortcomings and limitations noted above. The following is a brief description of these recommendations:

1. Advances should be made in new statistical operations to respond to demographic and social changes.
2. Among the consolidated operations, the focus should be on dimensions that, to date, have been too blurred in the usual statistical operations. Having information that is useful in assessing the demographic and social changes that are underway and for creating measures with which to address them is a key priority in the Spanish statistical scenario of the future, e.g.:
 - Monitoring the rapidly evolving job market and working life patterns more closely than is currently the case.
 - It is essential to make headway in producing multidimensional, quality of life indicators which cover economic, social and environmental aspects.
 - In the field of social protection, efforts should be made to reinforce operations regarding non-hospital health care data that provide information about morbidity, how the services work, and their quality and cost.
 - It is also essential to develop information about social services in order to facilitate the planning of basic benefits and long-term care, especially those related to elderly people.
3. One recommendation made with regard to the internal workings of the operations is to improve the internal comparability of the longitudinal series by stabilising and standardising their contents, and by reducing the time that elapses between data collection and data dissemination.
4. It would also be favourable to ensure that statistical operations are broken down sufficiently into geographical scales below the national level, so that differences can be identified.
5. Another very urgent need is the provision of information tools (technical or content documents) that make the statistical operations more understandable to the users.

However, with respect to the JPI-MYBL, Spanish public statistics do not allow researchers to obtain complete and uniform information about certain subjects, especially cross-disciplinary issues.

This policy brief summarises the major data sources for the ten policy fields identified by the working group of the Data Mapping Project of the Joint Programming Initiative “More Years, Better Lives”. An extended version of the original text and more information on the described sources are available at <http://www.jpi-dataproject.eu/>.

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