

Resilience and demographic stress in twenty-first century Catalonia

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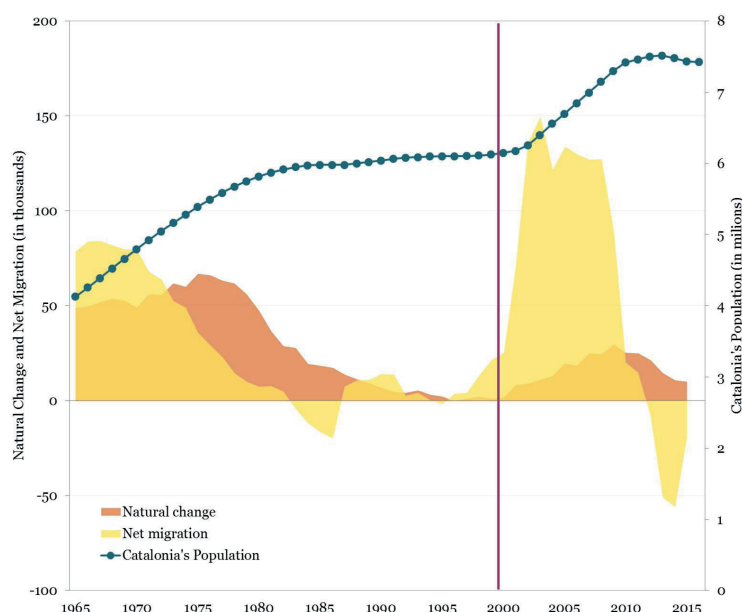
If resilience is defined as the ability of an individual or a complex system to return to a previous state of balance or find a new one after a critical situation, twenty-first-century Catalan demography can certainly be characterised as a resilient system. In the new millennium, the population of Catalonia has jumped from 6.2 to 7.5 million, mainly due to a migration boom that saw the arrival of 1.7 million people between 2000 and 2014. As a result of this inflow of migrants, 17% of the registered population in 2015 was foreign-born. From 2008, as a consequence of the bursting of a real estate and financial bubble and the structural adjustment programme that followed, international flows fell by half. At the same time, emigration increased, with nearly 800,000 people leaving the region, only 14% of whom were native-born. In spite of everything, population losses have been minimal. Family formation and fertility have been affected by recent immigration and the economic downturn, but they also reflect a failure to fully implement effective gender-equality measures, which has led to a decrease in the number of unions and births, as well as accelerating a process of deinstitutionalization launched several decades ago. At the same time, life expectancy at birth has continued to rise, increasing by three years since 2000, and there has been a narrowing of the gap between the sexes, which have become more equal in their good and ill fortune.

FIGURE 1. Population, rate of natural increase, and net migration in Catalonia, 1965-2015

THE INCREASE:

THE EXCEPTIONAL AS THE RULE

In the twenty-first century, Catalonia has seen population growth of 11.8 per thousand, a rate that has allowed the region to maintain its share of the global population: in 2014, 1.01 of every thousand inhabitants of the planet still lived in Catalonia. In just one year, 2002, the population grew by more than 160,000. This growth came in the wake of twenty years of stagnation and far exceeded that seen in the 1960s. This time, though, 93% of the increase was due to net migration, whereas a half a century earlier migration accounted for only 60% of the increase (see Figure 1). From 2008, when the economic crisis hit, population growth began to fall rapidly due to net migration. The loss of population may have peaked in 2013, with a decrease of around 45,000 people. The main factor behind the fall in population was negative net migration: given the aged population structure, the number of deaths is trending upward, at around 61,000 a year, a loss barely offset by slightly over 71,000 births. The key factor



Source: Population estimates based on Censos and Padrons [Census and Municipal Register data] (National Statistics Institute, INE): 1965-1983 (Centre for Demographic Studies, CED) and 1984-2015 (Statistical Institute of Catalonia, Idescat); Naixements i Defuncions [Births and Deaths], 1965-2014 (Idescat).

behind this trend is the growing significance of immigration, which, as we know, has become the main driver of demography in Catalonia (Cabr , 1999). Thus, despite the shift from positive to negative net migration and a weak rate of natural increase, the population of Catalonia on 1 January 2015 was estimated at 7.4 million.

Like most post-transitional societies, the region has become a Complex *Reproduction System* based on the contribution of migration. Immigration, driven by the economic cycle, has marked all twenty-first-century demographic phenomena. The increasingly intense pace of migration, which comes in longer waves of shorter amplitude that oscillate in direction, makes the exceptional the norm.

COUPLE FORMATION AND FERTILITY: THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF GENDER EQUALITY

The current economic situation and the gender equality process are the backdrop to recent trends in family formation (which encompasses all of the ways families come together and break apart) and fertility -changes whose roots go back to the 1970s.

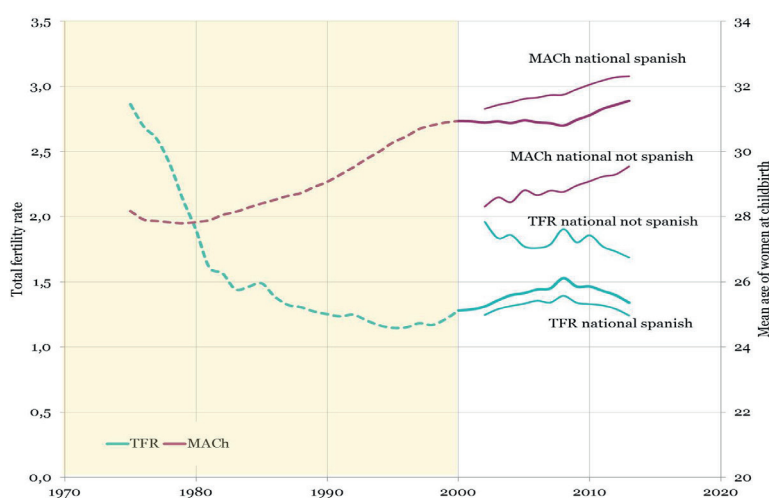
Since 1999, the number of marriages has fallen by 19% (from 32,000 to 26,000), and there has been a shift from religious to civil marriages: 83% of the 26,000 marriages registered in 2014 were civil unions, while in the latter years of the twentieth century only a third were of this type. These changes are due to immigration (in 26% of marriages at least one of the spouses is a foreign national) and an increase in second marriages. Mean age at first marriage has increased by 4.5 years (to 34.3 for men and 32.3 for women), and almost half of all couples between 25 and 34 cohabit. In 2014, 47% of children were born out of wedlock, in most cases to cohabiting couples. The total number of marital dissolutions (annulments, separations and divorces) during this period increased slightly (from 19,085 to 19,591), having peaked in 2006 at 27,846 after the requirement that couples go through a period of separation before divorcing was abolished (Solsona, et al., 2014).

The number of births rose from 59,616 in 1999 to 89,000 in 2008 due to the combined effect of three factors: a recovery in the fertility rate (from 1.21 to 1.53 births per woman), a more favourable age structure in Catalan women, and the contribution of foreign-born women (see Figure 2). Even though the fertility rate in 2014 (1.39 births per woman) was still higher than the historic low reached in 1995 (1.15), it remained low compared to other regions and countries. The contribution of foreign-born women to the fertility

rate in Catalonia is due more to complementarity in the timing of childbearing than to them having more children: the number births per woman is always under two. However, while native-born women tend to delay childbearing, with a mean age at childbearing of around 32 during the period under consideration, in the case of foreign-born women, age at childbearing ranged between 28 and 29.6. Between 2000 and 2013, 26.6% of registered births were to a foreign-born father or mother. After the downturn hit, births and fertility fell among both native-born and immigrant women. This was partly a result of economic constraints, but also due to a progressive decrease in the number of potential mothers (as a result of the age structure of native-born women, reduced immigration, and immigrant women returning to their countries of origin or re-emigrating).

The low fertility rate in Catalonia is primarily due to increasing childlessness (the number of women who have no children at the end of their reproductive life), which in turn is the result of the extraordinary increase in age at first birth. In 2007, childlessness among women was around 23%, a very high level.

FIGURE 2. Total fertility rate (TFR) and mean age at childbearing (MAC), by nationality (Spanish or foreign), Catalonia, 1975-2014



Source: Prepared by the CED based on *Indicadores Demogr ficos* [Demographic Indicators], INE

At the time, the only European countries with a higher rate of childlessness were Germany and Switzerland (Devolder, 2010). According to census data, in just two decades, from 1991 to 2011, childlessness doubled in the 30-34 age group (in which the mean age at childbearing falls) and among women aged 34-39, increasing from 24.1% to 49.7% in the first group, and from 14.3% to 30.5% in the second. The reasons lie in the perpetual delay of action on gender equality in the context of economic deregulation and the dismantling of the welfare state (Esteve et al., 2016).

LONGEVITY: IN HEALTH AND IN SICKNESS

Rising life expectancy and the gradual narrowing of sex differentials have been the most notable features of trends in longevity and mortality.

In 2014, life expectancy at birth was 80.4 years for men and 85.9 for women, which puts Catalonia among the countries with highest life expectancy. Gains are increasingly concentrated in older age groups, and improved health after age 65 is the main component driving the increase in life expectancy (Blanes Llorens & Spikjer, 2009). In 2014, a 65-year-old man could expect to live another 19 years, and a woman of the same age, another 23.1 years. If the rate of increase in life expectancy observed in 2000 is sustained, for each year an individual survives, he or she can expect to live an additional 0.2 years after the age of 65. This is undoubtedly attributable to the improving efficiency of the health system and changes in certain habits among the population.

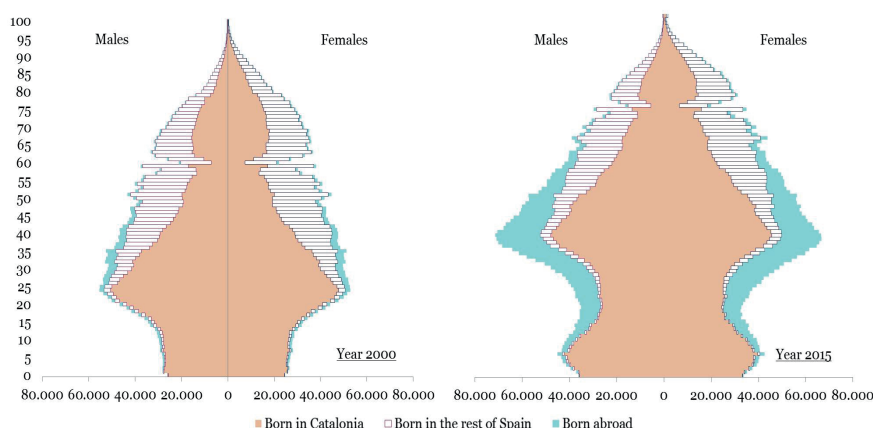
The life expectancy gap between men and women appears to be narrowing at a remarkable rate. The difference between the sexes in 2000 was almost 7 years. By 2014, it had narrowed to 5.5 years, while the difference in life expectancy at age 65 was around 4 years. Historically, this difference was partly due to a biological or genetic component that worked to the advantage of females, and partly to a social component that also favoured women, who abstained from the harmful habits that adversely affected the health and survival of their male counterparts. Today, in a context of ongoing improvement, the adoption of unhealthy habits by women (particularly smoking) and the abandonment of such habits by men are narrowing the sex differential.

MIGRATION FLOWS: DICTATED BY THE MARKET

Immigration from abroad disrupted everything, or almost everything, both when it soared in the early years of the twenty-first century, and when it declined, with a fall of 51% in 2007. Despite the attention focused on immigrants returning to their countries of origin, the economic crisis has not interrupted the flow of migrants from abroad: in 2014 nearly 100,000 entered Catalonia (a level which matched that seen at the start of the *boom*).

What stands out, however, is the change in the age and sex structure of flows, which are often driven by the desire for family reunification, and which vary in intensity according to place of origin. Thus, though it has gone almost undetected, it seems immigration may have reached a turning point for some nationalities in 2014. The issue of concern now is the flow of refugees -which up until now has been almost negligible -and the question of how it might evolve in the future. In terms of volume, however, the arrival of refugees is likely to make a relatively minor contribution.

FIGURE 3. Population pyramids for Catalonia, by place of birth, 2000 and 2015



Source: Prepared by the CED based on the 2000 and 2015 *Padró Continu de Població* [Municipal Population Register], INE.

Up until now, the most significant consequence of immigration flows in the twenty-first century has been the people added to the population of Catalonia, both directly and indirectly (i.e. the descendants of immigrants).

In addition to transforming the human landscape of all municipalities, large and small, these newcomers have changed the composition of the age pyramid (see Figure 3). These flows have not played a supplemental role: they have not been migrations of replacement as has often been claimed. Rather, they have magnified the defining features of the existing profile, adding more individuals mainly to *baby-boom* generations. At the outset of the new millennium, the percentage of foreign-born people in Catalonia remained very low. Despite its growing significance, this population represented only 4% of the total, while 27% were born in the rest of Spain, and the remaining 69% in Catalonia. This distribution has now been completely disrupted: the foreign-born represent 17.0% of the registered population, while the proportion born in the rest of Spain has fallen to 18.3%, and the Catalan-born share to 64.7%. There has also been a significant shift in age distribution. As already noted, the foreign-born population is mostly of working age.

In contrast, those born in the rest of Spain, who represent twenty-



tieth-century migrations, were growing old: 48.5% of this population was over the age of 64.

The second issue that has received a great deal of attention lately is emigration, especially when those leaving are native-born young people. Statistical fuzziness has hindered understanding of this emerging phenomenon, which has two distinct aspects: young people leaving the country due to the application of structural adjustment measures, and the mobility of individuals who belong to an emerging stratum of the information society (Cabrè & Domingo, 2014). Interest in this development is certainly justified, but it should be stressed that most of the emigration that took place between 2008 and 2014 corresponded to foreign-born individuals returning to their countries of origin or re-emigrating (91.3%, or 709,000 departures, according to data produced by the Migration Statistics unit of the National Statistics Institute). Only 5.8% of emigrants were Spanish nationals born in Spain (some 45,000 departures, including immigrants' children who were Spanish nationals born in Spain).

CATALONIA, QUO VADIS?

Resilience has been achieved through individual, family and collective sacrifice, but a price has been paid by individuals and generations that have had to learn to juggle while walking a tightrope in order to pursue their life plans, which in some cases have been curtailed. We must not forget that the impact of economic trends -marked by the peaks and troughs of the economic cycle -on people's life paths means increasing redundancy: not everyone is able to overcome the difficulties this situation entails. Increasingly, and all too often, some can only achieve economic and professional success by giving up having a partner and/or children, or by leaving the country.

Changes in demographic behaviours can be understood as resilient strategies that individuals employ in response to the impact of economic changes, which lead to an intensification of the stressed rate in terms of population growth. At the same time, taken together, extreme forms of adaptation may be a sign that the system is overheating.

Even though the sex and age structure of a population has a strong inertial effect on the short- and medium-term future (for example, the arrival of *baby-boom* generations of the 1960s at retirement age is perfectly foreseeable), the up-and-down evolution of the population in Catalonia in response to fluctuations in migration flows necessitates a process of constant redefinition. When we have been hit by a series of increasingly intense shocks, all efforts should focus on measures that facilitate social cohesion, and on fighting against the entropy associated with a market economy that leaves people unprotected and increases inequality. As a *Complex Reproduction System* based on immigration, Catalonia has no choice but to make exceptionality its defining characteristic and dialectically reformulate its recurring encounter with otherness—to make immigration one of its founding myths (Domingo, 2014). The future, dependent as it is on migration trends (i.e. on the economic cycle), is once again a bet against uncertainty. In the midst of this dizzying acceleration, perhaps now is the best time to ask ourselves where we are heading demographically speaking.

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