



Working Group on Equality and Demographic Challenge

Work Plan 2020

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1 Introduction

The economic and social progress experienced in Europe in recent years is unquestionable, but so is the evidence that this **progress has not eradicated existing inequalities between regions**¹. Organisations such as the International Monetary Fund warn that such inequalities persist and might increase due to factors such as climate change². **The crisis has entrenched territorial inequalities, and wealth is increasingly concentrated in Europe's large capitals.** In 2017, EUR 168 700 was the gap in GDP per capita, in terms of purchasing power parity, between Europe's richest region, in the west of Greater London, and the poorest in Extremadura, Spain. According to Eurostat data, the difference between the two has grown by 41 % in just ten years.

Geography and urban planning matter. **In the 28 Member States of the European Union, 113 million people live in poor households or at risk of social exclusion. In 14 Member States, this risk is higher in rural areas**³. It is the lack of opportunity and absence of basic public services that largely explains the "rural exodus" to urban centres. **More than 40 per cent of the Spanish territory has alarmingly low population densities.** They account for more than 60 % of the total number of municipalities and only 3 % of the total population. In view of this circumstance, **an ageing population is not the only main challenge to face. The aim is to broaden the focus and include the loss of population of many municipalities, the low density and the negative natural growth. In short, it is a question of tackling the demographic challenge.**

Over the last few years, **initiatives to address this global challenge have increased both at European, national and regional levels.** The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development in its report "on the deployment of cohesion policy instruments by regions to address demographic change" notes that this is one of the biggest challenges faced by the European Union⁴.

¹ CoR. (11 September 2019). Regional Social Scoreboard: New research shows 80 % of EU regions making progress but regional inequalities persist. Retrieved from: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/regional-social-scoreboard.aspx>

² PARDO, P. (16 October 2019). *The IMF expects climate change to increase inequality between "rich Spain" and "poor Spain."* El Mundo. Retrieved from: <https://www.elmundo.es/economia/macroeconomia/2019/10/16/5da612affddffe5198b4656.html>

³ GRASSO, D. (8 October 2019). *Urban or rural inequality? How geography determines the risk of poverty in the EU.* El País. Retrieved from: https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/10/08/sonar_europe/1570532089_506609.html

⁴ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. Report "on the deployment of cohesion policy instruments by regions to address demographic change". Retrieved from: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0329_ES.html?redirect

In Spain, the Government, together with the Autonomous Communities, is working on the development of a **National Strategy to Combat the Demographic Challenge**⁵. An **Interdepartmental Population Commission** has been set up in Extremadura⁶. The municipalities, grouped under the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), have also put on the table possible solutions to this challenge⁷. In October 2016, provincial councils, town councils, *mancomunidades* [local authority associations], counties and social and business agents from all over Spain signed the "Montánchez Declaration on Depopulation in the Rural Environment" within the framework of the first conference of this kind, held in Cáceres.

At a **legislative level**, there have also been several initiatives implemented to address this issue. In 2016, the plenary of the **Senate** of Spain agreed to the creation of a **Special Research Committee on Demographic Evolution in Spain**. In 2013, the **Assembly of Extremadura** established a **Research Committee on Depopulation in the region**, which completed its work in 2015. In 2019, on the initiative from the Ciudadanos-Partido de la Ciudadanía parliament group and unanimously accepted, a **parliamentary intergroup was created to study depopulation in the region**.

The need to meet this challenge seems clear to institutions. However, in a **survey published by the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS)** in February 2019, **only 24.2 per cent of respondents said they had heard of Demographic Challenge**. However, 82.2 per cent said they knew about depopulation, and 91.7 per cent of ageing.

Demographic change is observed across all of Spain, but is most acutely strong in regions such as Extremadura, which have been impoverished as a result of the combination of territorial, demographic and socio-economic factors. This is **highlighted by the latest data published** by the National Statistical Institute (INE).

⁵ GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN. National Strategy to Combat the Demographic Challenge. Retrieved from: http://www.mptfp.es/portal/reto_demografico/Estrategia_Nacional.html

⁶ DOE [Official Journal of Extremadura] DECREE 180/2019 of 26 November establishing the Interdepartmental Population Commission.

Retrieved from: <http://doe.gobex.es/pdfs/doe/2019/2310o/19040196.pdf>

⁷ FEMP. List of measures to combat depopulation in Spain. Retrieved from: http://www.femp.es/sites/default/files/doc_despob_definitivo_0_0.pdf

In the country as a whole, the resident population increased due to the influx of migrants. The positive migration growth offset the negative natural growth. Population increased in regions such as the Balearic Islands, Madrid and the Canary Islands, at the expense of the decline experienced by autonomous communities such as Extremadura, Asturias and Castilla y León.

Given that the "rural exodus" has another side, which concerns urban concentration, another issue should also be examined. In regions such as Extremadura, 53 per cent of its population lives in cities. The cities have become recipients of internal migration, resulting in the emptying of the rural areas⁸.

Comparison of demographic change in Spain by Autonomous Community					
AC	JANUARY	JULY	NATURAL GROWTH	EXTERNAL MIGRATION	INTERNAL MIGRATION
ANDALUCIA	8 427 404	8 446 561	-3 608	23 965	-1 107
ARAGÓN	1 320 586	1 324 397	-2 474	5 474	837
ASTURIAS	1 022 205	1 019 993	-4 126	2 159	-224
BALEARES	1 188 220	1 198 576	219	9 015	1 142
CANARY ISLANDS	2 206 901	2 220 270	-1 429	14 898	-53
CANTABRIA	581 641	581 949	-1 433	1 606	145
C. y LEÓN	2 407 733	2 402 877	-8 007	4 241	-1 034
C- MANCHA	2 034 877	2 038 440	-3 285	6 224	656
CATALUÑA	7 566 430	7 609 499	-4 085	47 119	147
C.VALENCIANA	4 974 969	4 998 711	-5 287	27 162	1 952
EXTREMADURA	1 065 424	1 062 797	-2 303	976	-1 283
GALICIA	2 700 441	2 698 764	-8 426	7 026	-215
MADRID	6 641 648	6 685 471	2 840	40 539	552
MURCIA	1 487 663	1 494 442	356	6 528	-90
NAVARRA	649 946	652 526	-176	2 582	184
PAÍS VASCO	2 177 880	2 181 919	-3 644	8 082	-369
LA RIOJA	313 571	314 487	-472	1 086	310
CEUTA	84 829	84 434	119	57	-570
MELILLA	84 689	84 286	219	358	-980
TOTAL	46 937 060	47 100	396	-45 002	209 097

Source: Own elaboration with INE data (first half of 2019)

⁸ ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL OF EXTREMADURA. Demographic Challenge and Territorial Balance in Extremadura. Retrieved from: http://www.juntaex.es/filescms/presidencia/uploaded_files/reto_demografico/20180709_Informe_de_Posicion_ant_e_el_Fenomeno_Demografico_y_Territorial.pdf

Discussing demographic challenge is also talking about depopulation and aging and **also about equality in its most cross-cutting sense**, since much of the demographic problems have to do with the differences that exist in the territories in terms of opportunities and public services; in short, in terms of quality of life.

In this respect, special mention should be made of the **absence of young and adult women in the rural areas**. Studies and the reality show that, while in medium and large towns the female population is higher, there is a deficit of women in small municipalities, all the greater the smaller the town. **In most of the national territory there has been an intense process of masculinisation**. In 2017, 2 out of 3 people who left small municipalities were women; 40 per cent of them were between 16 and 44 years old. The female population in rural areas is not only scarce, but also aged⁹.

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The progress made since then is indisputable, but there is still a long way to go. Steps are being taken, but **almost half of the Member States are below 60 points out of 100 according to the measurements of the European Institute for Gender Equality**. **Gender-based violence** is the greatest exponent of inequality between women and men. It is a scourge that, in Spain, since 2003 when data started being recorded, has claimed the lives of 1 034 women.

Of particular concern is the number of complaints of abuse in which the ages of the offenders do not exceed 25 years old, as well as the increase in **group sexual assaults**, 63 in Spain alone in 2019¹⁰. The Extremadura Prosecutor's Office draws attention to the **relatively frequent use of the exemption** (no obligation to testify), **resulting in numerous proceedings dismissals** when the means of proof other than the victim's own statement does not support the accusation.

Some glass ceilings have been broken and women are increasingly holding political, economic and social positions, **but the female unemployment rate remains higher than that of men**. It is a consequence, in part, from the fact that it is women who spend more time on unpaid work, care work¹¹.

⁹ GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN. Depopulation, demographic challenge and equality. Retrieved from: https://www.mptfp.gob.es/dam/es/portal/reto_demografico/Documentos_interes/Despoblacion_Igualdad.pdf0.pdf

¹⁰ GEO SEXUAL VIOLENCE Data on group sexual assaults. Retrieved from: <https://geoviolenciasexual.com/>

¹¹ EIGE. Gender Equality Index 2019: Still far from the finish line Retrieved from: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/ES>



It is a task that requires time and great dedication and which, however, does **not count towards the Gross Domestic Product** of the countries despite the fact that some studies already indicate that their professionalisation and outsourcing outside the family sphere should allow the development of a subsector capable of generating jobs.

It is therefore crucial to **analyse the role and situation of women in rural areas, given that those who leave do so through education and specialisation** in tertiary activities and many of those who stay keep the roles related to care. Rural women federation call for a diversification of women's activities in rural areas, as one of the tools to tackle the demographic challenge¹². Similarly, it is essential to **address the causes that explain the decision of postponing motherhood and fatherhood**.

Within the European Conference of the Regional Legislative Assemblies (**CALRE**) we have **addressed regional imbalances, equality and depopulation through different working groups, but they have been examined as watertight compartments**. In the light of the above, it is **appropriate** for regional parliaments with legislative capacity to **analyse this issue in a cross-cutting and comprehensive manner**.

We are facing a **multifaceted global challenge** that has to do with **human mobility in its entirety**, both within the regions and outside them. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) itself notes in the study "Situation of the immigrant population in rural Spain and its contribution to rural development" that migration has slowed depopulation in many municipalities of the country¹³. The **demographic challenge cannot be understood without equality, or lack thereof**. Therefore, it must be tackled from all levels.

This working group aims to be a **forum for discussion and analysis to provide solutions to a common challenge** and, moreover, to do so from the place where the wills of all citizens, their regional parliaments, are represented.

¹² FADEMUR. FADEMUR women called for 11 measures "for equality and against depopulation". Retrieved from: <http://fademur.es/fademur/las-mujeres-de-fademur-reivindican-11-medidas-por-la-igualdad-y-contra-el-despoblamiento/>

¹³ OIM. Situation of the immigrant population in rural Spain and its contribution to rural development. Retrieved from: <https://spain.iom.int/sites/default/files/ESTUDIO%20OIM.pdf>

2 Background

Over the years, various working groups have addressed issues within CALRE relating to territorial balance, equality and depopulation and ageing.

The working group "**Balance between rural and urban as a guarantee of an integrative system**" was created by the plenary assembly of CALRE held in Mezzocorona-Trento on 4 and 5 October 2010 on the initiative of the Assembly of Extremadura. This group was born with a number of established objectives, including the **defence of territorial cohesion, the promotion of knowledge of the rural environment** as a social value and the European recognition of the importance of consolidating mechanisms to ensure balance.

For its part, the working group on "**Equality and Opportunities for Gender Equality**" was established at the CALRE plenary assembly held in L'Aquila on 25 and 26 November 2011, following the incorporation of an annex to the conference statement on "CALRE and gender representation in regional parliaments."

In **2012**, this group was coordinated by the Trentino-Alto Adige Regional Council, which conducted a comprehensive **study on the state of women's participation in the national and regional political spheres**. In **2013**, the Parliament of the Åland Islands was responsible of the coordination of the group. They proposed an **analysis of how political parties and CALRE regions promote and encourage women to stand as candidates** in electoral processes.

In 2014 there was a hiatus in the operation of the group, being resumed in **2015** by the National Assembly of Wales, who opted to **implement a forum for the discussion of experiences and strategies to increase women's participation in democracy**.

In **2016** the coordination of this group was exercised by the Assembly of Extremadura, which carried out an **analysis of the efforts of parliaments to become more gender-sensitive institutions** that demonstrated the gap in equality existing in them. The meeting of presidents of regional parliaments held in Mérida also addressed the political and policy framework on equality in Europe.



In **2017** it was also the Assembly of Extremadura that coordinated this group, which completed the analysis of the effort made by these institutions regarding non-discrimination on the basis of sex reflecting on the existing ***micromachismo*** and **including the gender perspective in the preparation of budgets**. These issues were discussed at a meeting of presidents of regional parliaments in Cáceres, as well as taxation and gender equality.

In **2018** the Regional Assembly of Murcia was in charge of the coordination of the group. It set the objective of analysing data on the **disparity of income and remuneration between women and men, as well as reflection on the invisibility of unpaid work** and its impact on the economy and health and policies of work-life balance.

In addition, the **working group "Depopulation and Aging"** was established at the **CALRE General Assembly held in Varese in 2016 on the initiative from the Conference of Presidents of the Autonomous Parliaments of Spain (COPREPA)**, who at the meeting held that same year in Toledo agreed that the presidency of this working group was assumed by the Parliament of Castilla y León.

Thus, in 2017 and 2018, it was the Parliament of Castilla y León that coordinated the works. The work carried out in 2017 highlighted the **progressive abandonment of rural areas**, while in 2018 work focused on establishing **closer cooperation at European level to combat depopulation** and ageing, as well as as in the active participation of the group in Europe and the deepening of the shared knowledge of successful experiences in this field.

It can be noted that these areas have been analysed as if they were watertight compartments. Hence the proposal for the **creation of the "Equality and Demographic Challenge" group, an initiative to reflect from the cross-cutting and breadth of the view on this global issue in which regional parliaments**, where the will of citizens is represented, we have a lot to contribute.

3 Objectives and Lines of Action for 2020

In the light of the above, the demographic challenge cannot be understood if equality or lack of equality among all citizens as a whole is not taken into account.

So far, working groups developed within the framework of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) have addressed the phenomenon of depopulation and equality as watertight compartments. However, it is desirable that this **multifaceted global challenge should be analysed and examined in a more cross-cutting and comprehensive manner.**

This working group aims to be a **forum for discussion and analysis that addresses the causes and consequences that explain this phenomenon that affects the whole of Europe as a whole to propose solutions to this common challenge.** For this reason, throughout 2020 it intends to:

- **Collect and analyse data produced by European bodies** such as the Committee of the Regions and Eurostat to **determine the extent to which the crisis has contributed to strengthening territorial inequalities**, as well as to the extent to which geography, urban planning and basic public services determine the "rural exodus" to urban centres.
- **Map out and identify administrations, institutions and associations, at European, state, regional and municipal level, which have plans or actions to address the demographic challenge** in order to establish a kind of **common action plan or forum** concerning this common and global challenge.
- Check the **degree of knowledge that citizens have about this problem**, given that in Spain only 24.2 per cent of the population surveyed has heard about Demographic Challenge, to coordinate the efforts of awareness about this challenge.
- **Study the presence of this issue in European, State and regional legislation, as well as its degree of compliance**, taking into account that in February 2019 the European Parliament approved that depopulation should become a criterion when it comes to the distribution of Cohesion Funds.

- **Encourage the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027** to set forth policies that contribute to tackling the Demographic Challenge **by public administrations and institutions, but also networks such as the Southern Sparsely Populated Areas network and its counterpart in the north** of the continent, the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas.
- **Start collaboration and joint work with the European Commission, especially with the new Vice-Presidency of Democracy and Demographics of the European Commission**, led by Dubravka Suica as European responsible for anything related to the demographic challenge.
- Foster **cooperation and joint work with the European Parliament Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas**. (RUMRA & Smart Villages, the Intergroup on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas)
- **Analyse together with the academic field the role and situation of women in rural areas, as well as the proposals that are being made from organised civil society and public administrations** to enable women not to leave rural areas due to lack of opportunities or services, as well as conducting an analysis of public policies put in place to promote birth rates.
- **Resume the contact with the European Institute for Gender Equality** as well as discuss the **degree of compliance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as part of its 25th anniversary**.
- Collect data and case studies on **how migrants can help curb depopulation** and ensure rural, and also urban, development.
- **Promote the exchange of good practices**, experiences and strategies among CALRE members, as well as create a dedicated web space to the working group to exchange information and news.
- **Build relationships with other parliaments, European Union bodies and institutions and associations** to learn first-hand about the activities and policies developed in this regard.

- **Organise seminars and meetings** to present the results of the studies and analyses carried out, as well as a forum among the presidents of the European regional legislative assemblies.
- The Assembly of Extremadura will present to CALRE **a report with all the activities carried out**, as well as a final report of conclusions.



4 Calendar of activities

January 2020. Participation of the President of the Assembly of Extremadura, Blanca Martín, in the Standing Committee of CALRE in the Canary Islands as coordinator of the Working Group on Equality and Demographic Challenge.

Until 29 February 29 2020. Period for the incorporation of members into the working group.

From March to August 2020. Development of the proposed lines of action, as well as the implementation of networks of collaboration with public administrations, institutions and partnerships with the aim of jointly addressing a European strategy to tackle the demographic challenge based on equal opportunities for all citizens.

September 2020. Meeting of the working group and seminar in the Assembly of Extremadura to present the results obtained so far and to foster the exchange of experiences and good practices.

November 2020. Presentation of the final report of the Working Group on Equality and Demographic Challenge at the CALRE Plenary Assembly.