

## **Crisis and migration: the case of intensive agriculture in Spain**

Since the 1980's Spain rapidly went from being an emigration country to becoming a net immigration country. One of the most important reasons for this net influx of migrants was the need for a large unqualified and flexible workforce in the construction and agricultural sectors (Monteserin et al., 2013). Almeria, in the southeast of Spain, was the province to experience the most radical migratory transition in the country. From the 1970's, the introduction of intensive agriculture transformed this region from one of the poorest and largest emigration regions to one of the richest and most important immigration regions. Whilst the number of registered international migrants was around 1.000 in 1991, it reached 20.160 in 2011 (Garcia Lorca, 2012).

Intensive agriculture in Almeria has been largely dependant on an irregular migrant workforce since the 1990's. According to government estimations, there were around 30,000 irregular migrants in 2012. Before the economic recession, this workforce was absorbed by the labour market and numerous regularization campaigns proved a political tolerance towards an economically beneficial sector of the population. Family reunification was encouraged, integration programmes were widely funded and borders were more permeable. Today, after five years of continuous economic recession, the contribution of the migrant community to the economic development of the region seems to be forgotten. A radical shift has taken place in migration policies and even some of irregular migrants' basic universal rights, like their access to sanitation, are being limited (Amnesty International, 2013). Many examples prove that the restriction of migrants' rights is becoming an instrumental part of labour immigration policies. Furthermore, whilst Spanish public opinion seemed to show an exceptional enduring openness and no significant backlash against migration, evidence shows that this is starting to change (Arango, 2013).

Using the example of migration in intensive agriculture, this paper will firstly outline and compare the main migration policies implemented in Almeria from 1990 to 2013. Secondly, we will analyse the shift that has occurred in the political discourse and in public opinion towards migrants in the agricultural sector. Finally, we will attempt to assess whether current policies towards irregular migrants are beneficial to the economic context or if, on the contrary, they will be prejudicial. At a time where national workers are emigrating in search of better lives and opportunities, and when observations indicate that Spain may become one of the pioneers in population decline (UNDP, 2000): will refusing rights to migrants accentuate or alleviate the economic, demographic and social pressure in the long term?

**Sara Vigil**  
Research fellow FNRS  
CEDEM/ULg