



Hamburg Institute  
of International  
Economics

Database on Irregular Migration

**Carmen González-Enríquez**

## **Update report Spain: Estimate on irregular migration for Spain in 2009**

Hamburg Institute of International Economics. Database on Irregular Migration.  
Update report/ November 2009

<http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/>

Carmen González-Enríquez is professor of political science at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and senior analyst of immigration at the Real Instituto Elcano.

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Hamburgisches WeltWirtschaftsinstitut gGmbH (HWWI)  
Hamburg Institute of International Economics  
Heimhuder Str. 71  
D-20148 Hamburg

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**Database on Irregular Migration (<http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net>)**

Despite the political relevance of irregular migration, assessments of the size of the irregular migrant population are often vague and of unclear origin. This website aims at increasing transparency in this sensitive field. The database provides an inventory and a critical appraisal of data and estimates in the European Union and in selected member states. It contains estimates on the size of irregular migrant populations and indicators of their composition with regard to gender, age, nationality and sector of economic activity. The summarizing tables are designed to give users the best possible overview of quantitative data in the countries, in a simplified form. The researchers involved in the creation of this database are aware that irregular migration is a complex issue. Therefore, quantitative information is accompanied by substantial background materials, both on issues of general concern and on the situation in individual countries.

The database was created in the context of "CLANDESTINO: Counting the uncountable – data and trends across Europe", a project funded by the European Commission, DG Research, Sixth Framework Programme (2007-2009) (<http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/>). The Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI) hosts the database and aims at complementing and updating it in the coming years.

**Update reports**

The update reports aim at publishing new estimates on irregular migration which are based on previous estimates and are not suitable for journal publication or a working paper.

If you want to propose an update of existing estimates, please go to <http://www.irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Contact.2559.0.html>.

All Update reports are available at [http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Country\\_reports.6114.0.html](http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Country_reports.6114.0.html).



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## 1 Introduction

This estimate was produced for the database on irregular migration in October 2009. It is based on earlier estimates by the same author described in detail in González-Enríquez (2009). There, you also find background information concerning irregular migration in Spain.

## 2 Estimate

It is estimated that there were at least 300,000 and at most 390,000 irregular migrants in Spain in January 2009.

Groups	Defini- tion	Year	Estimate		Main data source	Short explanation
			Minimum	Maximum		
Total stock	Irregular foreign residents	2009	300,000	390,000	Multiple sources	Residual method for maximum estimate / Minimum estimate extrapolated from survey

Own calculations, see below (figures rounded)

## 3 Definition of irregular migrant population

Irregular foreign residents in this estimate include all foreign nationals from non-European Union countries living in Spain who have no residence permit. Those persons whose residence permits expired because of administrative delays (after three months since their application for renewal) are not included as irregulars, as they can renew their permits.

## 4 Explanation

### Maximum estimate

The maximum number of irregular immigrants can be established by comparing the number of residence permits issued by the Interior Ministry (IM) with the number of third country nationals (TCNs) registered in the Padrón. All regular foreign residents should in principle be in both datasets. Irregular residents are not included in the IM dataset, but they register in the Padrón. Therefore, the difference between the two datasets indicates the size of the irregularly resident population. However, some adjustments have to be made.

*Expired permits:* Those who have lost their residence permits because of administrative delays are not included in the ministerial data on valid residents permit, but they can renew their permits with a simple administrative procedure at the Police Offices. Hence, they must be added to the number of valid permits. The Interior Ministry does not publish this data. In an interview for the CLANDESTINO research project, the ministry informed that in January 2008 expired permits amounted to a 10% of all valid residence permits. We have used this same percentage to the 2009 numbers assuming that the administrative problems that caused these delays have not been solved.

*Asylum seekers:* The number of refugees is very small in Spain and most asylum seekers are missing in both datasets (Padrón and IM), so that their number can be neglected.

*Students:* Although there is no valid proof, there are indications from qualitative interviews that foreign students do not register in the Padrón. For the maximum estimate, it is assumed

that foreign students do not register. Otherwise, numbers of foreign students would have to be subtracted.

The same can be said about immigrant sexual workers: apparently many of them do not register in the Padrón. Under-registration is also known about Chinese citizens. But in both cases there is a lack of evidence as regards the numbers or percentages.

### Calculation:

TCNs registered on the Padrón	3,331,883
-TCNs with residence permits	2,679,270
- TCNS whose residence permits have expired	267,927
<b>Total irregular immigrants</b>	<b>384,686</b>

### Minimum estimate

For the minimum estimate, the results of a survey among immigrants are used to make a multiplier estimate. During the last weeks of 2006 and the first ones of 2007, a survey was conducted among foreigners in Spain, the *Enquesta Nacional des Inmigrantes* directed by the central statistical office (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). The survey interviewed 15,500 foreigners, 11,000 of them extra-community aliens, and it included a question about their legal situation. According to the ENI at the beginning of January 2007 an average 13% of TCNs were lacking a permit to stay, 10% if Romanians and Bulgarians are excluded (Reher and Requena 2008). These percentages must be considered as a minimum, as it is most probable that many interviewed foreigners without “papers” would hide it in front of an interviewer who presents himself or herself as working for an official institution. It can be assumed that there is only a slight underestimation of the legal status. The number of TCNs with regular registered residence was rising in spite of the economic crisis from about 3.1 to 3.3 million. There are some indications that the economic crisis disproportionately hit irregular migrants so that their number may not have risen in proportion to the number of regular residents. Therefore the minimum estimate of 2008 of 300,000 irregular migrants is taken over without adjustment for 2009.

## 5 Discussion

For the maximum estimate, understanding of the Padrón is needed. Spanish norms provide incentives for irregular migrants to register in the Padrón. In exchange of registration, they can receive free health care and the register is the most used way to prove their residence time when applying for regularisation. Therefore, it is generally assumed that nearly all irregular immigrants register in the Padrón, even though qualitative information indicates that some groups are reluctant to register such as Chinese citizens and sex workers. On the other hand, there were indications that the Padrón was highly inflated in the past. As there was no obligation to renew the registration in the Padrón, it included also persons who did not live in Spain anymore. Since the Law on Aliens was reformed in 2003, immigrants without permanent residency have to renew their registration every two years. Therefore, the process of updating the Padrón began in December 2005 and resulted in 2006 in the withdrawal from the Padrón of 300,000 extra-Community aliens who did not renew their registration. This may either concern former immigrants who no longer live in Spain, but it could also concern regular residents who were not informed about the obligation to renew their registration or did not take care to renew their registration. However, it can be assumed that the data quality has

improved in recent years and the Padrón can now be considered a good basis for making estimates.

As for the minimum estimate, the poll was conducted by the National Institute of Statistics on a difficult topic, so that it is surely underestimating the size of irregular migrant populations. At the same time it was comprehensive and non-threatening while the lack of legal status is no taboo topic in Spain as it is in other European countries. Therefore the degree of underestimation can be considered to be low.

One and a half year after the field work of this poll was conducted, the economic crisis has had a twofold effect in the number of irregular immigrants: firstly, the lack of jobs has a dissuasive effect on potential new irregular arrivals, while the police and administrative efforts to avoid irregular immigration have increased, leading to a drop in the number of irregular arrivals; secondly, the economic crisis can render irregular many previously regular immigrants who loose their jobs and hence the chance to renew their permits. Both effects could compensate each other and jointly produce a similar percentage of irregularity than the one detected in the poll in 2007.

There are other estimates for earlier years, mostly also done with residual method and Padrón data, which did not lead to highly diverging results (González-Enríquez 2009).

## 6 References

- González-Enríquez, Carmen (2009): Country report Spain. Report for the European Research Project CLANDESTINO. Undocumented Migration - Counting the Uncountable. Data and Trends across Europe. January 2009, [http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Country\\_reports.6114.0.html](http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Country_reports.6114.0.html).
- Reher, David and Requena, Miguel (2008): La Encuesta Nacional de Inmigrantes. Una nueva fuente de datos para el estudio de la inmigración en España. Real Instituto Elcano. DT 49/2008, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/>.