

# **Criminality among Romanian Emigrants in Spain**

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## **Abstract**

The current community of Romanians in Spain is a very active and integrated one at all levels in the host society. There is a mass media developed by Romanians, a large number of churches and associations of our countrymen and, also, there are a high number of cultural and artistic events in the community.

Unfortunately, the Spanish public perception on Romanian immigrants is not very good one, as they are seen as the most disagreeable group of emigrants. This is due to the high degree of antisocial and criminal activities with a strong social impact that Romanians commit in the host country as well as the intense media coverage of these events via all Spanish mass media channels.

**Keywords:** Criminality, Emigrants, Romanians, Spain

## **1. Introduction**

Besides the positive effects it has, globalization is the trigger of a series of negative consequences, causing an increase in the rate of migration and the level of social and geographical exclusion. In this context, Romania is located at the “negative” pole of the socio-geographical context and so many Romanian citizens, in poverty, saw in migration a solution for a better life. Although in our days a part of the emigrants from Romania do not honor their country abroad, it was a time when they represented the elite of our nation and in the same time it’s only hope for bringing the revolutionary ideas that would help modernize our state (Șerban 2010). In all its history, the Romanian emigration played a very important role in the modernization process of our country (Șerban 2013).

Romanian citizens emigrated often with the hope that they will be able to develop from the professional or financial point of view (Niță 2013). Spain has been in the last two decades one of the favorite destinations of Romanian emigrants, but unfortunately, once arrived in the host country, the emigrants encounter another aspect, namely the exclusion from profitable activities. For most Romanian migrants in Spain, the financial resources are needed primarily for basic needs (Niță 2013), that is why they are satisfied with jobs in the secondary sector (poorly paid jobs with low prestige, dangerous, dirty). Corroborating these aspects with the emergence of the effects of world economic crisis, two major phenomena occur: increase in the level of xenophobia among Spanish citizens and socio-economic exclusion of migrants.

The evolution of Spanish society attitudes and perceptions regarding racism and xenophobia is measured by analyzing the results of the survey "Attitudes towards immigration" conducted annually by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (CIS). Repeated measuring of public opinion by applying the same questionnaire leads to the fact that data can be compared in real time (Ilie 2011).

Particularly relevant in this regard is the "Report on racism and xenophobia evolution in Spain" prepared by the Directorate for the Integration of Immigrants in the State Secretariat for Immigration and Emigration, commissioned by the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia - OBERAXE, resulting in, based on the above mentioned survey, a qualitative analysis of perceptions of individual groups on immigrants (D'Ancora and Martinez 2011).

Regarding the general evolution of attitudes towards immigration we notice that, as immigration has been strengthened and migrant populations in Spain increased, a negative perception was felt increasingly raised towards this phenomenon (Ilie 2011).

According to the results of the survey "Attitudes towards immigration" only 4 % of Spaniards said they do not have aversion towards immigrants and 7 % did not answer. The rest of 53% declared their dislike towards the foreigners residing in their country. A percent of 16 % of the Spaniards, declared the Romanians as being the most disagreeable immigrants. Indeed, a higher percentage of Spanish citizens, meaning 17 % of them have dislikes towards the group consisting of Moroccans, Moors and North Africans. But we must keep in mind that this category includes the population of several countries and it exceeds with only 1 % the group of Romanian immigrants. This means that the Romanians "have managed" to draw the dislike of the Spaniards in a percentage overwhelmingly exceeding the rest of the nations (Ilie 2011).

In the study conducted in 2008 by the Government of Romania, Romanians are ranked number two in the group of immigrants Spaniards have a bad and very bad opinion about, being surpassed by the Romani people. This aspect becomes more serious if we analyze another question addressed to the Spanish population, namely: *If you think about the Romani people established in Spain, what nation do you first associate them with?*, 65 % of respondents associating Romani people with Romanians (Government of Romania 2008)

## **2. About the illicit behavior of Romanian immigrants in Spain**

We believe that a high level of delinquency among Romanians automatically attracts a high level of antipathy from the Spaniards, who are aware of this information, either because they hear it in the mass media, or from acquaintances, friends or family through rumor.

Is it correct the opinion of Spanish citizens according to which the negative impact of migration is represented primarily by increasing crime and social insecurity?

It appears so, since the number of crimes committed by immigrants in Spain has grown tremendously in recent years. Moreover, as shown in the Statistical Yearbook for the year 2012, issued by the Ministry of Interior of Spain (Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica 2013) in July 2013, in 16 year, 1996 - 2012 period, the number of foreigners that are in prison for committing crimes increased nearly four times, reaching from 7263 foreign prisoners in 1996 to 26,315 people in 2010. The percentage of foreigners detained in Spanish prisons is at the end of 2012, 33.4%, of the total number of prisoners (Table no. 1).

**Table no. 1**  
**Number and percent of people in Spanish prisons between 1996 - 2012**  
**(foreign prisoners and those of Spanish nationality)**

Year	Total of prisoners in Spanish prisons	Percent for the total of prisoners in Spanish prisons	Prisoners of Spanish nationality	Percent of Spanish nationality prisoners	Foreign prisoners in Spanish prisons	Percent of foreign prisoners in Spanish prisons
1996	41,903	100%	34,640	82.7%	7,263	17.3%
1997	42,756	100%	35,220	82.4%	7,536	17.6%
1998	44,370	100%	36,520	82.3%	7,850	17.7%
1999	44,197	100%	36,297	82.1%	7,900	17.9%
2000	45,104	100%	36,114	80.1%	8,990	19.9%
2001	47,571	100%	36,476	76.7%	11,095	23.3%
2002	51,882	100%	38,469	74.1%	13,413	25.9%
2003	56,096	100%	40,891	72.9%	15,205	27.1%
2004	59,375	100%	42,073	70.9%	17,302	29.1%
2005	61,054	100%	42,438	69.5%	18,616	30.5%
2006	64,021	100%	43,378	67.8%	20,643	32.2%
2007	67,100	100%	44,123	65.8%	22,977	34.2%
2008	73,558	100%	47,357	64.4%	26,201	35.6%
2009	76,079	100%	48,917	64.3%	27,162	35.7%
2010	73,929	100%	47,614	64.4%	26,315	35.6%
2011	70,472	100%	45,970	65.2%	24,502	34.8%
2012	68,597	100%	45,704	66.6%	22,893	33.4%

Source: Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica. 2013. Anuario Estadístico del Ministerio del Interior 2012, Catálogo de Publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado.Madrid.

On December 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, the number of prisoners of Romanian nationality in Spanish prisons was of 2,338 people, representing 8.88 % of the total number of foreigners detained in these prisons.

Romanian immigrants detained in Spanish prisons have, by far, the highest percentage among prisoners who are citizens of member states of the European Union, their number representing 46.86 % of the total.

However, making a comparison with all foreign prisoners in Spanish prisons, we will find that Romanians are third, being surpassed by Moroccans, who are 6,052 and Colombians, with 2,513 jailed people (Table number 2).

**Table no. 2**  
**Foreign prisoners in Spanish prisons registered according to nationality (31.12.2012)**

Nationality	Number of prisoners	Percent of the total foreign prisoners
Austria	16	0.1%
Belgium	68	0.3%
Bulgaria	309	1.3%
Cyprus	0	0.0%
Denmark	11	0.0%
Estonia	35	0.2%
Finland	4	0.0%
France	329	1.4%
Germany	159	0.7%
Greece	16	0.1%
Ireland	28	0.1%
Italy	320	1.4%
Latvia	48	0.2%
Lithuania	190	0.8%
Luxemburg	0	0.0%
Malta	2	0.0%
Poland	182	0.8%
Portugal	486	2.1%
United Kingdom	201	0.9%
Czech Republic	38	0.2%
<b>Romania</b>	<b>2.338</b>	<b>10.2%</b>
Slovakia	14	0.1%
Slovenia	18	0.1%
Sweden	5	0.0%
The Netherlands	140	0.6%
Hungary	32	0.1%
<b>European Union</b>	<b>4,989</b>	<b>21.8%</b>
Algeria	702	3.1%
Columbia	2,513	11%
Ecuador	1,205	5.3%
Morocco	6,052	26.4%
Nigeria	605	2.6%
Venezuela	333	1.5%
Other states	6,494	28.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26,315</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica. 2013. Anuario Estadístico del Ministerio del Interior 2012, Catálogo de Publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado.Madrid.

And yet if Moroccan and Colombian prisoners outnumber Romanians why is there this trend from Spanish citizens to despise Romanians more?

The answer is simple and is given to us both by the statistical data issued by the Spanish Ministry of Interior, the Romanian Ministry of Interior as well as the interviews I've personally conducted in Spain during the period July - August 2012: *Romanians commit crimes with a strong social impact.*

According to the Statistical Yearbook of the Spanish Ministry of Interior issued in 2013, in 2012, a percentage of 37.71 % of the total number of arrests made in the Spanish state for the crime of drug trafficking and use, is held by foreigners. Thus, in that year only 23.124 Moroccans were deprived of freedom (38.65 % of all foreigners), 1,016 Colombians (12.57 % of foreigners), 418 Dominicans (5.18 %) and 369 Romanians, representing a percentage of 4.56 % of the total foreigners investigated for this crime (Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica 2013).

Corroborating these figures with the number of Colombians and Moroccans detained in prisons and analyzing the Spanish Statistical Yearbooks starting with 2005, there results that their basic criminal activity is drug trafficking, a crime that is not perceived as having a major negative impact in the perception of many Spanish citizens.

In fact, "according to the latest statistical data, Spaniards are among the largest consumers of heroin and cannabis in the world"(Blanco 2012) said in June 2012 Jorge Fernández Díaz, Spanish Minister of Interior. Also he was warning that 4% of the Spanish population consumes cocaine, and 10 % use marijuana. Moreover, in 2012, as a result of random controls conducted among Spanish drivers, in collaboration with the DRUID (*Driving Under the Influences of Drugs, Alcohol and Medicines*) project which took part in Europe, there resulted that 19.4 % of drivers were under the influence of drugs, 5.3 % had consumed alcohol and 3.1 % had consumed alcohol and drugs.

At the same time, in the Statistical Yearbook of the year 2005 of the Spanish Ministry of Interior, the last which delimits the categories of offenses committed by groups of foreigners, it is observed that a large proportion of the offenses committed by Moroccans are sanctioned by the "Law regarding foreigners" (Ley the extranjeria no. 4/2000) (Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica 2006), these acts not having a negative impact in the perception of Spanish citizens, as they are not directly affected by them.

The report "Synthesis. Romanian crime in M.A.I. states representation" issued in 2009 by the Ministry of Administration and Interior of Romania, Department of European Affairs and International Relations, Foreign Representation Service, presents as main crime concerns of Romanians the following offenses (Ministry of Administration and Interior of Romania, Department of European Affairs and International Relations 2009):

- crimes committed with violence;
- trafficking people for sexual or labor exploitation (In the context of the Spanish legislation, the crime of trafficking people for labor exploitation almost exceeds trafficking people for sexual exploitation);
- procuring;
- burglary from houses or company offices or car theft;
- robberies;
- murders;

- computer crimes and counterfeiting of electronic payment instruments;
- traffic offenses;
- forgery of official acts (identity documents);
- drug trafficking.

Thus, it is easy to understand that the involvement of Romanian citizens in violent crimes (burglaries, robberies, settle accounts, car thefts, kidnapping, etc.) has a strong social and mediatic impact, much stronger than the crimes committed by Moroccans and Colombians.

Collecting the data available regarding the number of Romanian citizens detained in Spanish prisons, during the period 2004 - 2012, we will see a continuous ascent of it (Table no. 3).

**Table no. 3**  
**Romanian prisoners in Spanish prisons registered in the period 2004 - 2012**

Year	Total of Foreign prisoners in Spanish prisons	Romanian prisoners in Spanish prisons	Percent of Romanian prisoners in the number of foreigners
2004	17,302	983	5.7%
2005	18,616	1,186	6.4%
2006	20,643	1,488	7.2%
2007	22,977	1,896	8.3%
2008	26,201	2,138	8.2%
2009	27,162	2,169	8.0 %
2010	26,315	2,216	8.4 %
2011	24,502	2,348	9.5%
2012	22,893	2,338	10.2%

Source: Ministerio del Interior, Secretaria General Técnica. Editions: 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005.

The data are valid for December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year.

We should also mention that the above data is the number of Romanian citizens detained in prisons located in Spain. The number of arrested people (in police custody) is not included in this figure. If we were to account these data as well, the number would increase significantly.

According to the report “Synthesis. Romanian crime in M.A.I. states representation” the number of Romanians in police custody is yet another third of the number of countrymen deprived of liberty on the Spanish territory.

At the same time, many of the xenophobic tendencies expressed by Spanish public opinion are determined anti-social behaviors of marginal groups of Romanians, such as dwelling in improvised camps, usually located outside the city and begging.

## Conclusions

This perspective illustrates how the group of Romanian citizens in Spain is not just increasingly more highlighted than other immigrant groups as the number of our countrymen

increases, but also it is perceived as having negative characteristics that still differentiate it from other immigration groups, by the high level of criminal activities as well as by anti - social behaviors disagreeable to the Spanish population. In this context, mass media is the main cause propagating and expanding the negative perception that Spanish citizens have about Romanian emigrants.

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