Broadening regulation in a context of labour market change: Trade unions and immigration in Spain since the early 1990s.

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Methods

• The research for this report is part of a three country study with 160 interviews which took place from 2008–2011.

• The Spanish case consists of 46 interviews conducted with trade union officials and activists, public bodies, migrant organizations, and immigrants in a number of different regions in Spain as part of a wider project by the authors studying trade unions, migration and social exclusion/inclusion in the Netherlands, Spain and the UK and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

• The key interviews, both semi-structured and unstructured, have been conducted with trade union officials and activists at all levels of the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), including specific migrant organizations (especially Ecuadorian and Colombian organisations).

• The research methodology has been qualitative with a focus on gaining an in-depth understanding of the evolution of trade union strategies in Spain. The research has also included some participant observation of trade union congresses and visits to trade union offices and union-run migrant worker information centres and offices in five regional states within Spain.
• Immigration, in fact, was still very low at that time (241,971 immigrants constituting the 0.63% in 1986) and mainly consisted of European citizens.

• The only significant extra-European groups were Moroccans, Colombians, Chileans and Argentineans (Miguelez and Recio, 2008).

• According to the national statistical bureau (INE), in 2010 the number of immigrants reached 5,708,940, constituting 12.2% of the total population.
• Penninx and Roosblad (2000) argue that union responses to immigration can only be understood if we map the traditions and politics of trade unions within the particular national contexts and they propose a framework for understanding responses. Penninx and Roosblad (2000) argue that trade unions have faced three dilemmas in terms of their response to migrant workers:
  • firstly, whether to resist immigration or cooperate and try to influence state immigration policy;
  • secondly, whether to include migrant workers as union members once they have arrived;
  • and thirdly, whether special union policies should be established for migrant and minority ethnic members over and above those policies for white members.
However, this debate shows us that we also have to map regulation in a new and more novel way (MacKenzie and Martinez Lucio, 2005).

One cannot just measure the role of the state in any quantitative manner and read off from it the possibility for social inclusion strategies, whether existing or not – especially as the state is composed of various complex levels and institutions along with competing legitimating projects (Jessop, 2002).

One cannot solely measure the quantitative components of the welfare state and then try to evaluate the reality or potential of equality and pro-immigrant policies. The issue of social inclusion is not based, solely, on the need to develop social inclusion strategies and to legitimate them.

The type of social inclusion strategies that are developed by specific actors and with what support and evaluation strategies is equally important. Social inclusion covers a range of themes – education, labour market access, social support, political voice and others. The question of co-ordination and development is central, especially as sustainability is a major problem in the development of social inclusion strategies.
a) The state as engagement point

• The level of the state and its various bodies have been a reference point for trade unions in terms of social dialogue, the opening of representative spaces to various organizations within migrant communities, and the provision of services on the front line.

• These initiatives have mainly been taken up by trade union officers inside the apparatus of the union – especially those from immigrant, social affairs and equality departments. Activists and local territorially based representatives have played a role and worked alongside these, but in the main it has been the former who have driven this process.

• The ability to link to the state therefore represents an important dimension of the Spanish response, as we will see in the way information and support services have been developed. The outcome of this link with the state has been significant for forms of direct union support for migrants in various aspects of their needs.
b) Community and communication: the CITES and the CATES

- Trade unions have developed a network of information offices and centres throughout virtually every major Spanish city. These have been developed by unions, especially the CCOO and the UGT. They are normally located in local union offices, and their role is to act as a first port of call for immigrants in relation to work and other social- or labour-related concerns. There are many immigrant centres and law firms focused on these types of activity, but none can compare to the sheer extent and breadth of the union network – something which is unusual in most European nations.

- The new ‘community union’ dimension and the link to the past ‘community’ of the union is not so clear in such developments. In the CCOO this dilemma has in recent years been especially apparent, given its history. The CITEs are in part contextualized in terms of the ‘socio-political’ identity of the union – itself a changing object of internal union politics within the CCOO – but remain ambivalently linked to the union’s overall work and activities. Hence in recent years, the CCOO have begun to use the CITE as an entry into the mainstream activity of the union by raising reference to the role of membership and union activity. Hence, whilst they form a vital part of support for immigrants in terms of their rights, recent strategies have been developed to fuse such immigrant facing activities more clearly.
c) Roaming Regulation

• In response to this, trade unions have developed a greater emphasis on fieldwork and visits.
• In the case of agriculture, the UGT, through a cluster of officials, visits groups of workers and areas, for example, during the key moments of harvesting. They target areas and work alongside local trade unionists – some of whom may be immigrants themselves – with the aim of explaining the agreed terms and conditions of employment to workers. They also attempt to pick up on grievances and cases of bad practice in terms of employment.
• The housing and accommodation inspection.
• History of practices evolved from emigration and interface with French unions.
d) Welfare and Culture: engaging with immigration beyond the field of work

- Cross cultural events within and between communities
- Cultural practices and memory of emigration in terms of national historical work
- Cultural events and the role of emigration and memory in exhibitions
e) Coalitions and Social Movements

• Whilst there is a strong history of social engagement the question of migration is more complex

• As stated above, anti-racist initiatives at work and in society were not a priority within the labour movement due to low levels of immigration during the formation of the new trade union movement after the dictatorship of Franco (1970s onwards).

• This has also been reflected in the absence of systematic attempts to create immigrant activist networks, although there is an emerging body of immigrants within the union, and also activists who develop their own informal networks.
• The argument of various interviewees within the UGT and CCOO from a Spanish background is that this would lead to separatism, and that the British model of black workers’ sections would not be appropriate given low levels of activism within immigrant communities in relation to work-related politics.

• Training of a specialist nature for such groups is not deemed necessary, as the objective is to have any individuals engaged into the mainstream of trade union education, so the aim as expressed to us was getting immigrants into these modules.

• In addition to these internal bureaucratic initiatives there was a systematic attempt to open a dialogue with immigrant organizations. In the case of the CCOO, there were formal alliances with organizations within such communities through periodic meetings and mutual exchanges of information.

• The most stable dialogue between the majority trade unions and immigrant community representatives was with established bodies with a strong role in international development.
Conclusion

• A cursory glance at the activities of Spanish unions in relation to immigration reveals that there has been much innovation and engagement.
• This is a union movement that has drawn from its experiences and memories in relation to emigration, engaged with its social and gender-related structures, and developed very direct forms of engagement when it comes to the elaboration of a strategy regarding migration.
• We also see much regulatory innovation and use of complex levers to engage migrant communities.
• However, there are some challenges in the manner in which this response has developed which may become more problematic in the immediate future.

• Firstly, there has been a systematic dependence on the state for resources, and the development of social dialogue which may provide a challenge if political contexts change: Questions of coupling.

• Secondly, the core focus of the trade union response has been supportive social delivery through a range of educational and informational services. This has been done through the established apparatus of the trade union. One could argue that in the absence of a new wave of activists from immigrant communities, the trade unions have no choice but to proceed in this manner; however, there are possible democratic deficits and gaps in relation to the immigrant workforce that may need attention: Issues of capacity and networks.

• Thirdly, this raises the issue that there are still not sufficient numbers of activists or levels of activism from migrant communities. Many of the internal bureaucratic work of the unions still relies on its social and gender departments, directly or indirectly: Link to other equality resources and networks (dependence).

• Fourth, there tended to be a separation in aspects of the work on immigration within the trade unions; however, this problem was being met by merging the secretariats for employment with immigration, and of linking the work of the advisory centres more closely to the sector federations. Questions of participation and service oriented approaches.

• This leads to the fifth challenge, which is the fact that immigration in Spain has taken place mainly in highly flexible and vulnerable sectors. That is to say, immigrants have not had access to many of the core jobs and employment issues. This has meant that the trade union, which in the main has its power base located in the ‘core workforce’, has been less affected by immigration.