

Labor Migration and the World Economy: Spain and Japan Compared

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ABSTRACT:

I review the successive stages of international labor migration accompanying the development of the capitalist world economy as well as the political upheavals accompanying the rise of nativism in the receiving countries, as citizens of these nations started perceiving migrants as a threat to their economic position and cultural dominance. In that context, the experience of Spain is anomalous both for the relative ease with which the nation transitioned from being a migrant-exporting country to one receiving large waves of foreign workers and to the relatively smooth process of incorporation of migrants and, especially their offspring, to Spanish society. I discuss evidence backing both trends and then contrast the Spanish experience with that of Japan, a country that has so far resisted mass immigration despite rapid depopulation and the urgent need for foreign workers by its large economy. Flaws in the recent law allowing the arrival of temporary workers in Japan are pointed out and a series of policy suggestions are advanced to turn the present situation around allowing immigration to make a contribution to the future of Japanese society.