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**RURAL DEVELOPMENT, POPULATION AGING AND GENDER IN SPAIN: THE  
CASE OF RURAL WOMEN IN THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY OF  
CASTILLA Y LEÓN**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been characterized by the development of multiple changes in the economic, political and social systems of the different countries in the world. One of the factors of social change which has become increasingly important during recent decades is the continuous effort that women have been making to obtain recognition at all levels of economic, political and social life in their respective countries. In this sense, the context and the problems of women living in rural areas presents a different case, when we refer to areas with specific conditions brought about by the transformations which they have suffered during the last decades.

Rural life in Spain has been undergoing important changes since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These changes have been closely linked to the crisis in life-style once characteristic of traditional agricultural economies and societies. Both technology and changes in life-style in modern society have given rise to the transfer of the labour force away from agriculture activities towards the industrial sector and, above all, towards the service sector. This has provoked a continual depopulation of most rural areas in Spain, which in turn has set off a process of the aging of the population in these areas as well as their economic decadence.

To a great extent, women have led the exodus towards urban areas, mainly as a result of the difficulties which they face when trying to find employment in small villages. Paradoxically, women have also played a fundamental role in the economic and social revitalization of these same villages due to the fact that they constitute a sufficient labour force and that they often have the qualifications necessary to undertake projects which generate both income and employment. The Public Administration also plays an important role in the implementation of the policies of rural development, and especially in the attempt to attain equal opportunities between men and women.

This paper will try to demonstrate what exactly is the demographic and economic situation of rural women and, more specifically, of those who live in rural areas within the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León. It will attempt to establish to which extent women can play the protagonist role in boosting the rural areas in this region as well as to outline the measures which the Public Administration is taking to foment the economic and social integration of women who live in rural populations. While this focus of this analysis is mainly the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, we believe that its results and conclusions will also be useful in other regions which share similar demographic and economic characteristics, given that a certain degree of homogeneity characterizes the behaviour of the women who live in these territories.

## **2. THE SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN SPAIN**

As we have stated in the above introduction, the rural population in Spain has suffered a serious demographic decline during the last fifty years. According to the data of the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), in 1960, 57.2% of the population lived in municipalities of less than 10,000 inhabitants, while in 2001 this percentage has dropped to 23,63%. According to the Censo de Población for 2001, more than four and a half million women live in these municipalities, a number which represents 23% of the entire female population in Spain.

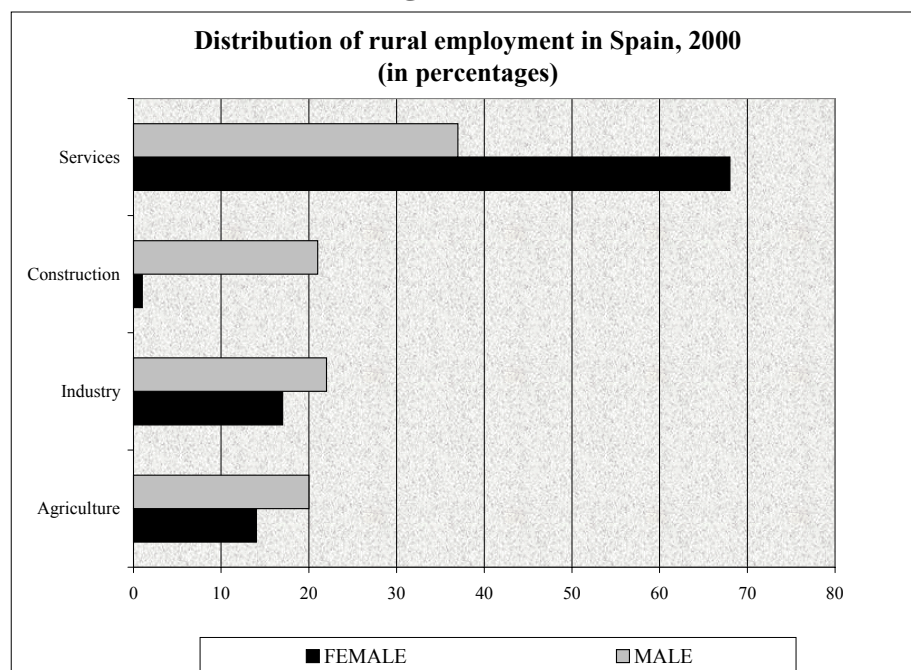
In rural Spain, women have traditionally worked in activities related to agriculture and to livestock. That is, there has been a clear differentiation according to gender, due to the fact that in the past, men received both salaries and social protection for fulfilling jobs designated as productive work, while women, on the other hand, constituted “family help”, and as a result, they worked within the agricultural operation but were

unpaid and ineligible for social benefits. In addition, women were in charge of raising children and looking after other dependent members of the family and they were also responsible for completing a wide range of domestic chores.

However, this situation began to change in the 60's, largely due to the progressive modernization of the agricultural process in Spain, especially in those parts of the country where the large and highly mechanized farms drove out a large part of the labour force in the agricultural sector. Thus, there have been profound changes in the sectorial structure of the Spanish rural environment in which women, to a greater and greater extent, have been increasingly relevant.

The economic activities directly related to the agricultural sector are slowly less and less representative within the economic context of rural areas in Spain. This is due to the greater socioeconomic development of the country and to the diversification of the activities within rural areas, which in recent years have consisted in the starting up and the progressive importance of subsectors such as rural tourism or the agrofood industry.

**GRAPH 1**



Source: elaborated using data from Encuesta de Población Activa, 2000.

According to García Sanz (2002) there is a clear terciarization of rural areas, which is strongly supported by female employment in the sector. Therefore, of the total number of women employed in rural areas, 67.7% work in the service sector.

The massive number of women employed in the service sector seems to represent an escape valve away from the traditional rural structure based on agriculture, now mechanized and masculine, towards a new, more diversified rural panorama in which women participates and receives both a salary and social protection. Furthermore, it is often women who initiate the diversification of the rural economic realm by becoming creating businesses, thereby generating both income and jobs. The economic needs of the family and also their greater need for social recognition motivate women to look for work within the rural area, which creates social networks more frequently than in larger urban centres

We must point out that while more and more women in rural areas are opting to do paid work, it is nevertheless true that there are still a lot of obstacles to overcome. The rural areas must be provided with certain infrastructures and services, and the new communication and information must be brought to these regions. There must be public funding for the creation of businesses and for their subsequent maintenance, especially for those which employ women, which come up against more difficulties in the labour field. Measures to attain equal opportunities must be given priority in the different territorial policies in order to reach true equality between men and women, especially in rural areas.

### **3. RURAL WOMEN IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN**

The Autonomous Community of Castilla y León is an interior region situated to the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula which, with its 94.204 km<sup>2</sup>, constitutes the largest region of Spain and of the European Union. This region maintains close links with rural society, given that its agriculture, according to the data of the Informe Anual del Consejo Económico y Social de Castilla y León (2003) for the year 2002, represents 9.7% of the region's growth (and 4% of the national average), that its agricultural jobs represent 9.17% of the total employment (as opposed to only 5.91% of the total in Spain) and that it possesses a rural population which, according to the Censo de Población for 2001 accounts for approximately 30% of its inhabitants.

Firstly, it is important that we define what we understand by the term "rural territory" in order to present the different data in this paper. Ideally, we would identify the rural territory of Castilla y León according to a multivariate criteria, in which we would

include demographic, economic, cultural, anthropologic, etc... criteria, but practical limitations lead us to have to resort to the size of the municipalities' populations as an indicator whether or not a territory is rural. Thus, we have taken into account the division of the municipal settlements established by the INE which considers all of those municipalities which have less than 2,000 inhabitants to be rural.

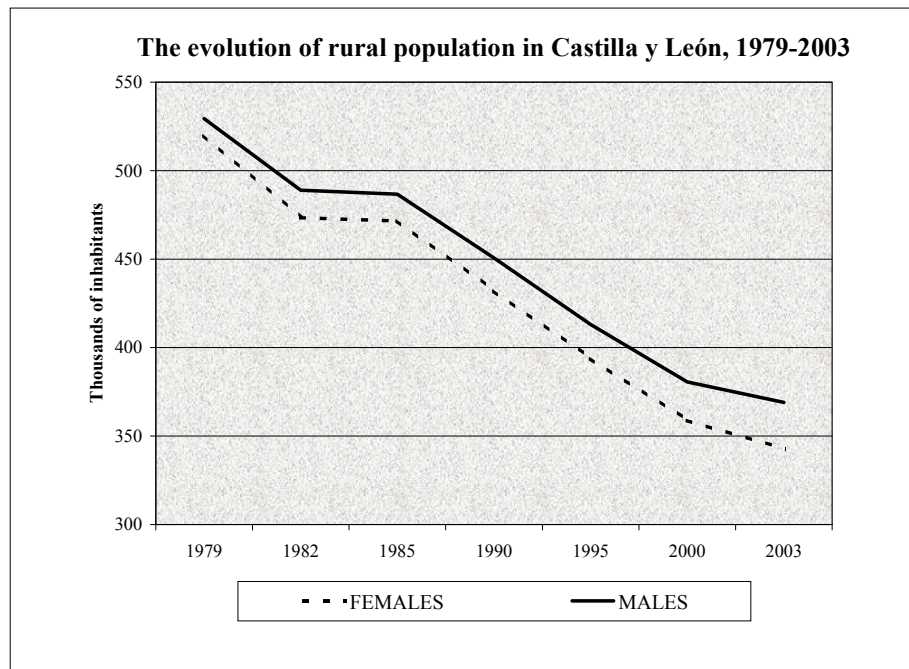
According to the above-mentioned definition, the rural area of Castilla y León, according to the Censo de Población for 2001 includes 2,126 municipalities (of a total of 2,248), which accounts for about 86% of the region's total territory. We can therefore affirm that the territory of Castilla y León, in extension, is eminently rural. On the other hand, and as we will see in the following, these rural areas are reduced, demographically speaking, and demonstrate important quantitative differences due to gender and, which is even more serious, they have few expectations for recuperation.

### **3.1 The demographic characteristics of rural women in Castilla y León**

#### *3.1.1 Evolution of the population*

During recent years the population of Castilla y León has decreased differentially, depending on the size of the municipalities. That is, while the region is progressively losing inhabitants, it is also suffering a demographic reorganization; the rural population has decreased while the population of the chief towns and of the cities in the Community are growing (Rico 2003). In GRAPH 2 we can observe the evolution of the aforementioned rural population, classified by sex, for the period 1979-2003. The number of men is greater than that of women throughout the entire period and, especially during the most recent years, this difference in numbers is increasing so that the proportion of women living in rural areas is progressively lower than that of men.

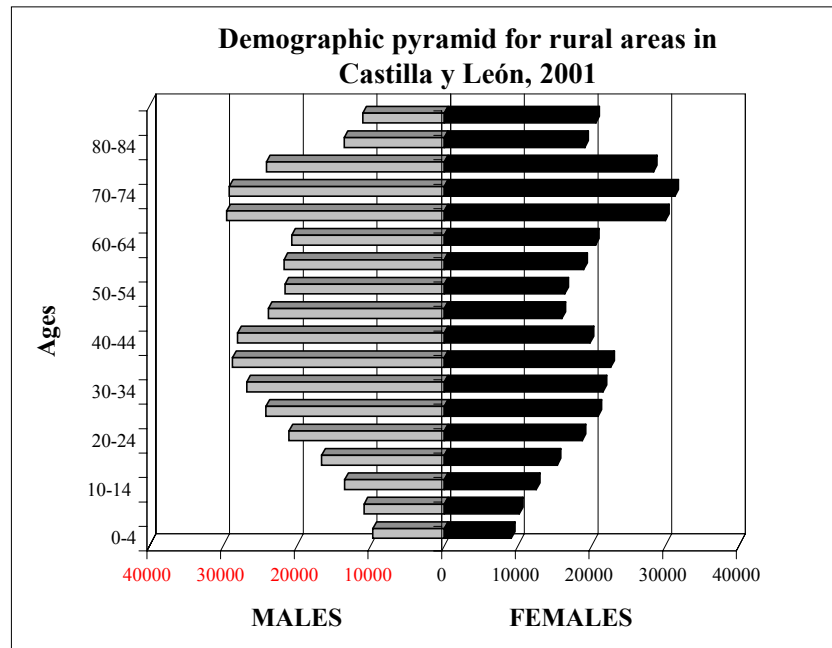
**GRAPH 2**



Source: elaborated using data from DG Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León.

The analysis of the rural population showing classification by age ranges and by sex undertaken by the last Census (Censo de Población, 2001) is shown in the population pyramid in GRAPH 3. The population pyramid has a very narrow base, which reflects the low birth rate characteristic of more recent decades. The middle part of the pyramid, which includes inhabitants between the ages of 45 and 65, reflects a sharp narrowing, due to the massive emigration of young inhabitants which took place thirty years ago. Finally, at the top of the pyramid the sections corresponding to inhabitants over 65 years old are widening, reflecting the high level of the aging of the population in this region. Therefore, a quick glance at the population pyramid for municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants reveals their serious demographic problems: a reduced number of young people, massive emigration and high rates of both aged and male population.

**GRAPH 3**



Source: elaborated using data from Censo de Población 2001 (INE).

### *3.1.2 Natural growth of population and migrations*

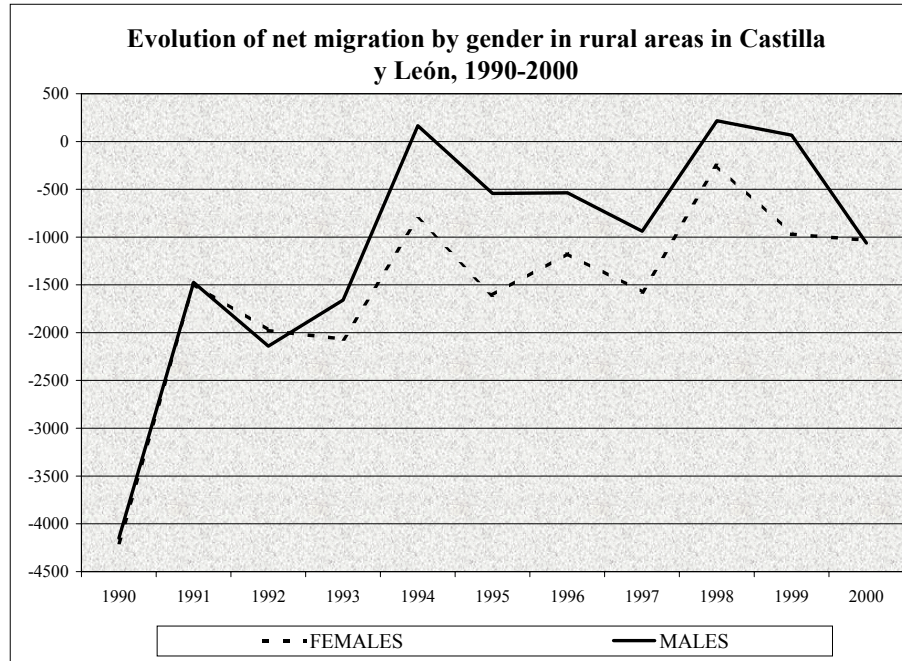
The decline in the rural population in Castilla y León is also due to natural causes. The natural growth in rural areas, defined as the difference between births and deaths which occur during a fixed period of time, has been negative during the last years; the numbers are very discouraging, as they indicate a yearly loss in population due to natural causes of more than 6,000 inhabitants, which promises to follow the same decreasing trend in the future (Rico y Gómez, 2003).

The second reason why rural municipalities possess decreasing numbers in population is that which is related to migrations. The evolution of the net migration of the rural areas in Castilla y León, classified by sex (GRAPH 4), shows that despite the fact that in 1990 the regional net migration was negative (almost 8,500 inhabitants), later the evolution is reverting until the point where, though slightly, the rural net migration is nearing zero.

In the case of the male population, there was a even a positive net migration during some years. GRAPH 4 also reflects the fact that women emigrate from villages more frequently than men, though for both population groups the migratory tendency is positive. This fact may be due to a change in migratory patterns; that is, either the exodus from rural areas is decreasing or the entrances are increasing. It may also be due to the fact that the migratory process has already finished. In other words, rural

population is already so aged that it is difficult for massive movements of population to take place. Nevertheless, the rural areas of Castilla y León continue to lose population through negative net migration and, if nothing is done soon, the situation might become unsustainable in poorer areas.

**GRAPH 4**



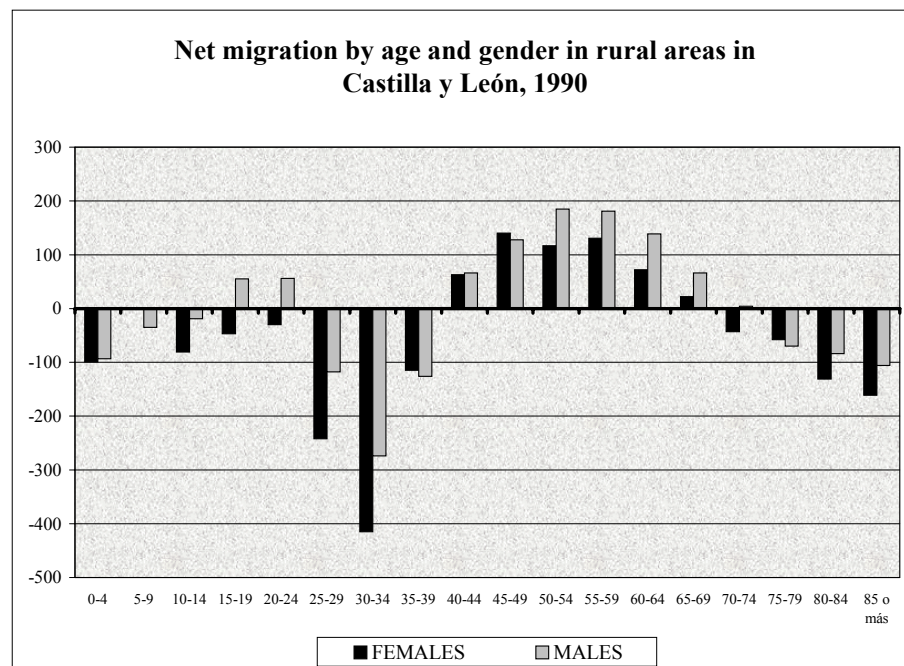
Source: elaborated using data from DG Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León.

While the migratory phenomenon characteristic of the small municipalities in Castilla y León is worsened because of the fact that women emigrate more often than men, this problem is further accentuated because of the specific age groups to which those inhabitants who leave these areas belong. With regard to this matter, GRAPH 5 classifies the female and male net migrations according to age ranges, covering five years each, for the year 1999. A quick glance at this graph will reveal that the population between the ages of 20 and 40 is the one which demonstrates the most negative net migration, because these are the inhabitants which leave the villages in greatest numbers and which leaves a wide population gap where those who have the most labour and reproductive potential should be. Likewise, it is generally the younger women who decide to abandon the rural nuclei. The population which is over 50 years old, especially the male population, shows positive net migrations. These are men who return to their home town in the search for the comforts and easy living of the countryside, or others who have stable employment and choose to move to these small municipalities and use them as “dormitories” and places to rest and relax. Finally, the



group of inhabitants who are over 65, much like the youth, are also leaving the villages, probably because they have offspring who do not live in the villages and therefore, they decide to move in with their families so that they will look after them (García Sanz, 1998) or because they move into residences which are located in larger population nuclei which have more access to social and health services.

**GRAPH 5**



Source: elaborated using data from DG Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León.

There are several reasons for the massive emigration of women from the rural areas in which they live. First of all, because of the difficulties which they face when searching for employment in the villages, women choose to move to urban centres which offers them more opportunities to find jobs as well as, possibly, more freedom. Therefore, from this point of view, women's emigration can be considered as a rational adjustment mechanism away from a rural structure which lacks dynamism and which was transforming the economic and social roles throughout Europe, and whose main sector was undergoing modernization and therefore the labour force was being expelled. At one time, women who left the villages did so because they were accompanying their husbands who went to look for work in the city, but the decision to leave the villages soon became the women's own decision; their goal was to find a job which would permit them to be economically independent. Those who left the villages were those who could work and who had potentially reproductive age.

On the other hand, the economic infrastructures and resources in health care and social services that the rural areas can offer are, in most cases, insufficient or less diversified than those of urban areas. Women generally value these types of questions very highly, so that the villages, and especially the small villages, do not attract them as places of residence. Being able to have quick access to health, educational or cultural services are some of the practical advantages of urban life which outweigh other values such as the peacefulness or the possibility to be closer to nature, two benefits which rural areas are better able to offer.

### *3.1.3 Aging and masculinization*

The massive emigration of young women from small villages towards urban centres creates a whole series of problems within the rural areas. Perhaps the most worrying consequence is the demographic aging of the population of these areas, along with its important economic and social implications (Gómez García 1997). However, in addition to the aging of the population, the massive emigration of these women also has other important consequences: the “masculinization” of the rural population of Castilla y León, as well as the emergence of new activities springing from the “de-agriculturization” and other related effects of the abandonment of the fields.

With respect to the aging of the rural population in Castilla y León, TABLE 1 displays the population percentages according to sex, and taking four age groups into consideration (children, youth, adults and seniors). As the years go by, the proportion of youth decreases while that of the seniors increases, meaning that demographically speaking, the rural areas maintain regressive and unbalanced population tendencies with regards to the different age groups. TABLE 1 also shows that there are a greater proportion of men than women in all of the age groups, except for in the senior group, due to the women’s higher life expectancy.

**TABLE 1**  
**Changes in demographic distribution by age groups in rural areas in**  
**Castilla y León, 1991-2001**

	1991		1996		2001	
<b>Ages</b>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
<b>0-19</b>	18,65	18,75	16,21	15,89	13,39	13,53
<b>20-39</b>	23,19	28,47	24,09	28,48	23,81	26,88
<b>40-64</b>	29,95	30,75	27,84	29,79	26,03	30,93
<b>65 and over</b>	28,21	22,03	31,85	25,84	36,77	28,66

Source: elaborated using data from Censo de Población 1991, 2001 (INE) and DG Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León.

With respect to the rural “masculinization” phenomenon considered to be a consequence of the selective migration in Castilla y León, both the above-mentioned table and the population pyramid reflect the greater proportion of women to men, as well as an increasing tendency in time. So, for example, in the year 2001 there were 106.71 men for each 100 women in the rural areas of Castilla y León, a mere indication of the serious demographic imbalance which is being generated. However, this fact is mitigated somewhat by the lower life expectancy of men, since if it weren’t for this, the imbalance between the sexes would be even greater.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most dramatic characteristic of the imbalance between the number of men and women within rural populations concerns the age ranges in which the imbalance occurs. GRAPH 6 shows the male rate (defined as the number of men for each 100 women) in the rural territory classified by different age ranges. As we can observe in said graph, in 2001, in the municipalities of Castilla y León with less than 2,000 inhabitants and in the age ranges of the youngest inhabitants, the proportion of males is a bit higher than that of the females, due to the fact that the male birth rate, on average, is higher than the female birth rate (García Sanz, 1998). With respect to those over 25 years old, this difference is disproportionate, and it reaches its maximum among those inhabitants between 45 and 49 years old, where there are 149.61 men for each 100 women. With regards to the elder fringe of the population, due to the males’ lower birth rate, the male rate decreases in such a way that, after 65, the number of men is less than the number of women. Amongst the very elderly (over 85) there are only 53.84 men for each 100 women.

**GRAPH 6**



Source: elaborated using data from DG Estadística. Junta de Castilla y León.

In a demographic situation such as the one described, which is characterized by a lack of women, it is logical that the problem of male bachelors arises, both among young males and among more mature men. Therefore, if these men do not find a partner, the birth rate shrinks, and this in turn fuels the creation of a “vicious circle of demographic decadence in rural areas”.

### **3.2 Projection of rural demographic aging in Castilla y León (2001 – 2026)**

Now that the main demographic problems, differentiated by sex, which characterize the rural areas of Castilla y León have been clearly underlined, in this epigraph we will try to determine the demographic patterns which these regions will probably demonstrate during the next 25 years. This will be a prospective study based on rural demographic data for 2001 (basically obtained from the Censo de Población 2001), of the changes which, stemming from various hypotheses related to the future behaviour of fertility, mortality and migrations, the size and structure (by age) of the rural population of Castilla y León will possibly undergo. This analysis will consider as rural municipalities those which had less than 2,000 inhabitants in the year 2001.

The projection has been developed considering different hypothesis regarding the evolution of those population change factors within the rural areas of Castilla y León. Taken together, those premises, made up a specific demographic scenario for the future,

which we have denominated as “base scenario” and which tries to synthesize the changes in the three main demographic factors (birth, deaths and migrations) according to past trends observed in the population and realistic assumptions about its future evolution.

**TABLE 2**  
**Rural population projection in Castilla y León, 2001-2026: Main hypothesis (base scenario)**

Fertility	Mortality	Migrations
Fertility rate: starting at a level of 0.75 in the year 2001, increasing until it reaches 1.3 in 2026	Life expectancy at birth: starting at a level of 76.8 years old for males and 84 years old for females in 2001, increasing until it reaches 78.3 years old and 85 years old, respectively.	Migration: It is assumed that, until the year 2010, the number of net migrants follows the same historic trend, on average, observed during the period 1995-1999. Afterwards, it remains constant at the level experienced in year 2010.

Source: Rico (2003)

TABLE 2 summarizes the main results of the projection of the population in the rural areas of Castilla y León in accordance with the hypothesis of the base scenario. That is, the main result consists in observing how there is a decrease of more than 225,000 people from the total rural population during the projected period, and estimating that the population will reach an approximate total of 501,300 people in 2026, a number which represents a decrease of 30.4% with respect to 2001. There is not a big difference between the decrease in the male and the female population. This demographic regression continues along these tendencies throughout the last decades and in the projection, one can observe how the drop in population takes places in all of the quinquenniums, though it is much more accelerated throughout the years 2001-2006 and 2006-2011, and slower after the regressive tendency. This evolution of the population is clearly due to a strong negative natural growth, given that, from the year 2006, the net migration is projected to be slightly positive.

While the total number of births seems to recover until 2011, due to the increase in the level of fertility, it decreases once more due to the serious proportional drop in the number of women who have reached reproductive age (from 15 to 49 years old). Therefore, the hypothetical increase in the fertility rate is not sufficient in order to obtain an increase in the total number of births, because the decline in the number of women is decisive. With respect to the mortality rate, we project that it will decrease

steadily throughout the entire time period in question, due to both the influence of the improvements in life expectancy and to the fact that the generations which we find at the end of the age pyramids are smaller and smaller. This fact will provoke a situation in which the natural growth will more and more favourable as time goes by, given that there will be proportionally less deaths than births.

Those inhabitants under 15 years of age will find their total number to be drastically reduced, to such an extent that in the year 2026, this age group will constitute 39.3% less than in the year 2001. Nevertheless, its percentage of participation with respect to the total population is projected to decline by one point (from 9% to 8%) during the same time period, due to the general reduction of the population.

The potentially active population (between 15 and 65) is projected to reduce itself 27.91%, in absolute terms, while in relative terms this group will be significantly larger; it will constitute 58% in the year 2001 and will reach 61% in the year 2026.

The size of the population over 65 will diminish 34.52% in absolute terms and 2% proportionally, between the years 2001 and 2006. Nevertheless, the data referring to the average age of the population confirm the progressive aging of the population in the rural areas of Castilla y León; throughout the span of the 25 year time period, the median age of the population will increase by 3 years.

In conclusion, the general characteristics of the projected demographic evolution for the rural areas of Castilla y León within the base scenario reflect the continuation of the process of depopulation, primarily as a consequence of a highly negative natural growth. The proportion of youth and seniors will tend to diminish, while the percentage of active population will tend to increase with respect to the year 2001. In principle, this result is encouraging, in the sense that it might indicate the generation of wealth in those rural areas. However, the accentuated process of rural aging of the population, far from slackening, becomes even more pronounced during the next 25 years, as is indicated by the average age of the population, which tends to increase. All of these results indicate that in the rural areas of Castilla y León, generational replacement is further and further away from taking place.

**TABLE 3**  
**Aggregated results of the rural population projection for Castilla y León,**  
**2001-2026 (base scenario)**

	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026
<b>Population aggregates (thousands)</b>						
Total Population size	726,5	668,9	617,8	574,7	536,4	501,3
POB (0-14)	65,9	54,1	48,0	43,8	43,0	40,8
POB (15-64)	423,9	405,9	385,2	365,1	338,8	305,6
POB (≥ 65)	236,7	208,8	184,5	165,7	154,5	155,0
POB 5-24 years old	118,8	97,5	79,9	68,8	62,3	57,2
Women 15-49 years old	134,7	130,7	120,7	106,8	91,9	78,2
<b>Quinquennial variations (percentages)</b>						
Population growth	--	-57,6	-51,1	-43,1	-38,3	-35,1
Births	--	14,5	15,1	14,6	13,7	12,8
Deaths	--	71,8	66,6	58,2	52,5	48,3
Net migration	--	-0,4	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5
<b>Indicators of the population structure</b>						
Proportions by age groups						
Young age (0-14)	0,09	0,08	0,08	0,08	0,08	0,08
Working age (15-64)	0,58	0,61	0,62	0,64	0,63	0,61
Old age (65+)	0,33	0,31	0,30	0,29	0,29	0,31
Median age of population	48,82	49,47	49,75	50,29	51,02	51,95
Sex ratio of the population	106,7	106,6	106,8	107,2	107,2	106,7
	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Rates of population change (per thousand)</b>						
Crude birth rate	--	4,2	4,7	4,9	4,9	4,9
Crude death rate	--	20,6	20,7	19,6	18,9	18,6
Natural increase	--	-16,4	-16,0	-14,6	-14,0	-13,7
Migration rate	--	-0,1	0,1	0,2	0,2	0,2
Population growth	--	-16,5	-15,9	-14,5	-13,8	-13,5

Fuente: elaborated using PDPM/PC.

### 3.3 Main labour characteristics of rural women in Castilla y León

The labour market is one of the realms of economic reality where the differences between men and women are more latent, and this is even truer of a region such as Castilla y León, where the women's labour participation rate is one of the lowest in Spain (Fernández Arufe, 2000). The segmentation between female and male work in the productive sectors and the high unemployment levels among women are significant facts worthy of mention if we refer to the labour market of this region. Both are even more exaggerated in the territory's rural areas.

As is shown in TABLE 4, the labour participation rate of women who live in the rural areas of Castilla y León is truly diminished, given that it constitutes 27.29% or, in other

words, that it only represents only one half of the labour participation rate of men living in the same regions. Similarly, the women's labour participation rate in rural areas is 9 points below that of the female average in the region. The low incorporation of women into the labour market can be explained, in principle, by the large proportion of habitants over 65 years of age, as we pointed out in epigraph 3.1.3. However, there are additional factors which also contribute to the women's downheartedness with respect to finding employment. According to Montoro *et al.* (1995) the family circumstances surrounding these women seem to condition their integration into the labour market, though to a less extent, due to the rather wide acceptance of family planning. Marriage and motherhood are both factors which often cause women to abandon the labour market. In rural areas, where there are fewer job opportunities, this is even truer. The higher the women's education level, the more direct is the compatibility between marriage-children-labour market. However, the data shows that there is still a long way to go before the women's labour participation rate can begin to reach that of their male counterparts. Here is where the Public Administration plays an important role, as it must take measures and offer incentives in order to make the compatibility between family and professional life possible, especially in rural areas, which are especially lacking with regards to employment opportunity, infrastructures and basic services.

**TABLE 4**  
**Labour force participation rates of rural areas in Castilla y León, 2001**

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Rural area</b>	27,29	57,29	42,76
<b>Castilla y León</b>	36,34	62,52	49,15

Source: elaborated using data from Censo de Población 2001 (INE).

With respect to the employment rate in the rural territory (TABLE 5), the data in the Censo de Población for the year 2001 indicate that the average employment rate amongst the male population is clearly higher than that of the females, both in rural areas and as far as the regional average is concerned. In this case, we must underline the fact that the women's employment rate is higher in rural areas than throughout the region as a whole. This is because it is easier to occupy all of the people who want to work due to their smaller number; it is easier to reconcile the offer with the demand.



**TABLE 5**  
**Employment rates of rural areas in Castilla y León, 2001**

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Rural area	83,11	91,67	89,02
<b>Castilla y León</b>	<b>81,96</b>	<b>91,24</b>	<b>87,74</b>

Source: elaborated using data from Censo de Población 2001 (INE).

With regards to unemployment, the differentials according to sex continue to be such that in 2001, female unemployment doubled male unemployment throughout the whole region (TABLE 6). Rural areas register levels of unemployment lower than the regional average, both in the cases of men and women. According to García Sanz (1998) this fact is due to the existence of a direct correlation between the labour participation rate and the unemployment rate: the higher the labour participation rate the higher the unemployment rate and vice versa. Unemployment levels are lower when the area is more rural because in said regions the labour participation rate also decreases.

**TABLE 6**  
**Unemployment rates of rural areas in Castilla y León, 2001**

	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Rural area	16,89	8,33	10,98
<b>Castilla y León</b>	<b>18,04</b>	<b>8,76</b>	<b>12,26</b>

Source: elaborated using data from Censo de Población 2001 (INE).

In conclusion, the work situation of rural women is quite pessimistic. Their low level of incorporation into the work market brings about the existence of idle resources in the rural areas and, as a result, less probability of employment in these areas. The prolongation of rural depression will depend, to a great extent, on women and on the use of their labour in order to embark on new, diversified activities which help to sustain the economic system of the villages. In some parts of the Spain, there are already rural development initiatives under way, and they seem to be obtaining positive results. These initiatives, together with other measures, might be able to stop the depopulation and the weariness of the villages of Castilla y León.

## **4. PUBLIC POLICIES FOR THE FULL DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN**

### **4.1 Public policies for equal opportunities between men and women**

The differential characteristics of the socioeconomic situation of rural women in relation to men or to other women living in more populated areas renders the implementation of a series of measures which fit the rural women's needs essential. The shortages which women living in rural areas must face (lack of access to services, lack of appropriate employment, etc...) make it necessary for there to be interventions at both the public and private levels in order to correct these shortages as much as possible.

In order to do just that, since the 70's, international organizations (UN, ILO, OECD) have begun to implement measures in order to promote women in economic, social, political and labour circles. In addition, they have put an end to all of the regulations which culminated in unequal treatment for women.

The European Union considers equal treatment and opportunities for men and women as a fundamental principle through its diverse legal instruments (Regulations, Directives, Decisions, Communications, Community Action Programmes, etc.). These measures have already begun to take effect in fields such as employment, the compatibility of family and professional life, decision making, participation in economic life, etc. Although results have been positive, it seems as if they are still too scarce and that the road ahead is still too long. In the last Councils of the European Union, there have been great attempts to make the equality in opportunity effective. A specific example of this effort is the consolidation of the concept "mainstreaming", defined as the integration of the principle of equality and of non-discrimination between women and men in all European policies and actions.

In the case of Spain, our country has followed the path marked out by the European Union, in so far as equality of opportunity is concerned. The different measures that have been taken have been compiled in different plans for equal opportunities between males and females ("*Planes de Igualdad de Oportunidades*"), approved by the Government. In the aforementioned Plans, the agreements reached both at the world

level (United Nations) and at the European level are taken into consideration, and they are adapted to the specific case of women in who live in the rural areas of Spain.

Similarly, several comprehensive plans for equal opportunities (“*Planes Integrales de Igualdad de Oportunidades para la Mujer*“) have been developed in the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León. Their fundamental goal is to promote employment and to improve the quality of life of the women in the region.

At the local level, the different provincial institutions (Diputaciones) and the local governments (Ayuntamientos) in the main cities throughout the region are also trying to reach an equal opportunity status between the men and women in their respective territorial zones, by way of different actions in the realm of education and training actions, labour integration, information and orientation, etc.

The following epigraphs will be dedicated to an analysis of various instruments, both at the political level of the Community and at the national level, which currently constitute an important source of both financial support and of job creation in the rural areas of Castilla y León. Moreover, the study will pay particular attention to how these instruments affect women in rural areas. Specifically, we will make reference to the EQUAL and to the LEADER Programs, as well as to the PRODER Operative Program.

#### **4.2 Community Initiative “EQUAL”**

The EQUAL Community Initiative has its antecedents in the NOW Initiative, which was initially outlined for the period 1991-1994, within the Third Program of Community Action. This Initiative springs from the recognition that segregation of women from men exists in the labour market, and it attempts to give more importance to the promotion of equality of opportunity. NOW is also ongoing throughout the periods 1995-1997 and 1998-1999, with the aim to strengthen the experience of the projects in the first phase, reflecting the consensus that the Union and the Member States have reached regarding the necessary prevention and reduction of female unemployment. Priority was given to those areas in which the participation level of women is especially low, such as the case of the creation of private businesses, and it contributed to the unification of the interventions in favour of women, mobilizing a wide range of social agents (ministries, local administrations, women’s organizations, private businesses, etc.). The largest number of projects is aimed at unemployed

women, to women who return to work, and especially to women who have few qualifications. In the case of the rural areas, the NOW Initiative gave special importance to women's business initiatives and to the promotion of the commercialization of new local products and services, as well as to the training of experts and to the availability of technical assistance for those project promoters who requested such help.

The EQUAL Community Initiative, foreseen for the period 2000-2006, slightly modifies the initial objectives of the NOW Initiative, in that it widens the radius of its action by promoting ways to fight against all forms of exclusion, discrimination and inequality in the labour market. In order to achieve this objective, each Development Partnerships must support projects which have to be included in one of the following five main thematic areas of the EQUAL Program: capacity of the professional insertion of those groups having special difficulties; the struggle against racism and xenophobia within the labour market; the creation of businesses, both in urban and rural areas; the adaptability of businesses and workers to economic changes and to new technology; the compatibility of family and professional life and the reduction of the imbalance between men and women by supporting the elimination of segregation in the workplace.

According to the Junta de Castilla y León, there are presently 14 EQUAL projects ongoing in the region. They depend on local territorial institutions (Ayuntamientos, Diputaciones, Mancomunidades), and 3 other multiregional projects whose geographical scope affects Castilla y León. Most of these programs affect the region's rural territory, and their main objectives are the reduction of gender imbalances, the compatibility of family and professional life and the insertion and reinsertion into the labour market.

#### **4.3 Community Initiative "LEADER"**

While the LEADER Community Initiative is related to the development of the rural areas of the Member States, we consider it to be of great importance to the topic which we are dealing with, namely the policies which are in favour of women living in rural areas.

Although in the LEADER Initiative women are not the direct aim of concrete measures, a lot of the projects affect them directly. The LEADER initiative stems from a new idea of rural development, which is based on a territorial, integrated and participatory focus.

It emerged for the period 1991-1994 and, has been subsequently prolonged for the periods 1995-1999 (LEADER II) and 2000-2006 (LEADER+). The Community Initiative offers financial help to those who undertake projects in rural areas which are in accordance with its main guidelines. The Initiative has meant the promotion of the equality of opportunity in rural areas given that it has made it possible for women eager to create their own source of income to start up innovative rural development projects. These projects are often related to rural tourism, to the promotion of local agrofood specialties and to the creation of small and medium-sized businesses.

According to the ex-post evaluation of the LEADER II Initiative (1995-1999), in the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, 30% of the private projects (excluding those undertaken by businesses, associations and cooperatives) were headed by women. This is a high percentage if we take into consideration the low level of female labour participation and the women's traditional lack of businesses initiative in rural areas. On the other hand, women obtained 50% of the total number of jobs created by LEADER II during the same time period (1995-1999), which may also be considered a success in order to promote labour insertion of women in new rural development projects. Most of the people who attended the training courses financed by this Initiative (courses in rural tourism, restoration, decoration, computers, handicrafts, etc.) were women. Within Castilla y León, various cooperatives entirely run by women in small municipalities have been created, which shows just how effective LEADER can be in promoting the creation of jobs for women in rural areas.

The new rural development projects adopted from the year 2000 and on are more concerned with the equality between men and women than those of the past. The aim of these programs is to support the important role which women can play in the diversification of the rural economy. In this way, the LEADER+ Community Initiative gives priority to those measures which are specific to women in rural areas. This is reflected in the Programs which are presented to the European Commission by the Member States, most of which include quantifiable objectives related to women.

#### **4.4 PRODER: Operative Program for Development and Economic Diversification of Rural Areas**

This is another Program which was also put into effect for the period 1995-1999, and which is also foreseen for the period 2000-2006 for those regions designated as “Objective 1 regions” of Spain. It is meant to promote endogenous and sustained development in rural areas, and is specifically intended for those rural areas located in poorer regions (Objective 1) which do not already benefit from a LEADER II program. In this way, PRODER completes the rural map in these Autonomous Communities. Therefore, due to the fact that Castilla y León is considered to be an Objective 1 region, it has benefited from this program since 1995.

The Program’s objectives are similar to those of the LEADER Community Initiative; that is, to promote endogenous and sustained development in rural areas through economic diversification, in order to put an end to their demographic regression, to raise the income and the social wellbeing of their inhabitants and to ensure the conservation of their natural resources and space. In order to reach these aims, PRODER supports and subsidizes a wide scope of rural development measures. In a generic way, these methods try to give importance to the villages’ patrimony, to promote tourism, to help small businesses as well as handicrafts and service activities, to revitalize the agricultural and forestry economic strength and to facilitate the education and training of people in rural areas. Like the LEADER Initiative, this type of program provides incentive for both men and women in rural areas, and is an excellent opportunity for job creation in these regions.

According to the Final Executive Report for the PRODER Program 1994-1999 in Castilla y León, 24% of a total of 11,217 projects in Spain have been carried out, at a total cost of 184.56 million euros. Those measures which have received the most money concern “small businesses, handicrafts and services” (22.8%), “agriculture and forestry potential” (21%), “rural patrimony” (20.7%) and “local tourism” (19.2%). These activities are precisely those which have more potential to generate and consolidate jobs, as the Final Executive Report indicates, although the following are topics still left pending: the lack of associations, improvements in the marketing and business networks, improvements in quality or sectorial plans, etc.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The development of the above-mentioned chapters lead us to make a series of conclusions regarding: the demographic and economic situation of women living in the rural areas of Castilla y León; the migratory process which has had a negative effect on rural regions; the aging of the population which has been left behind. Taking into consideration the different measures which the Public Administration is taken in favour of groups of women which have been analyzed, we can make a series of proposals which might enhance the full integration of women, so that they may play an essential role in the new changes and transformations affecting rural areas, and thus put an end to the progressive decadence of such regions in Castilla y León.

Economic, labour, political, etc. inequalities have traditionally existed between men and women. However, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, women have fought to obtain the same opportunities. In rural areas, this situation has brought about the abandonment of villages by women, especially by the youngest ones, who leave their villages in search for the personal and professional recognition which other areas, urban ones in particular, can offer. Those women who opt to remain in rural areas are beginning to be integrated into the labour market, especially into the service sector, in such a way that employment in rural areas is becoming more and more dependent on service activities, and this fact is primarily due to the female population.

The rural population of Castilla y León has decreased 29% in the last twenty years, a loss which has affected the total number of women more than that of men. The causes of this fact are, first of all, natural factors, as the birth rate has not been sufficient enough to compensate for the death rate, and secondly, migrations. With regards to this second factor, young women constitute an important group leaving the villages in numbers, which causes the aging and "masculinization" of the population in the territory, by reducing the size of the active labour force as well as the possibilities for generational replacement. Rural women opt to move to cities or to other more populated municipalities, mainly in order to search for employment, but also to take advantage of those services and infrastructures which are lacking in the smaller communities, and to enjoy an urban life-style.

The low female labour participation rates in rural areas constitute another serious problem for economic development, given that they represent an unused series of resources which are potentially capable of generating income, but which remain inactive for various reasons. Public Administration plays an important role where this question is concerned, in that it can take measures in favour of the integration of women into the labour market and offer incentives for the creation and maintenance of businesses headed by women, as well as promote the compatibility between professional and family lives.

Furthermore, the improvement of certain services offered in the rural areas of the region will be a key factor in order to provide wellbeing and quality of life to their inhabitants. While it is true that small villages will never be able to offer the same services as larger, urban centres, it is nevertheless extremely important that they renew, as much as possible, the services that they do offer, as well as widen their scope. They must better their communication infrastructures in order to make themselves more accessible to the chief towns in the region, and provide a public transportation network which will permit their inhabitants to have access to the service centres.

In order to settle population in rural areas, especially females, it will be necessary to initiate actions which generate new opportunities for women within the rural labour market. To this end, it will also be essential to provide specific training for women which will enable them to adapt to the new rural situation. The training programs will either teach the women new skills or help them recycle their old skills, advise them in the starting up of new businesses, allow them to learn from experiences in other areas or countries, etc. These initiatives will undoubtedly contribute to stopping the process of depopulation of rural areas in Spain.

Finally, it is essential to break away from the antiquated idea that the roles of women living in rural areas are different from those of women living in urban centres. Rural women think and behave in ways more and more similar, or identical, to their urban counterparts. The rural inhabitants of Castilla y León make up a group of people that possesses great social wealth, with potential for development, and present-day women in particular want their labour possibilities to be recognized. It is therefore necessary that both public and private institutions become highly involved in the promotion of the opportunities which rural areas in Castilla y León still have to offer in terms of income



and jobs. These actions are also applicable to other Autonomous Communities in Spain which share a similar demographic, economic and social situation in their respective rural territories.

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