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## Services, economic development and demographic revitalisation in La Campana de Oropesa y Cuatro Villas (Toledo)

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### INTRODUCTION

This study examines in depth the interrelationship between the provision of essential services, economic development, and demographic dynamics in the region of La Campana de Oropesa y Cuatro Villas, located in the western part of the province of Toledo. This area has been experiencing a pronounced population decline for decades, characterised by the progressive ageing of its demographic structure, a reduction in the active population, and a continuous outmigration towards larger urban centres.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the influence of the provision and accessibility of essential services on the demographic dynamics of the region. In addition, it seeks to identify the relationship between these factors and depopulation, proposing comprehensive strategies to promote economic development, territorial cohesion and population settlement in the area. To assess the extent to which the provision of services contributes to mitigating or reversing the negative demographic trends in the region, an analysis of the main current demographic and economic indicators has been carried out.

### METHODOLOGY

Through a multifactorial methodology integrating quantitative, qualitative and econometric analyses, the research aims to identify the structural factors that explain this regressive dynamic, as well as to formulate viable strategies for territorial revitalisation. The approach combines the use of official secondary sources, spatial analysis with GIS tools, a multiple regression model, and qualitative fieldwork consisting of semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of 420 residents across the 21 municipalities that comprise the region. The study is framed within a line of research focused on rural territories affected by depopulation—a phenomenon that not only concerns the Spanish context but also manifests in other European regions with similar characteristics.



## RESULTS

The results of the demographic analysis reveal a negative trend between 2001 and 2023, with an average loss of 0.58% in the region's total population. This decline affects the territory unevenly: while some municipalities close to Talavera de la Reina have recorded slight growth due to their residential function and the development of complementary economic activities, the majority have undergone significant regression. In municipalities such as Valdeverdeja, Torralba de Oropesa or Caleruela, population loss exceeds 25%, placing them at critical levels of demographic viability. This decline is largely associated with the lack of employment opportunities, weak economic diversification, and the scarce presence of basic services. The multiple regression model developed within the framework of the study identifies that the variables with the greatest explanatory weight for depopulation rates are employment opportunities (coefficient  $\beta = -0.58$ ), access to healthcare services ( $\beta = -0.42$ ), and investment in rural development ( $\beta = -0.45$ ). These statistically significant results confirm that stable employment, healthcare provision, and strategic investment planning are key factors in reversing the regressive trend.

The age structure reveals a marked ageing, with an old-age index of 27.38%, which significantly exceeds both provincial and regional averages. In 19 of the 21 municipalities, this figure surpasses 30%, indicating a situation of demographic stagnation. Furthermore, the outmigration of young people of reproductive age, particularly women, has contributed to an imbalance in the population pyramid, with increasing masculinisation and an ever-narrowing base. The regional birth rate (7.13 ‰) is insufficient to offset the high mortality rate (14.45 ‰), resulting in a negative natural growth of -0.73%. This situation not only compromises demographic sustainability but also poses serious challenges in terms of social services, elderly care, and economic vitality. Meanwhile, the presence of immigrant populations, although limited (4.21% of the total), plays a relevant role in certain municipalities such as Calera y Chozas and Alcolea de Tajo, where it helps to sustain the active population, especially in sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, and construction.

The economic analysis of the region reveals a structural trend towards tertiarisation, with a 26% growth in employment within the service sector between 2001 and 2023, contrasting with an overall decline of -8.61% in total workers. The secondary sector registered a reduction of 39%, while the primary sector barely declined by 0.37%. This transformation has occurred unevenly across municipalities: some, like Oropesa and Las Ventas de San Julián, have managed to increase their workforce due to the expansion of tourism and local commerce; others, such as Caleruela or Montesclaros, have experienced employment losses across all sectors, reflecting structural vulnerability. Public investment, although it increased by 183.86% across the region, has not always shown a positive correlation with job creation, indicating that the effectiveness of investment depends on strategic direction and the mobilisation of local capabilities. Municipalities that successfully linked investment to economic development have been those that implemented integrated plans and promoted activities with added value.

One of the most valuable contributions of this study lies in its qualitative dimension. The semi-structured interviews captured the local population's perception of the causes of depopulation and possible solutions. Among the main issues identified are lack of employment (50%), inadequate healthcare services (45%), poor public transport (38%), and limited digital connectivity (50%). Most participants expressed interest in active policies to attract businesses, promote entrepreneurship, and improve access to essential services. In terms of opportunities, 60% highlighted rural tourism and agriculture as sectors with potential to revitalise the local economy, while also noting the need for increased institutional support and promotion. The citizens' demands align with the quantitative findings and reinforce the idea that territorial revitalisation must simultaneously address both structural shortcomings and local aspirations.

The correlation between service provision and demographic indicators confirms that improvements in healthcare and education services are associated with higher birth rates and a lower degree of ageing. In particular, healthcare coverage shows a correlation of 0.87 with population growth and -0.87 with the ageing rate, evidencing its crucial role in population retention. Similarly, education services display a positive correlation with the birth rate (0.87), underlining the importance of educational infrastructure in attracting young families. Conversely, cultural services—while important for quality of life—demonstrate weak correlation



with demographic growth. The limited presence of private services of a social nature (such as commerce, transport, pharmacies, and banking) also restricts development potential in numerous municipalities, exacerbating territorial inequality.

In terms of planning, the regression model not only helps explain the causes of depopulation but also prioritises actions. The most influential variables should form the core of public policy: employment, healthcare, education, and rural investment. The model also indicates that unemployment has a direct effect on emigration, while factors such as digital connectivity or transport—although relevant—require complementary conditions to fully deploy their potential. In this regard, it is recommended to implement integrated policies that combine infrastructure improvement with fiscal incentives, entrepreneurship programmes, and economic diversification strategies. Strengthening the so-called “silver economy”, derived from the growing demand for elderly care services, could provide a pathway for job creation and retention of female population in the territory.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that depopulation in La Campana de Oropesa y Cuatro Villas is a multifactorial phenomenon driven by a combination of structural, social, and economic causes. The absence of basic services, lack of employment, and poor territorial planning have contributed to a regressive dynamic that is difficult to reverse without coordinated and sustained interventions. Nonetheless, there are latent opportunities in the territory that could be harnessed through strategic and integrated action. The development of rural tourism, the valorisation of local products, investment in connectivity, and improvements in public services are priority lines of action. The involvement of public and private stakeholders, together with active community participation, will be essential to ensure the viability of any strategy. Only through a comprehensive territorial vision—combining equity, efficiency and sustainability—will it be possible to transform the current scenario of decline into an opportunity for revitalisation and rural development.