

Rethinking migration : the Spanish model

COMPARATIVE SUMMARY



Migration to address demographic decline



Spain, long a country of emigration, is now one of Europe's main destinations. In 2025, 19% of the population is foreign-born. Faced with ageing and a negative natural balance, migration helps stabilise the active population. Younger and largely Latin American or Moroccan, immigrants sustain Spain's demographic balance and economic model.



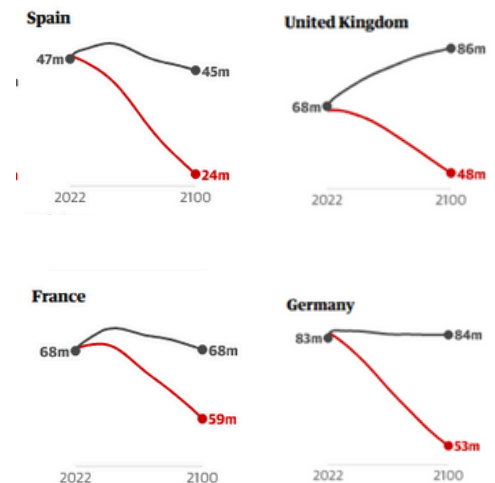
Most EU countries face demographic decline, with low fertility and ageing populations. Yet, migration policies often prioritise restriction. Only a few Member States view migration as a demographic resource. The Pact on Migration and Asylum lacks a demographic lens. A shift towards regulated work migration would help preserve Europe's social systems and workforce.

Population projections

scenario **with migration**

versus :

scenario **without migration**



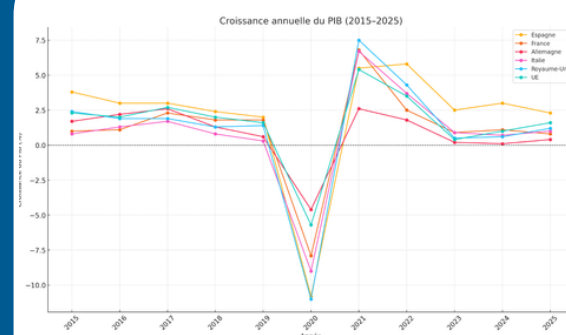
Regularisation as an economic growth strategy



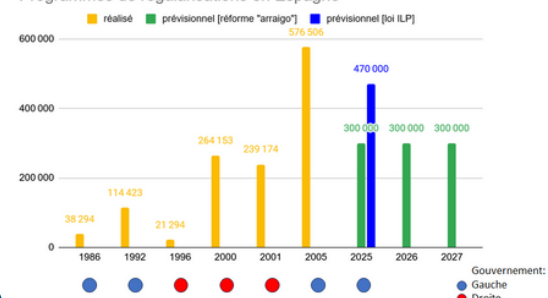
Spain has linked migration to economic strategy. Lacking effective labour migration channels, it has launched regularisations for undocumented workers. In 2005, 600,000 were regularised with no pull effect. Another major wave begins in 2025. These programmes formalised jobs, boosted tax revenue and improved working conditions, without increasing public spending.



Across the EU, fear of a “pull factor” blocks large-scale regularisations, despite strong evidence to the contrary. Many undocumented workers contribute to key sectors but remain invisible. Spain's experience shows that regularisation enhances inclusion, reduces informality and boosts the economy. An European approach to regularisation remains absent from the Pact.



Programmes de régularisations en Espagne





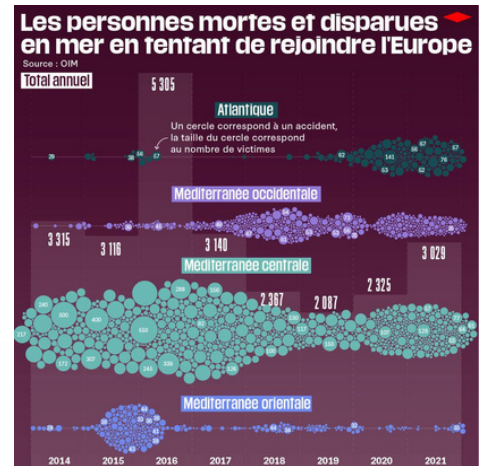
Schengen area's external borders



As a frontline Schengen country, Spain manages complex maritime and land routes. It has externalised border control through agreements with Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal, blending security, development aid and readmission. Its asylum system remains weak, with low protection rates and limited reception capacity. The Spanish model favours labour migration over asylum.



The EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum reinforces border control, returns, and externalisation, particularly to North and West Africa. Reception systems are overstretched, and solidarity mechanisms remain weak. The focus on deterrence has increased the dangers of migration routes. Spain's burden as a frontline state shows the cost of an unbalanced shared responsibility.



Inclusion through work and local policies



Spain's integration model is based on employment and local anchoring. A dedicated ministry, separate from the Interior, oversees migration. Integration is decentralised: regions and municipalities lead implementation. Employers' organisations play a key role. Since 2021, 40% of new jobs have gone to migrants, highlighting labour as a vector for inclusion.



In most EU countries, integration policies remain centralised and focus on language, values and legal status. Few link integration to labour or mobilise economic actors. Labour market access remains uneven, with legal, administrative and social barriers. Greater involvement of local authorities and employers would improve inclusion outcomes across Europe.

Unemployment rate in Spain from 1st quarter 2005 to 2

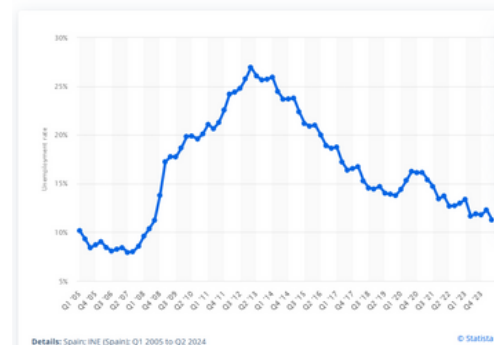


Ilustración 13: Presencia de ocupados extranjeros por ocupación (nivel de cualificación)



Fuente: EPA (INE). Cuarto trimestre de 2021.



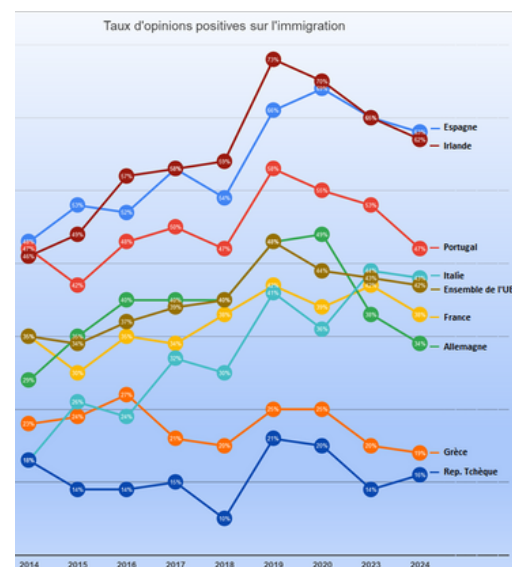
Open society, divided politics



Despite Vox's rise and political polarisation, Spain's public remains in support of immigration. 87% support refugee reception. The government defends a humanist line, centred on work. Xenophobic discourse is marginal, and grassroots mobilisation—like the ILP for regularisation—shows strong social consensus on inclusion.



Migration debates in Europe are increasingly polarised, driven by far-right narratives. The Pact reflects compromise, not consensus. Public opinion is more mixed: concerns about identity and security coexist with support for legal migration and humanitarian protection. Media framing and political rhetoric heavily shape perceptions across the EU.



Rethinking Migration: the Spanish model (Politique migratoire : l'exception espagnole)

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