



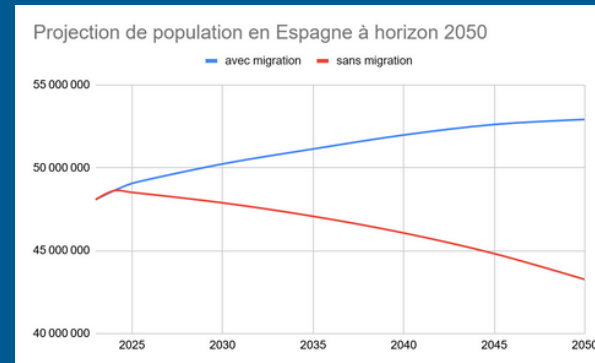
Rethinking migration : the Spanish model

SUMMARY



Immigration to cope with demographic decline

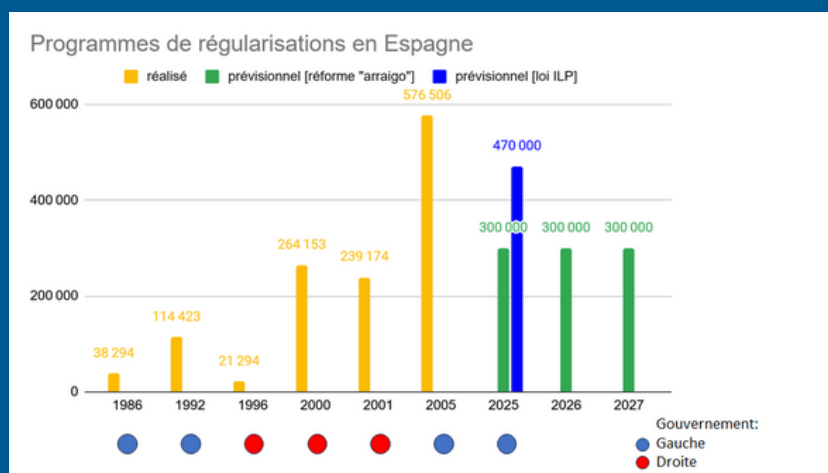
Spain has a relatively recent history of immigration. For a longtime a country of emigration, Spain became one of the main destinations for immigration in Europe in the 1990s, thanks to the economic growth linked to its entry into the EU. The number of immigrants rose from 700,000 in 1999 to 5 million in 2009. After a decline due to the economic crisis of 2008, arrivals have been on the rise again since 2018. In 2022, the reasons for entry are multiple: movement of European citizens, work, family reunification and humanitarian reasons.



Immigration partially offsets demographic ageing: without it, the population could fall from 48 million to 24 million by 2100. In 2025, nearly 19% of the resident population will be immigrants. 40% come from Latin America, while Moroccans have become the largest foreign community and, overall, immigration is fairly young. Naturalisation affects an average of 150,000 people per year, according to a residence-based system. These trends make migration a crucial issue for Spain's demographic and economic future.

Work and regularisation as drivers of the economy

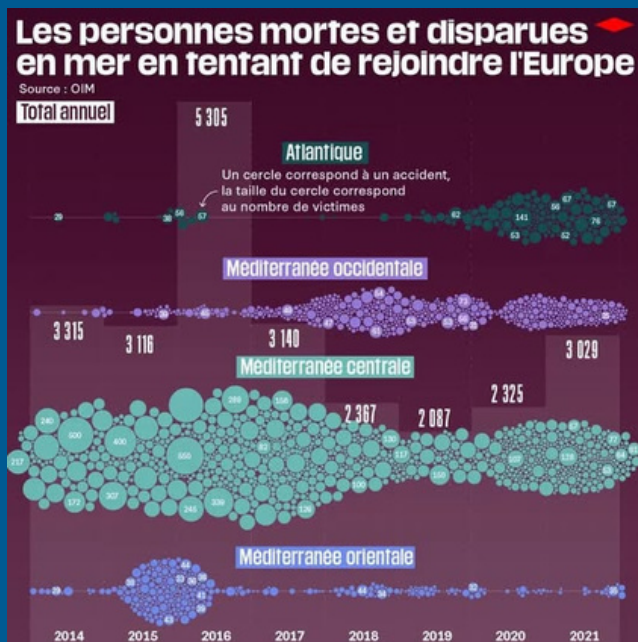
At the beginning of 2025, Spain is the only European country to see its GDP grow (by 3.2% in 2024). Three factors are identified as contributing to this growth: tourism, the European recovery plan and immigration. Spain has thus been able to link migration policy and economic needs by relying on immigration to support its growth, in particular through the integration of immigrants already present on its territory.



The regularisation of undocumented workers affected 1.25 million people between 1985 and 2006, and some 900,000 are expected to be regularised from 2025 onwards, with more flexible arrangements. The impact of the largest wave of regularisation in 2005 (around 600,000 people) has been assessed: no increase in migration flows was observed, contradicting the pull factor myth.

On the contrary, formal employment increased for immigrants without affecting that of nationals, while informal employment declined. Tax revenues increased without any rise in public spending. These regularisations have thus promoted integration, stimulated the economy and improved working conditions.

A guardian of EU's external borders



As a country bordering the EU, Spain is a major entry point into the Schengen area. This has required Spain to make adjustments, particularly in terms of visa policy and external border controls. The country quickly embraced the idea of externalisation, adopting bilateral agreements with African third countries. Migration cooperation is part of strategies combining security, development aid and readmission.

The most recent "Spain-Africa plan for 2025-2028" takes a realistic approach to the issue, recognising that migration in Africa is not limited to a one-way movement towards Europe but is more complex and often involves short-distance movements. Spain is one of the only European countries to increase its investment in public development aid in 2025.

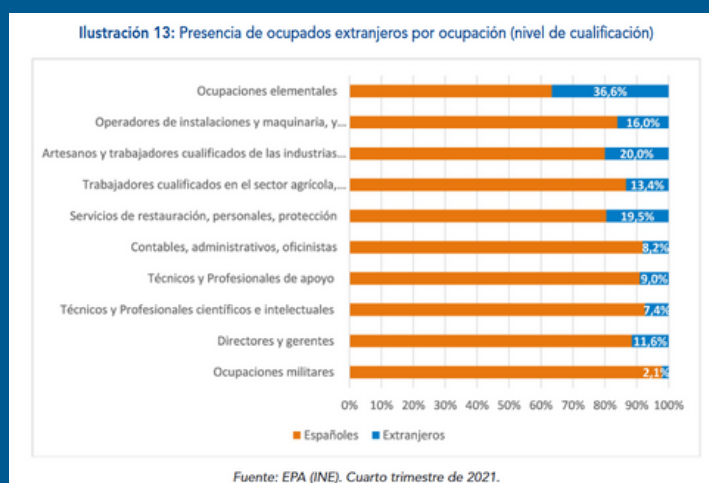
The international protection rate of Spain (asylum and subsidiary protection) is among the lowest in Europe, reception is uneven and accommodation capacity is insufficient. Border practices are regularly denounced. Caught between European requirements, security concerns and fundamental rights, Spanish border policy reveals the contradictions of a model geared towards integration through work but faced with ever-tighter control constraints.

Decentralised integration through work

In Spain, the integration of immigrants relies mainly on access to work. Since 2020, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, which was spun off from the Ministry of Labour and is independent from the Ministry of the Interior, has been setting the guidelines for migration and integration policy. Its implementation is largely decentralised to the autonomous communities and municipalities.

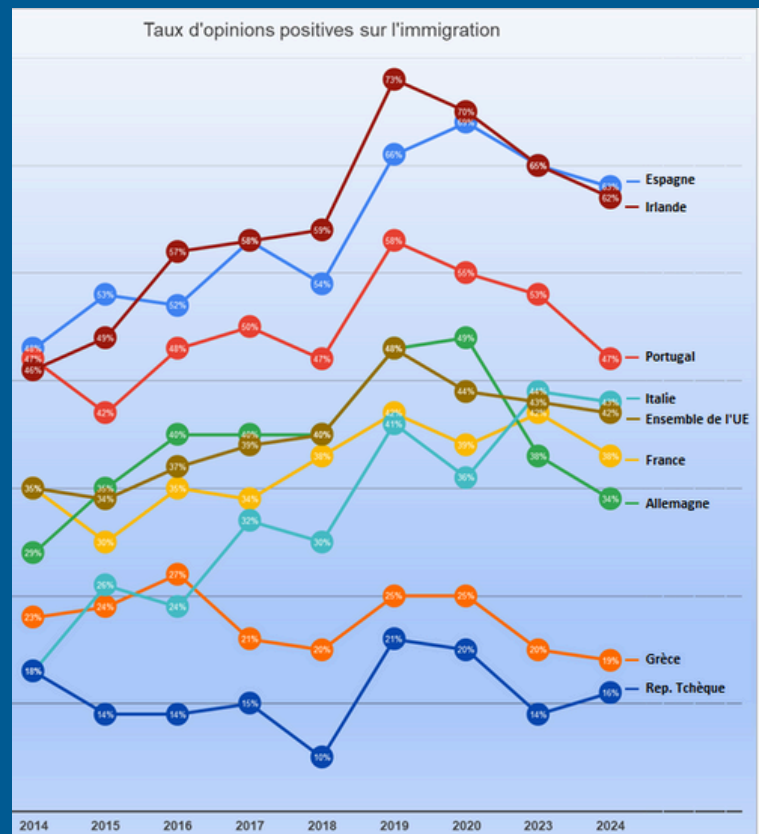
The Spanish economy – particularly the tourism, construction, agriculture and hotel and catering sectors – is heavily dependent on foreign labour. Between 2021 and 2024, 40% of new jobs were filled by immigrants.

Public policies focus on professional integration, with the involvement of employers' organisations. Skills acquisition and the gradual recognition of qualifications facilitate socio-economic integration. However, obstacles remain, such as the precarious nature of some jobs, access to housing and unequal access to rights. The Spanish model stands out for its pragmatic approach based on inclusion through work, despite administrative procedures that remain complex.



A mainly positive public opinion, despite political polarisation

Spain stands out in Europe for its relatively open public opinion on immigration, although marked by growing polarisation. The government of Pedro Sánchez has taken a unique position, defending immigration as an economic and demographic necessity. This approach contrasts with the rise of the far-right party Vox, which has made immigration a lever for electoral mobilisation, particularly in regions most exposed to arrivals. Public debate remains less focused on security than in other European countries and more oriented towards economic and humanitarian issues. The media play an ambivalent role, between anxiety-provoking stories about irregular arrivals and highlighting the role of immigrants. Despite local tensions and growing political instrumentalisation, a large majority of society supports a pragmatic view of immigration, based on integration through work and recognition of the economic and social contributions of immigrants.



Rethinking immigration : the spanish model (Politique migratoire : l'exception espagnole)

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