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REPORT
THE MIGRATION REALITY IN SPAIN: PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC POLICIES
CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS: KEY MESSAGES

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2025, on behalf of the Spanish Government, the Minister for Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, Elma Saiz, requested the Economic and Social Council of Spain to draft a report on requirements and forecasts related to migration. The report's objective was to contribute to analysing this reality, whilst making proposals for action with the aim of achieving orderly, safe and regular migration.

Since the last ESC Report 2/2019 on *Immigration in Spain: effects and opportunities*, several trends have continued to point to the opportunity of addressing this new analysis of migratory reality in our country, within the framework of a complex global geopolitical situation. Indeed, the migratory flows towards Spain in recent years are part of a major global trend in the international mobility of persons. Such flows are characterised by sociodemographic, political and economic differences between regions and countries, armed conflicts and humanitarian crises, the impact of climate change, as well as factors linked to labour demand, family reunification, ageing populations and the "care crisis", amongst others.

In this context, the report addresses this reality through an analysis centred on four axes. Firstly, it describes the main international trends and prospects of recent migratory flows, highlighting Spain's position in this context. Subsequently, it focuses on recent regulatory and policy frameworks within the European Union and in Spain, paying especial attention to the regulation of access to and stay in employment in our country. It also analyses the role of public administrations in their duty to guarantee a coordinated, agile and efficient management of immigration procedures. Thirdly, it addresses the economic and labour opportunities and impact of immigration, as well as the employment status of migrants in Spain. Fourthly, it addresses the challenge of social integration and issues related to citizenship, inclusion and interculturality.

It is worth highlighting two critical cross-cutting issues of migration in Spain that appear throughout the report and which require a comprehensive response involving various areas of public policy. Firstly, the situation of migrant women or women of migrant origin, who make up a large part of the migratory flows, and who often experience unique and highly unfavourable situations. Indeed, such situations are often revealed over the course of the analysis. This also sheds light on the inescapable con-

nection between an ageing population and the critical role played by people of migrant origin, mostly women, within the care and support system in Spain. Additionally, several sections of the report highlight the importance of paying greater attention in policy-making to the opportunities for the improved care of "second-generation migrants", children and youth who are migrants or have a migrant background, in line with the ESC's analysis in its recent Report 3/2024 on *Rights, quality of life and childcare*.

The first chapter of the report explores major trends in recent migratory flows to Spain and the socio-demographic characteristics of the resident foreign-born population. It takes as its basis the evolution of global migratory flows according to region of origin, including the specific characteristics of people's mobility within the framework of the European Union. Common variables of study such as gender, age, country of origin or educational level are revealed to be decisive factors behind the diverse situations prevailing amongst the foreign population and people of migrant origin. Other factors may be added to this, such as the geographical distribution of the migrant population and their concentration in certain regions, as well as their place of residence. As highlighted by the ESC in its *Report 2/2021* on *A living and sustainable rural environment*, immigration and rural areas create a dual system with unique characteristics that differ from those of urban environments.

Following a brief hiatus due to the onset of the pandemic, 2019 witnessed the start of a new phase of immigration in Spain. It was characterised by an increased number of arrivals and diverse origins of migrants, as well as their reasons for migrating to our country. There was also a sharp rise in applications for asylum and family migration, together with labour migration.

As explained in the first chapter, immigration is key to demographic balance in our country, as Spain's population growth is now driven exclusively by net migration. Thanks to increased immigration and settlement in most initiatives on migration, Spain now ranks as one of the countries with the most diverse population in the European Union. In just over thirty years, Spain has covered the same demographic ground that took countries like France or Germany twice as long. Thus, 14 percent of the overall population holds foreign nationality and 19 percent consists of foreign-born individuals.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the number of international migrants has increased all over the world, but the most notable increase has been in Europe and Asia. Between 2020 and 2024 alone, the number of international migrants in Europe increased by 11 million. This was largely due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led to one of the biggest displacements of people since World War II, with over eight million people seeking refuge in the European Union. As highlighted by the ESC in its Report 2/2023 on *The Governance of the European Union*, this emergency served to boost the implementation of certain measures leading to a new pact on migration and asylum. This time, Member States adopted a response that was very

different from past pacts, notably regarding the arrival of refugees from Syria in 2015-2016 which highlighted significant shortcomings that had to be overcome. At the same time, this report does not overlook the increasing instrumentalization of migration policy, the rise of national populist movements with a Eurosceptic and anti-immigration stance, as well as the spread of hate speech and xenophobic disinformation, especially through social media.

For years, the absence of a genuine EU migration and asylum policy has been considered as one of the shortcomings of European integration, making it difficult to properly manage migration in all its complexity. In its Report 2/2019, the ESC underscored the need to achieve a common migration, asylum and refugee policy that would boost the social and labour market integration of migrants, among other issues. Recently, in December 2023, the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum was reached under the Spanish Presidency and adopted in May 2024. This package of EU regulations and directives is intended to thoroughly reform European migration policy and ensure that it is more uniformly applied. National implementation plans will shape migration policies in each Member State. This implementation must ensure the necessary balance between security and control; on one hand, it must respect human rights and on the other hand, establish safe, orderly and regular migration channels. This will lead to a recognition of the mutual benefits of migration for migrants and Spanish society and the economy alike.

Chapter Two thus addresses the scope and significance of the new legal framework of the common European migration and asylum policy. It also analyses many of the numerous amendments that have been made in recent years to the Implementing Regulations of Organic Act 4/2000, of 11 January, on the Rights and Liberties of Foreign Nationals in Spain and their Social Integration.

Among the amended issues relating to the conditions for the entry and residence of migrants and their families, the system of residence and work permits has a decisive effect on the living conditions of the foreign population in Spain. The availability of regular employment access channels is a necessary condition for the dignified and adequate integration of migrants. At the same time, it must meet the production sector's need for qualified workers who possess the qualifications and skills that are in demand in the labour market. Hence, an appropriate regulatory design of these access routes is one of the main axes of migration policy. The effects of all these changes will unfold over time, but it is worth assessing, *ex ante*, the coherence of the reforms package with the objectives pursued, in light of the challenges and opportunities of the current migratory phase.

Furthermore, a comprehensive migration policy also depends upon the quality of the management carried out by public administrations within the scope of their competences; improved procedures; and the availability of sufficient human and technical resources, all of which have also been discussed in the report.

Chapter Three analyses the contribution of migratory flows to economic growth within the current expansionary phase in Spain. It notes that these flows have played a decisive role in the post-pandemic recovery of economic activity as well as supporting continued growth. This contribution is assessed on the basis of studies by European and international organisations, while also analysing the mechanisms that lead to these positive impacts. The effects of immigration are also felt in other areas that will require further in-depth study, and the outcomes of all of this will depend on the correct integration of migration in economic, labour and social policies in the years to come.

By contributing to the expansion of the labour force and employment, workers of migrant origin have played a key role in driving economic growth in recent years. This trend is expected to remain significant over the timeframe for covering labour shortages, as indicated by available prospective studies.

In 2019, the ESC highlighted the growing significance, which was already high, of the population of migrant origin in Spain's labour market, both in terms of its numbers and influence. At the same time, however, it also noted the unfavourable employment status of migrants, as demonstrated by basic indicators such as higher relative unemployment or lower ranks within the occupational hierarchy. These factors have an effect upon the living and working conditions of migrants and it has been necessary to analyse their evolution over recent periods.

Consequently, this chapter also deals with the labour profiles and occupational market positions of migrants, a group that accounts for around 20 percent of the labour force and of total employment. In both variables, women make up a larger proportion. It thus demonstrates that the labour market integration of migrants is already a significant aspect of the Spanish labour market. At the same time, however, continued gaps and imbalances in unemployment rates, sectoral and occupational concentration, and skill mismatches, amongst other factors, point to the need for improved active labour market and training policies that will benefit both workers and companies. This will also lead to improved management by public administrations in areas such as the recognition of foreign qualifications and the accreditation of work-based learning. This chapter also conducts a specific analysis into the labour market integration of "second-generation migrants". It notes that there is an intergenerational improvement, which encourages further in-depth study of this segment of the population as well as its degree of convergence with the native population.

Chapter Four of the report explores issues related to citizenship, social inclusion and integration of immigrants. It considers that the latter points, together with the prevention of racism and xenophobia, are part of the pillars of Spanish immigration policy. Spain's cultural complexity is both enriched and challenged by immigration, especially in matters of coexistence, citizenship rights, and political and social participation. Daily coexistence between migrants and the native population continues to be largely positive, although the report does note a shift in the attitudes and perceptions of

certain sections of the population as regards immigration, in contexts where migrants are perceived as a key factor of discontent and political disaffection.

In relation to all of the above, this report analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the Spanish model of social integration, starting with a basic description of the living conditions of the foreign and foreign-born population. As part of this analysis, it examines their economic status in terms of income levels, a status that is essentially shaped by the links to employment as described above. However, it is also linked to their ability to access certain goods and services that represent different spheres of the welfare state. These services include education, healthcare, access to housing and social services.

The report concludes by underlining the important role played by public policies that support social integration processes. These are primarily rooted at the regional and municipal government levels and are defined at national level through the Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion, against Xenophobia and Racism (2023-2027). It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the framework, paying especial attention to the protection of especially vulnerable groups, including persons seeking and receiving international protection in our country, and victims of trafficking in human beings. It also points to the need to boost the international protection and reception system.

Ultimately, the conclusions of the report are presented at two levels: firstly, in sections encapsulated in a separate box at the end of each chapter. Secondly, twenty key messages that emerge from the report overall are summarised at the end of the document. These messages make an appeal for consensus on a comprehensive migration policy that contributes to maintaining trust and tolerance in society, to be viewed as an objective of the public authorities, as well as of all social and political organisations and stakeholders alike, including social partners.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

FIGURE 1. KEY POINTS

1. Immigration, a structural and decisive component of Spanish society.
2. Key to post-pandemic recovery and sustained economic growth.
3. Regularity, stability and rights: a reality and a goal.
4. A regulatory framework that responds to the needs and challenges of the new cycle by updating the instruments for handling labour migration flows within a framework of social dialogue.
5. Improving the performance of public administrations, and providing them with sufficient resources, is key to efficient migration management.
6. Social situations improve over time, but segregation persists.
7. The double vulnerability of migrant women: a policy challenge.
8. The labour integration of migrants, an unavoidable dimension in the analysis of the Spanish labour market.
9. Irregular employment, extreme labour vulnerability.
10. High labour force participation, but with weaknesses in relation to employment.
11. Occupations and working conditions, a persistent gap compared to the native population.
12. Training, at the heart of occupational improvement and skills matching.
13. Towards an action on employability that is more integrated and connected to the needs of the productive network.
14. Participation in the Welfare State, key to social cohesion.
15. Towards a new evidence-based narrative. Attitudes and social participation.
16. An effective boost to coexistence and social integration policies.
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18. Second generations, current and future challenges of successful integration.
19. Improved information to better comprehend the diverse reality of migration.
20. A State Pact for Coexistence, necessary at a crucial moment.

1. Immigration, a structural and decisive component of Spanish society

More than thirty years have passed since Spain ceased to be a country of origin of migration and consolidated its position as one of the main destination countries. Throughout this time, there has been a constant renewal in the regions, countries of origin, and reasons for migration to Spain, in a shifting geopolitical context where, in addition to the demand for labour, other factors affecting the international mobility of people and its direction are also gaining importance. This include significant changes in the global political order with rising opposition to immigration, increased ageing and the care crisis, the impact of new technologies, and the effects of climate change.

Immigration is a decisive factor responsible for the dynamic nature of the Spanish population, contributing at least one-fifth of the total number of residents. For more than twenty years, population growth has depended almost exclusively on their contribution, with Spain having one of the lowest fertility rates in the world and one of the highest life expectancies. Within the core age groups of reproduction and labour participation (20-49 years), three out of ten people are foreign-born and one-third of births are to mothers of non-Spanish nationality. And this is without counting the Spanish people who have been naturalised over the years. Without being the solution to an ageing population, immigration is nonetheless essential for maintaining demographic growth and productive capacity in our country, and is decisive for the functioning of the economy, the labour market and the Welfare State.

The Economic and Social Council (ESC) believes that our country's migratory history, historical and family ties with other nations and the fact that many foreign-born people have full citizenship make it advisable to overcome the dichotomy between "us" and "them" when dealing rigorously with the issue of immigration. Moreover, the rise in mixed households, inter-cultural marriages, and births with at least one foreign parent reflects processes of social integration that blur the boundaries of what it means to be an "immigrant" and challenge the rigidity of this category. The migrant population is diverse in terms of profiles, trajectories and reasons for arrival, displaying internal differences as varied as in the native population, although with the marked predominance of Latin America as the region of origin in recent years.

On the other hand, the distribution of the foreign population is asymmetrical, with territories such as the Mediterranean strip under high demographic pressure and others barely receiving any international migratory flows. The settlement pattern is eminently urban, with highly significant concentrations in certain neighbourhoods of large capital cities. Immigration has become increasingly important in rural areas as a key factor for social, demographic and economic sustainability. All of this points to an unequal characterisation of infrastructure and services requirements, which must be addressed with the appropriate resource planning that takes into account the migration factor and its heterogeneity.

2. Key to post-pandemic recovery and sustained economic growth

Migratory flows generate multiple economic effects that are mainly reflected in the short-term evolution of activity, as demonstrated by the post-pandemic recovery of the Spanish economy. Also, the incorporation of migrants into the labour market directly enhances the potential for economic growth in the medium and long term. This confirms the fundamental role of these flows for the long-term continuity and sustainability of economic growth and employment.

These effects, which extend into many areas, are especially visible in relation to the sustainability of the pension system, as the integration of migrants into the labour mar-

ket boosts the system's financial foundations by increasing revenue from social security contributions and improving the ratio of contributors to pensioners.

In any case, and beyond the economic sphere, the impacts ultimately depend on the presence of adequate policies that promote quality labour integration of the immigrant population –education and training, active employment policies, and recognition of qualifications–; policies that must necessarily be linked to the needs of the labour market. Moreover, this would be reinforced by integrating, as far as possible, the reality of the immigrant population into the broader economic policy framework.

To this end, it is necessary to have further information and specific studies that provide more in-depth knowledge and a more precise assessment of the effects generated by migratory flows in different areas and especially in the economic sphere.

3. Regularity, stability and rights: a reality and a goal

Administrative regularity, one of the main vectors of social integration, is the norm for the vast majority of foreigners. More than half of non-EU people have long-term authorisations, with a significant increase in the number of naturalisations. In recent years, exceptional circumstances have been more important than those strictly linked to employment, among the reasons for granting residence permits, although most of the former also allow migrants to work.

Spain has notably joined the ranks of major countries granting asylum to people seeking international protection, although the proportion of successful applications is comparatively low and the waiting time too long, thus increasing the vulnerability of applicants. There is an urgent need to improve the procedure as well as boost the reception and international protection system.

Although they constitute a minority, the presence of a variable and hard-to-quantify number of people without the relevant authorisations represents an important challenge in terms of social cohesion, as administrative irregularity often means surviving in conditions of vulnerability and risk of social exclusion.

Irregular arrivals by sea represent a minimal part of the highly diverse nature of immigration and even of all entries, most of which are via airports. However, difficulties in coordinating different public administrations and the partisan instrumentalization of a humanitarian issue have led to a disproportionate prominence of this topic in debates, especially with regard to the reception and hosting of unaccompanied minors. Beyond its regional distribution, there is an underlying problem that needs to be addressed: the need to reinforce the child protection system and the resources for support, emancipation and labour market integration when these minors reach the age of majority, all of which are essential to preventing situations of vulnerability and marginalisation.

It is also necessary to draw attention to the need to prevent and address situations of supervening irregularity that cannot be channelled through the various forms of settlement. In response to this situation, the People's Initiative (ILP) was admitted for

processing in September 2023, with a bill for an extraordinary regularisation for foreigners in Spain. Regardless of the course of this initiative and the implementation of the new Regulation, it is worth recalling the need for further structural improvement of administrative processes and support resources in order to ensure administrative regularity and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

4. A regulatory framework that responds to the needs and challenges of the new cycle...

Regulatory policy is a key instrument for the management of migration flows and the integration of migrants. The 2020-2024 reforms have, in general, made progress towards a mutually beneficial management of migration, both for people coming to Spain in search of better life opportunities, and for Spanish society and the Spanish economy.

However, there is still room for regulatory improvement: boosting legal specificity and clarity, and making the channels for settlement more flexible by adjusting the system of requirements and periods of prior residence, are some lines of action that are worth pursuing.

Spain's implementation of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum could provide an opportunity to enhance these and other improvements, with the necessary assessment of the changes that have already been undertaken.

It is especially important that the forthcoming asylum and subsidiary protection reform included within this framework addresses the situations of persons seeking international protection following the reform of the Regulation, and updates the guarantees of these rights in line with the realities of increasing geopolitical risks.

... especially updating instruments for the management of labour migration flows within a framework of social dialogue

The aforementioned reforms have sought to make temporary residence and work authorisations more flexible and faster by means of certain regulatory changes that, although lacking sufficient clarity in certain points, could also reduce situations of supervening irregularity.

Within this context, the consideration of national employment status as a premise of the general regime for granting initial temporary residence and work permits continues to be a cornerstone of labour migration policy in Spain and to play an essential role with regard to the resident labour force.

However, the instruments intended to analyse the national employment situation continue to function inadequately, and are still unable to effectively reflect labour market realities and the recruitment needs of enterprises. Additionally, while the procedure for managing job vacancies as a mechanism for hiring in unclassified occupations has been shortened as regards the time taken by public employment services, the deadline for processing applications continues to be the general one of three months, with

excessive delays still being observed in some offices. Moreover, some of these changes have not been made within a framework of social dialogue.

It is therefore deemed necessary to update these tools to manage labour migration flows so that they adequately fulfil the functions for which they were adopted. These updates should take place within a participatory process that takes sufficient account of the role of social partners in managing migration flows for the purpose of work and labour integration.

5. Improving the performance of public administrations, and providing them with sufficient resources, is key to efficient migration management.

Within the current geopolitical context, the challenges posed by migration call for improved institutional coordination and cooperation to ensure the system is equipped to respond adequately in the ordinary management of visas, authorisations and documentation schemes and especially in migration crisis situations, which calls for a broad consensus on migration policy as a cornerstone of state policy.

It is also considered necessary to make more visible progress in improving the performance of administrative bodies in charge of migration management, addressing the problems that continue to be detected and which have a negative impact on both migrants' rights and the needs of enterprises. Improving administrative procedures requires the greater integration of all migration management, in order to ensure greater coordination, simplification and streamlining of procedures. It is also essential that the entire network of offices be adequately staffed and provided with material resources.

Attention should be also drawn to the urgent need to guarantee migrants' access to services in consular and immigration offices, and ensuring that the use of electronic resources for communication and processing, which in itself is a positive factor, does not create new barriers to access.

6. Social situations improve over time, but segregation persists

Over time, there have been improvements in the socio-economic situation of the majority of migrants, many of whom have been in Spain for decades. However, the social gap between the living conditions of the immigrant population and those of the native population continues to reflect an important gap that especially affects non-EU populations and certain areas and countries of origin. When designing public policies, attention should be paid to geographical origin as a factor affecting inequality, as it has a negative impact on migrants' quality of life and access to equal opportunities as well as on social cohesion. In fact, a large part of the foreign population, especially women, have incomes that are well below average and thus they remain more vulnerable to the risk of poverty and social exclusion, to situations of material deprivation, and to problems of accessing and maintaining housing as well as health care. The risk of a breakdown in social cohesion

becomes especially serious when such situations affect the children of immigrants who are, in most cases, already young Spaniards in their own right.

Further progress is required, on one hand, in creating quality employment and in the scope, sufficiency and improvement of major universal social policies for the entire population that fulfil access requirements, regardless of nationality and background. At the same time, it is necessary to include targeted policies that, within each area of intervention, seek to prevent and reduce the still notable impact of the country of origin on the social and material well-being of the population.

7. The double vulnerability of migrant women: a policy challenge

Gender is a factor that affects women and men differently with regard to the reasons and means of migration, the social and economic networks available, as well as the opportunities for integration and work in the destination country. While the proportion of men in the international migrant population is increasing at the global level, the opposite is happening in Spain and more than half of the migrant population is female. The influence of socio-cultural patterns and gender expectations in both origin and destination countries exacerbates employment and social integration restrictions for migrant women, who most often face structural and socio-cultural barriers, violence and discriminatory practices.

To a large extent, migration is a response to how gender relations are structured in the origin and destination countries. And the important contribution of immigrant women in the care sector in Spain, as well as the essential need to dignify the sector, should not hide the need to continue questioning the unequal distribution of gender roles on which it is based, as well as to make visible their increasing contribution in other areas of society, economy and employment, such as commerce, the hospitality and catering industry, or healthcare, among others.

Migrant women face multiple disadvantages and risks of discrimination, due to their double condition as women and migrants, together with a greater vulnerability to poverty and social exclusion, especially when they head single-parent households, as well as to gender-based violence. These disadvantages are often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge of their rights, cultural barriers, lack of support networks, and situations of irregularity.

8. The labour integration of migrants, an unavoidable dimension of the Spanish labour market

Employment is the main motivating factor behind most migrations. Eight out of every ten persons who have arrived in Spain within this century have joined the labour force.

Major prospective analyses reveal that Spain will continue to have labour requirements in the coming years, estimated at 2.4 million between 2025 and 2035. In the current context of a shrinking native labour force, migrant workers will continue to play an important role in filling these jobs.

In light of this contribution, it is essential to integrate the migrant perspective into the analysis of the Spanish labour market and to pay especial attention to the degree and quality of labour integration of migrants, as well as to the regulatory framework affecting companies, since they constitute keys to the proper functioning of our labour market.

9. Irregular employment, extreme labour vulnerability

The difference between the employment figures of the Active Population Survey (EPA) and the Social Security affiliation of foreign workers sheds light on the magnitude of informal employment which, in a large number of cases, is associated with the lack of right of access to the labour market due to situations of administrative irregularity.

Although the differences between employment and affiliation respond to specific characteristics of sectors and branches of activity, and also display important variations that make them difficult to explain, there are some branches with significant differences which require targeted actions to ensure compliance with the rights and obligations of workers and companies or employers.

Therefore, given the continued presence of high levels of administrative irregularities despite regulatory changes introduced in recent years, and bearing in mind that more recent changes require more time to be fully effective, it is advisable to reflect on the adjustments that may be necessary, based on the greatest possible consensus and after an evaluation within the framework of social dialogue.

10. High labour force participation, but with weaknesses in relation to employment

The key role played by employment within the reality of migration is demonstrated in the high labour participation of migrants. The activity rate of foreigners residing in Spain is one of the highest in the European Union and, moreover, higher than that of the native population, unlike most other European countries. One of the reasons for the relatively higher activity rate lies in the high labour force participation of non-EU women.

However, these high aggregate levels respond to a relative concentration of migrant workers in the middle age groups. Thus, both activity and employment rates of migrant workers between the ages of 25 and 54 are lower than those of native workers. The activity and employment gap between the immigrant and native population is more pronounced for women.

Moreover, migrant workers face a higher chance of unemployment. Together with differences in educational levels, the higher relative vulnerability to unemployment is indicative of a weaker position in the labour market, additional obstacles in accessing employment, and worse working conditions.

For all of these reasons, public policies must contribute to removing the obstacles that hinder migrants' participation in the labour market. Access to affordable and qual-

ity care services is of especial importance, and more specifically, in terms of its impact on women's activity.

11. Occupations and working conditions, a persistent gap compared to the native population

Migrant workers are mostly concentrated in low-skilled or less specialised occupations. With regard to branches of activity, migrant employment has a greater relative weight in domestic services, catering, accommodation, building construction, specialised construction and associated services and the primary sector.

The working conditions of migrant workers provide additional insights into the specific patterns of their jobs. Although the relative position of their wages has generally improved in recent years, they are still concentrated in the lowest paid sectors and occupations, which largely explains why migrants have significantly poorer wage conditions than native workers. Migrant women are concentrated in fewer occupations, which suggests a somewhat more rigid occupational structure and means that they face a double wage penalty, for being migrants as well as women.

The rate of part-time work among migrant workers has fallen, but still exceeds that of native workers and there are higher levels of cases of forced labour. Underemployment is also more prevalent among migrant workers and, among them, mostly for women. Levels of temporary work also exceed those of native workers, although there has been a significant decrease in recent years due to regulatory changes, and the gap between men and women is smaller than among the native population.

On the other hand, there is little difference in levels of self-employment, although the contribution of foreigners to entrepreneurship is significant, despite the relatively greater difficulties they face in implementing projects.

Thus, the working conditions of migrant workers reflect gaps in labour integration, such as those related to obstacles to their full labour participation, their lower skill levels, and less access to training opportunities for employment. Therefore, comprehensive action in these areas, together with the eradication of possible discrimination, should improve working conditions in their different dimensions and balancing the with those of native workers.

12. Training, at the heart of occupational improvement and skills matching

The aforementioned occupational concentration of migrant workers is related to their educational levels which, in aggregate terms, are lower than those of the native population.

Workers' qualifications do not always mean that they are able to join occupations with equivalent training requirements, leading to mismatches of over-qualification (or,

to a lesser extent, under-qualification). The level of such mismatches in Spain is high, with almost one-third of foreign workers being overqualified for their jobs.

Administrative barriers to the recognition and equivalence of degrees and to the recognition of qualifications, skills (including non-formal skills) and experience are a contributing factor. This affects migrant workers' job opportunities and possibilities of improved employment, as well as their living conditions. It also makes it difficult for companies to fill positions with the required skill levels and to attract international talent.

It is therefore necessary to promote migrant workers' access to opportunities for formal education at all levels, including making up for possible gaps in adult elementary education, with greater emphasis on the areas of knowledge where the greatest needs for qualifications and skills are detected. At the same time, the attractiveness of the training profiles best suited to the needs of the production sector, both present and future, must be increased, thereby laying the foundations for promoting Spain's competitiveness and capacity for innovation within a global context.

It is also essential to step up administrative efforts to streamline the procedures for the recognition and equivalence of qualifications. To this end, it is necessary to provide continuity in the timely reinforcement of staff and to continue to integrate technologies in order to streamline administrative procedures.

With regard to the recognition of non-formal skills and work experience, and based on the ongoing modernisation of the system, greater efforts must be made to reach out to and support migrant workers who face greater barriers to access, due to a lack of knowledge or complexity of the procedure. The focus on this group should also take into account the greater difficulties faced due to the requirements of formal accreditation.

13. Towards an action on employability that is more integrated and connected to the needs of the production sector.

It is necessary to combat the under-representation of migrant workers in vocational training, especially that of women and older workers. This is because access to training opportunities promotes upward job mobility, helps smooth job transitions, prevents unemployment and promotes re-employment, and fosters more complete working and contributory careers, all of which in turn lead to more adequate levels of social protection.

Faced with this challenge, the role of the employment services is key in providing employability programmes and activities with the capacity to focus on priority groups such as migrants, based on a precise knowledge of the needs of the production sector.

It must be organised on a systemic basis, in which education systems –including adult education actions– recognition of foreign qualifications, skills and work experience, and training for employment, act in a coherent, integrated and unified manner for a continuing learning that benefits both workers and enterprises.

In this regard, there must be greater efforts for coordination and collaboration between institutions (employment services, employment training providers, educational institutions) and the administrations involved, in order to make available these training and employability actions to workers by simplifying access to them.

Furthermore, the job seeking and observational functions of employment services should be boosted by means of close collaboration with companies, in order to adapt workers' qualifications and skills to the needs of the production sector, both today and in the future, as well as linking this demand to education and training systems.

14. Participation in the welfare state, key to social cohesion

The participation of migrants in the welfare state is a key element of social cohesion that benefits society as a whole: they contribute to its maintenance and are entitled to its services and benefits based on their contributory capacity or circumstances of need. The fight against inequality and the redistribution of wealth, as principles of action of the public authorities and characteristic elements of the social state, would be ineffective if they excluded more than one-fifth of the population in Spain.

In the case of contributory economic benefits, effective access is determined by their high labour participation which, in the case of unemployment benefits, determines a notable increase in their coverage rate, mostly contributory and above the overall rate. On the other hand, access to means-tested benefits depends on situations of economic need, and nationality or migrant background is not a conditioning factor in accessing them. However, the situation of administrative regularity is a determining factor and it constitutes one of the major exclusionary factors of people in need. In general terms, Minimum Living Income coverage is lower and coincides with an unequal and limited scope of regional minimum incomes, highlighting the considerable heterogeneity and disparity in the management, regulation and accessibility of these benefits, an inequality that is more marked among the migrant population than among the native population.

Furthermore, despite its universal nature in the stages of compulsory schooling, from the point of view of its inclusive nature, the education system faces important challenges in providing equal opportunities to students from socially vulnerable families. This includes many with an immigrant background. Problems in accessing the public health system also affect vulnerable groups and migrants to a greater extent, who are also less able to afford private healthcare. And neither have the resources of social services or associations and non-profit organisations, both of which largely manage the human dimension of migration management, increased to the extent required by the magnitude of the corresponding increase in the migrant population and their social needs.

It is important to address the reforms in education, health, social services and public housing policies that are necessary to overcome their shortcomings and to avoid

social segregation as regards their use. As far as this report is concerned, this is especially true for that which results from the accretion of economic and origin-based disadvantages.

It is also necessary to guarantee census registration as a requirement for equal treatment and non-discrimination in access to services and benefits, standardising regulations and procedural criteria, sanctioning illegal restrictive practices, eliminating unnecessary obstacles, and promoting adequate training of public personnel in this area.

15. Towards a new evidence-based narrative. Attitudes and social participation

In recent years**,** immigration has increasingly become a central topic of public debates. Although daily coexistence with migrants in Spain continues to be mostly positive and accepted, the stigmatisation of immigration by certain political groups with xenophobic, nativist and exclusionary nationalist approaches has increased its perception as a problem for the country. This negative view does not emerge from direct experience with migrants, but from contexts of misinformation that place immigration at the centre of discontent and social and political disaffection, reinforcing stereotypes and hostile attitudes towards different migrant groups. Its most extreme manifestation is hate speech, which incites potentially criminal acts of racism or xenophobic hate speech, responsible for four out of ten hate crimes in the country.

In the face of this, the fight against hate speech must not only be based on accurate information and economic and social data, but also on dismantling the emotional frameworks that present immigration as a problem or threat, proposing alternative narratives that appeal to citizens not only from the perspective of objectivity and reason, but also from the perspective of ethics and empathy.

Recovering and proposing a rigorous vision of immigration, which recognises and appreciates its intrinsic value, beyond its contribution to society in quantitative terms, will boost conditions for the social, political, economic and cultural inclusion of migrants.

In political terms, their electoral participation is very small when compared to their demographic weight. At the same time, although Spain is one of the European countries where immigration has risen the most in recent years, its political representation has hardly changed in recent decades. This situation is proof of a limited process of political inclusion, which is not keeping pace with the country's demographic transformation.

In this regard, social, political and cultural participation, both individually and through migrant and non-migrant organisations, contributes and should continue to contribute to the creation, promotion and dissemination of narratives that are radically opposed to hate speech targeting migrants.

16. An effective boost to coexistence and social integration policies

Social and cultural diversity has been broadened and energised by migration, bringing new values, traditions and ways of life which, to a large extent, enrich and strengthen the already diverse nature of Spanish society. However, both integration and segregation coexist in a context where the levels of inequality that continue to affect the native population and to an even greater extent the immigrant population (especially those from outside the EU and certain other specific communities) continue to be a cause for concern. Within a situation of expanding xenophobic currents that exploit these inequalities to destabilise social cohesion, active policies aimed at building bridges that strengthen the redistributive and integrative capacity of social policies and foster inter-cultural coexistence, inclusion and social integration as a two-way process involving society as a whole, are more important than ever.

Despite its late adoption (more than ten years after the expiry of the Second Citizenship and Integration Plan 2011-2014), the Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion against Racism and Xenophobia 2023-2027 (MECIRX 2023-2027) represents a suitable national roadmap to promote these objectives. However, apart from its accurate diagnosis and the monitoring tools suggested, it has not managed to involve the autonomous communities and local corporations in its implementation. Although its term has not yet come to an end, the Government has committed itself to drawing up a new Plan for citizenship, interculturality and social inclusion, which requires the consensus and mobilisation of all administrations, sectors and actors involved around the common principles of action in this field.

17. Supporting children and young people, regardless of their nationality or background

Children on the move, in contexts of migration or migratory backgrounds, are already an essential part of the youngest social groups in Spain. The vast majority live with their families, many have already been born here, and regardless of their nationality or origin, they are a part of Spanish childhood and youth, and face the same difficulties. The most recent studies provide an overall positive picture of the evolution of migrant children and second generations regarding educational outcomes, social integration, or sense of belonging. However, there are also significant gaps in living conditions and the risk of poverty and social exclusion of households with children of foreign nationality. The case of minors in an irregular administrative situation is especially serious, as it poses an obstacle to the exercise of their rights in areas such as access to census registration, healthcare, education, social services, leisure and sport.

Furthermore, a small but important minority of foreign children and young people in Spain (barely 1 percent) have arrived alone and lack familial support here. This in-

creases their vulnerability, one grave example being their identification as targets of xenophobia, within a child protection system with insufficient resources.

Inequality, poverty and vulnerability in childhood and youth undermine life opportunities and entail significant costs to society, as already pointed out by the Economic and Social Council in its 3/2024 Report: *Rights, quality of life and care for children*. Our country must place the best interests of children at the centre of all social policies, with special emphasis on overcoming the inequalities that affect children and young people in contexts of vulnerability, such as those that affect part of the immigrant population to a greater extent. This requires strengthening universal policies for the protection of children and households with children; providing increased resources to the child protection system; facilitating access to administrative regularity for minors who lack it; supporting young people's transition to adulthood, especially for the most vulnerable groups, with specific programmes and resources; and supporting inclusive education and intercultural coexistence in schools.

It is especially important to promote effective equal opportunities and non-discrimination on the basis of origin for young migrants, with special emphasis on improving their educational and labour market integration.

18. Second generations, current and future challenges of successful integration

Although the available evidence for Spain is limited due to the scarcity of data and the concentration of the population in the younger age ranges, the results point to a general improvement in the degree and quality of labour integration of the second generations compared to their parents amongst the migrant population, albeit with certain subtleties.

The most positive outcome relates to occupational change, with the second generation mostly working in higher-skilled occupations. Thus, although the educational distribution of first and second generations is quite similar, the second generation manages to significantly reduce the over-concentration of migrant workers in basic and low-skilled occupations. Despite this, the intergenerational improvement has not yet translated into full equality on par with native workers.

Given the growing importance of second-generation migrants for the demographic, economic, labour and social future of Spain, it is essential to gain a deeper understanding of their integration patterns and degree of convergence with the native population. This knowledge should serve as a basis for identifying and promoting the levers of upward mobility for second generations with opportunities that are similar to those available to native groups, and to prevent the elements of precariousness and exclusion that can lead to the intergenerational transfer of disadvantages.

19. Improved information to better comprehend the diverse reality of migration

After more than thirty years of experience as destination country for immigrants, Spain has now entered a phase of maturity as a receiving and integrating country. Different sources do not always collect all the relevant information that is required if we are to grasp this diverse reality in all its dimensions.

It is therefore important that the analysis of the situation of immigrants in Spain extends beyond the strict scope of "foreigners", linked to the variable of "nationality", to focus on the diversity of people's origins in this country. For example, the non-inclusion of "country of birth" or "country of birth of parents" in many statistical surveys prevents an accurate understanding of the reality in many areas of study. In order to adequately design public policies, it is necessary to be acquainted with the communities that share a country of origin and direct migratory experiences (by having been migrants) or indirectly, by belonging to a migrant family, even if they have not directly experienced migration from one country to another, such as children and young people born (second generation) or raised ("generation 1.5") in Spain.

The Spanish statistical information system must adapt to the recommendations of international organisations on improving the variables that allow for a better approach to migratory flows, the reality of migration, and its impacts in order to articulate appropriate evidence-based policies. In any case, it must be flexible enough to accommodate a rapidly changing reality so as to facilitate in-depth analysis for decision-making. Suffice it to mention the current major presence of people of Latin American origin, and the rate of acquisition of Spanish nationality, which have transformed the migratory reality in just a few years, rendering it partly invisible.

20. A State Pact for co-existence, necessary at a crucial moment

In its 2/2019 Report, the Economic and Social Council already noted that, in order to prevent a structural phenomenon from being classified as a problem, it was necessary for public authorities to take the lead by conveying a truthful and accurate account of Spain's reality. More than six years later, the tacit consensus that kept immigration out of the electoral debate has been broken; international xenophobic trends have taken shape in our country and gained acceptance, especially among a sector of the youth and via social networks. At the same time, immigration is now identified as the country's second problem, despite being the main driver of population and economic growth in recent years.

It is necessary to promote a balanced and realistic common vision that recognises and normalises the acceptance of immigration as a structural phenomenon in our societies and places value on coexistence within the diversity of origins. This does not mean ignoring their social, cultural or other related challenges, but rather addresses them within a framework of dialogue and consensus-building, which are essential to

ensuring the long-term sustainability of a policy project for social integration and coexistence, regardless of the volatility of public opinion, economic phases, or the political situation.

The Economic and Social Council once again stresses the need to preserve trust and social tolerance as a goal of the public authorities, as well as of all political and social organisations and stakeholders, including social partners. Enabling regular and safe migration and ensuring the protection of rights and fulfilment of duties of migrants should remain basic principles of immigration policy. It is necessary to reach a State Pact that fosters rapprochement, cooperation, coordination and institutional loyalty between all administrations, political and social stakeholders and the media, in order to design a balanced and comprehensive migration policy of our own, which is projected onto the different areas of public action, and which adapts to our unique characteristics within the margins permitted by the European Pact. Spain can thus become a benchmark society that advances by acknowledging diversity, respecting the rights of all its members, and is committed to inter-cultural coexistence within the framework of the values espoused by the European social model, which are pillars for the creation of an integrating common identity.