



**AFAIJ**  
Asociación para la Formación y  
Actividades Interculturales para la Juventud



**ICYE**

# NATIONAL PROFILE

## SPAIN 2020/2021





## 1. QUICK FACTS ABOUT SPAIN

Country name: **Spain**

Capital: **Madrid**

Main cities: **Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Sevilla**

Government in power: **PSOE (socialist) led by Pedro Sánchez**

Administrative divisions: **17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities (Ceuta and Melilla)**

Total area: **504,782 sq km**

Population: **46.75 million (2020)**

Currency: **Euro**

Religion: Roman Catholic, although people increasingly have no religion.

Official languages: **Castilian Spanish 74%, Catalan 17%, Galician 7%, Basque 2%**



## 2. HISTORY

**12000 BC** - Stone Age hunters paint sophisticated cave art near Santander.

**1100 BC** - Southern Iberia colonized by Phoenicians.

**900 BC** - Celts arrive and settle in Northern Spain.

**218-220 BC** - Romans defeat the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War and turn Spain and Portugal into a Roman province called Hispania.

**500 AD** - The Visigoths take over much of Spain.

**711** - Iberia invaded by the Moors, Muslims coming in from North Africa into the South of Spain, and rename it al-Andalus (this is where the name Andalusia comes from).

**718** - The Reconquista begins, a campaign by Christians to retake Spain from the Muslims.

**756** - Independent emirate established by Abderramán I, Cordoba.

**1469** - Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile marry, bringing some much needed stability to the country

**1478** - The Spanish Inquisition begins, a brutal campaign by the throne and the

Church to eliminate Judaism and other religion from the Peninsular, forcibly establishing Catholicism as the official language of Spain.

**1492** - Granada captured and Moors defeated. Jews expelled from Spain. Christopher Columbus 'discovers' the New World.

**1520s-1530s** - Spanish explorer Hernan Cortes conquers the Aztec Empire in Mexico and Francisco Pizarro conquers the Incan Empire, establishing the city of Lima.

**1588** - Spanish Armada defeated by the English fleet, led by Sir Francis Drake.

**1605** - Miguel de Cervantes publishes the first part of the epic novel, Don Quijote

### Spanish Empire

**16th-17th centuries** - Spanish Empire at its height, with Spain the predominant European power. The rise of Protestant states in northern Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean begin the country's gradual decline.

**18th century** - The War of the Spanish Succession loses Spain its European possessions outside the Iberian Peninsula.



Bourbon dynasty, originally from France, centralises the Spanish state, shutting down many regional autonomous assemblies and modernising government and the military.

**1807-1814** - Napoleon's France occupies Spain. Fierce nationalist resistance and British intervention in the Peninsular War gradually force French troops out.

**1881** - Pablo Picasso is born in Malaga, Spain.

**1883** - Antoni Gaudi begins work on the Sagrada Familia Catholic church in Barcelona.

**19th century** - Napoleonic legacy of political division and economic dislocation leaves Spain weak and unstable.

All Latin American colonies win their independence, with Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in Asia lost during a disastrous war with the United States.

**1910s** - Spain sought compensation in conquering colonies in Africa, most significantly northern Morocco and the Spanish Sahara.

**1920s** - The trade boom achieved by neutrality in the First World War is squandered through fighting Moroccan rebels and the financial mismanagement of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship at home.

### Civil war and dictatorship

**1931** - The return of democratic government leads to an electoral backlash against the monarchy and its allies, and a republic is declared. Radical policies of land reform, labour rights, educational expansion and anti-Church legislation deepen the political divide.

**1936** - After 2 years of right-wing government, a Popular Front coalition of left-wing and liberal parties narrowly wins parliamentary elections and seeks to reintroduce the radical policies of 1931.

A coup by right-wing military leaders captures only part of the country, leading to 3 years of civil war.

**1939** - General Francisco Franco leads the Nationalists to victory in the Civil War. More than 350,000 Spaniards died in the fighting, and Franco purges all remaining Republicans.

Spain remains neutral throughout the Second World War, although the government's sympathies clearly lie with the Axis powers.

**1950s** - As the Cold War deepens the US gradually improves relations with Spain, extending loans in return for military bases. Spain is admitted to the UN in 1955 and the World Bank in 1958, and other European countries open up to the Franco government.

El Milagro Español - the economic miracle of the late 1950s - sees Spain's manufacturing and tourism industries take off through liberalisation of state controls.

**1959** - The ETA armed separatist group is founded with the aim of fighting for an independent homeland in the Basque region of Spain and France. Its violent campaign begins with an attempt to derail a train carrying politicians in 1961.

**1973** - ETA kills Prime Minister Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco in retaliation for the government's execution of Basque fighters. Subsequent attempts to liberalise the Franco government founder on internal divisions.

### Move to democracy

**1975** - Franco dies, and is succeeded as head of state by King Juan Carlos. Spain makes transition from dictatorship to democracy, and withdraws from the Spanish Sahara, ending its colonial empire.

**1977** - First free elections in four decades. Ex-Francoist Adolfo Suárez's Union of the



Democratic Centre manages a relatively smooth transition to stable democracy.

**1981** - Coup attempt fails after King Juan Carlos makes a televised address demanding that plotters surrender.

**1982** - Socialists under Felipe González win elections and govern until 1996. Free education, an expanded welfare state and liberalisation of abortion laws are key policies. Spain joins Nato and later European Union.

**1992** - Barcelona hosted Summer Olympic Games.

**1997** - ETA kills Basque councillor Miguel Ángel Blanco, sparking national outrage and bringing 6 million people onto the streets in protest.

In December leaders of ETA's political wing are jailed for 7 years for collaborating with ETA.

**1998** - ETA announces its first indefinite ceasefire since its campaign of violence began.

**2000** - Aznar's Popular Party (PP) wins landslide in general elections. ETA's campaign for a sovereign Basque state has cost many lives

**2002** - Peseta replaced by Euro.

### Madrid attacks

**2004** - A total of 191 people are killed in explosions on packed rush-hour trains in Madrid in near-simultaneous pre-election attacks by an Islamic group with links to al-Qaeda.

With Spain still in mourning, the Socialists under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero defy earlier opinion polls and win a general election.

**2005** - Parliament defies Roman Catholic Church by legalising gay marriage and granting homosexual couples same

adoption and inheritance rights as heterosexual ones.

At least 11 die and many more are injured in a series of mass attempts by African migrants to enter the enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta from Morocco in a bid to reach Spain.

### Catalan autonomy demands

**2006** - Lt Gen Jose Mena Aguado sacked as head of army ground forces after suggesting that the military might take action in Catalonia if the region gains too much autonomy.

Voters in Catalonia back proposals to give the region greater autonomy as well as the status of a nation within Spain.

**2007** - Parliament passes a bill formally denouncing General Franco's rule and ordering the removal of all Franco-era statues and symbols from streets and buildings.

**2008** - The Socialists win re-election with an increased margin, but falls short of an absolute majority.

### Economic crisis

**2009** - Spanish economy enters recession for first time since 1993.

**2010** - Thousands of workers demonstrate against government spending cuts and plans to raise the retirement age by 2 years to 67 - the first mass labour protests since the Socialists came to power in 2004.

**2011** - Conservative Popular Party wins resounding victory in parliamentary election.

New government headed by Mariano Rajoy takes office.

**2013** - Economy registers 0.1% growth in July-September, formally lifting it out of recession.



**2014** - King Juan Carlos abdicates, succeeded by the crown prince as Felipe VI. Spanish government dismisses the result of a symbolic independence referendum in Catalonia.

### **New political forces**

**2015** - Popular Party government loses majority in general election that sees populist anti-austerity movement Podemos and new liberal Ciudadanos movement perform well.

**2016** - Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy forms minority government and ends 10 months of political deadlock after repeat elections in June.

**2017** - 2 Islamic State terror attacks kill 16 people in Barcelona and the nearby resort of Cambrils.

Madrid imposes direct rule in Catalonia after voters in a referendum back separation from Spain.

**2018** - Basque separatist former armed group ETA announces it is ceasing all political activities.

Mariano Rajoy loses a vote of confidence. Socialist leader Pedro Sánchez takes over as prime minister.

**2019** - Snap election boosts Socialists, but they remain short of a majority. Vox becomes first far-right party to win seats since the death of Francisco Franco in 1975.

Thousands of protesters take to the street after Supreme Court sentences nine Catalan leaders to long jail terms for sedition over the failed 2017 independence bid.

Fourth general election in as many years leaves Socialists still short of a majority, while Vox more than doubles its seats to become the third-largest party.

**2020** - Pedro Sánchez forms minority coalition government with left-wing Podemos party after winning a narrow parliamentary vote of confidence.

## **2. GEOGRAPHY**

Except for the subtropical Canary Islands, Spain can be divided into areas experiencing a Mediterranean climate; a climate dominated by the Atlantic Ocean; and (in the inner areas) a rather extreme climate with hotter summers and colder winters than nearer the coasts.

Spain's climate varies from temperate in the north to dry and hot in the south. The best months are from April to October, although mid-summer (July to August) can be excessively hot throughout the country, except the coastal regions. Most people from Madrid try to leave the city at some point during these months to cool off at the coast, so Madrid is best in late spring or autumn. In winter, however, the central plateau can be bitterly cold.

The most emblematic mammals are wolf, fox, wildcat, Iberian lynx, deer, Spanish ibex and wild boar, among others. The Iberian pig, from where Spain gets its famous ham (*jamón*), is the result of inter-breeding with different varieties of wild boar.



### 3. POLITICS

Spanish politics take place under the framework established by the Constitution of 1978, which was created during the transition from the Francoist dictatorship to democracy. Spain has a parliamentary monarchy, which means that the monarch, currently King Felipe VI, is the head of state, while the prime minister (since June 2018, Pedro Sánchez of the PSOE) is the head of government. His official title is the 'President of the Government'.

In the last decade, governmental powers have generally alternated between the PSOE and the PP. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, of the PSOE, led the government from 2004 to 2011, being the first Spanish Government to have the same number of male and female members in the Council of Ministers. He also brought much social liberal change to Spain, promoting women's rights, changing the abortion law and legalising same-sex marriage. The 2008 economic crisis took a heavy toll on Spain's economy, causing unemployment to soar to over 25%. In 2011, Mariano Rajoy of the PP won the elections and became prime minister. In June 2018 it went back to the PSOE, with Pedro Sánchez. Re-elected in December 2019, he is the current president of a Coalition Government, with the support of the progressive trend party, "United We Can".

### 4. ECONOMICS

Spain suffered a huge blow during the financial crisis of 2008. Although it entered the recession later, it stayed there for longer, meaning that by 2012 over a quarter of Spain's workforce was unemployed. However, since then, Spain has become one of the best-performing major economies in Europe. Its GDP growth rate was the highest among larger EU countries in 2015, and within just two years it had recovered 85% of the GDP lost during the 2009-2013 recession.

The automotive industry, Spain is the ninth world car producer in the world and the second in Europe (92% of this production is exported); the production of parts and accessories of vehicles, tires, the pharmaceutical industry, paper and petroleum products.

The tertiary sector is the most important in the economy of Spain, it is the largest economic activity in the country and the one that generates more jobs.

This sector is composed of education and health services, government, telecommunications, transportation, entertainment, insurance, tourism, retail trade, etc.

Spain is the fourth tourist destination worldwide receives more than 53 million visitors a year, thanks to this tourism represents 10% of the country's total GDP.

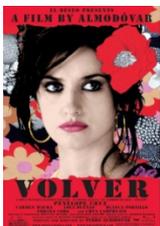




In the last four decades, Spain's foreign tourist industry has grown into the second-biggest in the world. As of February 2019, Spain holds first place in the world at international tourism ranking. This tourism includes cultural and religious tourism, but it is beach tourism which generates the most income for the country. The mild climate throughout the year and extensive sandy beaches on the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean, as well as two archipelagoes (the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands) make it an attractive location for Northern European sunseekers. The most popular coastlines include the Costa de Sol, with Malaga, and the Costa Brava.

In terms of agriculture, Spain does not benefit from good quality soil, although this is not so much of a problem as most agricultural land is used as pastureland for livestock. Exports of horticultural products such as citrus fruits and olives are the most important agricultural exports from Spain, including the famous Seville oranges. It is also the number one wine exporter in the world, and the largest producer of olive oil, the first consumer product in Spain and which is also bottled and sold in the neighboring countries of France and Italy.

Spain is, above all, a mosaic of cultures, as can be seen from its rich and varied history. Andalusia in the south of Spain is famous for its abundance of Moorish architecture and art, characterised by intricate and ornate structures and forms that make it an invaluable cultural destination. The Alhambra in Granada and the Mezquita in Córdoba are famous examples. Architecture enjoys a presence in Spain both from bygone eras to the modern day, such as the work of Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926), which is peppered throughout Barcelona and whose masterpiece is the Sagrada Familia Cathedral. Spanish culture touches upon all forms of artistic expression, also including painting. It boasts such painters as Diego Velázquez, El Greco, Francisco de Goya and, more recently, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró.



Spain's literary history is one of the richest in the world, boasting such writers as Francisco de Quevedo, Federico García Lorca and Antonio Machado. And that's not forgetting Miguel de Cervantes, whose epic *Don Quijote* is widely regarded as the best novel of all time. This success is continued in Spanish cinema, whose forefront star has to be Pedro Almodóvar, with such successes as *Volver*, *Talk to Her*, *What have I Done to Deserve This?*, *Pain and Glory*.

It is not just historical and contemporary artistic expression that lends Spain its extreme popularity, but also the way of life. People from far and wide are attracted by the characteristically laid back, sociable and vibrant lifestyle that Spaniards enjoy. The working day often includes a two-hour siesta halfway through, and bars fill up in the evenings as people pile in for tapas and a drink with their friends once it finishes. The people are not in such a rush as in other countries, and foreigners often notice how much later Spanish people eat and go to bed than in their own country. They also notice how much more slowly bureaucracy is handled, but this is all part of the atmosphere!



## 6. FOOD

Spanish people boast the highest life expectancy in Europe, and this has been linked primarily to the Mediterranean Diet. It was awarded the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity designation in 2010 because it is much more than just healthy food, and because it has been consolidated as culture that promotes social interaction, respect for the land and biodiversity, and preservation of traditional and craft activities connected with agriculture and fishing.



The main ingredients are olive oil, cereals, fruits, vegetables, a moderate amount of meat, fish and dairy products, and a lot of seasoning and spices. It is usually consumed with wine or infusions. The UNESCO mentions Soria, in Castille-León, as a clear example of a city that is committed to the Mediterranean diet, even though it can be enjoyed all over Spain.

Ham (*jamón*), found in 90% of Spanish households, is arguably the most popular component of the Spanish diet, emblematic of the Spanish culinary tradition. By law, it is divided into two main categories: *Serrano* or dry-cured ham, and Iberian ham. *Serrano* ham, derived from white pigs, represents 79% of the total production, and is used in more day-to-day consumption as it is more common and affordable. It only needs to be cured on the bone for a minimum of 7 months. Iberian ham represents 21% of total ham production and is derived from a breed of pig found exclusively on the Iberian Peninsula. It requires a curing period of a minimum of 24 months.

## 7. TRADITIONS AND FIESTAS

Spain has an outstanding multicultural heritage, and this can be seen in all areas of its social life. There is a wide variety of different festive celebrations to be found all over the country. Spanish popular festivities and traditions often have a clearly religious origin. This can be seen in all the expressions of Spanish folklore, which combine religious fervour with a variety of pagan and festive commemorations. The country's cultural diversity means the festive manifestations of each region vary widely from north to south, and yet at the same time these local customs exist alongside festivities which are celebrated all over the national territory.





The festive year in Spain starts with the traditional strokes of midnight in the Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid, which attracts throngs of people from the city itself and from all over Spain who welcome in the New Year with a grape swallowed for each chime of the clock. One of the most important traditional celebrations in Spain, however, is Easter week. This takes place at the end of March or in April, and takes place amid vivid and extremely moving popular processions. The greatest number of festive events takes place in the summer months, between June and September, according to the geographic area, as they tend to combine both religious and socio-economic aspects. Throughout most of Spain's geography there are also a range of different festivities in late summer (late August and early September) owing to the historic tradition of commemorating the harvest (and particularly the grape harvest). What's more, each area in the country has its own specific festivities. Some of the highlights are the Sanfermines bull-running festival in Pamplona, Sant Jordi and La Mercé in Barcelona, the Fallas bonfire festival in Valencia, the festivity of the Reconquest in Granada, the April Fair in Seville and San Isidro and the Verbena de La Paloma in Madrid. But these are just a few examples of the thousands of festive celebrations which are to be found across Spain all year round.

## 8. MADRID



Madrid, the capital of Spain, is located in the geographic centre of the Iberian Peninsula at an altitude of 646m above sea level. It is a cosmopolitan city that combines the most modern infrastructures and the status as an economic, financial, administrative and service centre, with a large cultural and artistic heritage, a legacy of centuries of exciting history.

Near the Plaza Mayor is the area known as the "aristocratic centre" where the jewel in the crown is the Royal Palace (Palacio Real), an imposing building dating from the 17th century featuring a mixture of Baroque and classicist styles. Beside it are the Plaza de Oriente square, the Teatro Real opera house. Arguably the most important square in Madrid is the Puerta del Sol, which is surrounded by a varied and select area of shops and businesses, and is where many festivities in Madrid are celebrated, such as New Years Eve and, more recently, entertainment for the UEFA Champion's League Final in 2019. Nearby is the "Paseo del Arte" art route, named for its world-class museums, palaces and gardens. Important museums include the Museo del Prado and the Reina Sofia, which house works by Francisco de Goya, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí, amongst others.



Madrid's lively nightlife is another key attraction of Spain's capital, due to its variety and the exciting atmosphere to be found in its bars, pubs, clubs and flamenco halls. Other daytime entertainment options include traditional outdoor dances, popular festivities and the San Isidro bullfighting festival, regarded as being the most important in the world.

## 9. AFAIJ AND USEFUL INFORMATION



# AFAIJ

Asociación para la Formación y  
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### Who we are

AFAIJ is a Spanish non-profit organization established in 1999, whose main aim is to promote the non-formal education of young people through social and intercultural activities. AFAIJ runs youth international voluntary service programmes as well as trainings and seminars. AFAIJ joined the ICYE Federation as an associate member in August 2015.

### Your Exchange Year

You are about to embark on one of the most exciting experiences of your life and for sure you will have a lot of questions. We are certain that every single aspect of this year, big or small, counts towards the achievement of a good experience. For this reason, as a team, we will try our best to help you as much as possible. Some of these important questions are answered below.



## Visa

If you are NOT a legal resident of any of the EU member countries, Norway, Liechtenstein, Iceland or Switzerland, you need a visa to enter Spain. If this applies to you, you will need to contact the nearest Spanish Embassy or Consulate in order to get a visa. For stays under 3 months, you can enter Spain with a tourist visa. If your stay is longer than 3 months, you need to apply for the Student Visa.

## The cost of living

Spain is not an expensive country, though the average cost of living varies a lot. Big cities like Barcelona, Madrid, or Bilbao are much more expensive than cities in southern Spain or small towns. Average prices are:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ❖ Beer: 1,50 – 3,00 EUR                                 | ❖ Cup of coffee: 1.20 – 2.00 EUR                  |
| ❖ Book: 8.00 – 20.00 EUR                                | ❖ Hamburger: 2.50 – 6.00 EUR                      |
| ❖ Bus/Metro ticket: aprox. 1,50 EUR (10 trip/12,20 EUR) | ❖ Internet (1 hour): 0.60 – 1.00 EUR              |
| ❖ Cigarettes: 4,50 – 5,50 EUR                           | ❖ Newspaper: 1.00 – 1.50 EUR                      |
| ❖ Cinema ticket: 6,5 – 8.00 EUR                         | ❖ Stamps: 0.35 – 0.75 EUR                         |
| ❖ Coca-cola: 1.50 – 2.00 EUR                            | ❖ Supper in a good restaurant: 15.00 – 250.00 EUR |
| ❖ Concert: 10.00 – 30.00 EUR                            | ❖ Theatre ticket: 3.00 – 75.00 EUR                |

## Interesting links

There are a lot of useful links about Spain and the areas where you will be living. We believe that a picture says more than a thousand words. Please take the time to look at some websites before you make your choice about Spain.

<http://www.spain.info>

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/spain>