

# Spain Report

## Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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## Executive Summary

In the past two years, Spain's key economic data compared favorably with other EU member states. Economic growth and job creation were solid and stronger than expected in 2022 and 2023. Spain exhibited resilience in the face of economic challenges, with energy costs and inflation rates remaining below the EU average. Spain could also reduce its public debt after reaching a historic high of 120% of GDP in 2020.

During the period under review, despite concerns about the stability of the left-wing coalition government and its status as a caretaker government from July to November 2023, the government pushed an ambitious legislative reform agenda through parliament while fending off a wave of hostility from the political right.

Most reforms were part of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) and agreed upon with the European Commission, establishing conditions for the reimbursement of funding from the NextGenerationEU program (Government of Spain, 2021). The RRP will mobilize up to €163 billion from 2021 – 2026, in addition to €36.7 billion from the Structural Funds of the multiannual financial framework 2021 – 2027 (MFF 2021 – 2027). The RRP addresses critical structural problems and aims to ensure long-term sustainable development through investments and reforms focused on ecological transition and digital transformation. Each payment is linked to the achievement of several milestones (qualitative goals) and targets (quantitative goals). According to the European Commission, which approved the amendment of the plan in October 2023 (Government of Spain, 2023), the RRP is currently on track. However, absorption capacity remains a challenge (European Commission, 2023).

The implementation had a significant impact on public administration. Several administrative departments have been strengthened, and new governance structures have been created to increase the government's executive capacity and accountability. Both ex ante and ex post evaluations have been enhanced, which will also have long-term positive effects. In particular, the strategic design of policies evolved substantially over 2022.

The fragmentation of the party system and polarization have significantly obstructed cross-party agreement. Increasing polarization has eroded the effectiveness of parliamentary institutions in a way that affects the quality of democracy, even though it did not prevent the government from pushing most of its legislative agenda until spring 2023. Although Spain overall remained one of the countries with strong democratic quality in electoral and liberal terms, the government made extensive – and for some, excessive – use of royal decree-laws. Despite the period 2022 – 2023 seeing the second-lowest proportion of such decrees since 2010, this practice prevented deliberation in the legislative chambers. This had an important impact on the balance between legislative and executive powers, raising questions of input legitimacy.

The structural weaknesses and cyclical problems, including the financing model, of the Spanish territorial system could not be addressed. However, intergovernmental coordination could be improved, and representatives of the autonomous communities met frequently to exchange information and to reach, to a certain extent, common agreements.

The electoral cycle, including local and regional elections in May 2023, which produced several government alternations in different autonomous communities, and the general early election in July, reduced institutional activity in most of the policies under review. The national elections of July 23, 2023, ended in a stalemate. Following weeks of political tensions, the PSOE reached a minority coalition agreement with the far-left Sumar coalition. However, the PSOE had to make further painful compromises that might have a long-lasting impact on the territorial organization of the state. These include an amnesty law for Catalan separatist politicians convicted or investigated for events related to the political crisis in Catalonia, the transfer of full tax autonomy to Catalonia, and further transfers of competencies to the Basque Country. Pedro Sanchez was re-elected as prime minister on November 16, 2023. However, a stable government that can govern with foresight is not guaranteed for the legislature.

## Key Challenges

Despite positive developments over the past two years, the economy has not yet overcome the various crises encountered in the last five years. As a result of tighter financial conditions and reduced levels of business and consumer confidence, GDP growth is now moderate.

Implementing the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) will be a key challenge in the coming years. The RRP has the potential to create powerful crowding-in effects, significantly impact key reforms on potential growth, and continue reducing public debt. Given the substantial investments anticipated from the Next Generation EU program and the MFF 2021-2027, monitoring absorption capacity will be essential.

Traditional challenges must also be addressed to enhance competitiveness and resilience. First, economic competitiveness and resource efficiency must improve, and the economy's dependence on tourism should be reduced.

Public policies should continue to prioritize climate-compatible public investment and innovation, while also fostering social and territorial cohesion and ensuring quality access to health and education. The minimum income scheme should be expanded.

The institutional framework promoting cooperation and shared decision-making across different government levels should be reinforced. Additionally, reducing tensions between central government framework legislation and the reality of heterogeneous regional systems is crucial. Maintaining territorial cohesion is becoming increasingly important; thus, the funding system for regional competencies needs an update and reform to ensure subnational governments have adequate resources.

The tax system should be expanded and tax competition reduced. New tax measures for 2022-2023 are important steps toward increasing government revenue and improving tax system efficiency. However, deeper changes are needed to enhance public efficiency and reduce post-tax social inequalities.

Labor market reform has shown positive results, but training capacities need improvement. Access to vocational training, including for immigrants, should be fostered. Greater continuity in education policies across different governments and better coordination across regions could help achieve this goal.

The welfare system's clearest challenge is population aging, which pressures the sustainability of healthcare and the viability of pensions. While pension reform was crucial, efforts should now focus on the healthcare system.

To achieve these policy goals, specific reforms are needed to strengthen the government's executive capacities without undermining the parliament. Regulatory impact assessment (RIA) processes should be enhanced.

Evaluation agencies must be strengthened to ensure transparency and quality evaluation of action plans and laws. Additionally, societal consultation in policymaking should be fostered, improving citizen access to public policy information.

Strategies should be developed to address the conclusion of the limited temporary NextGenerationEU program. Forming a coalition with other EU member states could strengthen the negotiating position for the program's continuation and redesign at the EU level.

The government, which took office in November 2023, and its supporting parties have initiatives requiring significant resources. Implementing these measures during economic downturns demands additional efforts, such as increased productivity or higher revenues. Agreements with nationalist regional parties may pressure social and territorial cohesion but could also enhance their legitimacy and social support.

The minority coalition government will need to change allies for most legislative initiatives, requiring political parties to compromise with others in parliament. In the current polarized political climate, this will be a significant challenge for governing with foresight and sustainable policymaking.

# Democratic Government

## I. Vertical Accountability

### Elections

Free and Fair  
Political  
Competition  
Score: 9

Registration procedures for candidates and political parties meet international standards of transparency and fairness. Candidates disqualified from registration or prevented from being elected have the right to appeal to a competent jurisdiction. Parties and candidates are required to maintain accurate financial records, and recent elections have not seen significant exclusion or discrimination. Only those convicted in certain criminal cases, always by a court, may lose their political rights. Candidates and parties denied registration or election rights can appeal to the administrative court, whose decisions can further be appealed to the Constitutional Court. Finalized lists are published in the official gazette.

All Congress of Deputies electoral candidate lists must ensure a minimum representation of 40% for each gender. Parliamentary parties are exempt from collecting signatures for candidate nominations, while non-parliamentary parties must gather signatures from at least 0.1% of voters in the respective constituency for their proposed lists. Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE), the major national public broadcaster, is obligated to inform voters about upcoming elections, providing proportional coverage of all contestants and organizing election debates.

All political parties with parliamentary representation have access to public media during electoral campaigns. They are covered by news reports and can participate in candidate debates. However, new parties face restricted access, with airtime in news and elections-related programming distributed based on past electoral performance. This has sparked controversy, particularly regarding the limitations faced by new parties in their first electoral campaign before entering parliament. According to the OSCE, the 2023 elections had fair media access and coverage, but challenges related to disinformation were

noted. Concerns have also been raised about certain regional governments' influence over regional public media.

The party financing law was reformed in 2015 as part of an anti-corruption plan to increase transparency and impose sanctions following numerous scandals. It imposes spending limits in electoral campaigns, and business contributions are theoretically subject to limits and conditions. Despite this, recent controversies have emerged regarding certain political parties attempting to evade legal scrutiny. Campaign spending is limited, and third-party financing of election campaigns is strictly prohibited. Candidates must submit a comprehensive report to the audit office detailing campaign income and expenditures within 100 to 125 days post-election. The legislation does not provide for interim reporting.

The Central Election Commission monitors compliance with campaign finance rules. The audit office, responsible for auditing party accounts, is empowered to undertake investigations on its own initiative and upon complaint. The OSCE noted that the audit office has strengthened its capacity for auditing political parties and developed internal regulations, including online submission of annual party and campaign finance reports. Among other initiatives, the audit office launched a public website providing information on the economic and financial activities of political parties and related entities. In January 2022, the audit office urged parliament to revise the legislation governing party financing, focusing on thresholds for sanctions and issues of disproportionality, but the law remains unchanged.

The OSCE expressed confidence in the legal framework during the 2023 elections, considering it conducive to holding democratic elections. The organization acknowledged widespread confidence in the efficacy of remedies offered by the election administration and courts in addressing election disputes. However, the OSCE recommended reviewing the balance between public and private funding to ensure the system does not disproportionately favor larger, established parties over smaller, local ones. Other recommendations, including enhancing transparency in election administration meetings, reviewing candidate eligibility restrictions, and establishing an independent media oversight authority, remain unimplemented (OSCE, 2023).

The national elections in 2023 faced logistical challenges primarily due to tight deadlines and the holiday season, resulting in difficulties recruiting sufficient polling staff.

Free and Fair  
Elections  
Score: 9

Every Spanish citizen aged 18 and older has the right to vote, and this suffrage is exercised without significant exclusion or discrimination. Only individuals convicted of certain criminal offenses may lose their political rights. All citizens are automatically included in the electoral register, which is based on permanent residency and updated monthly using data from municipal and consular population registries.

There has been considerable discussion about the voting rights of Spanish citizens living overseas, who have faced bureaucratic obstacles in participating in elections. The Organic Law 12/2022, of September 30, introduced new regulations for voting by Spaniards living abroad, establishing conditions for designating new centers authorized to collect ballot box votes.

In the 2023 elections, overseas residents no longer needed to apply to vote. They had to be registered in the Consular Register and the Register of Non-Resident Voters and received ballot papers by mail. Voters could also download ballot papers from the National Statistics Institute Website (Spanish Government, 2023).

The Organic Law on the General Electoral System (LOREG) establishes an independent, hierarchically structured administrative bureaucracy to ensure transparency, objectivity, and equality in electoral procedures. The Electoral Administration includes the Central Electoral Board, the Autonomous Community Electoral Boards, the Provincial Electoral Boards, and the Area Electoral Boards. These boards are well-equipped and financially resourced to guarantee the transparency and fairness of electoral processes.

Electoral boards are composed of three members, including a chairperson, selected by lottery from among registered voters in the respective precinct. Serving on an electoral board is a civic obligation, with exemptions granted only for compelling reasons such as work commitments or health issues.

The 2023 election campaigns were generally peaceful, though there were instances of tension and confrontation. The tone of the campaigns was harsh, with some parties using highly charged language to warn voters that supporting regional contestants might undermine democracy in Spain. Voters were required to register with both the Consular Register and the Register of Non-Resident Voters and received their ballots by mail. Voters could also download their ballots from the National Statistics Institute website (Spanish Government, 2023). Discussions about TV debate formats dominated political discourse during the first week of the national election campaign. There were no reported incidents of harassment, violence, or intimidation against voters (OSCE, 2023).



Some irregularities have been observed in the voter registry for postal voting. The influx of applications for postal votes for the 2023 municipal elections in Melilla prompted the electoral board to require that citizens requesting to vote by post must visit the post office and identify themselves with their ID card when submitting their ballot envelope. To enhance the security of postal voting for the national elections, the Central Electoral Board issued an instruction in early June 2023 requiring all voters to prove their identity when submitting their vote at the post office by registered mail. Some parties have spread misleading information about postal votes. Multiple cases of vote-buying in the local elections in May 2023, implicating various political parties, are currently under judicial investigation.

### Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted  
Party System  
Score: 9

Each major political party in Spain has local branches that allowing them to represent local interests and maintain a presence in communities. Several nationalist parties, which have significant national impact, focus on specific local interests or are pro-independence, maintaining a permanent presence of party activists in particular communities. Left-wing parties are noticeable but primarily concentrated in urban areas. The organizational hierarchy varies significantly among major political parties. For instance, the new Sumar party is a loose alliance of regional and local groups, whereas Vox is highly organized.

During the observation period, party leadership structures increased their control over major decisions, including the appointment of local and regional party leaders. However, the decline in party membership in recent years has weakened the connection between parties, new voters, and civil society actors.

Most parties and their candidates provide targeted goods and benefits to a minor extent. During the past legislative term, 19 parties were represented in the Spanish parliament, some with very specific programs and others with predominantly regional interests focused on particular goods and benefits.

According to the V-Dem project, party manifestos differ widely. For example, on immigration, some manifestos strongly oppose almost all forms of immigration, while others strongly support most forms (V-Dem Project, 2023). Similar variations exist in minority policies and the territorial organization of the state, among others. All party manifestos are publicly accessible.

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation  
Score: 6

All major political parties in Spain are committed to liberal democratic values and institutions. However, the rise of populist movements, including the ideologically radical but not extreme Vox, has intensified rhetoric around representative institutions. Vox advocates for some policies that counter several basic principles of liberal democracy, such as gender equality and minority rights (Santana et al., 2023). Among the main Spanish parties, Vox has the highest proportion of supporters who are dissatisfied with democracy and do not support it at all. Additionally, pro-independence political parties campaign against Spain's constitutional order.

Polarization significantly hinders cross-party agreements and the formation of parliamentary majorities. This polarization and fragmentation within the Congress of Deputies have severely affected the parliament's legislative function in recent years. Despite this, the first coalition government was in power from 2020 to 2023, and in 2023, a new minority coalition government was formed. Major political parties generally lack a cooperative attitude toward one another.

During the period under review, the General Council of the Judiciary – an autonomous body composed of judges and other jurists that exercises government functions within the judiciary to guarantee judicial independence – could not be renewed due to political deadlock. At the regional level, the financing scheme for regional governments has been pending an update since 2014, primarily due to significant disagreements among political parties.

Major political parties also struggle to cooperate in controlling the influence of anti-democratic actors. In contrast, the coalition government experienced few but notable policy dissonances between some members. Despite these challenges, the PSOE managed to form a majority for the investiture of Pedro Sanchez in November 2023 with ideologically divergent parties.

The ability to compromise and cooperate will continue to be crucial for governance and policy execution in the coming years. At the regional level, interparty cooperation in policymaking and implementation has a long tradition, with most regional governments formed by two or more parties.

#### Access to Official Information

Transparent Government  
Score: 7

Spain's first specific law enabling free and easy access to government information was approved in 2013. This transparency law covers requests for information and access to public documents. In 2023, a new law on whistleblower protection was adopted. Law 2/2023, which transposes the

Whistleblowing Directive, establishes an authority to protect whistleblowers and a regime of sanctions to address actions that might hinder whistleblower reports. The specifics of this law are still being developed. At the regional level, several lobby regulations and whistleblower protections have already been adopted.

Citizens can enforce their right to access information through several appeal and oversight mechanisms, such as the Spanish and regional ombudsmen or the transparency councils. In 2023, two measures related to the new integrity system – a code on good administration for civil servants and a code on good government – were adopted. However, the legislative debate on the new law on Transparency and Integrity has been postponed until 2024 due to the dissolution of parliament in May. Additionally, the government has been working on a draft law on access to classified information but did not submit the legislative project to parliament in 2023.

According to the European Commission, the efficiency of the Council of Transparency and Good Governance has improved. During the review period, a new document management system was introduced to enhance transparency and reduce formalities, ensuring adequate and prompt access to information. However, following the regional elections in May 2023, the regional government of the Community of Madrid introduced a legal amendment to reduce the autonomy of the Council of Transparency.

Under the Transparency Law, public administration has one month to reply to a citizen's request for information. If the citizen is not satisfied with the response, they can file a complaint with the Council for Transparency and Good Governance. The council has three months to decide whether the requested data can be provided. However, during the review period, the council took an average of seven months to respond to citizens' complaints to the state administration (El Pais 2023). This delay is mainly due to the council receiving four times more complaints in 2023 and 2022 than in 2015, when it started its activity, while the number of staff has hardly changed (Council of Transparency and Good Governance 2023).

## II. Diagonal Accountability

### Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media  
Score: 8

The freedom of the press is guaranteed in the Spanish constitution. Law 13/2022 of July 7, 2022, regulates the provision of audiovisual services, and Law 17/2006 of June 5, 2006, on State-Owned Radio and Television safeguards the independence, neutrality, and objectivity of the public media. Indeed, Spain has a diverse and free print, audio, digital, and TV media landscape.

In the past decade, some laws, such as the so-called gag law, placed constraints on media freedom and created difficulties for journalists. Although the government tried to repeal the most controversial articles of this law, the lack of agreement on this issue before the parliamentary elections in July 2023 constituted a serious breach of one of the government's electoral promises. Reporters Without Borders reported on a climate of polarization, which is eroding society's confidence in journalists and fueling hate speech against the media. According to the World Press Freedom Index, reporting is being replaced by opinion. Spain was ranked 36th in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, down from 29th in 2021.

Certain media outlets have alleged that the government is declining to address questions during press conferences. Simultaneously, extremist parties engage in verbal assaults against journalists whose inquiries they deem problematic. Particularly, the far-right party Vox continues to spread false information and deny journalists and the media access to its press conferences and other events. During the review period, the appointment of the public broadcast (RTVE) president continued to be a challenge. In February 2021, the PSOE and PP reached an agreement to renew the Board of Directors of RTVE, and a new president was appointed in March 2021. Nevertheless, after losing support from the government coalition, the president resigned in 2022, and an "acting chair" with limited executive powers was nominated.

According to the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM), editorial autonomy in Spain increased from a medium risk of 63% in 2020 to a high risk of 75% in 2021 because the appointment and removal of media editors-in-chief are not safe from political interference in practice.

The situation regarding regional public-broadcast groups is particularly concerning, as incumbent governments often openly promote their partisan political objectives. This has been notably evident in Andalusia, Madrid, and especially Catalonia, where public media has overtly supported the nationalist regional government's pro-secession stance while limiting access for those with opposing or pluralistic perspectives.

In private broadcasting operations, there is no regulation guaranteeing autonomy in appointing and dismissing editors-in-chief. While media groups are formally independent, both national and regional parties in office have traditionally sought to support newspapers, radio, and television stations ideologically aligned with them. Various mechanisms enable political influence on media decisions, with licensing and institutional advertising being prominent among them. In 2021, the central government increased its allocation for institutional advertising by 86% compared to 2020. Independent media outlets have called on the government to safeguard information plurality and quality by ensuring a fair distribution of institutional advertising. However, there have been no new developments regarding the legal framework for institutional advertising during the review period.

The National Commission for Markets and Competition (CNMC) serves as the national-level audiovisual regulator, while regional audiovisual authorities oversee service providers at the regional level. Law 7 July 2022 advocates for better cooperation between the CNMC and regional audiovisual authorities to improve the supervision of online services, platforms, and providers. In 2023, the CNMC was allocated additional human and financial resources.

Despite attempts to exert influence, government or public officials do not censor digital, print, or broadcast media. Freedom House's 2022 Freedom on the Net report does not include data for Spain, but there is no evidence of state censorship, self-censorship among journalists, or harassment of journalists beyond isolated incidents.

A recent survey from the Center for Sociological Research (CIS) shows that the confidence of Spanish citizens in media information has slightly decreased, scoring 4.1 on a 10-point scale. Law 2/2023 establishes an authority to protect whistleblowers, aiming to enhance transparency and accountability in media practices.

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and the right to information, ensuring a pluralistic media environment with various public and private television and radio stations, newspapers, and internet portals.

According to Law 17/2006 on State-Owned Radio and Television, public media must reflect the social, ideological, political, and cultural diversity of Spanish society. The CNMC, together with regional audiovisual authorities, oversees public and private media to ensure a plurality of opinions. The licensing and regulatory regimes for privately owned media also support this plurality.

Spain's largest newspaper is the influential center-left *El País*, while other nationwide newspapers include the center-right *El Mundo* and the conservative *ABC*. In Catalonia, the moderate nationalist *La Vanguardia* leads the market. Progressive digital publications like *Eldiario.es* and *Publico.es* have large readerships, while significant center-right digital media sites include *Elconfidencial.com*, and right-wing sites consist of *Elespanol.com* and *Okdiario.com*. Despite the rise of digital media, the electronic versions of print newspapers remain the country's most widely read information websites.

The radio market is dominated by the center-left SER station, followed by Cadena Cope (owned by the Catholic Church), the center-right Onda Cero, and the Catalan private station RAC-1. The publicly owned Radio Nacional de España also has a notable presence. In television, the market is largely controlled by the Italian company Mediaset (including Telecinco and Cuatro channels), Atresmedia Corporación (owning the right-wing Antena 3 and the leftist La Sexta), and the public broadcaster Televisión Española, alongside regional public-television networks and small private stations. The primary media groups collectively secure 80% of advertising revenue in television and 96% in radio, while the press sector's four major publishing groups reach 87% of audiences.

The CNMC has warned that this concentration could threaten media pluralism in the future. The concentration of the advertising market by Mediaset and Atresmedia has been confirmed by a CNMC sanction. According to the MPM 2022 Report, Spanish media pluralism faces a high risk of media concentration (67%). The widespread use of social networks has facilitated the proliferation of electronic newspapers and independent blogs, counterbalancing oligopolistic trends and ensuring a variety of opinions in public debate.

Although media criticism of the government varies in intensity and tone, all outlets report on government issues and acknowledge significant political perspectives. Some media exhibit bias toward certain political parties.

Civil Society

Free Civil Society  
Score: 9

Article 21 of the constitution affirms the right to peaceful assembly without prior authorization, although authorities must be notified in advance when assemblies are planned in public areas. Article 22 recognizes the right of association, requiring notifications 10 days before an event, with a 24-hour notice acceptable in exceptional cases. Law no. 4/2015 for the Protection of Public Security prohibits spontaneous demonstrations and introduces penalties for failing to declare gatherings at essential community service facilities.

In 2022 and 2023, the government attempted to repeal controversial articles of this law but was unsuccessful due to early elections. Several rule of law reports and the Venice Commission noted the law’s negative impact on the right of assembly and freedom of expression. Political and civic groups operated freely during the review period.

In October and November 2023, protesters demonstrated against the agreement and the investiture of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. Most demonstrations were peaceful, but some groups used violence against public security forces. The government did not apply arbitrary restrictions or employ intimidation or harassment.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Capital and Labor)  
Score: 7

The Spanish constitution mandates trade unions and employers’ associations to advocate for and safeguard the economic interests of workers and employers. It establishes a model of neo-corporatism, authorizing these organizations to represent workers in collective bargaining and participate in mandatory preliminary conciliation procedures before presenting disputes to government conciliation agencies. Although trade union density is low (18%), Spain’s biggest trade unions (UGT and CCOO) and employers’ associations have the organizational strength to independently formulate policies to which the government responds. Both main trade unions tend to collaborate and defend common platforms. According to the OECD, employer organization density is higher (88%). However, governments may proceed with policies even without CSO support in the absence of agreement.

During the review period, the government actively engaged in dialogue with UGT, CCOO, and employers’ associations, signing several agreements, including one on raising the minimum wage. Numerous meetings were convened to discuss policy proposals. The 2023 labor market reform strengthened trade unions by amplifying the significance of indefinite contracts.

Post-COVID-19, the government, trade unions, and employers’ associations met within the Social Dialogue Board for Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience (2021–2026), serving as a channel for dialogue on the RRP’s design and implementation. Membership dues for professional associations, business associations, official chambers, and trade unions are tax-deductible.

Due to the prevalence of self-employed workers and small businesses, trade unions play a lesser role than in countries with significant industrial sectors. From January to September 2023, 588 strikes occurred, involving 210,410 workers, marking an increase compared to 2022. However, the number of days lost to strikes has been below the EU average in recent years. Trade unions have been successful in mobilizing and collective bargaining.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Social Welfare)  
Score: 5

With the exception of trade unions and employers’ associations, noneconomic interest groups in Spain are relatively weak, making it difficult for them to influence political decision-making with relevant policy proposals. The lack of a strong, organized civil society discourages the government from considering these associations’ views in policy formulation, as this would complicate the process without necessarily adding social legitimacy. Their influence largely depends on their participation within political parties.

For example, although women’s associations are weak as autonomous organizations, they have become increasingly influential within political parties, especially the PSOE. Similarly, the LGBTQ+ movement has successfully defended homosexual rights. Platforms and networks have been able to gain media attention and shape public policy by demanding more transparency, better mortgage regulation, and changes in healthcare and education. Over the last several years, pensioners have staged large protests to demand fairer pensions for themselves and future generations.

Effective Civil Society Organizations (Environment)  
Score: 6

Environmental interest associations in Spain also face challenges in influencing political decision-making. Major groups in climate policy include Greenpeace, WWF, Amigos de la Tierra, Ecologistas en Acción, and SeoBirdLife. However, these organizations have gradually gained technical competence and increasingly rely on academic expertise and specialized publications to influence public opinion and policymakers.

While the general population supports environmental protection, there is little active participation in civil society organizations’ activities. Leading environmental groups benefit from their international or European umbrella organizations to put forward policy proposals. During the review period, CSOs participated in consultations on the design of government environmental strategies. Major CSOs collaborated to urge the government to accelerate an



ecologically and socially just transition and to use the EU Council presidency to push for ambitious climate goals during COP28.

### III. Horizontal Accountability

#### Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public  
Auditing  
Score: 7

The Court of Audit, recognized by the Spanish constitution, is an external audit body responsible for auditing the state's accounts, electoral and party funding, and the financial management of the entire public sector. In addition, most autonomous communities have established regional courts of audit to monitor their devolved competences. The national audit office is empowered to undertake investigations on its own initiative following the submission of a complaint and has the authority to impose substantial penalties for the misuse of public funds.

The head of the audit office is appointed by the King based on a proposal from the plenary, for a term of three years. The election is conducted by secret ballot. Members of the plenary and the head of the Court can be removed from office only after completing their term, upon resignation accepted by the parliament, due to incapacity or incompatibility, or for serious failure to perform their duties (Court of Audit 2023).

After a contentious period when the political autonomy of the Court was questioned, the major parties reached an agreement in 2021 to renew its members.

Although there have been certain improvements (the budget for 2023 was €78 million; 2020 €63 million), the office suffers from a lack of financial resources, personnel, and independence from politicians, since members of the plenary are appointed by the parties themselves. The Court of Audit legally has budgetary autonomy and draws up its own budget, which is approved by parliament.

The Court of Audit actively exchanges information on improved methods as a member of several international organizations of supreme audit institutions, such as EUROSAI, INTOSAI, and OLACEFS. It also maintains relations with the European Court of Auditors and participates in auditing various international organizations.

Effective Data  
Protection  
Score: 9

The Spanish Data Protection Agency (AEPD) is a public authority that operates independently of the public administration. Integrated into a broader international and subnational network of agencies, the AEPD possesses the capacity and personnel to advocate for data protection and privacy issues against the government and vested interests. The AEPD has the autonomy to choose which audits to conduct.

The workload and relevance of claims have increased significantly over the past 30 years – from 81 complaints in 1994 to more than 15,000 in 2023. The findings of the data protection authority are quite impactful and often publicized in the media, particularly in cases involving Google or ChatGPT. Additionally, the agency actively promotes rights against the unlawful publication on the internet of photographs, videos or audio with sexual or violent content and calls for stronger regulation from the legislature in this regard.

There are also data protection agencies in Catalonia and the Basque Country. According to the Organic Law on Data Protection, the appointment of the president of the AEPD is the responsibility of the government upon the proposal of the Ministry of Justice. A public competition of candidates must first be called, and their “merit, capacity, competence and suitability” must be assessed. The president and the deputy can only cease to hold office before the end of their term either at their own request or by removal by the Council of Ministers. The AEPD prepares and approves its own budget and sends it to the government, which includes it in the General State Budget.

### Rule of Law

Effective Judicial  
Oversight  
Score: 8

The Spanish judiciary is independent and capable of ensuring that the government and administration act according to the law. Specialized courts review actions and norms adopted by the executive, effectively ensuring legal compliance. Courts serve as effective and independent monitors of public authorities’ activities, and the government complies with court decisions even if it disagrees with them. Any natural or legal person with a legitimate interest can bring a legal protection action (amparo) before the Constitutional Court against governmental, administrative, parliamentary, or judicial decisions. In 2023, 6,243 appeals for protection were lodged with the Constitutional Court, primarily against judicial decisions, but most were dismissed for lack of legal grounding. During the review period, there were no examples of noncompliance.

Article 159 of the Spanish constitution outlines the composition of the Constitutional Court, comprising twelve members appointed by the King. Four are nominated by Congress with a three-fifths majority, another four by the Senate with the same majority, two are appointed by the government, and two by the General Council of the Judiciary, also requiring a three-fifths majority. These enhanced majorities are intended to ensure consensus in appointing independent judges. However, political practice often results in partisan appointments among major parties. The division between conservatives and progressives within the Constitutional Court has been significant during the review period.

The politically fragmented parliament failed to muster the three-fifths majority necessary to appoint new members to the General Council of the Judiciary – an autonomous body of judges and other jurists that governs the judiciary and aims to guarantee judges' independence. The incumbent council has operated on an interim basis since 2018. The lack of renewal is affecting the Supreme Court's functioning and the entire justice system, raising concerns about caseload and the duration of proceedings.

The 2023 EU Justice Scoreboard indicates that some judges struggle to reconcile their ideological biases with the requirement of effective independence, potentially hindering the judiciary's mandate to serve as a legal and politically neutral check on government actions (European Commission 2023). Public opinion increasingly perceives courts and judges as lacking independence due to perceived interference or pressure from economic interests and, more prominently, from government and opposition politicians.

Within the RRP, the government has continued efforts to increase the justice system's efficiency. Measures taken to enhance the quality of justice include legal aid and digitalization related to data management and interoperability of applications within the justice system. An example is Royal Decree Law 6/2023 of December 19.

Universal Civil  
Rights  
Score: 8

Spanish state institutions generally respect and protect civil rights. According to the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, Spain is ranked 15th in protecting fundamental rights. Consequently, the rights guaranteed by the constitution and ordinary legislation are enforced. All individuals have equal access to justice and due process under the rule of law. Few infringements occur in practice, such as those concerning illegal immigrants. During the review period, Amnesty International accused Spain and Morocco of a cover-up for failing to properly investigate events at the border of the Spanish enclave of Melilla in 2022, when dozens of migrants and refugees died during a mass attempted crossing.

Courts provide effective protection, even if systematic delays and a lack of adequate resources – both human and technological – undermine this effectiveness to some degree. The legislation acknowledges the right to equal treatment and nondiscrimination for individuals, irrespective of nationality, age, legal status, or residency. Over the review period, there have been enhancements in the legal framework and policies aimed at preventing discrimination. Law 15/2022, enacted on July 12, 2022, is designed to ensure and promote the right to equal treatment and nondiscrimination while upholding the equal dignity of individuals.

The law explicitly prohibits discrimination based on factors such as birth, racial or ethnic origin, gender, religion, belief or opinion, age, disability, sexual orientation or identity, gender expression, illness or health condition, serological status, genetic predisposition to certain pathologies and disorders, language, socioeconomic status, or any other personal or social circumstance. Article 19 mandates public administrations to promote information and accessibility to justice for particularly vulnerable groups.

To guarantee accessible justice for people with disabilities, the Ministry of Justice promoted a website dedicated exclusively to accessible justice for these individuals. Linguistic minorities can use all the official languages before the courts of their autonomous communities. In 2023, a new government office, the Office for Combating Discrimination, was created within the State Agency for Labor and Social Security Inspection.

Effective  
Corruption  
Prevention  
Score: 7

Corruption levels in Spain have declined since the real estate bubble burst in the wake of the economic crisis, partly due to the criminal, political, and social prosecution of corrupt politicians and officials. Spanish courts have a solid record of investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, but the system is often overburdened and cases move slowly. According to the WJP Rule of Law Index, Spain is ranked 23rd in the absence of government corruption. However, in 2023, Spain's score in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index fell slightly, although Spain continues to rank comparatively highly at 35th place out of 180 countries (2019: 30 out of 180 countries). The 2023 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 89% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 70%) and 41% feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 24%).

On February 16, 2023, parliament adopted the whistleblower protection law. The law stipulates that, within a maximum period of 18 months from its enactment, the government must endorse an Anti-Corruption Strategy. This

strategy is intended to assess the objectives outlined in the law and address the requisite measures to cover potential loopholes.

In December 2022, the Independent Office for Regulation and Supervision of Procurement sanctioned the National Public Procurement Strategy, aiming to prevent corruption and irregularities in implementing public procurement legislation. The effectiveness of the Council of Transparency and Good Governance has improved. In 2022, the General Intervention of the State Administration (IGAE) strengthened its assessments of fraud risks in public grants and subsidies.

In implementing the RRG, other administrative levels have established mechanisms for preventing corruption. For example, all implementing entities must have an anti-fraud plan. Public procurement procedures have also been improved to enhance transparency. As mentioned earlier, the audit office is responsible for auditing party accounts. The law governing party financing was reformulated in 2015 and remains unchanged, despite a request from the Court of Auditors.

In 2020, the Congress of Deputies agreed on a code of conduct for members of parliament. This document represents a further step in improving the transparency of members’ activities. Additionally, a Conflict of Interest Office of the Congress has been created to monitor compliance with integrity rules. According to the 2022 annual report, most members of parliament follow the code. However, the rules of procedure of the Congress do not contain any sanctions for noncompliance (Oficina de Conflicto de Intereses de las Cortes Generales 2023).

The electoral law establishes that the function of deputy is “incompatible” with “any other profession or remunerated activity.” However, the Congressional Statute Commission grants a number of exceptions.

**Legislature**

Sufficient  
Legislative  
Resources  
Score: 6

The Cortes Generales is a bicameral assembly consisting of the Congreso de Diputados (Congress of Deputies) as the lower chamber and the Senado (Senate) as the upper chamber. Article 72.1 of the constitution ensures the independence of both chambers, allowing them to equip themselves with the necessary personnel and resources to perform their constitutional duties effectively. According to Article 60 of the rules of procedure for the lower chamber, “the Congress shall have all necessary personal and material means and facilities available for the conduct of its business, including technical,

documentary, and advisory services.” Article 60 further specifies that the Budget Committee should be provided with suitable allocations to enable technical advice on legislative proceedings related to revenue and public expenditure.

Each parliamentary group receives funds to hire personnel, with budget amounts based on the party’s electoral results. However, individual members of parliament do not have dedicated assistants, and the limited staff is shared among them.

No formal parliamentary research units exist, and studies are rarely produced, except for legal reports. Committees have few independent administrative resources but rely on the legal expertise of clerks. Temporary staff hired through a procurement system assist parliamentary members and institutions, offering specific expertise in areas like economics, budgetary affairs, and journalism.

Parliamentary committees can invite independent experts without legal limitations, and requests for expert testimony have increased, especially at the beginning of legislative processes or in specialized subcommittees. However, limited staffing and financial resources hinder systematic involvement from university scholars, think tank analysts, and other experts. Collaborations with public administrations or the Bank of Spain occur but often include political judgments from the executive. In 2022, the Congress, in collaboration with the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), established the Science and Technology Office to prepare reports on scientific and technical topics of interest to members of parliament.

Effective  
Legislative  
Oversight  
Score: 8

Article 110 of the constitution allows committees of either the Congress of Deputies or the Senate to summon government members to answer questions, provided the request comes from at least 70 deputies or one-fifth of the committee members. The Bureau of Congress and the Board of Spokespersons must vote on the request. The ruling party may attempt to reject opposition requests, but if approved, ministers are obliged to respond. Ministers often comply with these invitations and even request to report on their departments’ matters.

The power to request information is a specific aspect of the Cortes Generales’ control function under Article 66.2 of the constitution. The government must provide requested information within 30 days in the most suitable manner. This legal framework allows the government some flexibility, such as withholding documents on grounds of secrecy or delivering them incompletely or late. Access to documents may vary by ministry. According to

parliamentary sources, the government generally provides the requested documents in full and within a reasonable time, though delays and shortcomings prompt parliamentary claims of rights violations.

Effective  
Legislative  
Investigations  
Score: 8

Opposition parties can initiate investigations within the legislature against the governing party’s will. According to the standing order of Congress, the Plenary of Congress – at the proposal of the government, the Bureau, two Parliamentary Groups, or one-fifth of the members of the House – may agree to set up a Commission of Inquiry into any matter of public interest. Those summoned by a committee of inquiry must comply or face serious disobedience charges.

During the 2019-2023 legislative period, several Commissions of Investigation were established, requiring appearances from the former prime minister and ministers. In the current legislative term beginning in August 2023, the opposition party Esquerra Republicana, supported by Bildu and BNG, registered several commissions, including one to investigate alleged Pegasus spying in Congress. The agreement between the Socialist Party and Junts per Catalunya in November 2023 includes creating commissions to investigate lawfare related to the Catalonia conflict. However, judges are “independent, irremovable, accountable, and subject only to the rule of law,” according to Article 117.1 of the constitution.

Commissions of Inquiry address legislative defects or monitor government actions, serving as political control instruments with significant media impact. However, their scope is limited as their conclusions are not binding, and decisions need not be based on their findings. Partisan organization of conclusions can undermine overall coherence, and findings should be reported to the Prosecutor’s Office for further action.

Legislative  
Capacity for  
Guiding Policy  
Score: 8

The responsibilities of the regular parliamentary committees in the Congress of Deputies and the Senate align with government ministries’ functions. Since 2020, 22 ministries have been monitored by 21 standing legislative committees in Congress, renamed to match ministerial portfolios. Changes in committee structures were approved in December 2023 due to the new government’s redesign of ministries, ensuring no mismatch (Congreso 2023). However, limited committee resources present significant challenges for effective monitoring.

Non-permanent committees address cross-cutting policy areas, though no commission oversees the core executive, the office of the president. Committees effectively monitor and discuss ministerial activities, and

opposition parties can chair legislative committees, reflecting the Chamber's power distribution. For example, during 2020-2023, the Finance Commission was chaired by the opposition.

Committee work is crucial for preparing legislative acts and reaching agreements among parliamentary parties, especially in minority governments. However, during the analyzed period, legislative capacity faced constraints due to increased emergency legislation use, exemplified by rule-by-decree practices to bypass parliamentary scrutiny. The Bills of Parliament mechanism, intended to facilitate legislative projects, was misused to avoid mandatory assessments by esteemed bodies like the Council of State. This practice empowered an acting government to expedite bill passage without proper legislative processing, even in crucial matters like the Amnesty Law.



# Governing with Foresight

## I. Coordination

### Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective  
Coordination  
Mechanisms of  
the GO/PMO  
Score: 8

Spain’s Government Office (Ministry of the Presidency) and Prime Minister’s Office (Gabinete) play crucial roles in evaluating proposals from line ministries, focusing on political, strategic, and technical aspects. The Government Office typically handles drafting and technical issues, while the Prime Minister’s Office concentrates on political and strategic considerations. This institutionalized process occurs weekly, with representatives from all ministries meeting at the cabinet meeting preparatory committee. Advisers from the Prime Minister’s Office also participate in this committee and in the specialized ministerial committee on economic affairs, which assists the Council of Ministers (see “Cabinet Committees”).

The Prime Minister’s Office is structured somewhat to reflect various ministerial portfolios but lacks comprehensive policy expertise for thorough executive oversight. The Government Office, which organizes Council of Ministers’ sessions and is headed by the minister of the presidency, evaluates the substantive content of draft bills to some extent, despite lacking sectoral policy expertise. Ministries are expected to involve the Prime Minister’s Office informally in preparing policy proposals. Although these ministries are formally autonomous, the legal and political hierarchy within the government facilitates and encourages this consultation pattern with the prime minister’s team.

The Annual Regulatory Plan of the General State Administration outlines the legislative or regulatory initiatives that various ministerial departments plan to submit each calendar year to the Council of Ministers for approval.

Two powerful ministerial committees prepare cabinet meetings in Spain: the Committee for Economic Affairs and the Committee of Undersecretaries and

Secretaries of State. The Committee for Economic Affairs reviews and schedules economic or budgetary interministerial coordination. The Committee of Undersecretaries and Secretaries of State filters and settles issues before cabinet meetings, preparing the Council of Ministers' weekly sessions held every Tuesday. The minister of the presidency chairs this committee.

To implement the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), existing departments have been assigned new responsibilities. For example, the Economic Office of the Prime Minister serves as a monitoring unit, the Ministry of Finance's department for EU funds acts as the managing unit, and the General Intervention Board of the State Administration functions as an oversight and audit unit.

During 2022–2023, the lack of experience in managing coalition governments and partisan differences impacted the effectiveness and coherence of policy formulation, leading to coordination problems among line ministries. To streamline consultation, the Prime Minister's Office increased personnel and financial resources to evaluate line ministries' policy proposals.

Effective  
Coordination  
Mechanisms  
within the  
Ministerial  
Bureaucracy  
Score: 7

The two most important senior bureaucratic positions in the ministries are the secretaries of state, akin to junior ministers but not formally part of the cabinet, and the undersecretaries, career civil servants acting as department administrators. These officials meet in the General Committee of Undersecretaries and Secretaries of State to coordinate upcoming policy initiatives, often the first time other ministries learn of a policy initiative from a different department. This committee effectively prepares the Council of Ministers' weekly sessions held on Tuesdays.

The head of the Government Office chairs the preparatory committee meetings, where all draft bills, appointments, and other ministerial proposals are discussed and scheduled for the Council of Ministers' agenda. A provisional agenda is published a week before the cabinet meeting, and the Government Office circulates all relevant documents for discussion by the line ministers.

On Tuesday mornings, the prime minister's advisers assess the relative importance of agenda items and identify likely divergent positions. The preparatory committee performs an important gatekeeping function by returning problematic proposals to the appropriate line ministry and forwarding the remaining proposals to the Council of Ministers.

High-ranking civil servants play a crucial role in preparing policy proposals within each line ministry but have limited involvement in horizontal coordination with other ministries. Due to strong departmentalization, each ministry tends to act within its area of competence, avoiding proposals that may involve other ministries. Although many administrative interministerial committees exist formally, they do not effectively coordinate policy proposals or decision-making between ministries.

Under the Digitalization Plan for Public Administrations 2021–2025, all ministries must draft digital-transformation action plans to simplify interdepartmental working procedures, electronically exchange information, address information classification, and implement information exchange standards. The Digital Agenda 2026 fosters digital transformation of interministerial coordination, introducing a corporate data warehouse to break down information silos between various ministerial departments and creating a strategic framework for vertical inter-administrative coordination.

Civil servants exchange information across ministerial boundaries in their daily work at both the vertical and horizontal levels. The High Commission for Personnel and the National Institute for Public Administration provide incentives for interministerial exchange. However, specialized corps tend to aggravate administrative fragmentation, as each seeks to control a department according to its specialization, leading to a “silo” structure, where each ministry, department, agency, organism, or public entity follows its own operating logic.

Complementary  
Informal  
Coordination  
Score: 8

When interministerial problems cannot be solved through informal contacts, meetings between officials from the involved ministries are organized, often relying on the fact that senior civil servants belong to the same specialized corps or share a network of former colleagues. To foster informal mechanisms within the coalition cabinet, meetings of the heads of ministers’ private offices were introduced, although their communication flow is limited.

Informal meetings across various levels of government are frequent. Several sectoral conferences have established working groups to foster vertical informal coordination and support formal coordination. In the context of the coalition government, these informal arenas have become very useful, but their effectiveness depends on the ministers’ personality and political status. For example, they could not avoid the internal controversy and cabinet division over the law on sexual abuse, leading to Podemos’ cabinet ministers voting against their own government in parliament.

### Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively  
Setting and  
Monitoring  
National  
(Minimum)  
Standards  
Score: 7

Increased territorial inequalities among public administrations constrain subnational self-governments from meeting national minimum standards for delivering public services. The central government has always aimed to ensure uniform national standards, but this has not been completely effective. Regional governments sometimes design and implement their own public policies without following clearly defined national standards. Few national standards or performance indicators exist for important policy areas such as social services, education, or transport.

In some policy fields, subnational governments use key performance indicators to implement reforms with minimum standards. In other fields, like open government or climate governance, some autonomous communities have adopted higher standards than the national government. As a result, variations in the quality of public services offered by autonomous communities exist, as reflected in recent education (PISA 2023), public health (FADSP 2023), and quality of government (European Commission 2021) reports. Minimum standards are set by basic framework national legislation but are not enforced effectively. The High Inspectorate has not been particularly effective in monitoring the provision of services by autonomous communities.

Regulations on financial sustainability within public administration and local governments have strengthened the central government’s tools to ensure regional and local governments meet national minimum standards. Sanctions for noncompliance are limited. Article 155 of the constitution allows the central government to intervene in an autonomous community, but this instrument has been applied only twice.

In 2022–2023, the national Ministry of Health developed a reform to enhance coordination and multilevel governance within the national health system. The government is establishing a National Public Health Center to improve governance and foster cooperation between the autonomous communities’ healthcare and public health services. The Sectoral Conference for Public Health monitors compliance with minimum standards in the NHS. Other sectoral conferences monitor the implementation of common agreements, especially regarding the execution of the RRP, where compliance is tied to fund transfers.

Effective  
Multilevel  
Cooperation  
Score: 7

The constitution does not establish an institutional framework for shared government, continuous political dialogue, legislative cooperation, or conflict resolution among different government levels. Autonomous communities do not participate in central state decision-making, even in matters directly affecting them. Sectoral conferences have assumed the role of facilitating cooperation between the central government and AC governments. Each conference establishes a specific framework for cooperation among administrative levels, with some having a permanent organizational structure and meeting regularly, while others have never convened.

Although sectoral conferences have a political composition, they focus on technical matters and do not serve as channels for political relations. They operate hierarchically, and some have adopted internal rules of procedure allowing shared decision-making. These conferences have been crucial for implementing the RRP. Since December 2022, 139 sectoral conferences and over 35 bilateral meetings with autonomous communities have been held regarding RRP implementation. These meetings have seen the adoption of criteria for fund distribution and monitoring.

The Conference of Presidents represents the highest level of multilateral cooperation between the central government and autonomous communities. The new standing order for the conference, adopted in March 2022, establishes a permanent secretariat and specific rules for adopting common agreements, though the planned number of meetings has not been met.

Coordination and consultation mechanisms do not include local self-government. Intergovernmental relations between the central government and autonomous communities concerning local matters were organized through the Sectoral Conference for Local Affairs, which was dissolved in June 2022 due to inactivity. The National Commission for Local Administration is the permanent body for collaboration between the General State Administration and local administration. The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) cooperates with the government in several dialogue forums on local government matters.

Subnational self-government officials frequently express dissatisfaction with the lack of institutionalized participation in central government decision-making processes, particularly in education policy. Institutionalized participation would reduce conflict and improve framework legislation. Local self-government political decision-makers often express dissatisfaction at not being able to participate in central and regional government decision-making processes, such as those related to immigration.

## II. Consensus-Building

### Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing  
Scientific  
Knowledge  
Effectively  
Score: 6

Recent institutional innovations in Spain have aimed to incorporate scientific expertise into both the executive and legislative branches, marking a shift from the traditional reliance on in-house experts. The most significant of these innovations is the National Foresight and Strategy Office, established in 2020. Now a Directorate General of the Presidency of the Spanish Government, this office analyzes future challenges and opportunities to help the country prepare for them. It collaborates closely with ministries, state bodies, universities, think tanks, foundations, NGOs, and civil society organizations. This office has become a regular interlocutor with the European Commission on policy strategy, contributing to Spain's third-place ranking in the previous SGI strategic planning indicator (Sustainable Governance Indicators 2022).

However, there are no institutional mechanisms to ensure a formalized connection between the government and external experts. Although university scholars, think tank analysts, and practitioners are often consulted by ministries, this typically occurs only at the beginning of the legislative process to prepare draft bills and assess their impact.

To ensure the participation of civil society groups and the private sector in the design and implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), several consultative councils have been established. In 2022, the government sought external advice for fiscal reform, and the names of the experts and the final report were published. These experts represented a broad geographic spectrum and diverse perspectives. The Ministry of Labor based its 2022 initiative to increase the minimum wage on a report from a commission of experts, whose names and the final report were also published.

The Spanish government presents its legislative projects on a sound scientific basis, leveraging expertise from European and international institutions. Generally, during the period under review, the scientific community was not particularly critical of the government's central plans, such as those concerning climate change, digitalization, or economic transition. However, there have been frequent criticisms from non-governmental actors regarding the reform of the civil code and the amnesty law, popularly known as the "only yes means yes" law, which allowed some convicted offenders to have their sentences reduced.

**Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development**

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Capital and  
Labor)  
Score: 8

The Economic and Social Council (ESC) consists of employers’ organizations, trade unions, and other societal representatives, as provided for in the constitution. Other government advisory bodies are established by specific policies. The ESC and other advisory bodies issue opinions on draft legislation, but these opinions are not binding on the government.

The extent of labor representatives’ participation in executive policymaking varies with the governing party. Under the current left-wing executive, particularly since 2020, this cooperation has been limited. Between 2022 and 2023, trade unions, business organizations, and the government signed several agreements, including those related to temporary layoffs. The government has been successful in moderating disputes within employer organizations and trade unions and has supported agreements such as increasing the minimum wage. However, members of trade unions and employer organizations have expressed dissatisfaction with their participation in the policymaking process, indicating that the government does not always follow up on consultation talks or present policy initiatives before these talks begin.

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Social Welfare)  
Score: 7

Government officials and CSOs frequently engage in social welfare, though this role varies across policy areas depending on decentralization and the governing parties. For example, in youth policies, CSOs’ participation is channeled through the Council of Youth. However, the frequent use of emergency legislation has limited CSOs’ effective participation in legislative proposal preparation.

The government has also convened numerous meetings with social stakeholders to structure and monitor the implementation of the RRP. According to Eurofound, while the outcomes and overall satisfaction of social partners were positive, there were complaints about insufficient preparation time and lack of timely background information. The government did not provide the necessary background information in a timely manner. As a result, the social partners often found it challenging to prepare for work sessions. The government’s involvement in moderating disputes among CSOs or following up on consultation talks is less compared to its role with unions and employers. The Minister for Social Affairs, appointed in 2022 and 2023, ranked low in terms of meetings with CSOs, having held only nine meetings according to their public agenda.

Effective  
Involvement of  
Civil Society  
Organizations  
(Environment)  
Score: 7

Leading environmental groups and CSOs have gained technical competence and are increasingly engaged by the government in expert commissions, public hearings, and performance monitoring. Governmental objectives for climate change and energy transition are discussed with CSOs. The Ministry of Ecologic Transition has established an online platform listing all ongoing consultations, allowing CSOs to participate before regulatory development and during the draft regulation stage. Environmental CSOs express satisfaction with their participation, with limited criticism.

During the review period, the frequent use of emergency legislation has limited CSOs’ effective participation in legislative proposal preparation. However, the current Minister for Environment ranks seventh in frequency of meetings with civil society representatives among ministers appointed between 2012 and 2023, with 72 meetings.

**Openness of Government**

Open  
Government  
Score: 8

The Spanish government frequently publishes data and information to enable citizen accountability. The centralized online platform, [transparencia.gob.es](https://transparencia.gob.es), lists all ongoing legislative initiatives and consultations, facilitating citizen participation. This platform provides access to the yearly regulatory planning agenda for primary laws and subordinate regulations. It also annually publishes statistics on citizen utilization of the platform and hosts content related to transparency and good governance in public administration.

In December 2022, the president of the government presented the annual report “Cumpliendo” (Fulfilling), enhancing the accountability of the executive’s work. Since 2019, Spain has ranked 8th among OECD countries in open, useful, and reusable government data.

In October 2020, the government approved the Fourth Open Government Plan (2020–2024). According to the Transparency and Accountability Working Group, which monitors the plan’s implementation, only 2% of the planned initiatives had not been started by November 2023. The monitoring report is published in a user-friendly format on the open government data portal, where citizens can also provide feedback and comments.

Under the Open Government Plan, the government has adopted measures to foster data-driven management, particularly in the field of justice, and promoted data reuse by amending Law 37/2007 on the reuse of public sector information in 2023. Since 2011, the State Technical Committee for the



Administration of e-Justice has promoted the interoperability of systems and applications used by the Administration of Justice.

In line with these efforts and as part of the RRP, the Council of Ministers approved measures in December 2023 for the digital and procedural transformation of the Justice Administration. These measures include creating the Justice Folder, which allows individuals to consult their case files and request appointments. An Electronic Judicial File is also being promoted to include all documents forming part of a judicial procedure.

### III. Sensemaking

#### Preparedness

Capacity for  
Strategic  
Foresight and  
Anticipatory  
Innovation  
Score: 7

The National Foresight and Strategy Office, a Directorate General of the Presidency of the Spanish Government, is responsible for analyzing future challenges and opportunities and planning multiple scenarios to prepare for them. Reporting directly to the president and his chief of cabinet, it consists of a multidisciplinary team of researchers. While the office's impact on work practices and organizational culture within ministerial bureaucracies has been limited, the new Sánchez government, which took office in November 2023, has highlighted the office's positive impact and announced plans to strengthen it and increase cooperation between the office and the administration.

Several high-level policy units support policy implementation in areas such as open government, knowledge management, and digital transformation. Examples include the State Secretariat for Digital Transformation of the Ministry of Economy and Digital Transformation and the Directorate General of Public Governance of the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration. In 2023, Spain launched the first national Agency for the Supervision of Artificial Intelligence in the EU.

Spain has invested significantly in the digitalization of its public sector, ranking well above the EU average in the EU Digital Public Administration Indicators from 2012 to 2022. Significant resources for digital transition over the coming years are committed by the NextGenerationEU program, although these resources are limited to a specific timeframe and conditional on fulfilling specific objectives. Resources for experimentation are more limited, and the government has not clearly engaged in policy experimentation through various innovative techniques.

The Learning Strategy of the National Institute for Public Administration 2023–2024 does not include strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation as essential skills for high-level civil servants.

During the Spanish EU presidency, the government presented the strategic plan “Resilient EU2030” to enhance the resilience and global competitiveness of the European Union in sectors such as energy, digital technologies, health, and food.

### Analytical Competence

Effective  
Regulatory  
Impact  
Assessment  
Score: 7

Spain lacks an independent body that periodically evaluates the quality of the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) process. However, since 2018, the Office on Regulatory Coordination and Quality within the Ministry of the Presidency has been responsible for ensuring the quality, coordination, and coherence of executive rule-making activities. Additionally, a Report of Regulatory Impact Analysis was established in 2017, managed by the Ministry for Digital Transformation and Public Function, to anticipate the impact of executive initiatives in terms of budget, competences, and gender. These innovations, however, focus more on technical issues than on substantive policy or societal impact assessments.

The Office on Regulatory Coordination and Quality oversees the implementation of better regulation requirements and facilitates secure communication with ministerial departments. The Ministry of Territorial Policy reviews the quality of various RIA components with the autonomous communities and oversees public consultation and participation processes. This ministry also promotes and monitors the reduction of administrative burdens and public consultations.

Other line ministries have specific units for impact analysis, such as the Directorate General for Environmental Quality and Assessment at the Ministry for Ecological Transition. The Council of State assesses the legality and development of regulations, monitors the public administration’s functioning, and reviews the legal quality of regulations initiated by the executive, issuing statements in response to consultations from ministries and other state entities.

Preliminary RIAs for legal norms are sometimes developed by entities other than the executive, with special parliamentary committees or stakeholders occasionally involved in studying particular issues. However, most RIA processes rely on internal ministerial resources, and the outcomes are not

always made public. The Regulatory Impact Analysis Report consolidates information accompanying a regulatory project, including its impacts on socioeconomic indicators, administrative burdens, gender, public budgets, the environment, and business compliance costs. Behavioral research methods are not utilized in RIAs.

Effective  
Sustainability  
Checks  
Score: 5

Adopted in 2021, the Spanish Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 was approved by the Council of Ministers with input from all ministerial departments, autonomous communities, and local entities. Since then, the government has established a comprehensive institutional governance system to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form a common basis for decision-making.

The Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 holds executive powers for developing and coordinating actions related to the SDGs. The government's Delegated Commission for Agenda 2030 oversees interministerial dialogue, while the Sectoral Conference for Agenda 2030 facilitates coordination with autonomous community governments. The Sustainable Development Council acts as an advisory body, involving the private sector, trade unions, academia, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Additionally, the parliamentary Joint Commission for the Coordination of the Agenda 2030 Strategy monitors the implementation of these initiatives.

The National Strategy includes 144 specific impact indicators for monitoring SDG implementation, which are also referenced in the RRP and the annual budget law. The action plan for implementation includes specific policies, such as the National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (2019–2023). The Council of Ministers approved the 2023 Progress Report in July 2023.

The RIA framework does not include explicit indicators for sustainability checks, focusing instead on gender impact and administrative costs.

Effective Ex Post  
Evaluation  
Score: 5

Spain has been steadily intensifying its better regulation initiatives, expanding beyond administrative simplification to include stakeholder engagement and ex post evaluation. The Office on Regulatory Coordination and Quality oversees the implementation of better regulation requirements and supervises the definition of objectives and methodology for the ex post evaluation of regulations covered by RIAs. However, it does not directly scrutinize the ex post evaluations.

The Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility (AIReF) handles Ex Post Evaluation related to public spending and the efficiency of public policies.

While its reports are not binding, the administration must justify any decision not to follow the recommendations. Ex post evaluation has been reinforced concerning the RRP implementation, with IGAE and AIReF, along with institutions with diverse technical expertise, handling the evaluations.

In December 2022, the parliament approved Law 27/2022 on institutionalizing public policy evaluation within the General State Administration. This law aims to improve public policy evaluation as a transversal tool for all public policies, creating three new bodies: the State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies, a Higher Evaluation Commission to coordinate different ministries, and a General Evaluation Council representing civil society. These entities are still pending development.

According to Law 27/2022, the results of ex post evaluations must be published on the Transparency Portal. The law includes specific standards for implementing ex post evaluations based on the content, purpose, and timeframe of the evaluated public policy. However, these innovations are still awaiting development.

Frequent reforms aimed at establishing an evaluation agency and AIReF's lack of financial and human resources have limited the effectiveness of Ex Post evaluations. Nevertheless, AIReF has become a competent and critical institution, delivering high-quality, scientifically sound reports. Despite these efforts, the evaluations have not resulted in significant legislative changes.

Most autonomous communities have developed additional systematic ex post evaluation programs for their public policies, but the practical impact of these measures has been limited.

# Sustainable Policymaking

## I. Economic Sustainability

### Circular Economy

Circular  
Economy Policy  
Efforts and  
Commitment  
Score: 7

The Spanish government recognizes the importance of incorporating the circular economy to promote the shift toward a sustainable development model. In June 2020, the Council of Ministers approved the Spanish Circular Economy Strategy 2030. The strategy aligns with the objectives of the two EU Circular Economy Action Plans, the European Green Pact, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The strategy sets several comprehensive quantitative objectives to be achieved by 2030, including reducing domestic material consumption by 30% relative to national GDP, using 2010 as a reference, and reducing waste by 15% compared to 2010 waste levels.

Three-year action plans outline the administration’s measures for promoting the circular economy across different sectoral policies. The first action plan includes 116 measures to be implemented by 11 ministries.

The Circular Economy Council is responsible for monitoring the implementation and drafting of annual improvement proposals. The Interministerial Commission for Circular Economy comprises representatives from ministries whose policies directly impact the transition toward a circular economy. This commission must hold a plenary session at least once a year to coordinate line ministries and their sector policies in efforts to foster a circular economy.

The RRP includes a specific priority area (Component 12) titled “Spain’s Industrial Policy 2030.” Adopted in March 2022, this component comprises a series of reforms and investments intended to lay the foundation for implementing the Circular Economy Strategy and waste regulations (Government of Spain 2022).

By 2021, Spain ranked among the European countries with a lower circular material use rate. The electoral context has slowed down the implementation of the plans set forth in the government’s commitment.

**Viable Critical Infrastructure**

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to a Resilient  
Critical  
Infrastructure  
Score: 8

The National Critical Infrastructure Protection Plan (PNPIC), approved in 2016, contains criteria and guidelines for mobilizing operational responses and measures to ensure the constant modification and up-to-date protection of critical infrastructures. The National Security Strategy adopted in 2021 includes the protection of critical infrastructure as a key to addressing threats to Spain’s interests and values.

The PNPIC has frequently been updated. The Administration’s Strategic Sector Plan in 2021 involves the designation of 80 new critical operators and 137 new critical infrastructures. Specific action plans refer to the financial system, nuclear industry, energy (divided into oil, gas, and electricity), transport (divided into air, rail, maritime, road, and urban transport), water, chemical industry, space, ICT, food, health, and facilities and research.

During the review period, the Royal Decree Law 7/2022 of March 29 was adopted to ensure the security of fifth-generation electronic communications networks and services. According to the law, the National Security Scheme for 5G networks and services shall be reviewed at least every four years or whenever circumstances so advise, under the responsibility of the Minister of Economy and Digital Transformation. Spain ranks fourth among the world’s countries in the Global Cybersecurity Index 2020.

The Center for Critical Infrastructure Protection (CNPIC) is the body within the Ministry of the Interior responsible for coordinating and supervising all activities assigned to the Secretary of State for Security regarding the protection of critical infrastructures in the national territory. The CNPIC maintains the National Critical Infrastructure Protection Plan and determines the level of criticality. The CNPIC manages a network of more than 300 entities and around 1,200 security plans, including 12 ministerial departments and autonomous community administrations, to facilitate horizontal and vertical policy coordination and implementation.

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving a Decarbonized Energy System by 2050  
Score: 9

**Decarbonized Energy System**

In December 2020, Spain adopted the Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (ENCP) 2021–2030, which includes measures on both mitigation and adaptation. The long-term goal of the plan is to make Spain carbon neutral by 2050, achieve a 90% reduction in GHG emissions from 1990 levels, and base the electricity system exclusively on renewable sources by 2050. In May 2021, the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law was passed, establishing specific national targets for 2030 and detailed measures to fulfill these objectives. For instance, financial resources and environmental and energy sustainability criteria must be incorporated into all public procurement in a cross-cutting and mandatory manner.

The overall strategy is broken down into sector-specific action plans, such as The Self-consumption Roadmap and The Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap. In December 2022, the Council of Ministers approved the Strategic Project for Economic Recovery and Transformation, focusing on the industrial decarbonization of sectors like non-metallic mineral products, the chemical industry, oil refining, metallurgy, and paper manufacturing.

The Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge (MITECO) is responsible for the vertical and horizontal coordination and implementation of these strategies. Since early 2022, autonomous communities must report on their energy and climate plans, detailing measures adopted and planned in line with the Spanish Energy Transition Law’s objectives.

As part of the RRP, the government moved its 2025 energy transition targets forward to 2023 and increased investments, with almost 40% of these investments earmarked for the ecological transition. The European Commission assessed the implementation of the 2023 targets as “well under way” (European Commission 2023).

**Adaptive Labor Markets**

Policies Targeting an Adaptive Labor Market  
Score: 7

One of the RRP goals is to create “new policies for a dynamic, resilient, and inclusive labor market.” Following this plan, the Spanish Strategy of Active Support to Employment 2021–2024 was approved, and in April 2022, a labor reform came into effect. The reform introduced stricter restrictions on temporary contracts, reducing temporary employment in the private sector, while increasing flexibility in employment contracts. This enables companies

to efficiently mobilize and demobilize labor in response to fluctuations in the demand for their products and services.

During periods of short-term economic shocks, companies have the flexibility to suspend labor contracts or reduce working days, helping them navigate crises without costly redundancies. In cases where the challenges faced by a company are not linked to a temporary downturn in the business cycle but are caused by a more enduring shift in demand, a training plan for the affected workers must be formulated.

Law 3/2023, enacted on February 28, aims to transform the decentralized Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal (SEPE) into a state agency to enhance speed, agility, and flexibility in active labor policy. The law prioritizes job training, offering two types of training contracts: alternation training, which combines paid work with training, and training for professional practice suitable to the level of studies.

Coordination and planning of employment policy between the Spanish Employment Agency and the public employment services of the autonomous communities is a priority. Local corporations, other public entities, and private entities involved in employment policy implementation will collaborate with the Spanish Employment Agency. The law also aims to improve the effectiveness of public employment services through continuous evaluation. The Civil Service Law adopted in December 2023 reinforces transparency and agility in selection processes and performance evaluation.

Policies  
Targeting an  
Inclusive Labor  
Market  
Score: 7

According to the OECD, the activation requirements for the unemployed are lower than in most other OECD countries. In December 2023, the government agreed to increase unemployment benefits for the first six months and make them compatible with employment. After the first six months, the subsidies are reduced to incentivize the unemployed to return to the labor market. However, the law was not passed by parliament on January 10, 2024, due to the planned cuts in unemployment benefits for those over 50. It will probably be resubmitted (Royal Decree Law 7/2023 of December 19).

To encourage and empower people to combine accessible out-of-work benefits with active labor market programs, unemployment benefits are compatible with grants and subsidies for attending vocational or on-the-job training or for training placements. In 2022 the Council of Ministers regulated the Minimum Basic Income (IMV) as compatible with income from work or self-employment, as well as grants and subsidies for attending vocational training, to improve the opportunities for social and employment inclusion for those who receive this benefit.



The OECD suggests that Spain's low female labor force participation rate may be attributed to existing tax disincentives for second earners. Unlike many OECD countries that employ individual-based income taxation, Spain offers joint declaration with reductions based on household income composition, which benefits single-income households but creates disincentives for second income earners.

The 2021 labor market law fostered the promotion of training for young people through financial incentives. Law 3/2022 creates an integrated system for vocational education, while the Law 3/2023 of February 28 on Employment implements instruments for active employment policies and a strategic plan for vocational training. Although participation in vocational training remains limited, it is increasing rapidly. Law 3/2023 also aims to promote equality between women and men in access, permanence, and promotion in employment, as well as the reconciliation of personal, family, and working life. It includes measures aimed at facilitating geographical mobility and promoting recruitment in sectors of activity other than those in which individuals would normally have worked.

Law 10/2021 established a legal framework and guarantees for the extension and standardization of remote work.

Policies  
Targeting Labor  
Market Risks  
Score: 8

For the first time, Law 2/2023 establishes that all individuals participating in external training or academic internships as part of company, institution, or entity training programs must pay social security contributions, thereby extending existing social insurance schemes to previously excluded categories. The labor market law of 2021 reinstated the precedence of sectoral agreements over firm-level agreements for wage negotiations. Higher-level agreements take priority over firm-level ones, with specific exceptions in areas such as overtime payment, distribution of working time, and conciliation. The new labor regulation encompasses agreements on more than 12 different items, including criteria to balance the representation of men and women in training contracts, plans for reducing temporary employment, and access to training programs for fixed-term employees, among others. In this context, the reform has the potential to enhance the role of collective bargaining and social dialogue. All workers may benefit from improvements in protection negotiated by the unions with employers.

The lack of a unique personal ID has historically created several problems for the portability of social rights. Moreover, procedures are not uniform across autonomous communities. These regions use different operational tools, request different ID numbers for primary identification, and adopt varying

strategies to identify people when the primary ID number does not exist (Muñoz de Bustillo, 2022). Autonomous communities also employ different strategies for undocumented persons. The Organic Law 3/2018, of 5 December, on the Protection of Personal Data and the Guarantee of Digital Rights, includes the right to portability. The OECD suggests enhancing regional transferability of social and housing rights to improve system efficiency and enable individuals to leverage employment opportunities in more distant locations (OECD 2023). Additionally, improving communication with households eligible for the minimum income guarantee could increase its utilization.

**Sustainable Taxation**

Policies  
Targeting  
Adequate Tax  
Revenue  
Score: 7

According to the OECD, tax compliance in Spain has improved recently. Spain demonstrates commendable performance in tax compliance and administration, excelling in the digitalization of its tax processes. This digital advancement helps reduce tax arrears and lowers compliance costs. There is potential for further improvement by allocating more resources to the Tax Administration Agency to enhance system efficiency. As outlined in the RRP, the fiscal system is being modernized to reduce the informal economy and tax fraud by increasing staff and tax investigations. Tax reforms within the RRP, aligned with recommendations from an expert committee, aim to align Spain’s revenue-to-GDP ratio more closely with the EU average. These reforms focus on bolstering corporate, wealth, and environmental taxation while reducing tax exemptions. However, experts note that these changes are still pending, as Spain needs to improve tax revenue to balance the increased public deficit accumulated over the last decade. In late 2022, a tax reform was implemented, raising the asset tax for wealthier residents while reducing it for more modest families (see also “Policies Targeting Tax Equity”).

Policies  
Targeting Tax  
Equity  
Score: 6

Horizontal equity in Spain’s tax system is affected by the asymmetrical tax competence of autonomous communities. There are two distinct models: the common regime, applied uniformly across most autonomous communities, and the foral regime, which grants broad fiscal and financial self-governance to the Basque Country and Navarre, allowing them to set and regulate their own tax systems. Significant regional differences exist among the common regime autonomous communities, leading to varying tax rates for similar economic players in different regions. The main differences relate to taxes on revenues, donations, and asset transfers.

To improve horizontal equity, a finance ministry expert committee recommended harmonizing the tax system across autonomous communities in 2022. However, it is unlikely this measure will be implemented soon. Some regional governments, particularly Madrid, have faced criticism for cutting taxes on revenues and other items.

Regarding vertical equity, Spain's tax revenues relative to GDP are modest, primarily driven by labor taxation. Social security contributions from workers and the self-employed are regressive, increasing inequality by reducing the redistributive effect of direct taxation. In 2022, the proportion of labor taxes to both GDP and total tax revenues was slightly below the EU average, as were revenues from consumption and environmental taxes. Spain's tax scheme reduces inequality less than the EU average. To increase tax revenues, there is potential to leverage tax bases more extensively, such as implementing wealth-related taxes and more broadly applying the "polluter pays" principle (European Commission 2023).

The RRP addresses tax system reforms, following the EC recommendation to make taxes more progressive. The 2021 budget included increased tax rates for high-income individuals and corporations. In 2023, the government implemented tax reductions benefiting low- and medium-income households and small and medium-sized enterprises, while raising taxes for wealthier individuals, especially those with substantial capital income. A "solidarity tax" was introduced in 2023 on assets worth at least €3 million, impacting wealth, personal income, and corporate taxes, and generating €635 million in revenue.

Policies Aimed at  
Minimizing  
Compliance  
Costs  
Score: 7

According to the Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, in 2022, a significant portion of the Spanish population – one in two citizens – felt they did not know what taxes were for, and many were unaware of the taxes they were paying. Concurrently, one in four people believed the state's role should be minimal, intervening only to correct market imbalances. However, most citizens would pass a tax knowledge test, as evidenced by the percentage of correct answers.

As part of the RRP, the Tax Agency is developing a new model for remote taxpayer interaction and information services. The Integral Digital Administration aims to increase administrative capacities for tax collection and minimize compliance costs for taxpayers. The agency will assist taxpayers through multiple channels, streamlining service management and delivery. This centralized control enhances service quality and facilitates the development of appropriate IT tools and training methods.

Policies Aimed at Internalizing Negative and Positive Externalities  
Score: 6

Spain performs slightly below the OECD average in green budgeting. In 2021, environment-related tax revenues amounted to 1.8% of GDP, compared to the OECD average of 2.0%. Pollution and resource taxes on waste, water pollution, and abstraction account for a small portion of environmental tax revenue. Additionally, energy and transport taxes contribute minimally to this category.

While autonomous communities have a history of legislating environmental taxes, the Spanish government adopted its first green taxes in 2023. A finance ministry expert committee recommended increasing environmental taxes, including higher rates on car registration, diesel, and agricultural fuel, and new taxes on airplane tickets.

Investments in knowledge transfer and job creation benefit from special tax treatment. Spain’s corporate tax rate within the eurozone is moderate at 25%, with incentives and tax exemptions reducing the effective rate to around 20%. Spanish regulations permit the carryforward of unused tax credits for research, development, and innovation (RDI) investments. Spain has one of the most advantageous “patent box” regimes in the EU, allowing up to a 60% exemption of net income from specific intangible assets.

Tax policies vary among autonomous communities. For example, the Community of Madrid approved a tax reduction for foreign investors in 2023, targeting individuals who have lived outside Spain for at least five years and wish to invest and transfer their tax residence to the region. Specifically, 20% of the total investment in financial assets or real estate may be deducted.

**Sustainable Budgeting**

Sustainable Budgeting Policies  
Score: 8

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, and during the period under review, the suspension of EU fiscal rules provided various levels of government with considerable discretion over overall debt limits. However, this also introduced uncertainty about the normative context of their medium-term budget planning. AIREF warned that debt will start to rise in 2025 if the structural deficit of 4% is not reduced. It pointed out that the RRP is a good opportunity to combine fiscal stimulus with deficit containment. In this regard, the RRP should be seen as an opportunity for the consolidation of public finances. Moreover, the budget for 2024 was issued by an acting government, which supports this direction.

The amendment to section 135 of the Spanish constitution aims to enforce the principle of budgetary stability, binding all public administrations, and to

achieve economic and social sustainability. Loans intended for servicing the interest and capital of the state's public debt will always be considered part of budgetary expenditures, and their repayment shall be accorded absolute priority. These allocations cannot be altered or amended as long as they adhere to the terms of the issuance.

Article 135 does not refer to controls and sanctions on sub-central authorities in case of noncompliance with debt limits. However, Organic Law 2/2012 of 27 April on Budgetary Stability and Financial Sustainability specifies the corrective and repressive measures the Ministry of Finance and Public Administrations can take in case of noncompliance. According to Article 32, if the budget settlement results in a surplus, this surplus shall be used to reduce the level of net indebtedness. In the case of the social security system, the surplus shall be applied as a priority to the Reserve Fund to meet the system's future needs.

In general terms, the budgetary process is very transparent. The government delivers its budgetary plan to the European Commission to show how the budget includes the economic policy recommendations presented by the Commission, as well as the long-term planning commitments of the government within the RRP.

The SDGs are mentioned in the 2023 budget law. Virtually all budgetary policies are in harmony with at least two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with most policies aligning with between 4 and 7 SDGs. Similarly, 58% of budgetary programs align with two or more SDGs. Notably, social SDGs are prominent in terms of the number of policies and programs aligned. It is important to emphasize the role of the Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan in aligning budgets with transformational goals, such as digital transformation.

### Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

In 2020, the government approved the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (EECTI) for 2021 – 2027 in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, aiming to double public and private investment in R&I to 2.12% of GDP by 2027. The strategy was developed in collaboration with regional governments, economic and social stakeholders, universities, research organizations, and scientific bodies.

The strategy follows the strategic lines of the Horizon Europe themes, and several lines of action are established. For example, Action Line 1: Budget focuses on increasing the budget dedicated to R&I during 2021 – 2027 and encouraging private investment until it reaches the EU average.

In September 2022, Law 17/2022 amending Law 14/2011 on Science, Technology, and Innovation was adopted to align with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Research and technology policy has traditionally been a weak point for Spain, as evidenced by the low number of patents registered. Bureaucratic hurdles are only one obstacle. Nevertheless, according to the European Commission's 2023 Innovation Scoreboard, Spain's innovation performance has notably improved relative to 2010, with human resources being the strongest-performing innovation dimension. Moreover, Spain performs above the EU average regarding innovation-friendly environments and employment impacts, and the performance gap with the EU is becoming smaller. In 2023, strong increases were marked in the sales of innovative products. However, there have been significant decreases in environment-related technologies since 2016 (European Innovation Scoreboard 2023).

The government participated in the 2023 launch of the European Tech Champions Initiative (ETCI) to support early-stage technology startups by facilitating financing with European capital. The ETCI initiative complements efforts by the Ministry of Economy and Digital Transformation through the Instituto de Crédito Oficial (ICO), particularly the venture capital company Axis.

The Ministry of Science and Innovation is the lead unit for coordinating and promoting the Technology and Innovation Strategy. El Consejo de Política Científica, Tecnológica y de Innovación (Council for Scientific, Technological, and Innovation Policy) acts as the coordination body for scientific and technical research at the state (interministerial) and autonomous community levels. The Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Industrial (CDTI) operates as a public business entity within the Ministry of Science and Innovation, focusing on fostering innovation and technological development. It serves as the conduit for all applications seeking financial assistance and support for R&D&I projects undertaken by Spanish companies, both nationally and internationally.

Law 17/2022 aims to enhance the capabilities of the Science, Technology, and Innovation System, with the goal of improving coordination, governance, and knowledge transfer. This legislation strengthens co-governance mechanisms

between various administrations by outlining a Map of Unique Scientific and Technical Infrastructures. In this map, ownership is shared between the government and other relevant administrations, promoting collaborative efforts in advancing scientific and technological initiatives.

The National Open Science Strategy for 2023 – 2027, endorsed in 2023, includes all commitments related to open science made by various public entities within the system. It thoroughly examines the international and national landscape concerning open science.

Both the State Plan for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation and the Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation undergo external and independent evaluation processes. The monitoring and evaluation are conducted in two phases: an interim evaluation and a final evaluation one and a half years after completion. For this, a Monitoring Committee has been created. This committee consists of representatives from ministerial departments and their funding agents, autonomous communities, agents from both the public and private sectors, and civil society. So far, one report has been published.

### Stable Global Financial System

Global Financial  
Policies  
Score: 7

Within the EU framework, the Spanish government has implemented several international agreements in recent years to prevent and combat high-risk financial activities that pose systemic risks. However, crypto-asset activities in Spain are not currently regulated. The Banco de España monitors developments in this market as part of its financial stability responsibilities.

During the review period, the Banco de España called for European regulation to provide legal certainty in crypto-asset operations and supervision. During Spain's presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Ministry of Economy and Digital Transformation announced the European Union's Markets in Crypto-Assets (MiCA) Act. The Spanish government expressed its intention to fast-track the adoption of MiCA, with the crypto regulatory framework set to be enacted in Spain by December 2025. The EU's deadline for implementing MiCA across all 27 member states is July 2026.

Spain is a permanent invited guest to G-20 meetings and sits on the Financial Stability Board (FSB). Members of the FSB commit to maintaining financial stability, ensuring the openness and transparency of the financial sector, implementing international financial standards, and undergoing periodic peer reviews.

At the EU level, Spain has vigorously advocated for a banking union and for the European Central Bank to take a more active role in strengthening the single European currency. During the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union, the government succeeded in reforming fiscal rules, enabling member states to maintain sound public accounts while adequately financing public services.

Spain has been actively involved within the OECD in the fight against tax havens. As a member of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, Spain signed the statement on the Two-Pillar Solution to Address the Tax Challenges Arising from the Digitalization of the Economy in July 2023. In February 2023, the Spanish Ministry of Finance approved a new list of non-cooperative territories. In November 2023, the Spanish government formally submitted Madrid’s candidacy to host the new European anti-money laundering authority. Spain has a system for combating money laundering and the financing of international terrorism.

According to the Tax Justice Network, Spain was ranked 22nd in the corporate tax haven index in 2021 and 29th in contributing to financial secrecy worldwide.

## II. Social Sustainability

### Sustainable Education System

Policies  
Targeting Quality  
Education  
Score: 7

Article 27 of the Spanish constitution guarantees the right to education and academic freedom. The Spanish education system is decentralized: the central government regulates basic elements, while the autonomous communities develop their own regulations and manage the education system within their territories. Schools have pedagogical, organizational, and managerial autonomy over their resources.

Primary funding comes from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and regional education authorities. National allocations for education are established annually in the state budget, while autonomous communities determine their own education budgets. Local administrations are responsible for creating, constructing, and maintaining facilities for public educational institutions.



There is significant variation among autonomous communities in allocating financial and human resources per student, leading to substantial differences in educational outcomes. During the review period, the education system received significant EU resources to enhance the digital skills of teachers and students. The RRP supports efforts to reduce early school leaving and grade repetition rates, improve the link between educational attainment and labor market needs, and provide additional support to the most vulnerable students.

In April 2022, the Organic Law 3/2022 on the organization and integration of vocational training came into force, aiming to create 200,000 new vocational training places by 2023. It introduces dual vocational training in certain study grades and emphasizes the relationship between training centers and companies.

Between February and April 2022, a series of royal decrees were enacted to implement a curriculum reform for primary and secondary education. The updated curricula align with the EU Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning.

The education system facilitates the recruitment of highly qualified educators through university education and further training opportunities. Primary school teachers need a teaching degree and must pass competitive examinations, while secondary education teachers require a university degree followed by specialized master's training.

The framework legislation outlines guidelines for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs offered by autonomous communities. These programs provide teachers with diverse training activities and establish priority training guidelines. The National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training annually determines the priority areas for teacher training plans and offers professional development programs.

In January 2022, the government initiated a continuous national dialogue on enhancing the teaching profession, particularly in anticipation of low replacement rates. The results of this discourse will shape a new regulatory framework.

The education system is founded on a strong commitment to inclusiveness and values at all levels of education. The government's commitment to equity is reflected in the education law that came into force in 2021. Digitalization and the development of digital competencies are among the top priorities of the law, providing a reference framework for digital teacher competence.

Policies  
Targeting  
Equitable Access  
to Education  
Score: 7

“Environmental sustainability education is a fundamental element of the Education Act. This subject is covered both as a cross-cutting component and within the subject of Civic and Ethical Values. The law also envisions integrating sustainable development and global citizenship into the training program for prospective teachers.”

Spain has improved access to early childhood education across all autonomous communities. Spanish legislation ensures that every child aged three and above has a legal entitlement to a place in an early childhood education institution. Royal Decree 95/2022 establishes minimum teaching standards for early childhood education, declares the second cycle tuition-free, and outlines plans for extending free education to the first cycle, prioritizing students at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Administrations are mandated to incrementally enhance the availability of public places in the first cycle. The RRP includes a commitment to creating 60,000 affordable public places for children under three by 2024, particularly in areas with higher risks of poverty or social exclusion and in rural regions.

Autonomous communities establish the curriculum for early childhood education and regulate complementary activities and school services. Financial support, admission processes, and the number of places vary significantly among communities. A sound monitoring system for quality is still to be established, and further cooperation is necessary to ensure equal access and quality.

Primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education are compulsory and cost-free. The Law of Education includes measures to ensure that students from low-income families are equally represented in public and semi-private centers. Extracurricular activities that require payment will not be allowed during school hours.

According to national framework legislation, the autonomous communities must encourage the quality, equity and social inclusion of students with disabilities, as well as equal opportunities and nondiscrimination. The role of the National Institute for Educational Evaluation could be fostered.

School failure is significant in Spain, with the percentage of students not achieving the compulsory education diploma below 15%. This proportion has stabilized after a decade of substantial decrease. Students who fail cannot continue and eventually leave formal education. The education law aims to increase educational and training opportunities for all, improve educational outcomes, and limit grade repetition. The Spanish government and autonomous communities are jointly implementing cooperation programs to

promote second-chance education opportunities for students at risk of repeating grades or leaving school, through targeted pedagogical and psychological guidance. However, awareness of these opportunities for re-entry into education and training remains low.

**Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs**

Policies  
Targeting Equal  
Access to  
Essential Services  
and Basic Income  
Support  
Score: 7

The minimum income scheme was approved in May 2020. Until then, there were 17 different schemes in Spain, each run by a different regional government. The minimum vital income, granted by social security, aims to guarantee a minimum standard of living across the entire country. Generally, the national income scheme also aimed to reduce administrative complexity, simplify applications, unify definitions, and streamline information.

According to AIReF, only 35% of potential recipients received the aid in 2022, and of the 470,000 families that met the requirements, 58% did not apply for it (AIReF 2023). To address this, the government launched an information bus that traveled around Spain and deployed an institutional campaign across multiple media outlets explaining how to apply.

Additionally, the autonomous communities and local entities have developed measures to improve the take-up of their support for essential services. For example, Project CiNTRAS in Madrid supports families benefiting from the minimum income scheme through counseling. Each regional government also provides a minimum vital guarantee, which complements the national scheme.

The high level of non-take-up of the minimum vital income has been explained by difficult procedures and the focus on online applications, as well as the lack of trained personnel for the implementation of these measures in public administration. After three years of implementation, the procedures have been simplified (easy language) and become more routinized. However, further measures are needed to reduce the level of non-take-up.

National policies ensure that those in need have access to basic services through the minimum vital income, intergovernmental transfers, and framework legislation and regulations. Access to water and sanitation services is regulated by local governments. While there is no direct intervention by the central government, some AC governments have legislated a rebate of up to 100% of the water tax bill for vulnerable households. A social fund has been set up by water companies that have been granted the concession to provide home water services. This fund is used to pay the water bills of people living in severe poverty or social emergency situations.

The central state regulates access to energy and discounts on tariffs. For example, in 2022 and 2023, the government extended the reduction on electricity and gas taxes. Autonomous communities and local governments manage direct aid and pay part of the tariff for households in a situation of social emergency, termed “bono social eléctrico.”

The central government approved earmarked transfers to local governments during the observation period to reduce or eliminate public transport tariffs. The government included the development of digital infrastructure in the RRP to strengthen social and territorial cohesion. In 2019, the government passed a law obligating banks to offer a free basic account to individuals in precarious situations or at risk of financial exclusion.

Policies  
Targeting Quality  
of Essential  
Services and  
Basic Income  
Support  
Score: 7

The minimum vital income (MVI) guarantees a minimum standard of living and fulfills basic human needs in Spain. For individual beneficiaries, the support is set each year at the amount of non-contributory pensions. In 2022, an adult household without dependent children that met all the requirements could receive a maximum of €5,899.60 per year. This guaranteed income increases as the household size grows.

In 2023, an extraordinary 15% increase in the MVI amounts was approved. Most autonomous communities have adjusted their regulations governing minimum incomes to align with the state benefit. These regional minimum incomes complement the state benefit and account for various living costs, such as housing, energy, and public transport, specific to each autonomous community.

To mitigate the impact of rising energy prices and interest rates on vulnerable populations, the government implemented several measures in 2022. These include lowering VAT on natural gas and basic foodstuffs, offering free medium-distance public transport by rail, and implementing protections for mortgagors without resources. These measures were extended on January 10, 2024.

**Sustainable Health System**

Policies  
Targeting Health  
System  
Resilience  
Score: 7

The implementation of digital medical records and prescriptions, patient portals, and electronic appointments accounts in large part for Spain’s high ranking in Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Digital Health Index. The index also points to the loss of joint efficiency in monitoring because there is no shared digital health strategy among the levels of government.

The RRP sets the goals of enhancing the health system's resilience (30.8% of the total health investment of the RRP) and digital transformation through the development of shared massive data analysis (5.8% of the total health investment). Accordingly, the national Digital Health Strategy (2021 – 2026) foresees areas for joint decision-making between the national Ministry of Health and the autonomous communities, which have full responsibility for planning and developing digital health services. These areas include the interoperability of clinical information between health services and the integration of essential data for each person in the NHS (Government of Spain 2022).

To implement the strategy, the Intergovernmental Council of the NHS established a Digital Health Commission to streamline information sharing, collaboration, and decision-making among all actors in the NHS, such as in disease prevention. In this context, the Ministry of Health, with the participation of all autonomous communities, is launching the National Health Data Space, a large national health data pool to facilitate research and decision-making in health through the use of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence.

Moreover, the government established a new General Secretariat for Digital Health. Its main objectives are promoting innovation and reinforcing performance assessment and data analysis capabilities.

The Spanish Agency of Medicines and Healthcare Products aims to guarantee medicine supplies and improve coordination. While the unequal distribution of health professionals hinders access, new policies, such as the implementation of telehealth, have been speeded up due to investments from the RRP. The agency's annual budget was reduced in 2022 – 2023 to levels prior to 2016. The RRP also sets out a new approach for the rational use of medicines and ensuring sustainability. During the reviewed period, the centralization of medicine purchases continued to be managed at the regional level.

Per capita health spending in Spain remains below the EU average and varies significantly among autonomous communities (OECD 2022). Over the past decade, there has been a widening gap between Spain and EU countries in total health expenditure, reflecting slower growth. The increase in spending is attributed to an aging population and advancements in medical technology. To counteract the rising costs, measures such as the digitalization of the health system, research and innovation in health, and talent attraction are considered essential. However, specific targeted actions have yet to be implemented.

Policies  
Targeting High-  
Quality  
Healthcare  
Score: 7

The law on the cohesion and quality of the national health system dates back to 2003 but has been frequently updated, most recently in March 2021. The system is designed to offer efficient primary care. However, recent years have seen the healthcare system come under pressure from demographic changes, evolving healthcare needs, rising expectations, and innovations (WHO 2023). Experts and professionals have long pointed to a budgetary shortfall that has negatively impacted the system, resulting in a lack of human and material resources and increasing variability in the timeliness and quality of healthcare services across autonomous communities. Long waiting lists for ambulatory care and surgery, as well as overloaded emergency services, are common issues. According to the Health Barometer 2023, only 57.5% of the general population rated the functioning of the health system positively in October 2023, compared to 72.1% in 2019.

In 2023, the Spanish Ministry of Health's budget expenditure exceeded €2.6 billion, up from approximately €2.4 billion in the previous year. The INVEAT plan, part of the RRP, has dedicated €796 million since 2021 to modernize technology, enhance early disease diagnosis, and enable prompt therapeutic intervention.

The national Ministry of Health has improved its constitutionally determined coordination function, aiming to ensure national standards in healthcare delivery. The anticipated National Public Health Agency is expected to improve system governance and foster cooperation mechanisms between the healthcare and public health services of the autonomous communities.

In late 2023, the central government convened a Sectoral Conference for Health with autonomous communities to address systemic issues. However, effective cooperation and shared decision-making have been challenging, evidenced by the government imposing its coordinating power to enforce the use of facemasks in healthcare facilities during the rising incidence of influenza in January 2024.

The RRP has partially improved access to funding for training and research in the health sector, including venture capital investment in technology-based or innovative companies. Investments from the RRP will contribute to creating a healthcare data lake to facilitate massive data processing projects. Autonomous communities' health services are working on implementing innovative advanced analytics techniques to optimize waiting lists and assist in cancer screening.

Furthermore, the RRP includes measures to strengthen the resilience and capacity of the health system. These measures aim to boost research on

pharmaceutical product sustainability, increase genomic testing capabilities, improve human biomonitoring infrastructure, and upgrade patient-oriented clinical research units.

The Public Health Strategy 2022 included a specific action plan to improve the population’s health and well-being through disease prevention, promoting healthy lifestyles, and fostering safe and sustainable environments. Smoking, alcohol consumption, and obesity remain significant public health issues in Spain, with high consumption rates potentially linked to comparatively low taxes on these substances.

Policies Targeting Equitable Access To Healthcare  
Score: 7

Equitable access to healthcare is guaranteed throughout Spain, despite persistent social differences. The system offers universal healthcare regardless of socioeconomic status, age, gender, or ethnicity. However, the challenges facing the public health system have led Spaniards to spend a record amount on private health insurance in 2022.

Essential healthcare is guaranteed in all autonomous communities, and individual satisfaction with the health system does not vary substantially across regions (with Cantabria peaking at 6.83 and Andalusia recording the lowest at 5.87 in 2023). Nonetheless, significant differences exist among and within autonomous communities regarding access to healthcare. Variations in regional health spending reflect efforts to ensure equivalent access to welfare across the country, but differences persist due to regional governments’ preferences and ideologies and varying service provision conditions (population dispersion or congestion). These issues highlight the need for reforming the financing of the Spanish territorial model.

**Gender Equality**

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Achieving Gender Equality  
Score: 9

In recent years, the Spanish government has enacted various laws to enhance gender equality in the workplace, including the Equal Pay Decree. In March 2022, the government endorsed the III Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men 2022–2025, with a projected investment of €1.3 billion. Aligned with Agenda 2030, relevant Council of Europe conventions, and the European Strategy for Gender Equality 2020–2025, the plan is organized around four key action areas and builds upon assessments of previous plans.

At the strategic level, 14 indicators measure the plan’s impact, and at the specific level, 64 result indicators have been established. The monitoring system includes at least one performance indicator for each operational objective. For example, impact indicators for the first action plan include

increasing the integration of gender equality in public policy management and the number of public employees trained in gender equality approaches.

The strategic plan serves as a guiding document for the central government administration, providing a framework for other administrations to design their action plans.

Guaranteeing the inclusion of a gender perspective has led to various laws mandating ex ante gender assessments and gender budgeting practices.

The Ministry of Equality and the Interministerial Commission for Equality between Women and Men are the primary entities responsible for implementing gender equality policies. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, are also involved in specific actions. The plans build upon existing infrastructure, including the Women's Institutes and Equality Units in ministerial departments, and establish new interdepartmental working groups for gender mainstreaming. The Sectoral Conference on Equality ensures cooperation between the Central State Administration, autonomous communities, and local entities. Civil society is also involved in monitoring the strategic plan 2022–2025.

Autonomous communities have established joint anti-discrimination protections based on gender identity and sexual orientation. However, the extreme right-wing party Vox, in coalition with or supporting the PP in several autonomous communities, is attempting to overturn laws on anti-discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation and reduce funding for women's institutes.

### Strong Families

Family Policies  
Score: 8

Maternity leave in Spain consists of 16 weeks for a single child, during which the mother receives 100% of her salary. If the baby has a disability, an additional two weeks are allowed. To promote shared responsibility within households, fathers are also entitled to up to 16 weeks of paid leave for the birth of a child. Adoptive and host parents are also entitled to paid leave.

The family support system provides job protection and wage replacement schemes for up to eight months. After maternity or paternity leave, parents can apply for unpaid leave, allowing them to take up to three years off work to care for their children and then return to their workplace.



In the first half of 2023, 109,731 paternity leaves were taken by the first parent, usually the mother, and 122,044 by the second parent, usually the father. However, more women (21,089) than men (3,853) have requested additional leave for child or family care (Meil et al. 2023). Work-life balance is a growing concern in Spain. The government has addressed this with the introduction of the Family Law (Royal Decree Law 5/2023), aiming to improve work-life balance for employees by introducing three new leaves of absence focused on childcare and family care:

Employees can apply for unpaid leave to care for their child for an extended period beyond one year.

Employees can request up to five days a year to care for a family member or partner in cases of accident or serious illness.

Employees have the right to be absent from work in situations of force majeure for up to four days.

Access to affordable childcare for children below school age is not guaranteed (see “Sustainable Education System”). Boosting schooling for children aged 0-3 is one of the main investments of the RRP. Between 2021 and 2023, a total investment of €670.1 million has been earmarked for the creation of more than 65,000 publicly owned places. According to Eurostat, the enrollment rate in the first cycle of preschool has reached 46.5%, its highest level since data became available. The number of children aged 0 to 3 enrolled in school increased by 6.8% in the 2022–2023 academic year compared to the previous year, with 29,919 more pupils.

At the state level, there is a tax deduction for “childcare expenses.” Fourteen autonomous communities use their regulatory capacity to apply different deductions related to childcare costs in early childhood education centers or costs in other educational stages, such as the purchase of textbooks.

### Sustainable Pension System

Over the past years, there has been no shortage of warnings from within or outside Spain (e.g., the Bank of Spain, the EC, IMF and OECD) that the country’s pension system is heading toward a crisis. As part of the RRP, the EC requested a pension reform. In 2023 the government reached a pact with the opposition and social partners to safeguard the public pension system. The pension reform substantially increased basic pensions, minimum pensions and targeted benefits, as well as income protection for workers with irregular

careers, including mothers. The reform particularly benefits retirees with low pensions.

Spanish pension policy successfully prevents poverty but only moderately meets standards of intergenerational equity and fiscal sustainability. Older people are less likely to be poor than the general population, with the old-age poverty rate (5% for men; 2% for women) being lower than that of the total population. Nonetheless, Spain ranks as the sixth OECD country in terms of income poverty among those aged over 65.

Spain removed automatic adjustment mechanisms, leading to a decline in pensions in real terms for several consecutive years. To address financial sustainability, including the low indexation of pensions in payment, Spain reintroduced price indexation, effective in 2022. Consequently, the recent pension reform will increase the net replacement rates for full-career workers. In 2023, the gender gap in pensions was reduced to 21.1%.

Policies  
Targeting  
Intergenerational  
Equity  
Score: 7

In Spain, fewer than one in ten individuals aged 65-69 are employed. The 2023 pension reform aims to incentivize longer working lives. For the first time, the average retirement age surpassed 65 years in 2023. According to the reform, individuals who postpone retirement receive a 4% bonus for each full year worked beyond the retirement age. This bonus can be received as a lump sum, which depends on the initial pension amount and the period of contributions, or as a combination of both. The new regulation reduces the early retirement period from 24 to 21 months for those previously taking early retirement, mitigating the higher penalty for the additional three months.

To address the anticipated rapid growth in pension expenditures until 2049, the reform includes an increase in the contribution base and a restrained increase in the maximum pension. It also introduces an Intergenerational Equity Mechanism. Beginning in January 2023, the contribution rate will increase by 0.6% (0.1% for workers and 0.5% for employers) from 2023 to 2032 to fund this mechanism. Contributions have been raised for high earners through a new solidarity contribution on earnings exceeding the maximum contribution base, which does not contribute to pension entitlements (AIREf 2023).

Withdrawals from the Intergenerational Equity Mechanism will be permitted starting in 2032 to support pension spending. The annual drawdown is capped at 0.2% of GDP, and until approximately 2040, inflows into the fund must surpass outflows.

Collectively, these measures, coupled with a reform in contributions by the self-employed, are projected to ensure intergenerational equity.

Integration Policy  
Score: 8

### Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

According to a December 2023 survey by CIS, only 8.6% of Spaniards listed immigration as a main concern, down from 15.6% in September 2019 and 59.2% in September 2006. This indicates that Spanish society is quite open toward the inclusion of migrants.

In 2022, 118,842 applications for international protection were formalized, doubling the number from 2021. However, significant difficulties arose in obtaining appointments to declare willingness to apply for international protection. The Forum for the Social Integration of Immigrants (2023) identified obstacles such as the accumulation of files in immigration offices, a shortage of appointments, and the heterogeneous interpretation of existing regulations. Digitalization in public administration has exacerbated existing inequalities among different social groups, particularly affecting immigrants and applicants for international and temporary protection.

EU immigrants have equal access to the Spanish labor market, while non-EU immigrants can access employment, self-employment, and unemployment support. However, available jobs are often unskilled, precarious, and insecure, primarily in domestic work and agriculture. Many non-EU immigrants are overqualified, but recognition procedures for their skills and qualifications are problematic.

Royal Decree 889/2022 establishes a six-month deadline for the homologation of foreign diplomas, aiming to improve migrant employability. Royal Decree Law 16/2022 of September 6 aims to enhance working conditions and social security for domestic workers. Royal Decree 629/2022 of July 26 updates labor-related migration regulations to address labor market needs and mismatches.

Spain ranks 23rd out of 38 Western democracies in the Migrant Integration Policy Index for migrants' education. Most immigrant pupils can access all schools legally, but the dropout rate is high. Most immigrants are first-generation and, in the case of Latin Americans, share language and cultural ties with the native population. However, there is limited support for learning the language and catching up academically. Language courses are mainly provided by the third sector, funded by the Ministry of Immigration or the autonomous communities. Organic Law 3/2022, effective March 31, aims to facilitate social and educational inclusion for vulnerable people, such as immigrants, in the vocational training system. Spain ranks 11th out of 38 Western democracies in the Migrant Integration Policy Index for family reunions and permanent residence. The Forum for the Social Integration of

Immigrants (2023) recommends uniform criteria for assessing family extensions and accreditation of relationships, including criteria for DNA tests.

Voting rights for immigrants have been a significant debate. EU immigrants can vote and run in municipal and European Parliament elections. Foreign residents whose home countries permit Spaniards to participate in their elections have the right to vote and run in municipal elections.

The naturalization process is Spain's main area of weakness. Immigrants can become citizens after 10 years of residence, with dual citizenship granted only to those from certain countries. Immigrants cannot travel abroad for extended periods during this time, although short holidays and work trips are allowed. They must pass a basic language test and a cultural test, and the process takes about two to three years. Recent changes have eased economic and language requirements slightly. Royal Decree 629/2022, of July 26, establishes units for processing residence or work authorizations.

The Secretariat of State for Migration develops migration policy, while the Interministerial Commission for Foreigners' Affairs ensures coordination among relevant departments. Coordination with autonomous communities has been infrequent, with no meetings of the Sectoral Conference on immigration during the observation period. Autonomous communities have competencies related to social policies and work with third-sector entities and civil society organizations on training and consulting for immigrants.

In 2022, the State Secretariat for Migration promoted a public consultation for developing the "Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion," adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2023. The framework includes 23 action lines, with annual or biannual reports on the actions undertaken. The Spanish government has been advocating for an EU-wide solution for illegal migration and asylum procedures. During the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union, the council reached a political agreement on migration and asylum.

### Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of  
Development  
Cooperation by  
Partner Country  
Score: 7

The Law on Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Global Solidarity, approved in January 2023 (Law 1/2023, de 20 de febrero), updates Spanish development cooperation policy to align with contemporary global standards and the commitments of the 2030 Agenda. It aims to foster greater integration into the European Union's cooperation policy and improve the management of

development assistance through a more robust structure and more coordinated, strategic, and effective action by all cooperation actors.

Strategic planning of the cooperation is articulated through the Master Plan, among other instruments. The V Master Plan of the Spanish Cooperation covered the period 2018–2021. During the observation period, no new plan was adopted, but the Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) implemented an updated action plan for 2022–2023 in October.

Law 1/2023 includes a specific section on the “Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Spanish Cooperation for Sustainable Development.” A new Evaluation Office of Spanish Cooperation will be established as a unit attached to the Secretariat of State for International Cooperation. The 2022 evaluation report included an advanced assessment of the 2021 cooperation policies, improving upon previous reports.

Spanish cooperation policy aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at capacity-building for poverty reduction. Solidarity with disadvantaged people and future generations, sustainable development, poverty eradication, social and territorial cohesion, and the fight against global inequalities are fundamental principles of Spanish development cooperation.

In the 2023 budget, official development aid stands at 0.34% of GNI, up from 0.28% in 2022, but still far from the government’s commitment to reach 0.5% in 2024. Law 1/2023 stipulates that 0.7% of GNI should be dedicated to official development assistance by 2030, with ten percent of this budget targeted for humanitarian assistance.

Spanish universities play a significant role in development cooperation and are represented on the Cooperation Council. As contributors within the Spanish cooperation system, public universities actively promote knowledge-sharing and innovation with developing countries. They are required to report their performance in this field to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. The Observatory of University Development Cooperation (OCUD) is an initiative led by the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities, in collaboration with AECID and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation.

According to AECID, Spanish development aid focuses on saving lives and strengthening public health systems. It fosters universal health coverage in developing countries by supporting the strengthening of national health systems and services. The goal is for partner countries to provide quality and equitable services at all levels of healthcare, both primary and specialized.

This is achieved through technical cooperation programs, such as the Specialized Medical Training Programs (Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative) and programs within the Pan American Health Organization.

The OECD identified various laws and regulations in 2022 that hinder the flexibility, predictability, and accountability of the development program. Regulations, procedures, and the capacity to offer multi-year funding vary across instruments, including those directly managed by AECID.

### III. Environmental Sustainability

#### Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Achieving  
Climate  
Neutrality by  
2050  
Score: 8

The current government strategy for climate transition is composed of three main guiding tools.

In May 2021, the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law was passed. This law establishes the minimum national targets for the year 2030:

- A reduction of greenhouse gases by at least 20% compared with 1990
- A renewable energy share of at least 35% in final energy consumption
- An electrical system in which at least 70% of the energy comes from renewables
- A reduction in primary energy consumption of at least 35%

The law establishes that the National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change 2021–2023, which aims to coordinate government actions against climate change, should be implemented through a specific work program. The Ministry for Ecological Transition collaborates with other ministerial departments and autonomous communities to produce reports at least every five years. These reports detail the progression of climate change impacts and risks, as well as policies and measures to enhance resilience and mitigate vulnerability. The work program for 2026–2030 will be formulated based on these reports.

Law 7/2021 establishes the Committee of Experts on Climate Change and Energy Transition, an advisory body tasked with preparing an annual report to be submitted to and discussed in parliament. However, the committee has not yet been established. Several autonomous communities have created their own Committees of Experts.

The Spanish Climate Change Office within the Ministry for Ecological Transition is responsible for promoting daily assessments related to climate change impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation. The work program includes several indicators to monitor and evaluate progress. For instance, the integration of climate change into the Strategic Plan for Health and Environment includes an indicator requiring the approval of a Strategic Plan that outlines objectives and actions to prevent climate change impacts on human health.

In 2021, the government adopted several sector-specific action plans in line with the Climate Change and Energy Transition Law, including the Circular Economy Strategy, the Green Infrastructure Strategy, and a new hydrological planning cycle. Within the RRP, the government moved its 2025 energy transition targets forward to 2023 and increased investments in renewable energy, ecosystem and biodiversity protection, housing stock renewal, and electric mobility infrastructure.

In recent years, the government has oriented all public policies to align with its main climate action objectives. However, some subsidies, such as those for fuels, have been counterproductive. The Green Public Procurement Plan was approved in 2018, and similar plans have been adopted by autonomous communities. The Quality of Architecture Act, adopted in 2022, supports a new energy and ecological transition model promoting greater inclusion and social cohesion.

Regarding courts' review of climate targets, in July 2023, Spain's Supreme Court ruled in favor of the government in the country's first climate litigation case. Environmentalists, including Greenpeace, Ecologistas en Acción, and Oxfam Intermón, had sued the government, arguing that its targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions were not ambitious enough. The court determined that the state's climate plan fulfills its commitments as an EU member.

The governance of climate change involves different responsibilities across various levels. While central government ministries do not intervene at lower political levels, national legislation is obligatory for other administrations. Law 7/2021 established a framework providing some flexibility for autonomous communities. Conflicts exist in areas such as land management (managed by autonomous communities) and water use (central state responsibility).

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Minimizing  
Environmental  
Health Risks  
Score: 7

## Effective Environmental Health Protection

Spain anticipates an increase in morbidity and mortality due to heat waves, which, as a result of climate change, are projected to become more frequent, intense, and prolonged in the coming decades. Another concern is the risk associated with the spread of established or new disease vectors.

In 2021, the government adopted the Strategic Plan for Health and Environment 2022–2025. This plan outlines 14 comprehensive thematic areas, including “climate change,” “air quality,” “extreme temperatures,” and “disease vectors.”

For instance, the action plan for “air quality” aims to reduce mortality and morbidity attributable to air pollution, in line with the National Climate Plan’s goals. Actions include monitoring air quality in high-traffic areas, especially near schools, playgrounds, and healthcare facilities.

The plan includes several indicators to measure specific outcomes. A Monitoring Commission will oversee the development and management of the strategic plan and publish an annual report assessing compliance with the proposed actions in each thematic area. However, no progress report has been published thus far.

Policy implementation is not delegated to bureaucracies and executive agencies. The national plan serves as an umbrella for the actions of the autonomous communities, which must provide data to the central government for monitoring. Many autonomous communities already have their own Environmental Health Protection Plans and significant experience in integrated health impact assessments within Environmental Impact Assessments, although methodologies vary widely. The central government aims to enhance cooperation with the autonomous communities.

In recent years, the government has aligned all public policies with its primary climate action objectives. However, some subsidies, such as those for fuels, have been counterproductive.



Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to Preserving  
Ecosystems and  
Protecting  
Biodiversity  
Score: 8

### Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

In December 2022, the government approved the Strategic Plan for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity through 2030 (Royal Decree Law 1057/2022, de 27 de diciembre), developing and updating the main guidelines established by Law 42/2007. The strategic plan provides a framework for promoting the protection and conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, as well as the restoration and recovery of ecosystems. The RRP includes two packages of direct support for investments in ecosystem and biodiversity preservation, with an initial estimated budget through 2025 of €1.6 billion.

The plan aligns with other national strategies, such as the Spain Circular Strategy 2030, EU legislation, and international commitments. The overall strategy is broken down into individual action plans, including Knowledge on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, Nature Protection and Conservation, and Ecosystem Restoration, targeting ecosystems in the air, water, and land.

According to the decree, evaluation reports should align, as far as possible, with the deadlines for national sexennial reports sent to the European Commission under the Nature Directives. An interim monitoring and evaluation report is expected in the first half of 2026. Although specific steps to expand and improve the indicators are not mentioned, the law allows for amendments to ensure the plan’s content remains appropriate for achieving national objectives. A review of the State Council for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity will be conducted before 2024.

One specific development of this plan is the Strategy for Biodiversity and Science (2023–2027), which outlines actions to enhance scientific contributions to policymaking on this topic.

While the central government intends to improve cooperation with the autonomous communities, conflicts sometimes arise. For instance, in spring 2023, the Andalusian government planned to reclassify some lands in Doñana Park to favor agricultural water use. This conflict was eventually resolved through an agreement between the central and regional governments.

**Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection**

Policy Efforts  
and Commitment  
to a Global  
Environmental  
Policy  
Score: 8

In 2021, the Office for Humanitarian Action and Environment and Climate of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) published a guide to integrate environmental protection into humanitarian action and emergencies. Law 1/2023 further strengthens this focus on environmental protection in development cooperation. However, the new director plan, which should outline a roadmap with specific targets, has yet to be published, and the Spanish Cooperation Evaluation Office has not been established. During the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union, the government successfully negotiated at COP 28 for increased climate finance and progress in the global green transition. During this period, Teresa Ribera, the Minister for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, emerged as an international leader in climate change, enhancing the influence of Spanish policy actions at the European and global levels.

Tender and procurement processes for Spanish cooperation are open to the private sector and other actors, such as non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs). These processes must include social, environmental, and human rights aspects in the technical specifications, award criteria, and special execution conditions, in accordance with Law 9/2017 of November 8 on Public Sector Contracts.

Law 1/2023 emphasizes policy coherence for sustainable development as a fundamental principle. The objectives of sustainable development cooperation will be integrated into all internal and external policies, working with autonomous communities, local authorities, the European Union, and international organizations, while respecting the competences and capacities of each actor.

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Spain has implemented several capacity-building initiatives as essential components of mitigation and adaptation projects. These efforts ensure successful and effective implementation and sustainability, with a total of 57 projects reported.

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