

**INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION REVIEW
FORUM 2026
SPAIN AND THE
GLOBAL COMPACT FOR
MIGRATION 2022-2026**

MAY 2026

FACTSHEET



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ESPACIO
POR DERECHOS



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE DERECHOS SOCIALES, CONSUMO
Y AGENDA 2030

DIRECCIÓN GENERAL
DE AGENDA 2030



AGENDA
2030

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION REVIEW FORUM 2026

SPAIN AND THE GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION 2022-2026

Progress, implementation gaps and priorities for rights-based follow-up

This policy brief summarises selected findings from CONVIVE Fundación Cepaim's shadow assessment of Spain's implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration during the 2022-2026 cycle. It is designed as a concise institutional tool for meetings with UN actors, Spanish authorities and civil society partners during the 2026 International Migration Review Forum.

Spain has made relevant normative, institutional and operational progress in several areas of migration governance. However, implementation remains uneven. The strongest developments have often occurred in administrative management, border control, return and external cooperation, while rights-oriented dimensions - regular pathways, vulnerability identification, access to protection, non-discrimination, independent oversight and alternatives to detention - require further consolidation.

| Finding | Why it matters |
|--|--|
| A useful institutional baseline exists | Spain's 2022 national commitments provide a clear reference point for assessing implementation, but they need stronger indicators, timelines and accountability mechanisms. |
| Progress is real but uneven | Reforms on foreigners' regulation, humanitarian assistance, equality, regularisation and external cooperation show movement, yet many measures remain stronger on paper than in effective access. |
| The EU framework is a central conditioning factor | The European Pact on Migration and Asylum, return regulation initiatives and the external dimension of EU migration policy may narrow rights-based implementation if safeguards are not operationalised. |
| Prevention remains weaker than emergency response | Spain maintains significant rescue and reception capacities, but access to safe pathways, asylum from outside the territory and prevention of deaths remain insufficient. |
| The next cycle should focus on implementation quality | The priority is not only new commitments, but measurable follow-up: public indicators, independent monitoring, safeguards, resources and coordination across levels of government. |

The next implementation cycle should focus on turning Spain's commitments into measurable practice, particularly in areas where progress remains uneven: regular pathways, early identification of vulnerabilities, access to protection, prevention of deaths and disappearances, safeguards in return procedures, and rights-based international cooperation.

1. Scope and assessment logic

The assessment takes Spain's 2022 national action commitments under the Global Compact for Migration as the principal reference point. The approach is selective, evaluative and rights-based: it does not seek to assess all 23 GCM objectives, but rather the objectives expressly prioritised by Spain for the 2022-2026 cycle and most relevant to implementation in a Southern European border context.

For political advocacy purposes, this brief prioritises five objectives where the evidence is particularly relevant for IMRF discussions and for meetings with UN mandates, international organisations, Spanish institutions and civil society partners: Objective 5 on regular pathways; Objective 7 on vulnerabilities; Objective 8 on saving lives and missing migrants; Objective 21 on return, readmission and reintegration; and Objective 23 on international cooperation. Objectives 1, 15, 16 and 17 are treated as cross-cutting issues on data, services, inclusion and non-discrimination.

The analytical sequence follows four questions: what Spain committed to, what progress has been observed, what gaps or tensions remain, and what operational recommendations should guide the next cycle.

OBJECTIVE 5. REGULAR MIGRATION PATHWAYS

| Spain's commitment | Progress observed | Remaining gaps / tensions |
|---|--|---|
| Spain committed to increasing the availability and flexibility of regular migration pathways, including through the review of foreigners' law, labour migration instruments and public information on legal channels. | Relevant progress includes the adoption of Royal Decree 1155/2024 approving the new Foreigners' Regulation, the continued use of collective recruitment at origin, channels for highly qualified workers and international mobility, and the opening of an extraordinary regularisation process in 2026. | Implementation remains mixed. Existing pathways are stronger for selected labour market and high-skilled profiles than for people already in Spain, people at risk of irregularity, or persons needing protection. The need for a new extraordinary regularisation also shows that ordinary channels have not been sufficiently flexible. |

Implementation priorities

- Consolidate implementation of Royal Decree 1155/2024 through homogeneous criteria, adequate administrative resources and indicators measuring whether it reduces irregularity.
- Expand ordinary regularisation channels for people with established social, family or labour roots, so that inclusion does not depend repeatedly on extraordinary processes.
- Activate in practice safe access to international protection from abroad, including mechanisms under Spain's asylum law, resettlement and family reunification.
- Ensure that implementation of the European Pact does not displace the development of sufficient regular pathways in favour of control and return.

OBJECTIVE 7. REDUCING VULNERABILITIES IN MIGRATION

| Spain's commitment | Progress observed | Remaining gaps / tensions |
|--|--|---|
| Spain committed to addressing vulnerabilities in migration, with attention to women in situations of special vulnerability, victims of trafficking or violence, unaccompanied children, humanitarian assistance at borders and detection of possible international protection needs. | Spain has maintained a significant Humanitarian Assistance Programme, which assisted 54,597 vulnerable people in 2025. It has also adopted measures on unaccompanied children and maintained strategic frameworks on trafficking and exploitation. | Implementation remains partial. Gaps persist in early identification, age assessment, specialised protection for migrant children and potential victims of trafficking, coordination between child protection, asylum and migration systems, and prevention of vulnerable people entering detention or inadequate procedures. |

Implementation priorities

- Guarantee homogeneous procedures for early identification of specific protection needs from the first point of arrival.
- Complete and implement a holistic, multidisciplinary and child-rights-based age assessment procedure, respecting the presumption of minority where reasonable doubt exists.
- Strengthen coordination between autonomous communities, prosecutors, child protection services, migration authorities and specialised civil society organisations.
- Ensure that screening and accelerated border procedures under the European Pact do not weaken vulnerability identification.

OBJECTIVE 8. SAVING LIVES AND ADDRESSING MISSING MIGRANTS

| Spain's commitment | Progress observed | Remaining gaps / tensions |
|---|---|--|
| Spain committed to saving lives and undertaking coordinated international efforts on missing migrants, including reinforcement of maritime rescue, cooperation with neighbouring countries and use of databases to identify missing persons and unidentified remains. | Spain maintains significant search and rescue capacity. In 2024, Salvamento Marítimo coordinated rescue, assistance or search for 72,438 people in the Spanish SAR area and rescued 23,928 people from irregular vessels. | Implementation remains insufficient from a prevention perspective. IOM documented at least 5,786 deaths and disappearances on maritime routes to Spain between 2022 and 2025, while civil society monitoring recorded much higher figures. Access to asylum from outside Spain remains exceptional, and identification of missing migrants is not yet sufficiently accessible to families. |

Implementation priorities

- Maintain and reinforce search and rescue capacities under a life-saving and safe-disembarkation logic.
- Create a specific, accessible and coordinated state mechanism for the identification of missing and deceased migrants, with information channels for families.
- Expand safe and legal pathways, including humanitarian visas, embassies, consulates, resettlement and family reunification.
- Guarantee genuine and effective access to asylum at borders, with individual assessment, legal assistance and interpretation.
- Review cooperation practices with third countries to ensure compatibility with the right to life, non-refoulement and human rights obligations.

OBJECTIVE 21. RETURN, READMISSION AND REINTEGRATION

| Spain's commitment | Progress observed | Remaining gaps / tensions |
|---|---|--|
| Spain committed to facilitating return and readmission in conditions of safety and dignity and to supporting sustainable reintegration, while recognising the principle of non-refoulement and the need to avoid collective expulsions. | Positive elements include formal recognition of non-refoulement, the commitment to external oversight of repatriation devices, and the 2026 extraordinary regularisation as a corrective measure for situations of consolidated residence where return would be disproportionate. | Implementation is partial and insufficient. Concerns include significant use of immigration detention linked to return, asylum applications processed in CIEs, summary returns at land borders, limited alternatives to detention, insufficient independent monitoring of forced returns and weak detail on sustainable reintegration. |

Implementation priorities

- Ensure that every return or readmission decision is preceded by an individualised assessment with effective legal assistance, interpretation and examination of protection needs, roots and vulnerability.
- Reduce detention in CIEs to genuinely exceptional cases and develop effective non-custodial alternatives.
- Strengthen independent monitoring of return operations, including transparency and participation of specialised human rights bodies.
- End summary returns and any readmission practice without individual procedure, especially in Ceuta and Melilla.
- Distinguish clearly between voluntary and forced return and develop public indicators on sustainable post-return reintegration.

OBJECTIVE 23. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND EXTERNAL DIMENSION

| Spain's commitment | Progress observed | Remaining gaps / tensions |
|--|--|--|
| Spain committed to strengthening international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration, combining the fight against irregular migration networks, legal migration, action on root causes and protection of human rights and human dignity. | Spain has maintained active multilateral, regional and bilateral engagement, including in the UN system, the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Rabat Process and Euro-African and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation frameworks. Its external action remains significant and institutionally developed. | Implementation remains exposed to an imbalance. Cooperation is increasingly influenced by EU priorities on return, externalisation and border control. Without stronger safeguards, bilateral and regional cooperation may reinforce containment rather than safe mobility, protection and rights-based development. |

Implementation priorities

- Ensure that all bilateral, regional and EU migration cooperation includes verifiable human rights clauses, asylum access safeguards, independent supervision and suspension mechanisms in case of violations.
- Balance operational cooperation on border management with regular pathways, labour mobility, protection and development-oriented measures.
- Strengthen transparency and accountability in cooperation with third countries, including public information on objectives, funding, safeguards and evaluation.
- Promote the Pact for the Mediterranean as a framework for shared mobility, protection, inclusion and development, not only for migration containment.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES FOR THE NEXT IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

| Objective | Policy relevance |
|--|---|
| Data and evidence (Obj. 1) | Spain has improved administrative data production, but data for rights-based policy remains insufficient. Priority should be given to indicators on irregularity, discrimination, access to rights, vulnerability, detention, exclusion from reception and policy outcomes. |
| Basic services (Obj. 15) | Formal recognition of rights has not eliminated practical barriers. Civil society evidence points to persistent obstacles in health care, registration, housing and administrative access, particularly for people in irregular or vulnerable situations. |
| Inclusion and non-discrimination (Obj. 16-17) | Spain has adopted relevant equality and anti-discrimination instruments, but structural barriers remain in housing, labour, education, public discourse and access to services. Data should be used to measure not only incidents, but systemic inequality. |
| European implementation | Spain's adaptation to the European Pact on Migration and Asylum should include safeguards on asylum access, vulnerability identification, non-refoulement, alternatives to detention, independent monitoring and fundamental rights supervision. |

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMRF FOLLOW-UP

1. Strengthen implementation coherence

Ensure that instruments linked to control, return and cooperation with third countries do not weaken rights, inclusion, equality, vulnerability reduction and regular pathways.

2. Move from formal progress to measurable effectiveness

Adopt public, periodic and verifiable indicators to assess not only administrative activity, but actual access to rights and policy outcomes.

3. Embed safeguards in European Pact implementation

Operationalise safeguards on asylum access, vulnerability identification, data protection, non-refoulement, independent monitoring and alternatives to detention.

4. Expand regular and safe pathways

Develop ordinary mechanisms for regularisation, safe access to protection, labour mobility with safeguards, resettlement and family reunification.

5. Prevent deaths, not only respond to emergencies

Connect rescue capacity with prevention: safe pathways, border access to asylum, identification of missing migrants and human rights-based cooperation with third countries.

6. Reinforce independent monitoring and accountability

Strengthen oversight of return operations, detention, border procedures, cooperation practices and the implementation of fundamental rights guarantees. While developing effective alternatives to detention, particularly for vulnerable persons

7. Improve multi-level coordination

Align the work of ministries, autonomous communities, local authorities, equality bodies, ombudsperson institutions and civil society actors around clear implementation benchmarks.

IMRF 2026 - Factsheet May 2026

Edita:

CONVIVE Fundación Cepaim

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