

## Box 3

**AN OVERVIEW OF IMMIGRATION FROM CENTRAL AMERICA, PANAMA AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC (CAPDR) TO SPAIN<sup>1</sup>**

The share of immigration to Spain accounted for by migrants from Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic (CAPDR)<sup>2</sup> has been growing in recent years. According to the most recent population figures,<sup>3</sup> there were 450,000 CAPDR-born residents in Spain in 2021, accounting for 6.2% of all foreign-born residents in the country, practically double the figure of a decade earlier (3.3%) (see Table 1).

These dynamics reflect a relative shift in CAPDR emigration flows (at least in terms of legal migration) towards Spain and away from this group's main traditional destination country, the United States (see Chart 1).<sup>4</sup> As a result, Spain has become the second biggest destination for Central American and Dominican migrants overall, after the United States (see Chart 2).

**The determinants of migration flow dynamics**

Migration flow dynamics are shaped by both economic conditions in the destination countries (pull factors) and social and economic conditions in the countries of origin (push factors). Accordingly, immigration flows from the CAPDR region to Spain have likely been driven, first, by Spain's improving economic conditions since 2013 and, second, by bouts of social and political unrest in Honduras and Nicaragua (the main Central American countries of origin) and several natural disasters.<sup>5</sup>

Going forward, migrant flows to Spain could increase as a result of recent agreements reached with some Central American countries. For instance, in 2021 an agreement was signed with the Honduras Government<sup>6</sup> to promote

Table 1  
Spain: resident population and immigrant inflows

	Total foreign-born residents (a)				Total immigrant inflows			
	2011	2015	2019	2021	2011	2015	2019	2021
	6,282,208	5,883,891	6,549,309	7,254,797	371,335	342,114	750,480	887,960
Proportion of total Spanish population (%)	13.5	12.7	14.0	15.3				
Distribution by country of birth (%)								
CAPDR	3.3	4.2	5.4	6.2	6.5	6.5	9.2	5.5
Central America and Panama	1.1	1.5	2.7	3.6	3.5	4.2	7.7	4.1
Dominican Republic	2.2	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.0	2.4	1.5	1.4
EU27 excl. Spain	28.6	27.7	23.8	21.5	28.8	24.3	13.1	17.7
Europa excl. EU27	9.5	10.0	9.2	9.0	9.5	11.1	7.9	8.6
Africa	17.1	17.3	17.7	17.9	13.0	12.7	14.7	17.6
North America	1.4	1.6	1.7	1.7	3.0	3.4	2.5	2.5
South America	32.5	30.7	32.8	34.4	20.0	22.1	38.3	29.3
Asia	5.8	6.2	6.9	7.0	9.7	8.5	6.8	7.0
Oceania	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1

**SOURCE:** INE (Continuous Household Survey, migration statistics).

**a** Figures at 1 January of the reference year.

1 Box prepared in collaboration with the *Executive Secretariat of the Central American Monetary Council*.

2 The CAPDR group comprises the Spanish-speaking countries of Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) and the Dominican Republic.

3 Data from the National Statistics Institute (INE) Continuous Household Survey 2023 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Migration Statistics 2023.

4 For the United States, the migrant flow data only include the number of foreigners granted resident status, whereas for Spain the data also include illegal immigrants.

5 Juan Fernando Izaguirre Silva (2018). *"Emigración y remesas a Centromérica"*. SECMCA.

6 <https://www.inclusion.gob.es/web/cartaespana/-/acuerdo-espana-honduras-de-migraciones>.

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circular migration (where immigrants commit to returning to their countries of origin), while a similar agreement was reached with Guatemala in January 2023. In addition, the shift in Central American migrant flows towards Spain could be spurred further by the agreement signed in 2023

between the United States, Canada, Mexico and Spain to promote regular migration from Central and South America. In particular, Spain will be involved in an initiative whereby the United States will set up regional processing centres in several countries in order to reinforce the

Chart 1  
CAPDR immigration to Spain and the United States

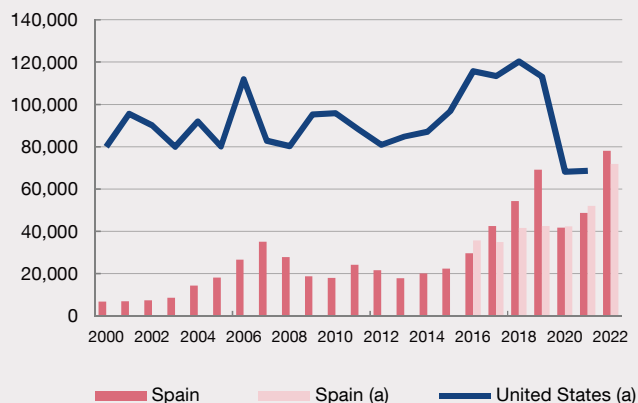


Chart 2  
Destination of CAPDR emigrants (%) (b)

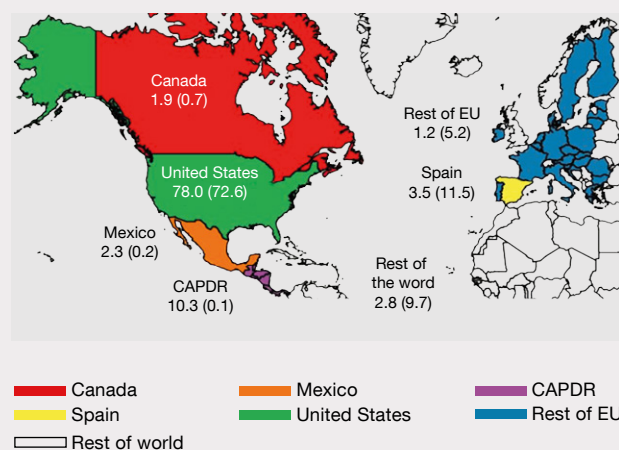


Chart 3  
Proportion of women in immigrant inflows, by country/region of birth (2019)

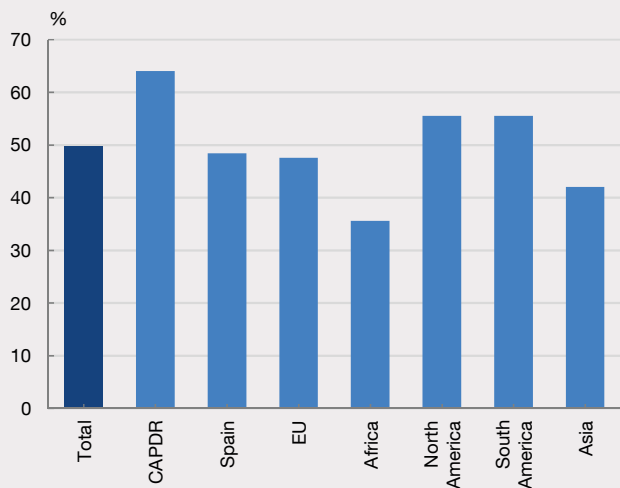
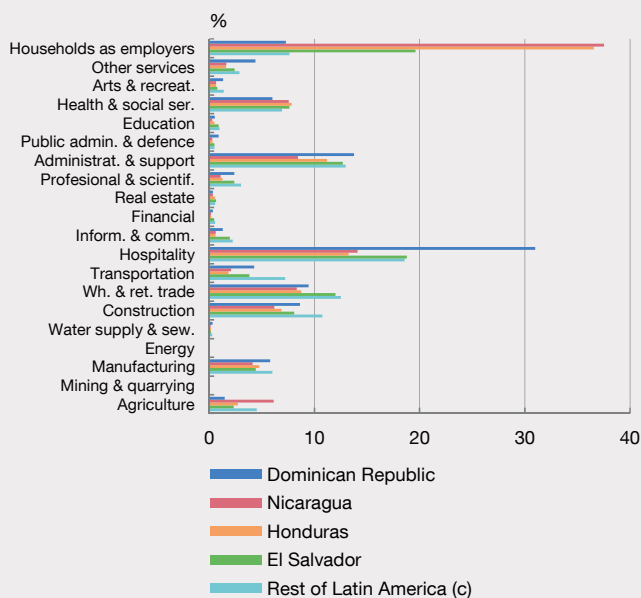


Chart 4  
Foreigners registered with social security. Distribution by sector



SOURCES: INE, Ministerio de Inclusión, Migraciones y Seguridad Social, United Nations and OECD.

- a Data for immigrants granted resident status.
- b Data in brackets: Dominican Republic.
- c Aggregate of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

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channels for regular and orderly migration and reduce irregular migration.<sup>7</sup> With this same goal in mind, several amendments were made to Spanish immigration law in 2022, which made it easier for foreign students to stay in Spain, streamlined the certification of occupations with labour shortages and introduced new opportunities for irregular migrants to legalise their status.<sup>8</sup>

**Profile of the migrants**

Migrants to Spain from CAPDR countries have a somewhat different profile to those from other regions.

For instance, the percentage of women (64% in 2019) is considerably higher than for migrants to Spain as a whole

(around 50%) (see Chart 3). According to social security registrations data, approximately half of the Central American and Dominican women registered in Spain are domestic workers, with particularly high percentages among Honduran and Nicaraguan women.

Furthermore, CAPDR migrants to Spain are younger than those from other countries: in 2019, around 40% of such immigrants were aged 20-29, some 12 pp more than the figure for all immigrants to Spain in that year.

In addition to the domestic work sector, the economic sectors with the highest shares of CAPDR immigrants are hospitality, wholesale and retail trade and administrative and support services (see Chart 4).

7 <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/notasprensa/inclusion/Paginas/2023/270423-acuerdo-migracion-regular-america.aspx>.

8 OECD *International Migration Outlook 2023*.

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