

# **SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN SPAIN**

María Elizabeth Coronel Santacruz

## **1) What is Social Integration?**

How do people from different groups in society come together? And how is this maintained?

First of all, we would like to set the definition of Social Integration: in sociology, this concept refers to a situation where **minority groups** come together or are incorporated into **mainstream society**. Though, we should note, this doesn't mean in a forceful way.

Social integration also refers to a process of largely agreeing on a shared system of meaning, language, culture, and interests. This doesn't mean there aren't any differences, but that we kind of agree to live together and, at least to an extent, feel part of a larger community. The aim of social integration is to respect **diversity, equality of opportunity** and **participation of all people**, meaning that increased social integration helps reduce conflict in society, and it can help us feel more connected to our own community.

## **2) What does Spain do to contribute to social integration?**

There are several organizations and facilities that Spain offers to minority groups.

Some examples are:

### **ACNUR**

ACNUR is a company created under the United Nations Organization. They work together with governments and other international organizations to protect minority groups, especially women and children. They also aspire, where possible, to help minority communities in Spain and internationally, and indigenous people to maintain their heritage and cultural identity, and to ensure vital access to healthcare, interpreters and accommodation.

### **CÁRITAS**

'Cáritas Española' aims to carry out the charitable and social action of the Church in Spain, through its confederated members. They promote the comprehensive development of people and towns, especially the poorest and most excluded.

### **MANOS UNIDAS**

Manos Unidas is a non-governmental development organization of the Catholic Church and volunteers in Spain for the help, promotion and development of third world countries. Its purpose is to fight against hunger, ruin, eviction, poverty, underdevelopment and the causes that cause it.

## **UNICEF**

UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents, and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across more than 190 countries and territories, they do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence.

They are also the world's largest provider of vaccines, and they support child health and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, quality education and skill building, HIV prevention and treatment for mothers and babies, and the protection of children and adolescents from violence and exploitation.

Before, during and after humanitarian emergencies, UNICEF is bringing life saving help and hope to children and families. Non-political and impartial, this organization is never neutral when it comes to defending children's rights and safeguarding their lives and futures.

## **CRUZ ROJA**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), founded in 1863, works around the world to provide humanitarian aid to people affected by conflict and armed violence, and to promote laws that protect victims of war.

## **MÉDICOS SIN FRONTERAS**

'Médicos sin fronteras' is an international medical and humanitarian organization that provides aid to victims of natural or human disasters and armed conflicts, without any discrimination of race, sex, religion, philosophy or politics. In 2021, the group was active in 70 countries with more than 43,000 employees, mostly local doctors, nurses and other medical professionals, logistics experts, engineers and water and sanitation managers.

### ***3) Groups of disadvantaged people***

#### **DISABLED PEOPLE**

Disability is a physical, mental, intellectual, sensory (auditory or visual) deficiency that affects daily life. For this reason, Spanish public institutions have aid for people with disabilities equal to or greater than 33% and there are also benefits and discounts for people with disabilities in public and private activities. Depending on the degree of disability, and also where you live, and the economic and social conditions of each person, different aid can be obtained.

Main aids for people with disabilities in Spain that are normally applied by city councils or autonomous communities:

**1. Reduced prices on public transport****2. Tax benefits for people with disabilities****3. Financial aid and scholarships for books, transportation and lunch****4. Help for housing**

There is aid for buying or renting officially protected housing and aid for adapting housing.

Society is increasingly aware of the needs of people with disabilities, and for example, neighborhood communities are obliged to follow rules to adapt facilities to people with disabilities that you can consult here.

**5. Help with your vehicles**

There are aids for the adaptation of the vehicle and reduction of the registration tax.

**6. Prosthetic aids or medical equipment**

People with disabilities can apply for help to pay part or all of the cost of medical equipment that is needed, such as prostheses or wheelchairs.

**7. Economic provision of personal assistance.****8. Non-contributory pensions.****9. Family allowance for a dependent child with a disability****10. Facilities in the labor field such as:**

- The reservation of specific places for people with disabilities in contests and oppositions.
- Benefits for companies that hire people with disabilities.

Aid to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities at risk of social exclusion

**11. Discounts on medicines**

Depending on the degree of disability, there are discounts on the co-payment of medications. In the case of minors with disabilities, in 2021 they no longer pay for medicines.

**12. Possibility of being a large family with two children****IMMIGRANTS**Mixed pattern of cultural integration

Cáritas Española and the University Institute for Migration Studies (IUEM) carried out a state survey to assess the integration process of the almost eight million inhabitants of immigrant origin who live in Spain today in the last decade.

Likewise, the research confirms that the immigrant population develops a pattern of mixed cultural integration. That is, in their daily actions, in their way of dressing, their diet, their family rules, etc. It combines both cultural patterns of their countries of origin and customs acquired and learned here. Thus, both the theses that defend that immigrants live with their backs to the host society and the 'assimilationist' theses are shown as **minority realities**.

The immigrant population **lives** and **interacts** with the native population and, in general, these relations are **good** and **cordial**. There is regular and direct contact between both groups; we are co-workers or desks, we share train and bus cars, squares, shops..., in short, we are neighbors. And the longer immigrants remain in our country, a greater number of significant links are generated with the native population, going from sharing public spaces to becoming, one and the other, people of reference, friends or couples.

In fact, these closer relationships are key to achieving true integration processes and are more common between natives and immigrants the longer the latter spend in Spain.

In addition, this study affirms that the growth of immigrant hostility and its political expression has been slowed down in Spain, due to the action of a series of key factors, such as: public integration policies, the immigrant memory in popular neighborhoods, labor complementarity, etc.

## REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) supports refugees, asylum seekers, stateless people and people in need of international protection in Spain. In other words, this organization focuses primarily on those women, men, children or older persons who belong to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities or indigenous groups who often experience discrimination and marginalization (factors that are aggravated in situations of forced displacement). Age, gender and other specific factors may expose them to additional protection risks and discrimination. This organization works closely with minority and indigenous groups to identify the risks they face as well as strategies to mitigate them. As individuals and groups, their active participation in community life is an enriching element that should be told with great pride.

### 4) Conclusion

In a world in which the current COVID-19 crisis is showing us that it is more connected than ever, it has been shown as noticeable evidence that the best way to protect ourselves is to protect others. We deserve measures of equity that unite us as a society and help us reduce uncertainties. These are just a few examples of what Spain can do to further unite society.

