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Living and Working in Spain



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| Living and Working in Spain as a Refugee

Practical guide to community support, courses and everyday integration

Spain has, over recent years, become one of Europe's most significant destinations for people seeking safety. Refugees arrive from a wide range of countries, each bringing different experiences, languages and skills. In response, Spain has developed a diverse network of support managed by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration, in collaboration with Comunidades Autónomas (Regions). Alongside government programmes and support channelled through a network of more than 20 NGOs, there are multiple charities, faith organisations, neighbourhood associations and volunteer-run initiatives. Together, these groups help newcomers settle into daily life — from learning Spanish, accessing healthcare or navigating paperwork to finding work, building social connections and understanding local systems.

Life in Spain can still feel challenging at first. The administrative procedures are detailed, the asylum process can be slow, and public services differ between Comunidades Autónomas (Regions). In some of them, more than one official language is used, which can add an extra layer of complexity for someone just arriving. Housing can also be competitive in larger cities, and job opportunities vary depending on location and sector. For these reasons, having clear, practical guidance is essential during the first months.

This guide focuses on the information people most often need when they begin building a stable life: where to meet supportive community groups, how to join free or low-cost courses, what mental-health services are available, how to find housing, and how to manage basic everyday tasks such as transport, schooling and healthcare. It is not a legal overview, but rather a practical starting point to help refugees understand what is available and where to look for help.

Whether someone is settling in Madrid or Barcelona, living in a small rural village or a coastal town, or still deciding their long-term plans, the aim of this guide is to offer reliable, accessible information. It highlights the main organisations and pathways that can make integration smoother, reduce isolation and support people in taking confident steps towards independence in Spain.

01

Community Groups and Integration Centres



| Community Groups and Integration Centres

Spain's refugee reception system is managed by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration, in collaboration with Comunidades Autónomas (regions), and a network of over 20 NGOs. Additionally, there are local governments, faith organisations and neighbourhood associations involved. Many refugees first come into contact with these centres when they need help understanding the asylum system, learning Spanish, accessing healthcare or simply finding a welcoming community. Because Spain is divided into autonomous communities with their own social services, the type of support available can differ from region to region. The organisations below operate widely and provide reliable, day-to-day guidance.

National-level NGOs with physical centres

A network of more than 20 organisations work across multiple cities and run long-standing integration programmes managed by the Ministry. They are often the most comprehensive sources of support for newly arrived refugees. Four of them are mentioned here, but the full list is available [here](#).

1. CEAR – Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid)

Website: <https://www.cear.es>

Cities: Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Málaga, Sevilla, Las Palmas and others

CEAR is one of Spain's most experienced refugee organisations and plays a major role in supporting people throughout the asylum process.

What they offer

- Legal advice, preparation for asylum interviews and support with appeals
- Social workers providing guidance on healthcare, education, housing and public services
- Job-readiness support, including CV assistance and workplace culture workshops
- Spanish language classes and cultural-orientation sessions
- Temporary accommodation programmes when funding is available
- Community events that connect newcomers with local residents

Why it's useful

CEAR offers long-term, structured support and is often involved with individuals and families throughout the entire integration journey.

2. ACCEM

Website: <https://accem.es>

Cities: Madrid, Barcelona, Sevilla, Murcia, Salamanca, León, La Rioja, Guadalajara and others

ACCEM supports refugees, migrants and people in vulnerable situations across Spain.

What they offer

- Legal and administrative advice
- Spanish classes from beginner to intermediate level
- Help preparing for work, including interview practice and job-search support
- Reception centres and temporary accommodation
- Activities for families, community events and childcare support
- Assistance with health appointments and public services

Good for

People who need practical, everyday help alongside legal and social support.

3. Cruz Roja Española (Spanish Red Cross)

Website: <https://www2.cuzroja.es>

Cities: Nationwide

The Red Cross is one of the main organisations receiving and assisting asylum seekers on arrival.

What they offer

- Emergency assistance (food, clothing and basic needs)
- Accommodation in reception centres and transitional housing
- Interpreting services and multilingual support
- Language courses and employability workshops
- Psychological support and wellbeing activities
- Programmes for families, women and unaccompanied young people

Why it matters

It has extensive reach, with centres in nearly every region, making it a key starting point for many refugees.

4. CONVIVE Fundación Cepaim

Website: <https://www.cepaim.org/>

Cities: Madrid, Valencia, Alicante, Gandía, Huelva, Valladolid, Barbastro, Navalmoral de la Mata, Teruel, Soria and Ciudad Real.

CONVIVE Fundación Cepaim is a non-profit social action organisation working to promote inclusive, intercultural and equal access to citizenship rights, particularly for migrants, refugees and people in vulnerability. Its approach is community-based and spans legal, social, educational and labour integration interventions.

What they offer

- Personalised socio-labor integration itineraries (orientation, training and employment support)
- Accompaniment in accessing rights, protection and social services for migrants, asylum seekers and people in exclusion situations
- Temporary reception and holistic support for migrants and asylum seekers (basic needs, social support)
- Programmes addressing equality, non-discrimination and intercultural coexistence
- Community development and intercultural participation activities
- Support for families, youth and marginalised groups through socio-educational initiatives
- Rural integration and socio-economic projects in depopulated areas

Why it's useful

Fundación CEPAIM offers integrated legal, employment and community support, making it a practical, rights-based resource for vulnerable newcomers.

Local community hubs (city-based)

Local hubs provide an informal type of support and do not always form part of the Spanish International and Temporary Protection Reception System. They however often become social and cultural anchors for refugees. Many focus on language practice, cultural orientation and community-building.

1. Barcelona – SAIER (Barcelona Service Centre for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees)

Website: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/saier>

City: Barcelona

SAIER is the main municipal centre in Barcelona for newcomers, including asylum seekers.

What they offer

- Legal counselling and support with asylum procedures
- Employment guidance and job-search training
- Spanish and Catalan language courses
- Interpretation and translation services
- Help accessing healthcare, schools and social welfare
- Psychological support (limited but available)
- Workshops on everyday life in Barcelona

Why it matters

SAIER is free for all migrants and functions as a one-stop centre for integration in Barcelona.

2. Madrid – Centre for Immigrant Integration and Participation (CAIPIs / CAIIs)

City: Madrid

These centres are operated by the City Council and offer everyday support for refugees and migrants.

What they offer

- Spanish language courses at various levels
- Cultural orientation and practical workshops
- Help creating CVs, searching for jobs and preparing for interviews
- Social and legal advice
- Activities for children, young people and families
- Community events, including conversation groups and cultural evenings

Useful for

Anyone living in Madrid who needs day-to-day assistance navigating public services and local systems.

3. Andalucía – Andalucía Acoge

Website: <https://acoge.org>

Cities: Seville, Málaga, Córdoba, Huelva, Algeciras and others

A well-known regional network supporting the integration of migrants and refugees. Andalucía Acoge forms part of the Spanish International and Temporary Protection Reception System.

What they offer

- Intercultural mediation and community-building programmes
- Legal guidance and support with residency and asylum procedures
- Employment training and workplace skills development
- Spanish classes and conversation groups
- Women's groups, youth activities and family support
- Awareness-raising events promoting local inclusion

Why it's useful

It connects newcomers with both social support and local community life.

4. Valencia – CMIV (Municipal Centre for Immigration and Refuge)

City: Valencia

What they offer

- Orientation for new arrivals
- Language and integration courses
- Information on healthcare, education and social services
- Workshops on workers' rights and local labour laws
- Intercultural activities, volunteering programmes and local events

5. Local neighbourhood associations and community centres

Across Spain, many neighbourhood centres host informal activities for newcomers.

Common offers

- Spanish conversation clubs
- Homework support for children
- Cultural events and social gatherings
- Workshops on everyday topics (household budgeting, local transport, digital basics)
- Volunteering opportunities
- Safe spaces for women and families
- Football clubs. For instance, [Dragones de Lavapiés](#) is a community-based football club created in 2014 formed to a large extent by migrants and refugees. Currently 40 of its 65 football players are migrants, providing a healthy way to integrate while transmitting solidarity and community values, fostering dialogue and celebrating diversity through sport and competition.

Why they matter

These centres help reduce isolation and allow refugees to build local connections, especially in smaller towns or areas where larger NGOs are not present.

02

Courses and Training Options for Refugees in Spain



| Courses and Training Options for Refugees in Spain

Refugees in Spain have access to a wide range of free or low-cost courses, from basic Spanish-language classes to vocational training. Many programmes are coordinated by national NGOs, local councils, regional employment offices or publicly funded adult-education centres. Several organisations also provide childcare, travel support or flexible timetables, which makes participation easier for parents or people working irregular hours.

A. Spanish-language courses (free or low-cost)

Spanish (Castilian) is essential for everyday life, while some regions also use co-official languages such as Catalan, Basque or Galician. Refugees can enrol in language courses offered by NGOs, town halls, education centres and volunteer groups.

1. Official Language Schools (Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas – EOI)

Website: varies by region

Public language schools offering affordable courses for adults.

What they offer

- Spanish from A1 to advanced levels
- Courses in Catalan, Basque and Galician in relevant regions
- Morning, evening and weekend groups
- Certificates recognised throughout Spain

Why it's useful

EOI courses are structured, consistent and taught by qualified teachers.

2. NGO-Based Spanish Classes

Available through CEAR, ACCEM, Red Cross, Fundación CEPAIM and Andalucía Acoge.

What they offer

- Beginner to intermediate Spanish
- Practical vocabulary for daily situations
- Conversation groups and informal speaking clubs
- Workshops covering local culture, public transport, healthcare and basic administration
- Some centres provide childcare during lessons

Who it suits

People who prefer community-based classes with supportive, small groups.

3. Municipal language programmes

Cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Seville and Bilbao run local language courses through community centres, libraries and integration services.

Examples

- **Madrid** – “Aulas de Español” in community centres
- **Barcelona** – Spanish and Catalan courses through SAIER and Barcelona Activa
- **Valencia** – Free Spanish courses offered through CMIV
- **Basque Country** – Courses available in both Spanish and Basque (Euskera)

4. Volunteer-led language exchanges

Libraries, neighbourhood associations and universities often organise free conversation groups.

Activities include

- Language swaps (intercambios)
- Conversation cafés
- Reading groups and pronunciation practice

These are especially helpful for building confidence and reducing isolation.

B. Digital skills and employment preparation

Many refugees want to improve their digital literacy or prepare for office-based and remote jobs. Courses are available both in-person and online.

1. Regional employment services (SEPE and autonomous community job offices)

Website: <https://www.sepe.es>

These offices run free employment courses for people registered as job seekers.

Typical courses

- Customer service
- Office administration
- Retail training
- Logistics and warehouse work
- Basic IT and digital literacy
- Job-readiness programmes

Good to know

Some regions offer subsidised transport or provide course materials free of charge.

2. Barcelona Activa

City: Barcelona

Website: <https://www.barcelonactiva.cat>

What they offer

- Digital skills training (basic and advanced)
- Job-search support
- CV writing and interview coaching
- Workshops on workplace rights in Spain
- Entrepreneurship programmes

3. Fundación Telefónica – Conecta Empleo

Website: <https://conectaempleo-formacion.fundaciontelefonica.com>

Courses include

- Basic computer skills
- Office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Introduction to programming
- Digital marketing
- Workplace communication
- Online safety

Why it's useful

High-quality courses with certificates, accessible from anywhere in Spain.

C. Vocational courses in construction

Spain's labour market has a strong need for workers in construction trades. Refugees with the right to work can access free or funded training that leads to recognised certificates.

1. Sectoral vocational training for construction

Courses are aligned with **collective agreements** in construction and adapted to regional labour demand. They are mainly financed by the SEPE Vocational Training (Formación Profesional para el Empleo) service. FLC works with a network of organisations that form part of the International and Temporary Protection Reception System which refer refugees and migrants.

Common options

- Basic construction skills (peón de construcción, auxiliary tasks)
- Bricklaying and masonry
- Painting and finishing works
- Plumbing and sanitation basics
- Electrical installations (entry-level)
- Carpentry and formwork
- Thermal and acoustic insulation

Why it's useful

Courses often include compulsory health and safety training required to work legally on construction sites. Courses are many times complemented with employment interventions and links to employers.

2. Private training centres with grants or scholarships

Some private centres offer funded places for refugees, especially through regional government or EU projects.

Typical areas

- Welding
- Air-conditioning and refrigeration
- Advanced hospitality training
- Driving and transport certificates
- Machinery operation

D. Recognition and upgrading of qualifications

Refugees who have worked in a skilled profession before arriving in Spain may need to have their qualifications assessed or officially recognised.

1. Diploma recognition (Homologación / Convalidación)

Managed by the Ministry of Education

Website: <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es>

They offer

- Evaluation of foreign diplomas
- Recognition for regulated professions such as medicine, nursing, engineering, teaching and architecture
- Validation of secondary school certificates

Important

The process can be slow, so starting early is recommended.

2. Skills recognition and accreditation

This system allows workers to certify experience gained in their home country or informally in Spain. This applies to skills learned through work or informal training.

Who can apply?

- Refugees with work experience or on-the-job training
- Usually at least 3 years of experience
- Experience can be from Spain or the country of origin
- Rules can vary by region

How the process works

- Application: Refugees apply and show proof of work experience
- Advice: An adviser checks documents and explains if skills are sufficient
- Evaluation: Skills may be tested in practice or through an interview
- Certificate: Successful applicants receive an official certificate valid across Spain
- Training (if needed): A training plan is offered if some skills are missing

Why it's useful

Certificates improve job prospects and allow access to higher-level training.

03

Mental-health and Wellbeing Support



| Mental Health Support and Wellbeing

Adjusting to life in Spain can be both hopeful and stressful. Refugees often face uncertainty about their legal status, concerns for family members abroad, difficulties with housing or employment, and the pressure of learning a new language. These challenges can affect emotional wellbeing. Spain has a growing network of organisations offering psychological support, practical counselling, crisis assistance and community-based wellbeing activities.

This section explains where to find help, how to access services even without Spanish, and what support is available for adults, children and vulnerable groups.

A. Main NGOs providing mental-health support

Several national NGOs offer free or low-cost psychological services tailored to refugees and asylum seekers. Support is available in Spanish, English and sometimes Arabic, French or other languages depending on staff availability.

CEAR – Psychological and Social Support

Website: <https://www.cear.es>

Cities: Multiple across Spain

CEAR has dedicated mental-health professionals who specialise in the needs of people seeking protection.

What they offer

- Individual psychological counselling
- Assessments for people who have experienced trauma, displacement or violence
- Group sessions on stress management, resilience and coping strategies
- Family support and parenting guidance
- Psychoeducation on navigating change and uncertainty
- Referral to public mental-health services when specialist treatment is needed

Who it suits

Adults and families who need structured, ongoing support from trained professionals.

ACCEM – Psychosocial Care

Website: <https://accem.es>

Cities: Nationwide coverage

ACCEM integrates mental-health support into its wider refugee-assistance programmes.

What they offer

- One-to-one psychological support
- Social counselling for issues such as bureaucracy, budgeting and housing stress
- Support groups for women, parents and young people
- Emotional-wellbeing workshops (e.g. managing anxiety, adapting to change)
- Help accessing local health centres and mental-health specialists

Why it's useful

The combination of emotional support with practical advice helps reduce day-to-day stress.

Cruz Roja Española (Spanish Red Cross)

Website: <https://www2.cruzroja.es>

Cities: Nationwide

The Red Cross includes mental-health support as part of its reception and integration programmes.

What they offer

- Emotional support for newly arrived refugees
- Counselling sessions focused on adaptation and crisis management
- Community-based wellbeing activities (art, relaxation, physical activity)
- Support for survivors of violence or exploitation
- Youth-focused emotional support in reception centres

Caritas – Community and Emotional Support

Website: <https://www.caritas.es>

Cities: Nationwide through diocesan and parish networks

Caritas provides non-clinical, community-based emotional support.

What they offer

- Friendly, informal counselling sessions
- Assistance for people facing loneliness or social isolation
- Community groups promoting connection and daily routine
- Workshops on family communication and stress reduction
- Crisis referrals to municipal services or shelters

B. Mental-health support for children and young people

Children often struggle with language barriers, school transitions and separation from familiar environments. Spain offers a mix of school-based, NGO-based and municipal support.

1. School Guidance Teams (Equipos de Orientación)

Present in every public school.

Support includes:

- Psychological counselling
- Observation of learning or behavioural difficulties
- Mediation between families and teachers
- Special support plans for newly arrived children
- Referral to child mental-health specialists if needed

2. NGO programmes for children and teens

CEAR, ACCEM and Red Cross run:

- Homework support groups
- Emotional-regulation workshops
- Social-skills groups
- Activities that help children settle into new schools

Andalucía Acoge and Catalan organisations run youth clubs, mentoring programmes and creative projects aimed at reducing isolation.

3. Child and Family Municipal Centers (Centros Municipales de Servicios Sociales / Centros de Atención Familiar)

Available in most cities, providing:

- Psychological support for children
- Parenting support for families struggling with adaptation
- Play-based sessions focusing on emotions and confidence
- Help accessing specialist child mental-health units (USMIA)

C. Crisis support and emergency assistance

For urgent situations involving violence, severe stress or immediate emotional crisis, several services are available across Spain.

1. Emergency number: 112

For urgent medical, safety or psychological emergencies.

2. Domestic-violence helpline: 016

Free and confidential, available 24/7.

Interpreting is available in multiple languages.

Supports people experiencing

- Domestic or gender-based violence
- Intimidation or control in the home
- Emotional or psychological abuse

The 016 number does not appear on phone bills.

3. Anti-racism support & discrimination line: 021

Free nationwide telephone service to assist people who have experienced or witnessed **racial or ethnic discrimination or racist hate crimes**.

It provides professional support and guidance and is a specific resource to report and get help in these situations

4. Municipal Social Services (Servicios Sociales Municipales)

These centres offer immediate and practical support for people in crisis.

They provide

- Social workers and emergency assessments
- Crisis counselling
- Access to municipal psychologists
- Emergency accommodation for individuals and families
- Referral to specialised shelters or safe houses

5. Psychological emergency units (Unidades de Salud Mental – Urgencias)

Hospitals across Spain have teams trained to support people in acute mental-health crises.

Anyone can go directly to hospital emergency departments (Urgencias) if they feel unsafe.

D. Community-based wellbeing activities

Not all emotional support needs to be clinical. Many people benefit from regular social activities, creative expression and opportunities to build routine. These programmes are widely available through NGOs, cultural centres and neighbourhood associations.

1. Conversation groups and social clubs

Provided by CEAR, ACCEM, Red Cross, municipal libraries and community centres.

Activities include:

- Spanish conversation circles
- Cultural outings
- Walking groups
- Book clubs
- Group cooking sessions

These reduce isolation and help newcomers practise Spanish in a friendly environment.

2. Women's groups and family activities

Run by CEAR, ACCEM, Andalucía Acoge, Caritas and local councils.

They offer

- Safe spaces to discuss challenges
- Parenting workshops
- Relationship and communication sessions
- Creative groups such as sewing, crafts or dance
- Support networks for single mothers

3. Creative and physical wellbeing programmes

Available in multicultural centres, art spaces and some NGOs.

Examples

- Art therapy workshops

- Music and movement sessions
- Storytelling and photography projects
- Yoga or gentle exercise groups
- Gardening and urban-community projects
- Community-based football clubs

These activities help people relax, connect with others and gain confidence in their new environment.

4. Faith-based and community-led groups

Local churches, mosques and cultural associations often provide informal support.

Typical activities

- Emotional support from community leaders
- Peer-support groups in native languages
- Family events and cultural celebrations
- Volunteer-run language practice

These spaces can be particularly helpful for those who feel more comfortable in familiar cultural settings.

04

Housing and Everyday Practical Guidance



| Housing and Everyday Practical Guidance

Finding stable housing and understanding everyday systems can be challenging for refugees in Spain. The rental market is competitive in many cities, administrative processes can feel complex, and services vary significantly between the autonomous communities. This section outlines where to find housing support, how to navigate everyday tasks such as healthcare and transport, and what practical steps help newcomers settle into daily life.

Housing Support

Housing in Spain is largely provided through the private rental market. Social housing exists but is limited and usually reserved for long-term residents. Many refugees rely on NGOs, municipal services and community groups for guidance on contracts, rights and safe searching practices.

CEAR – Housing and Social Support

Website: <https://www.cear.es>

Cities: Multiple

CEAR assists refugees in both the initial reception phase and during the transition into private accommodation.

What they offer

- Temporary accommodation through the national reception system (if eligible)
- Help searching for private rentals
- Mediation with landlords and letting agencies
- Assistance reviewing and signing rental contracts
- Guidance on registering at the residence address (empadronamiento)
- Support for people at risk of homelessness
- Help accessing municipal housing services

Why it's helpful

Their staff understand the challenges refugees face in the housing market and provide practical, hands-on support.

ACCEM – Housing and Integration Services

Website: <https://accem.es>

Cities: Nationwide coverage

ACCEM manages several reception centres and also helps people move into independent housing.

What they offer

- Temporary or transitional accommodation (depending on funding)
- Advice on finding affordable flats
- Landlord communication support
- Help understanding contracts, bills and local regulations
- Emergency assistance for vulnerable families

Cruz Roja Española (Red Cross)

Website: <https://www2.cruzroja.es>

Cities: Nationwide

The Red Cross operates reception centres and assists refugees moving into long-term housing.

They provide

- Temporary accommodation for asylum seekers
- Practical help entering the private rental market
- Orientation on tenants' rights and responsibilities
- Support with deposits and utilities (depending on regional funding)
- Information on local housing offices and social housing programmes

Municipal Social Services (Servicios Sociales Municipales)

Available in all towns and cities across Spain

Services include

- Emergency accommodation and referrals to shelters

- Help applying for regional housing support
- Social workers who assist with administrative tasks
- Financial aid for households in crisis (varies by region)
- Guidance on negotiating with landlords or agencies

Local community centres and neighbourhood associations

In many areas, community groups maintain informal networks of rental opportunities.

They offer

- Local noticeboards with rental adverts
- Interpretation for contract discussions
- Workshops on tenants' rights
- Peer support from residents who have navigated the system themselves

These centres can be particularly useful in smaller towns where NGO presence is more limited.

Where to search for rentals online

Popular rental platforms in Spain include:

- <https://www.idealista.com>
- <https://www.fotocasa.es>
- <https://www.pisos.com>
- <https://www.habitaclia.com> (especially Catalonia)
- <https://www.milanuncios.com> (general listings)

Safe searching tips

- Never transfer money before seeing the property in person
- Be cautious of offers with unusually low prices
- Ask for everything in writing
- Clarify whether utilities (electricity, water, gas) are included
- Check the deposit conditions (fianza)
- If unsure, ask an NGO to review the contract before signing

Understanding Rental Agreements in Spain

Understanding Rental Agreements (Contrato de Alquiler)

A typical rental contract in Spain includes:

- Full names and ID numbers of tenant and landlord
- Address of the property
- Duration of contract (usually 1 year, often renewable)
- Monthly rent and payment deadline
- Deposit amount (usually one month's rent)
- Responsibility for utilities and building fees
- Rules for contract termination
- Inventory list of furniture (if furnished)
- Permission for empadronamiento (address registration)

Empadronamiento (Local Address Registration)

Registering your address at the local town hall is important for:

- Accessing healthcare
- Enrolling children in school
- Accessing social services
- Proving residence for certain benefits

Landlords must allow it if the tenant legally lives in the property.

Everyday Practical Guidance

Understanding key systems early on can make daily life in Spain more manageable.

1. Healthcare

Spain has a strong public healthcare system, and most refugees can access it after registering their address.

Steps to access care

- Register at your local town hall (empadronamiento)
- Visit your local health centre (centro de salud)
- Request a health card (tarjeta sanitaria)
- Register with a family doctor (médico de cabecera)

Emergency services

- **112** – for urgent medical or safety emergencies
- Hospital emergency departments are called *Urgencias*

Language support

NGOs such as CEAR, ACCEM and Red Cross often help with interpreting or accompany people to appointments when necessary.

2. Public Transport

Transport varies by city, but most places offer integrated bus, metro or tram networks.

Examples

- **Madrid:** Metro + EMT buses
- **Barcelona:** Metro, buses and trams
- **Valencia:** Metrovalencia and EMT buses
- **Seville:** Buses and trams

Tips

- Monthly travel passes are usually cheaper than single tickets
- Some regions offer reduced fares for people on low incomes or in vulnerable situations

3. Opening a Bank Account

Many banks offer accounts suitable for newcomers.

Common banks

- CaixaBank
- Santander
- BBVA
- ING
- Sabadell

Typical requirements

- Passport
- Address certificate (empadronamiento)
- NIE (foreigner identification number) if available
- Mobile phone number

Some banks also offer “accounts for non-residents”.

4. Mobile Phones and Internet

Spain has several providers offering prepaid and contract plans.

Main providers

- Movistar
- Orange
- Vodafone
- MásMóvil
- Yoigo
- Digi

Prepaid SIM cards are widely available in supermarkets and kiosks.

5. Food, Shopping and Essentials

Affordable supermarkets include:

- Mercadona
- Lidl

- Dia
- Carrefour
- Alcampo

Charities and community groups also run food-distribution programmes for people in need.

Second-hand options

- Wallapop (mobile app)
- Flea markets (rastros)
- Local charity shops
- Milanuncios for furniture and household items

6. Education and Schools

Public education in Spain is free.

To enrol a child

- Contact your local education office or school
- Provide ID and any available school documents
- Register your address (empadronamiento) beforehand
- Children may receive additional Spanish-language support

Primary and secondary schools often have orientation staff who help families adapt.

7. Everyday Administration

Key offices include:

- **Town Hall (Ayuntamiento)** – empadronamiento
- **Police (Policía Nacional)** – asylum procedures, NIE and residency cards
- **SEPE** – employment services
- **Autonomous community offices** – social benefits, education and health
- **Social services** – support for vulnerable families

NGOs can help with:

- Writing official letters
- Filling in digital forms
- Understanding appointment procedures
- Preparing documents for asylum or residence processes

Everyday tips from common refugee experiences in Spain

- Keep copies of all documents, including rental contracts and receipts
- Attend local community events to meet people and practise Spanish
- Ask for help early if you feel overwhelmed by paperwork
- Learn key phrases in Spanish, even before formal classes begin
- Make use of free municipal workshops — many are practical and easy to join