

SUMMARY


# THE REALITY OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS IN SPAIN







Ministry of Social Rights, Consumption and Agenda 2030, from the tax allocation of the Personal Income Tax and Corporate Income Tax

 **Dirección de la Sede Central:** Calle Jinetes, 5, 29012 – Málaga


 952 21 89 87


 aem\_malaga@yahoo.es

 Asociación Marroquí-España

 @amarroquimalaga

 @asociacion.marroqui.malaga

 @AsociacionMarroqui

 Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de los Inmigrantes



# INDEX

<b>PRESENTATION</b> .....	4
<b>1.INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	5
<b>2.STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS AND DYNAMICS OF ASSOCIATIONS</b> .....	7
2.1.Definitions of migrant associations.....	7
2.2.Factors and reasons for the emergence of immigrant associations.....	8
2.3.Functions and activities of immigrant associations.....	8
2.4. Internal organisation and functioning of immigrant associations.....	9
2.5. Leadership in migrant associations.....	10
<b>3.THE REALITIES OF WOMEN IN IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS</b> .....	12
<b>4. THE NETWORKING OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS</b> .....	13
<b>5. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, ADVOCACY AND INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS</b> .....	14
5.1. Social participation and advocacy.....	14
<b>6. NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS</b> .....	16
6.1. Institutional.....	16
6.2. Social.....	16
6.3. Economic.....	17
6.4 Professionalisation.....	17
<b>7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICES</b> .....	19
<b>8. CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	20

# PRESENTATION

We are pleased to present the report *The reality of immigrant associations in Spain*, prepared by a multidisciplinary research team (sociology, psychology, social work and international relations) of the association and funded by the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumption and Agenda 2030, from the tax allocation of Personal Income Tax and Corporate Tax. The study, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Compact for Migration, responds to the need for a comprehensive diagnosis of immigrant associations in Spain, exploring their characteristics, activities, needs and relations with public administrations.

We are aware that immigrant associations arise from collective experiences organised with the aim of achieving common objectives, and play a key role in creating a sense of belonging and in the social integration of migrants. Moreover, these associations contribute, both directly and indirectly, to the well-being of society as a whole, promoting actions that not only benefit the migrant population, but the entire community. It is from this premise that our research work arises.

The general objective of this research is to gain in-depth knowledge of the functioning and working dynamics of associations founded and/or managed, partially or totally, by immigrants, as well as to observe the relationships and links that bind them to other organisations and to the administration.

For years, the Moroccan Association for the Integration of Immigrants has been concerned about the associative fabric of immigrant organisations. This report allows us to deepen and resolve this interest in the knowledge of immigrant associations, which must be recognised as active agents of social change. Immigrants should be seen not only as equals, but also as integral members of the community, as welcoming neighbours who, although they initially thought they were just passing through, have now decided to stay and contribute to the development of a more inclusive, fair and equitable society.

We are grateful for the commitment of all those who have made this research possible.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Immigrant associations are the result of the combination of different experiences, and are oriented towards the achievement of socially shared goals. Immigrant associations are a meeting point for people whose biography is marked by similar experiences, and in this common space a collective conscience is generated. Immigrant associations seek to change the living conditions of immigrants living in the host society, deploying different action strategies. For all these reasons, and as the sociologist Alain Touraine would point out, immigrant associations contribute to the production of society.

This document offers a summary of the study *The reality of immigrant associations in Spain (2024)*, which analyses the characteristics of these organisations, their interaction with other social actors, their capacity for political influence in the host society, as well as the challenges they face and the achievements they have made. The aim is to broaden knowledge about the sector, highlighting good practices in the associative sphere of organisations formed by immigrants. Based on these findings, recommendations and concrete actions have been proposed to strengthen collaboration between immigrant associations, other social organisations and governmental institutions.

Academic interest in immigrant associations in Spain began in the 1990s, coinciding with the emergence of immigrant organisations in the country<sup>1</sup>. These studies initially focused on exploring the relationship between immigrant associations and social integration<sup>2</sup>. Later on, research focused on the role of immigrant associations as political agents.<sup>3</sup>

In the study, an immigrant association is defined as an organisation founded,

---

1 Albert, María; Moncusí, Albert and Lacomba, Joan (2011). African immigrant associations: participation and integration in the case of the Valencian Community. *Revista Española del Tercer Sector*, (19), 87-120.

2 Carmen Bel Adell (1994). La integración social de los inmigrantes y las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONGs). *Papeles de geografía*, (20), 119-132.

3 Moraes, Natalia and Cutillas, Isabel (2018). L'estructura d'oportunitat política transnacional i el gir relacional en l'anàlisi de la participació política i l'associacionisme migrant. *Revista de sociologia*, 103 (4), 605-624.

directed and formed by people of foreign origin who reside in the host society, and whose purpose is to defend the interests of an ethnic or cultural community. This term allows for an adequate delimitation of the object of study, and is widely accepted in the academic literature and by the entities consulted.<sup>4</sup>

The research was carried out using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including surveys, interviews and focus groups. A mapping of immigrant associations was carried out by consulting the registers of associations of various public administrations, corroborating the information through contact with their representatives. Subsequently, 176 immigrant associations were surveyed in order to find out about their characteristics and general situation. In order to go deeper into this information, 37 immigrant associations and 34 people belonging to the public administrations of the different autonomous territories were interviewed. In addition, 15 focus groups were carried out (1 national and 14 regional) to complement the information obtained.

---

4 As explained in Chapter 2, some of the immigrant associations consulted are critical of the use of this term.

## 2. STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS AND DYNAMICS OF ASSOCIATIONS

### 2.1. DEFINITIONS OF MIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

An association is a space shared by a group of people who organise themselves for the same purpose. The concept of association has four dimensions: sociability, solidarity, identity and participation. An immigrant association refers to organisations that are founded, run and formed by people of immigrant origin. Immigrant associations vary considerably, with differences in their composition (socio-demographic, ethnic and cultural), structure, approaches, action strategies and particular purpose. Moroccan associations are a clear reflection of the diversity and heterogeneity of immigrant associations<sup>5</sup>, as different types can be identified, such as trade union, social integration, development, women's and religious associations, among others. It is common for immigrant associations to be confused with pro-immigrant associations, which are generally made up of people who belong to the host society and whose activity is oriented towards responding to the needs of the immigrant population.

The study has shown that the term is widely accepted by various immigrant associations, but it is not without its critics. Some organisations have pointed out that the concept has been developed mainly from the perspective of welfare NGOs and pro-immigrant organisations, which, according to them, makes the specific realities of immigrant associations invisible. Another criticism is that the term places excessive emphasis on ethnic-cultural aspects, leaving the specific objectives and activities carried out by these associations in the background. Its use would also hinder the normalisation of the immigrant population, as it establishes a clear distinction between native associations and immigrant associations.

---

5 Lacomba, Joan and Berlanga, María Jesús (2022). Migrants, refugees and the third social sector. An analysis of the role of large Spanish NGOs in the management of funds and policies. *Alternativas. Cuadernos de Trabajo social*, 29 (1), 1-23.

## 2.2.FACTORS AND REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

Among the factors related to the emergence of migrant associations is the importance of forming support groups among people in similar situations. Migrant associations often form around a common denominator, such as nationality, culture or religion. Sharing a nationality also implies a link to a common language, customs and socio-political experiences. These commonalities act as a powerful bonding factor that encourages the creation of associations<sup>6</sup>. Immigrant associations allow for the sharing of experiences and difficulties associated with the migration process, becoming essential spaces for socialisation and psychological support for immigrants in the host country.

Immigrant associations are a mechanism for seeking resources and fighting for full citizenship. In the face of systems that frequently marginalise immigrant groups, depriving them of full social and political participation, these associations become tools for accessing opportunities and resources. However, access to these spaces is not always easy, as a lack of resources or professionalisation can limit participation. Likewise, associationism facilitates contact with various actors in the host society, which contributes to overcoming cultural barriers and promoting a better understanding of their environment<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.3.FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

Immigrant associations play a key role in welcoming and counselling the migrant community. One important aspect is their contribution to combating the unwanted loneliness that many immigrants experience on arrival in the host country. It is important to note that the action of these organisations is not static, but

---

6 Gómez Gil, Carlos (2007). El asociacionismo de inmigrantes. University of Alicante. Observatorio Permanente de la Inmigración. <http://hdl>.

7 Mori3n, Jos3, and Aboussi, Mourad (2016). Immigrant associations in Spain: functions and limitations in the face of the challenge of integration. *Trabajo Social Global-Global Social Work*, 6 (11), 143-165



evolves according to the changing needs of the immigrant community. Initially, immigrant associations aimed to support people in their arrival and settlement in the host society. However, over time, and as the stay in the country becomes permanent, these associations expand their work, attending to anyone in need. In some cases, associations decide to internationalise their social action, extending their reach beyond national borders to benefit people in their respective countries of origin.

In terms of the types of activities carried out, the focus on leisure and free time stands out, with 63% of the associations surveyed engaging in cultural activities (sports, painting, sculpture, photography, theatre, music, reading, writing, etc.). In addition, a significant percentage, 49%, organise activities in the field of training and education, such as workshops, classes or courses, including language classes. Thirty-nine percent of the associations focus on labour market insertion, offering advice on finding employment, while 37% are involved in the promotion of rights and social denunciation, working on political advocacy, activism and the promotion of citizenship. Also 37% develop activities related to legal advice, providing information and assistance in legal proceedings.

## 2.4. INTERNAL ORGANISATION AND FUNCTIONING OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

The organisation, governance model and functioning of immigrant associations vary according to the specific situation of each entity. Factors such as the number of members and their link to the association (whether as staff, partners or volunteers), the resources available and the nature of the activities carried out have a direct impact on the structure and internal dynamics of the organisation.

The study has revealed that the internal organisation is not homogeneous and responds to factors such as the group's thinking and the needs of the entity. In the recently created associations, it was found that a horizontal governance model predominates, characterised by a non-hierarchical organisation, in which all the people involved have the same rank and responsibility within the association. However, as the organisation's resources increase, whether human, financial, material and/or technical, maintaining this model becomes difficult. This is why associations adopt the vertical or hierarchical model, which implies a clear distinction between coordinators, contracted staff and volunteers, both in terms of roles and position in the organisational structure.

Physical space influences the structure, organisation and action of the organisations. In the research, it was observed that 60% of the associations consulted have a space where they can hold meetings, store material resources and attend to their users. Of the total, 35% use a space provided by the public administration, while 16% maintain their headquarters by paying rent. On the other hand, the percentage of associations that own their headquarters is practically residual, representing 2% of the entities consulted.

The research also found that only one out of three immigrant associations surveyed has staff. When they do have staff, it tends to be small, ranging from 1 to 5 people. Moreover, the profile of the people hired is characterised by their high qualifications and technical specialisation, as their incorporation responds to the need to implement specialised care services, as well as to professionalise the management of the organisation. These data show that immigrant associations in Spain are small in size and that they are mainly driven by members and volunteers.

## 2.5. LEADERSHIP IN MIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

Leadership should be understood as a social relationship in which the person who leads is capable of guiding the actions of the people being led. In the study, it was observed that the figure of the leader plays a fundamental role in immigrant associations. Leaders take on very important functions, such as the founding of immigrant organisations, including the founding of immigrant organisations, the establishment of strategic alliances with other social actors, the organisation and mobilisation of the immigrant community, as well as the visibility of the association.

However, leadership can also generate harmful dynamics both for the immigrant community and for the associations themselves. One of the main problems identified is personalism, which implies subordinating collective well-being to the particular interests of a single individual. This phenomenon generates a deep malaise in immigrant associations, causing not only fractures in the association movement, but also a growing sense of distrust towards these organisations on the part of the immigrant population. The division in immigrant associations significantly reduces the transformative potential of these organisations, which limits the possibilities of exercising an effective political influence in the host society.

# 3. THE REALITIES OF WOMEN IN IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

Immigrant associations function as meeting spaces for people who perceive themselves as otherness, allowing them, by overcoming this label, to find a place of mutual understanding and recognition. However, these spaces do not always guarantee equality when analysed from a gender perspective (at least in mixed spaces).

The study has shown that 60% of the associations with people recruited in the last year are women. These data confirm that immigrant associations are a highly feminised sector. However, the feminisation of the sector does not necessarily imply that women lead decision-making or have a significant presence in key bodies, such as the Board of Directors. Only one third of the organisations have women on the Board of Directors (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary or Member).

Training in gender issues has a certain presence in immigrant associations. Forty-one per cent of immigrant associations offer it to all members of the organisation, from volunteers to the Board of Directors. On the other hand, 36% of the organisations do not offer gender training to any of their members. This does not mean that people lack this type of training, but it does mean that the organisation itself does not provide it.

Women's associations emerge with the purpose of responding to their own needs, creating a space where immigrant women can feel safe and find a place of their own. Although these organisations focus on serving immigrant women, many of them do not do so exclusively, as they also provide support to local women. Their presence is spread mainly through word of mouth among women, which facilitates the creation of bonds of trust, and from there, they expand their reach to serve a greater number of women.

## 4. THE NETWORKING OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

Social organisations have the capacity to generate support networks that not only contribute to their sustainability over time, but also significantly strengthen them. The breadth and composition of associative networks depend on factors such as the size of the association, its trajectory, the type of entity, the availability of resources and the territory in which it operates. Immigrant associative networks are made up of different actors, such as other immigrant associations, pro-immigrant organisations, welfare NGOs, institutions, businesses and the immigrant population. These connections are established mainly for the purpose of exchanging information, referring users and organising joint activities, thus strengthening the collaboration and impact of the entities.

The study reveals that immigrant associations prioritise cooperation with counterpart organisations, a practice adopted by 85% of the organisations surveyed. This collaboration, based on solidarity and mutual support, significantly enhances their capacity to influence the socio-political reality of the host society, as the research shows. Over time, these alliances favour the formation of federations, thus consolidating more stable and permanent collaborative links.

# 5. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, ADVOCACY AND INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

## 5.1. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY

In Spain, the formal participation of the immigrant population faces significant limitations, which leads this social group to explore alternatives for influencing the host society. The study has revealed that associationism, in its various forms, emerges as the main mechanism for social and political participation of the immigrant community. This phenomenon contributes to the creation of a collective consciousness and the strengthening of solidarity among its members, transforming the immigrant, as an individual, into an actor with a shared history and reality with others.

Associationism is presented as a key tool for structuring, articulating and making visible the demands of the immigrant population. The strategies identified to influence the socio-political reality of the host society include:

- The organisation and mobilisation of immigrant social protest.
- Pressure on public institutions.
- The push for the creation of institutional consultative bodies.
- The establishment of alliances with local political formations.

## INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

Relations between immigrant associations and public institutions are diverse and dynamic, and are influenced by the visibility of the entities, which stands out as a crucial factor in consolidating long-lasting and stable relationships. In this context, associations play five distinct roles:

- **Consultant:** focuses on the exchange of information between the administration and migrant associations, which can be unidirectional or bidirectional.
- **Collaborator:** this role seeks to promote joint initiatives through cooperation, which can be one-off or permanent.
- **Mediator:** based on the transfer of the demands and needs of the immigrant community to the political-administrative authorities.
- **Assistance:** in this role, the associations take on responsibilities assigned by the public administration, developing specialised services that respond to social needs such as legal advice or job placement.
- **Critical:** focuses on denouncing institutional malpractices, including administrative inefficiency and discrimination based on region of origin.

# 6. NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT ASSOCIATIONS

## 6.1. INSTITUTIONAL

The institutional needs of immigrant associations arise as a result of dysfunctions in public administration, especially with regard to the complexity and high cost of administrative processes. The study shows that one of the main difficulties detected is the complexity and lack of information on the procedures necessary for associations to become legally constituted. Although some public administrations offer support in this area, immigrant associations prefer to be supported by pro-immigrant organisations, which are considered more accessible and closer than the administration itself.

This problem also extends to the area of public funding, an essential resource for associations to be able to carry out their projects. Access to public subsidies presents similar obstacles, compounded by an additional factor: the increasing complexity, stringency and competitiveness of funding allocation processes. As a result, associations that rely heavily on public funding find their long-term sustainability compromised.

## 6.2. SOCIAL

Access to housing, together with racism and xenophobia, stand out as the main social problems identified by immigrant associations. With regard to housing, the organisations have stated that they lack the necessary resources to address this issue. Difficulties in accessing adequate housing lead many immigrants to opt for precarious solutions, such as unregistered housing, in poor conditions or associated with irregular administrative situations.

Moreover, racism and xenophobia are of great concern to associations, which warn about the growing proliferation of hate speech and the increase in xenophobic acts. In this context, Muslim associations have denounced the increase in Islamophobic expressions, targeting both individuals and Muslim religious centres. These challenges reflect the urgency of addressing these social needs on multiple fronts.

## 6.3. ECONOMIC

Raising financial resources is crucial for the functioning of immigrant associations. Although the associations present different strategies for raising resources, obtaining public resources stands out as the main source of funding. This type of funding is crucial for the development and sustainability of associations, as it allows them to hire specialised technical staff to implement essential services, such as administrative, legal and psychological counselling, which respond to the specific needs of the immigrant community. Moreover, public funding makes it easier for associations to have a headquarters, whether rented or owned, which is a key resource for their operation. Conversely, the lack of access to public funds negatively affects the development of the association's activity, limiting its capacity for action and its scope of community care.

## 6.4 PROFESSIONALISATION

The research has identified professionalisation as one of the main needs of migrant associations. Despite the great work they do, many face obstacles that limit their capacity for growth and effectiveness. Among these obstacles, the following stand out:

- **Lack of physical space:** the lack of an adequate place to carry out its activities and offer its services affects the structure of the organisation and limits its action.
- **Lack of training in association management:** many of these organisations lack adequate training in administrative management, which makes it difficult to make strategic decisions and optimise resources. The lack of skills in key areas such as project management, fundraising or team coordination has a negative impact on the sustainability and scope of their activities.
- **Lack of hired technical staff:** Professionalisation also implies having qualified staff, such as lawyers, psychologists or social workers, to provide quality services. However, many associations do not have the financial resources to hire such staff, which affects the quality of the services they can offer to the immigrant community. It is equally important to incorporate workers for the functioning and maintenance of the association.



These shortcomings represent major obstacles to the development and consolidation of immigrant associations, limiting their capacity to effectively address the needs of the immigrant population and to establish stronger relations with public administrations and other organisations. Professionalisation is therefore an indispensable element for improving both their autonomy and the effectiveness of their work.

## 7. ACHIEVEMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Despite economic difficulties and lack of resources, immigrant associations have managed to consolidate, grow, and expand their impact. Among their most outstanding achievements are the creation of their own spaces, the increase in participation and collaboration, and the implementation of activities that promote cultural visibility and immigrants' rights. It also underlines the importance of their recognition by both participants and public administrations, which reinforces their role in society.

The good practices of these associations include the development of innovative activities, such as guaranteeing rights through accompaniment of vulnerable people, the creation of job banks, remedial classes for immigrant children, and emotional wellbeing workshops. In addition, some associations manage services that other entities do not provide, such as soup kitchens, which highlights their importance in the community.

Associations have strengthened their links with public administrations through participation in forums and councils. These collaborations have enabled the creation of policies that reflect the demands of the immigrant population, such as the development of anti-racism plans or the improvement of care services.

Public administrations also recognise the role of these associations, highlighting their ability to make diversity visible and raise awareness of the situation of migrants in society. In this regard, some administrations encourage the professionalisation of associations and provide them with training in key areas such as applying for funding, the use of digital platforms and intercultural mediation.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

1. **The debate on how to define migrant associations is still open**, reflecting the diversity and complexity of these organisations.
2. **Only one in three associations has contracted staff**. This reflects the limited financial resources faced by these organisations, which rely heavily on volunteers to carry out their activities.
3. **Most of the activities carried out by the associations are related to leisure and free time**. These include sporting, cultural and recreational activities such as painting, theatre, music, among others, reflecting a clear commitment to influence the cultural sphere.
4. **Immigrant associations are feminised but women are a minority in leadership positions**. This contrast highlights the need to promote greater gender equality in leadership positions within these organisations, ensuring that women not only participate, but also have access to management positions and positions of influence.
5. **Almost half of the associations offer gender training**. This effort shows a clear commitment to integrate the gender perspective into their structure and activities, promoting equality and raising awareness of gender issues.
6. **Immigrant associations prioritise collaboration with counterpart organisations**, which allows them to share experiences, resources and strategies to address the common needs of the population they serve. This collaboration facilitates the creation of mutual support networks that strengthen both collective action and their capacity to have an impact on the receiving society.
7. **Immigrant associations are active agents of social change**, as they seek to improve the living conditions of the communities they represent, while contributing to the development of a fairer and more inclusive society.
8. **Progress has been made in immigrant institutional participation**. These improvements reflect a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating immigrant associations in spaces for consultation in which to convey the demands and needs of the immigrant community.

**9. Immigrant associations adopt different roles in their relations with public institutions,** reflecting their adaptability and versatility.

**10. There is growing concern about the proliferation of racism and xenophobia,** in its different expressions.

**11. Institutional obstacles have a negative impact on the structure and activity of the association,** limiting its action and long-term sustainability.

**12. The professionalisation of the organisation is crucial for the survival of organisations.** This process implies strengthening their structure, organisational capacities and internal management.



