

UNIT 5

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY OF SPAIN



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UNIT 5

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1. THE POLITICAL MAP OF SPAIN

Spain is located on the southwestern tip of continental Europe, and is very close to continental Africa, where it has several territories. It lies between two large bodies of water: the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

Spain has an area of 505 530 km². Most of its territory is located on the Iberian Peninsula, although it also consists of two archipelagos, the Islas Canarias and the Islas Baleares, and two cities in North Africa: Ceuta and Melilla. Other smaller islands are also part of Spanish territory, including those located to the north of Morocco: the Chafarinas Islands, the Alhucemas Islands and Alborán Island.

Since the current Constitution was adopted in 1978, Spain has been organised into 17 Autonomous Communities, divided in turn into the 50 provinces that have made up Spain since the 19th century.

2. THE CONSTITUTION AND CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

2.1. THE CONSTITUTION

The fundamental law of a state, which establishes its basic principles and laws, is called the Constitution. In Spain, the current Constitution was approved in 1978. It regulates the form of the state and the main characteristics of the territorial organisation.

2.2. CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The central government is comprised of all the institutions that can act throughout the whole of Spain.

All of the central government bodies reside in the capital of the state: Madrid.

2.3. POWERS OF THE STATE

- **LEGISLATIVE POWER:** The laws that govern Spain are made in the Cortes Generales, or Spanish Parliament. This institution is made up of two chambers of representatives: the Senate (Senado) and the Congress of Deputies (Congreso de los Diputados). Members of the Cortes Generales, which are grouped into political parties, are elected at general elections.
- **EXECUTIVE POWER:** Its function is to govern according to laws that are made and passed by the Cortes Generales. Following these laws, it directs domestic and foreign policy and the central government. It is made up of the Prime Minister (Presidente del Gobierno), who is appointed by the Congress of Deputies, and ministers.
- **JUDICIAL POWER:** Judicial power is responsible for ensuring that all public and private activities are done within the limits of the law. The courts are responsible for administering justice. This power is applied when it is believed that a crime has been committed or our legal rights have not been respected.

2.4. AUTONOMOUS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

2.4.1. AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT

Spain is organized into **17 Autonomous Communities** and two **Autonomous Cities** (Ceuta and Melilla). The Spanish Constitution of 1978 protects their right to self-government.

Each Autonomous Community has its own **Statute of Autonomy** which sets out how it is organized and decides how the government deals with different issues: health, education, etc.

The Autonomous Communities hold elections every four years, in which an **Autonomous Parliament** is elected by universal suffrage. The **president** of the Autonomous Community is chosen by the parliament to govern alongside his or her **councilors**.

2.4.2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Autonomous Communities, in turn, are divided into provinces, which are made up of municipalities.

The representatives of the different Spanish political institutions (state, autonomous and local) are chosen by elections, in which all Spanish citizens over the age of 18 can participate.

3. THE POPULATION OF SPAIN

3.1. The structure and distribution of the population of Spain

In 2015, the population of Spain was 46.5 million.

In Spain, there are more women than men. The sex ratio is 96.6%, which means that there are almost 97 males for every 100 women. Although more boys are born than girls, this trend is the reverse in the elderly population, as a result of the higher life expectancy of women.

If we look at the age groups, we can see a strong tendency towards an ageing population. When the number of elderly people exceeds 12% of the total population, it is considered that a population is ageing. In Spain, this rate is 18.4%. This is the result of a progressive fall in the birth rate and a higher life expectancy.

3.2. Population Density

The population density of Spain is 92 inhab./km². However, these people are not distributed evenly. There is a lower population density inland and in mountainous areas, whilst a high concentration of the population is located on the coast, on the islands and in major cities such as Madrid or Sevilla.

It is notable that most of the Spanish active population works in the tertiary sector (over 75%).

3.3. Natural population movement

The demographics of Spain are similar to other developed countries, or in other words, it has low birth and death rates.

Over recent years, there has been a slight increase in the crude death rate, which is related to the high percentage of elderly people. The increase in this rate means that the natural increase is very low. From 1900 to the present, the figures on natural population movement of the Spanish population have changed considerably:

- At the start of the 20th century, the birth and death rates were very high, so the natural increase was almost 5%.
- The birth rate began its decline after the 1930s, although it remained high until 1970. On the other hand, advances in healthcare, quality of life and food meant that the death rate fell significantly.
- From the 1970s, the natural increase started to fall, reaching its lowest values in the last years of the 20th century.
- In the early years of the 21st century, the birth rate experienced a slight rise as the population became younger due to the arrival of immigrants.
- From 2008, the reduction in the birth rate and a slight increase in the death rate have led to a very low natural increase.

3.4. Migration to and from Spain

External migration that began in the 19th century was caused by the economic necessity of the majority of the population. Migrants were usually young men without professional qualifications. This migration continued until the 1970s and had two main destinations: the Americas and Europe.

In the last years of the 20th century and the early years of this century, Spain became a country that received immigrants. The need for labour attracted immigrants from different origins: Europe, Latin America (due to historical, linguistic and cultural ties with Spain) and Africa (due to its proximity to the Spanish coasts).

After 2010, the number of immigrants fell for reasons related to the economic crisis. In addition, alongside this **reduction in immigration, increase in emigration**.

3.5. Migration within Spain

3.5.1. Internal Migration

Internal migration has been mainly motivated by causes related to employment and economy. We can identify two stages in this type of migration:

- Between 1850 and 1930, many Spaniards took advantage of the boom in industrialisation and the expansion of the railway to leave the countryside and move to industrial areas. Cataluña, Vizcaya and Madrid received the largest numbers of people from the Meseta Central, Andalucía, Galicia, Aragón and Extremadura.
- The rural exodus intensified between 1960 and 1975. The receiving areas from the previous stage were joined by the Mediterranean coastline and archipelagos, which started to develop their tourist industry. This was the period during which big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, and their surrounding areas, experienced significant growth.

3.5.2. The consequences of internal migration

High depopulation in areas of origin. As mainly older people remained in the countryside there was a markedly ageing population. Migration has also left many small villages abandoned.

Settlement problems in areas of destination. Cities grew uncontrollably, with problems of housing, traffic and social marginalisation in some cases. However, they were more demographically and economically dynamic.

3.5.3. The actual increase of the population of Spain

In 2015, the actual increase of the population of Spain was negative. This was a consequence of a very low natural increase and a net migration figure in which the number of emigrants is greater than that of immigrants. Therefore, a slight decrease in the population of Spain has been detected. This continues the trend that began in 2012, when the total population was estimated to be 47 200 000 inhabitants.

However, this increase was not negative in all Autonomous Communities. The population increased in the Islas Baleares, Comunidad de Madrid, Región de Murcia, Cataluña and Islas Canarias.

At the beginning of 2016 the population of Spain reached the highest number in its history, with 47 846 084 people.

4. SPANISH CITIES

Spain is a notably urbanised area as almost **80% of the population lives in urban areas.**

4.1. The urbanisation process.

Spain's first cities appeared before the industrialisation of the 19th century. In many cases, they make up the old town or historic centre of modern cities. There were several different stages within these pre-industrial cities.

During Antiquity, the Phoenicians and Greeks founded cities in the Iberian Peninsula. However, the most notable cities were those founded by the Romans, like Sevilla, Barcelona and Mérida, with a grid plan of straight streets.

Two types of cities appeared during the Middle Ages: cities of Muslim origin, such as Córdoba, Málaga and Madrid, or of Christian origin, like Ávila and Segovia. These cities are characterised by an irregular plan and the presence of walls.

During the Renaissance, in cities like Valladolid, a main square and buildings with splendid architecture were built. Later, during the Baroque, cities were renovated and some were beautified, such as Salamanca and Aranjuez.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, cities experienced significant growth which was associated with the development of industry. This attracted a large number of inhabitants.

This growth was reflected in the expansion of urban areas around the old town, in which industrial areas and residential areas were built. Working class neighbourhoods near factories appeared, as did the ensanches, or extensions, where the bourgeoisie lived.

Over recent years, urban growth has been related to an increase in population in the more remote locations of the metropolitan area and the transformation of big cities. These phenomena are related to:

- The high price of housing in big cities which has favoured the appearance of continuous urbanisation.
- The relocation of industry to the outskirts of the cities in order to prevent problems with pollution.
- The improvement of transportation between big cities and the towns that surround them, as well as the adaptation of cities to the widespread use of vehicles.
- The boom in tourism and services which promoted the adaptation of old towns.

5. THE SPANISH URBAN NETWORK

Spanish cities are distributed throughout the country and certain dependence relationships are established between them, forming an **urban hierarchical structure**.

The urban structure of Spain has gone through significant changes over the last few decades. Nowadays, in Spain, a place is considered a city if it has **over 10 000 inhabitants** and if its economic activities are mainly conducted in the secondary and tertiary sectors.

- **National Metropolises.** Madrid and Barcelona. Their scope goes beyond the Spanish borders, and they cover all types of urban functions.
- **Regional Metropolises.** Sevilla, Málaga, Valencia and Zaragoza. Their scope goes beyond their Autonomous Community, and administrative, commercial and industrial functions predominate in them.
- **Provincial Cities.** There are 36 provincial cities, such as Guadalajara, Toledo, León, Jaén, or Huesca. They have a radius of action that does not exceed the

limits of the province and where administrative and commercial activities predominate.

- **Autonomous Cities.** There are two: Ceuta and Melilla. They have fewer competences than Autonomous Communities, but more than other municipalities.

The Spanish urban network is not independent, it is integrated into the European network, forming an extension of its Mediterranean axis. Relationships between urban areas in Spain are characterised by the compatibility between a peripheral layout, generated by the dynamism of coastal cities and archipelagos, and a centralised layout around the state capital.

Spain has a peripheral layout, and except for Madrid, Zaragoza and Sevilla, the most populated cities in the Peninsula are located on the coasts, like Bilbao, Barcelona, Valencia and Málaga.

Madrid's political, economic and cultural importance means that urban flows and relationships are focused in this city.