

UNIT 6 - POPULATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

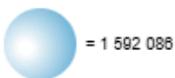
Spain has around 47 million inhabitants. But where do people prefer to live? In the countryside or in the city? On the coast or inland?

[In this link](#), you can access an interactive map that shows the distribution of the Spanish population by urban areas. You can navigate the map to see the information and change the year of the data to analyze the evolution over time.

Población, 2023 (habitantes) - Fuente : INE. Estadística del Padrón continuo. Censo anual de población



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As we can see on the map, Spanish people prefer to live in large urban areas, those with more than 500,000 inhabitants, which are home to half of the population. Among these, the metropolitan areas of Madrid and Barcelona stand out. Together, they concentrate a quarter of the total population.

With a few exceptions, such as Madrid, Zaragoza, or Valladolid, most of Spain's population lives in coastal municipalities or near the coast, forming urban areas along the Mediterranean, the Atlantic axis, the Guadalquivir axis, or the Ebro axis.

The provincial distribution reinforces this idea: besides Madrid, the most populated provinces are those on the Mediterranean coast and some on the Cantabrian coast.

[The following interactive map](#) shows the population data of Spain by provinces. You can navigate the map to see the associated information and change the year of the data to analyze the evolution over time.

The most populated Autonomous Community in Spain is Andalusia, followed by the Community of Madrid and the Valencian Community.

1 Población (habitantes) 2023 ▼



REFLECT:

What do the Autonomous Communities of Andalusia, Catalonia, and the Valencian Community have in common from a geographical point of view that differentiates them from Madrid?

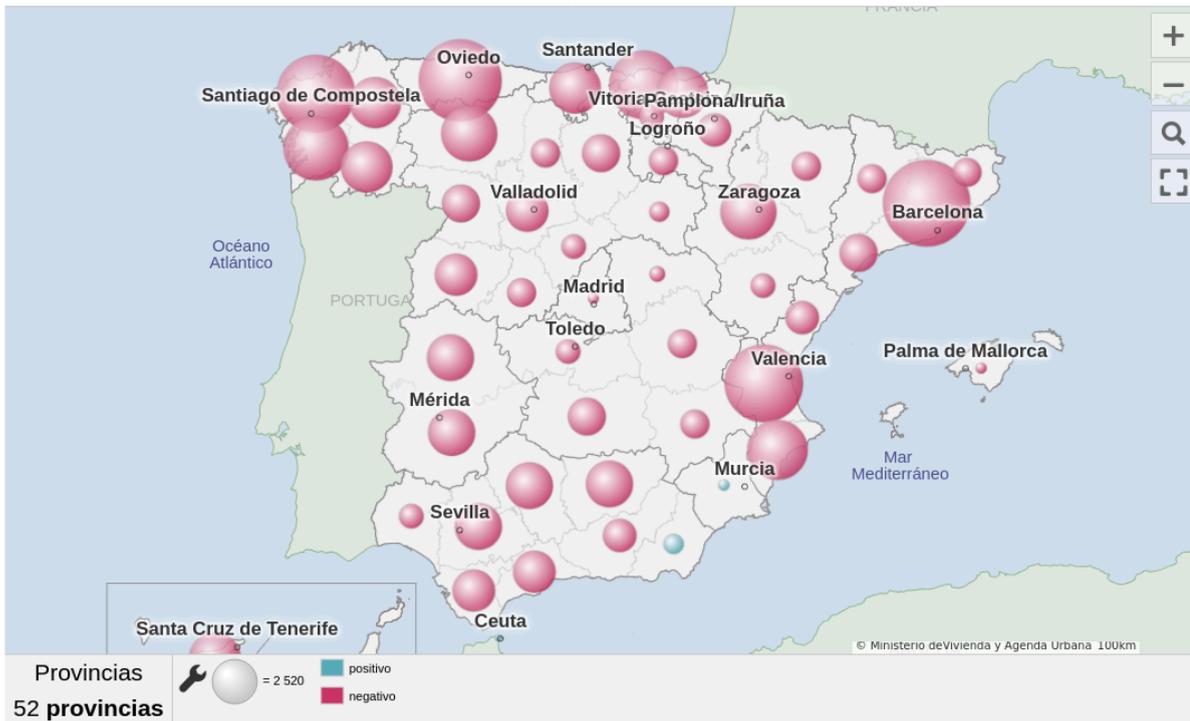
How would you describe the population situation in Galicia based on the data? Argue your answer.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS

In demographic evolution, besides natural growth, migration also plays a role.

[The following map](#) shows the growth or decline of the population due to the difference between birth and death rates:

1 Crecimiento vegetativo 2022 ▾

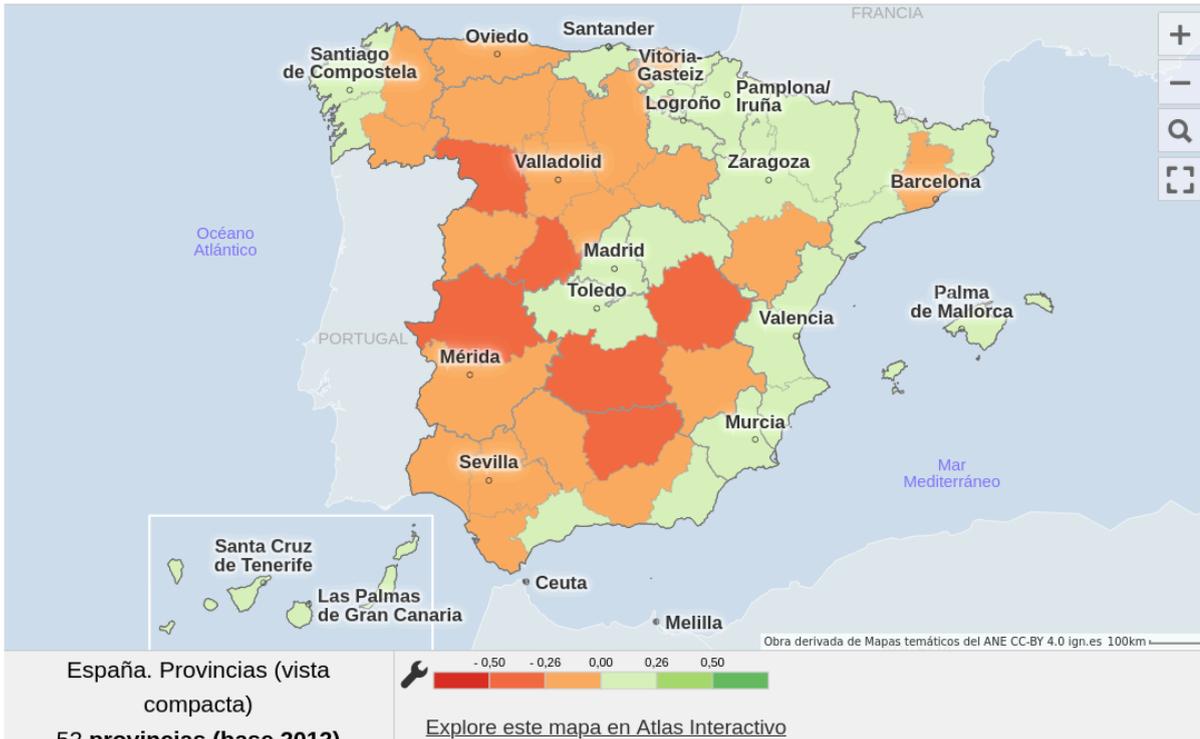


The colors clearly differentiate provinces with negative values (showing a greater population decline in the northern part of Spain) and positive values (mainly in the southern part of Spain, Madrid, and the Balearic Islands).

In general, Spain is characterized by having a low natural growth rate, with a decline when mortality exceeds birth rates. This was not the case before 1975 when many more people were born in Spain. This is known as the "baby boom," when birth rates exceeded 20 per thousand. Currently, Spain's birth rate is around 8 per thousand.

[This other map shows](#) the population growth or decline over a specific period due to migration movements, including returns of emigrants and arrivals of immigrants.

1 Saldo migratorio interior (serie) (%) 2015-2020 ▼



The population balance is carried out annually through the population register to understand the sustained evolution over time and check if there is a trend of growth or demographic decline.

INVESTIGATE:

Define the following terms using geographical terminology: natural growth, migration balance, immigration, emigration, population.

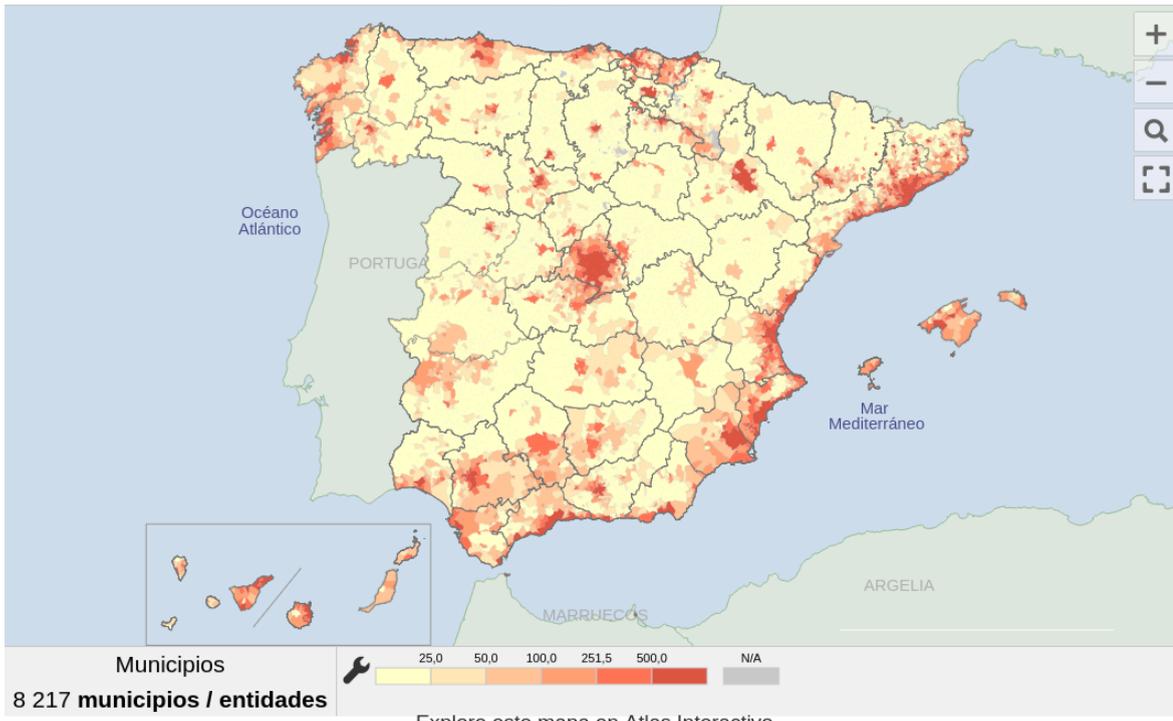
2.1. ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE POPULATION

The conceptual difference between absolute and relative population is that the first refers to the total number of inhabitants in a territory, and the second puts them in relation to the surface area. This is also called population density and is calculated by dividing the number of inhabitants by the square kilometers of the reference territory.

At the municipal level, cities are the densest spaces. In large cities, more than 5,000 inhabitants live per square kilometer, compared to rural areas, which are sparsely populated, with densities of less than 30 inhabitants per square kilometer.

The following map shows the population density in Spain by municipality.

1 Densidad de población (habitantes/Km²) 2023 ▼



1. Population Density (inhabitants/km²) 2023 ▼

8,217 municipalities / entities

Given that the size of the provinces in Spain is relatively similar, the two most densely populated provinces are Madrid and Barcelona, with more than 700 inhabitants per square kilometer. On the other hand, the least populated provinces, such as Teruel and Soria, are also the least dense, with fewer than 30 inhabitants per square kilometer.

Uniprovincial Autonomous Communities like Madrid or those in the Basque Country have the highest population density (in addition to the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla). The rest of the Autonomous Communities (such as Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, and Castilla y León) are characterized by low population density, as the average density of this large area is less than 30 inhabitants per square kilometer.

The following map shows the population density by Autonomous Community.

1 Densidad de población (habitantes/Km²) 2023 ▼



INVESTIGATE:

Use the municipal fact sheets from the IGE to find out the population, surface area, and population density of the municipality where you live.

3. DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

In relation to age, what is the Spanish population like?

The population is aging progressively, and this depends mainly on the progressive reduction in birth rates. The relationship between birth and death rates conditions the demographic structure of a territory.

The Aging Index shows the relationship between the elderly and young people. In Spain, especially in Galicia, Asturias, and Castilla y León, the number of elderly people triples or almost triples that of

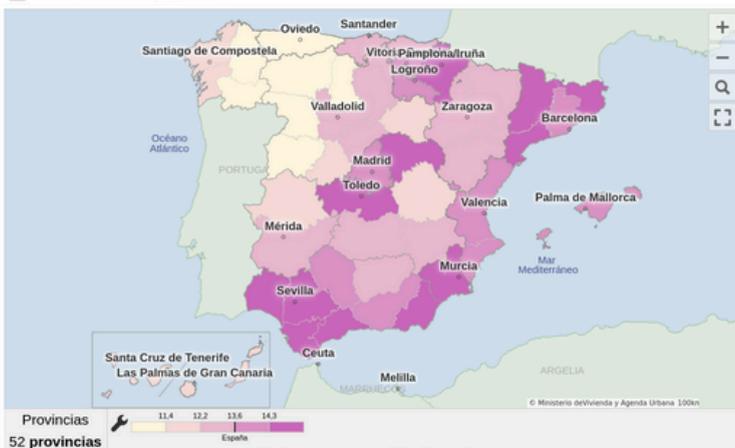
children. On the other hand, there are provinces with a younger population, such as those on the Andalusian coast, the Region of Murcia, and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

Young People (<15 years) and Elderly (>65 years)

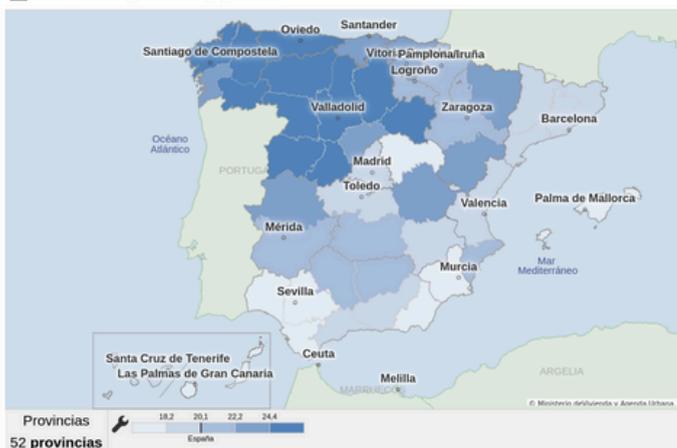
The percentages of the population under 15 years old and over 65 years old, in relation to the total population, allow us to better understand the population structure by age, as well as the processes of rejuvenation or aging.

The following maps represent the childhood index (population under 15 years old per 100 inhabitants) and the elderly index (population over 65 years old per 100 inhabitants).

1 Índice de infancia (%) 2023 ▾



1 Índice de envejecimiento (%) 2023 ▾



Both maps are complementary and show that the provinces with a young population are those with a low percentage of elderly people, such as those on the Mediterranean coast or Guadalajara, due to their proximity to urban centers. Conversely, the provinces with a very aged population are characterized by low percentages of children and high percentages of elderly people, located mainly in the interior of the peninsula, especially in the northwest.

INVESTIGATE:

Observing the maps of the percentage of the population under 15 years old and over 65 years old per 100 inhabitants, shown in this section, identify the province where you live. What percentage of young and elderly population does it have? Is it a young or aged population? What is the reason for this situation? Argue your answer.

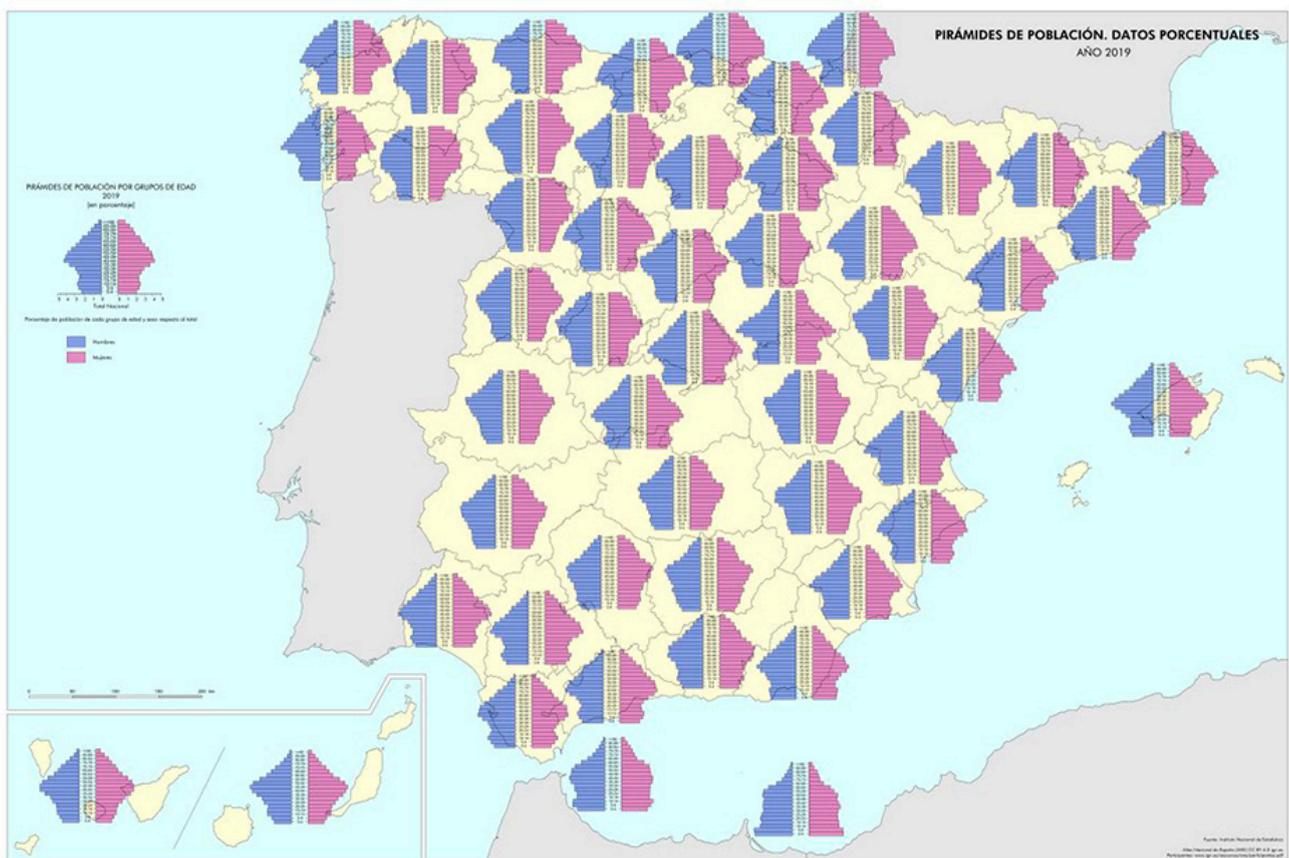
3.1. POPULATION PYRAMIDS

The way to represent the age structure is through a population pyramid, where the youngest age groups are at the base and the older age groups are at the top. It also differentiates the population by gender.

Population pyramids reflect the relationship between young and elderly people.

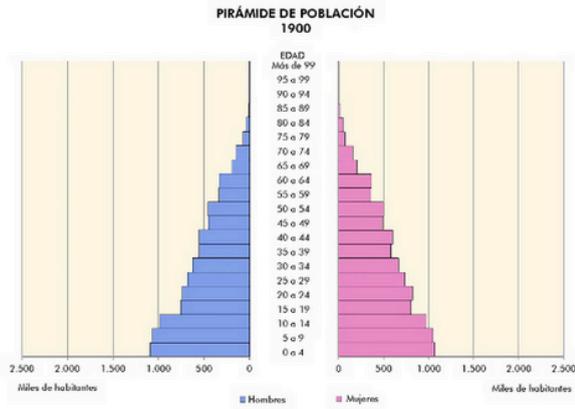
As we can see in the image, the population pyramid in Spain is narrowing at the base. The wide part (which corresponds to those born during the baby boom) represents the young population in 1995. Currently, this is the adult population, while the top represents the elderly population. Today, there are still more children than elderly people, but in a few decades, the majority age groups will be those over 65 years old. The aging of the Spanish population is unstoppable, which will have numerous consequences in the future.

In the following map, we can see the demographic pyramids by province in 2019.

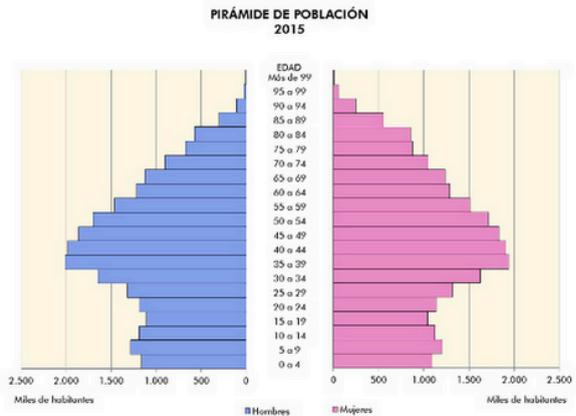


REFLECT AND INVESTIGATE:

Why are the population pyramids of Spain and the United States so different?



Atlas Nacional de España (ANE), ign.es. [Pirámide de población 1900](#) (CC BY 4.0)



Atlas Nacional de España (ANE), ign.es. [Pirámide de población 2015](#) (CC BY 4.0)

Look up information about demographic regimes and make a diagram showing their main features, including the chronology.

4. MIGRATION MOVEMENTS IN SPAIN

Migration movements are those displacements of the population that involve a change of residence. These can occur within a country or across borders.

Migrations can be voluntary or involuntary, and there are multiple factors that favor their occurrence (economic, environmental, social, etc.). There are different types of migrations (consult the glossary of the topic to review concepts such as irregular migration, which refers to the "movement of people that does not comply with the laws, norms, or international agreements governing the entry or stay of people in a country of origin, transit, or destination." (IOM, fundamental terms on migration)). However, this is outside the scope of this topic.

Migration is a global phenomenon and affects a large number of people (especially in a globalized world). It is present in the 2030 Agenda as a driver of sustainable development. Its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents an important milestone for more effective international migration management.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, approved by the United Nations in 2015, consists of a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and other global challenges such as climate change, pollution, and ecosystem degradation, along with 169 targets established in a plan to be achieved in 15 years.

Given the increase in migration flows worldwide, in 2000 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed December 18 as International Migrants Day.

5. CAUSES OF MIGRATION

The main reason for migration is the possibility of improving the quality of life for migrants and their families, as well as overcoming economic, social, and demographic inequalities in their countries or places of origin: hunger, unemployment, armed conflicts, persecution for political, ideological, or religious reasons, or climate changes and natural disasters. Another factor is that more developed countries often require labor that is difficult to cover with local residents.

Below, some of the reasons that motivate migration movements are briefly mentioned and described:

Improving Quality of Life

The primary cause of migration is the search for better wages and improved working conditions.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the United Nations, slightly more than two-thirds of international migrants in 2019—and also in 2020—were migrant workers. That is, people of working age who move with the goal of being employed and engaging in paid work.

An international migrant is defined as "any person who changes their country of usual residence." Movements "for purposes of leisure, holidays, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment, or religious pilgrimage" are excluded from this definition (UN DESA [1998], Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1, para. 32).

To understand the reasons that lead migrant workers to change countries, it is important to know what the destination countries are like.

In the previous graph, it can be seen that in 2019, the vast majority of migrants went to:

- **High-income countries** (which usually correspond to developed and wealthy countries). Most migrants concentrate in these countries.
- **Upper-middle-income countries** (with a good level of development and a slightly lower level of wealth than the previous group).

The conclusion that can be drawn is that migrants move to seek employment, improve their working conditions, and, in general, their "quality of life." Economic reasons, therefore, play a fundamental role in migration.

Globalization

The so-called "globalization" is a process of trade liberalization of goods and services based on the reduction or even elimination of tariffs, accompanied by the removal of barriers to the movement of people, capital, technology, etc.

Globalization has led to a multiplication of communications based on increasingly advanced transportation and telecommunications. All of this has facilitated the movement of people around the world and created the perception of a less divided and more integrated world.

Climate Change

Climate change—which refers to changes and variations in climate elements over the medium to long term due to natural and human causes—exacerbates the problems affecting developing regions, particularly those with agricultural economies where natural disasters (such as droughts) are already frequent, periodically reducing income. Similarly, due to global warming, rising temperatures will make natural phenomena even more severe, motivating people to migrate to other places to rebuild their lives.

Climate change can influence migration movements in Spain in two ways:

1. **Affecting living conditions in the countries of origin of immigration.** For example, in countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Balkans, which are geographic regions from which immigrants often come to Spain.
2. **Increasing the risks of erosion and desertification**, especially in areas with semi-arid climates, due to rising global temperatures. This could particularly affect southeastern Spain and central areas of the Ebro depression, encouraging emigration to other regions of Spain or abroad where these conditions do not exist.

REFLECT:

- Can you mention some aspects of globalization that might encourage migration movements?
 - How has industrialization and technological development in the secondary sector influenced (and continues to influence) migration movements?
-

KEY CONCEPTS

- **Immigration:** The arrival of a population to a territory from another place to settle there. It can be due to various causes, with economic reasons being the most frequent, although it can also be motivated by political reasons. The person who migrates is called an immigrant.
- **Migration:** The movement of a person from one place to another (usually crossing certain boundaries or borders), involving a change of residence (temporarily or permanently).
- **Emigration:** The departure of a population from their place of origin or residence. The person who emigrates is called an emigrant. In Spain, examples of emigration include rural exodus or the emigration of the 1960s and 1970s to Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland, etc.).