



SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS SPAIN

2026

Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

Recent employment developments

Between 2013 and 2023, Spain's unemployment rate consistently remained above the EU average. In 2020, the unemployment rate of 16 % was more than double the EU average of 7 %. By 2023, unemployment fell to 12 %, still double the EU average of 6 %. Youth unemployment (15-24) dropped from 38 % in 2020 to 29 % in 2023. Unemployment among adults aged 25-49 decreased from 15 % to 11 % over the same period, while the unemployment rate for those aged 50-64 declined slightly from 12 % to 11 %. In 2023, there was a 3-percentage point difference in the unemployment rate between men (11 %) and women (14 %).

Employment has fluctuated markedly over the past decade. Employment growth between 2015 and 2019 was notably above the EU average (+3 % annually compared with +1 % for the EU on average). Between 2019 and 2020, employment in Spain fell sharply by -3 %, while the EU experienced a smaller decline (-1 %). This was followed by a relatively strong recovery in Spain between 2020 and 2023 (+3 % annually, compared with +1 % for the EU on average).

In 2023, the employed population in Spain was distributed across a broad range of sectors⁽¹⁾. The highest employment shares were in wholesale and retail trade (15 % compared with 13 % in the EU),

manufacturing (12 % versus 16 %), and health and social care (9 % versus 11 %). Conversely, the lowest employment shares were in mining and quarrying, energy supply, and water and waste treatment, each below 1 % (Figure 1).

Service and sales workers represent the largest occupational group, accounting for 21 % of total employment in 2023 (16 % in the EU). The top three sectors where service and sales workers are employed are distribution and transport (59 % of service and sales workers compared with 53 % in the EU), non-marketed services (24 % versus 27 %) and business services (16 % versus 17 %). The second-largest occupational group is professionals, who account for 19 % of total employment (22 % in the EU) and work mainly in non-marketed services (56 % of professionals compared with 47 % in the EU) and business services (31 % versus 35 %).

The employed population in Spain is predominantly highly qualified. In 2023, just under half of workers held a high-level qualification (47 % compared with 38 % in the EU-27) and around one quarter had a medium-level qualification (24 % versus 46 %). A significant share of the employed population – 29 % – had no or low qualifications, which is much higher than the EU average of 16 %.

Males accounted for 54 % of the employed population in 2023, as in the EU-27. The age structure of the workforce shows a strong concentration in the 25–49 age group, which accounts for 60 % of total employment (just above the EU average of 57 %). One third of the employed is between 50 and 64 years (32 % in the EU), while young people (15–24) represented only 6 % of employment (compared with 8 % in the EU). The share of workers aged 65+ remained low (2 %, versus 3 % in the EU on average).

In 2023, the share of young people (15-24) neither in employment nor education or training (NEET) was 9 %, in line with the EU average. At 9 %, the NEET rate among young women was lower than the 10 % observed for young men (9 % for both in the EU).

Recent skills and learning developments

⁽¹⁾ To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see [Annex 2 of Cedefop's skills forecast methodological framework](#) (April 2023).

Analysis of [Cedefop's online job advertisements](#) (OJAs) shows that in 2023, most job advertisements collected in Spain targeted professionals (one quarter of total OJAs, similar to the EU average). Other occupations with high market shares include associate professionals (20 % compared with 19 % in the EU) and service and sales workers, who accounted for 17 % of all online job advertisements (compared with 12 % for the EU as a whole). Professionals are most in demand in non-marketed services (38 % of OJAs for professionals compared with 33 % in the EU) and business services (36 % versus 28 %). The most in-demand occupations in OJAs for professionals were ICT professionals (30 %) and researchers and engineers (21 %).

Demand for associate professionals is highest in non-marketed services (24 % of OJAs compared with 22 % in the EU), and distribution and transport (22 % versus 17 %). Most OJAs for associate professionals aim to recruit an office associate professional (56 %) or a science and engineering technician (22 %). OJAs for service and sale workers are most common in the distribution and transport sector (33 % of OJAs for service and sales workers) and in non-marketed services (14 %). Such OJAs are predominantly for personal services workers (49 %) and sales workers (39 %). These OJA patterns confirm the high importance of the services sector in the Spanish economy.

According to [Cedefop's European Skills Index](#) (ESI), Spain ranked last out of 31 countries in 2024, the same position as in 2017. In 2024, the best-performing pillar is skills development (ranked 23rd, up from 25th place in 2017). In the ESI skills development pillar, Spain performs relatively well in high digital skills (13th) and pre-primary pupil-to-teacher ratio (17th). The indicators with the greatest room for improvement were early leavers from training in the ESI skills activation pillar, and the share of underemployed part-time workers in the ESI skills matching pillar (both ranking 30th).

In 2023, 39 % of the population had above-basic digital skills, exceeding the EU average of 27 %. Digital skills attainment is more pronounced among the employed population and the 25-34 age group (47 % and 55 % with above-basic digital skills respectively), and higher than in the EU on average (33 % and 39 %).

Training participation is above the EU average level of 14 %, with 17 % of the employed population in Spain taking part in learning activities in 2023. Participation in training was higher among women

(20 % compared with 16 % in the EU-27) than men (15 % versus 12 %). In Spain, 19 % of the employed population aged 25-49 and 14 % of 50- to 64-year-olds participated in learning, which is higher than the participation rates for the EU as a whole (16 % and 11 %).

Future employment trends

Looking ahead, employment in Spain is expected to continue growing at around +1% annually between 2022 and 2035 – a rate more than double the EU average employment growth rate of +0.4%.

[Cedefop's Skills Forecast](#) shows that between 2022 and 2035 employment is expected to grow most strongly in water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (+35%), accommodation and food service activities (+34%), and information and communication (+32%). Notable employment growth is also projected in administrative and support service activities (+29%), electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (+27%), and real estate, professional, scientific and technical activities (+26%). Despite the relatively high employment growth in electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, its employment share will remain low. Employment is projected to decline significantly in agriculture, forestry and fishing (-44%), and to diminish slightly in human health and social work activities, mining and quarrying, and financial and insurance activities – sectors in which employment falls by -4%.

By 2035, the occupations with significant employment growth include assemblers (+69%), legal, social, cultural, and related associate professionals (+63%), food preparation assistants (+51%), and information and communications technology professionals (+49%). Employment is projected to decline strongly for street and related sales and service workers (-59%), market-oriented skilled forestry, fishery and hunting workers (-46%), other clerical support workers (-37%), and hospitality, retail and other services managers (-32%).

Most expected job openings over the 2022-2035 period are for service workers (23% of total job openings), particularly sales workers (9%) and

personal service workers (8%). Job openings for professionals are expected to account for 21% of total job openings, particularly for teaching professionals (6%) and health professionals (4%). From a skill level perspective, job openings for staff in high-skilled, non-manual occupations (38% of job openings) and skilled non-manual occupations (32%) will dominate – a trend that reflects the impact of digital transformation and automation of the economy. Consistent with this, demand is expected to be strong for highly qualified workers (71% of total job openings) and medium-qualified workers (30%), while demand for low-qualified workers is expected to be limited.

The highly qualified labour force is projected to grow by +2% annually over the period 2022-2035, similar to EU average trends. The medium-qualified labour force is expected to grow by +1%, exceeding the EU average. In contrast, the labour force with no or low qualifications is projected to decline by -5% annually – more than the EU average decline of -3%.

Female labour market participation is forecast to grow modestly, in line with the EU trend, in the 2022-2035 period. Ageing will affect the labour force, with the strongest growth expected for the 65+ age cohort (+2% versus +6% for the EU on average). The 60-64 age cohort will grow by +3%, in line with the +2% EU average growth. Growth is also positive for the 55-59 age cohort (+2% compared with +1% in the EU-27), the 25-29 cohort (+2% versus +1%), and the 20-24 cohort (+1%, similar to the EU average). Labour market participation is expected to decline, particularly among people aged 15-19 or 40-49.

Future skills and learning trends

Between 2022 and 2035, Spain's labour market is projected to expand across all skill levels. By 2035, high-skilled non-manual occupations and skilled non-manual occupations are expected to increase their share of total employment by 1 % (from 36 % to 37 % and from 30 % to 31 %, respectively). This comes at the expense of the employment share of the skilled manual occupations (from 21 % to 20 %) and elementary occupations (from 13 % to 12 %).

Nevertheless, all four groups are expected to see an increase in their absolute employment numbers, as total employment is projected to increase by 16 % between 2035 and 2022. These trends reflect particularly strong employment growth in non-manual roles.

Employment in [high-tech occupations](#) in Spain is projected to grow by +11 % between 2030 and 2035, outpacing the +7 % EU-27 average growth rate. This expansion is mainly fuelled by positive employment trends in education (+22 %), finance and insurance (+20 %), accommodation and food services (+14 %), and wholesale and retail trade (+14 %). At the other end of the spectrum, employment in high-tech roles will contract significantly in agriculture (-16 %).

Employment in the overall [high-tech economy](#) is projected to grow by +12 % between 2030 and 2035 – more than double the EU average of +5 %. Employment growth will be strong in knowledge-intensive services (+12 % compared with +9 % in the EU-27) and high-technology manufacturing (+13 % versus +2 %).

Expected skill shortages

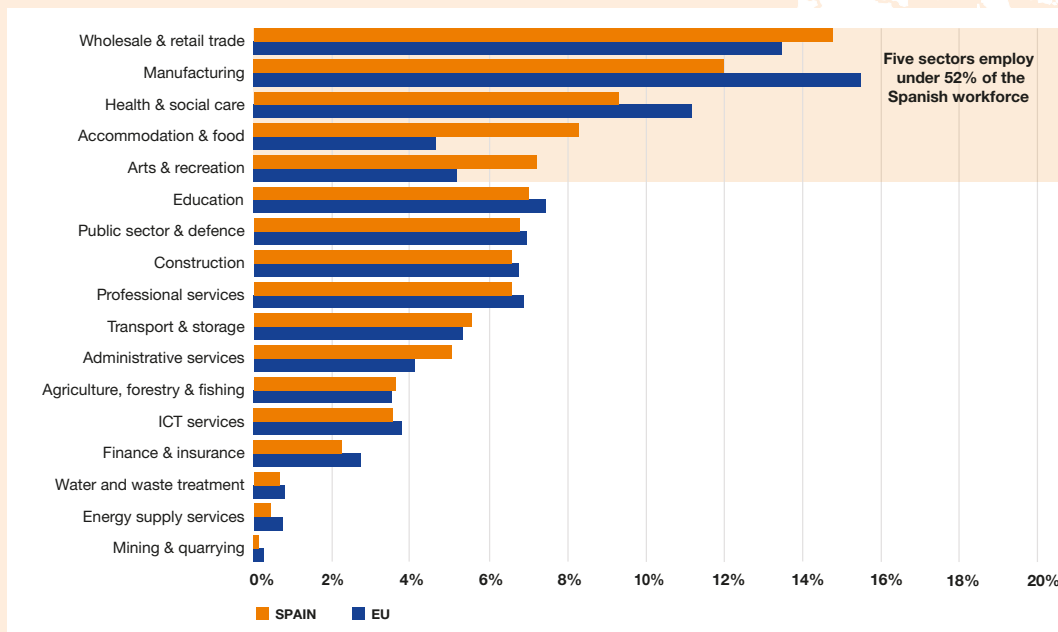
According to [Cedefop's Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#), employers in Spain will face the highest shortages of skilled agricultural and fishery workers, service workers and shop and market sales workers, and technicians and associate professionals (Figure 3). Shortages are also expected for high-skilled occupations and medium-skilled non-manual occupations. Labour shortages will make it harder to recruit legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals, customer service clerks and personal service workers. For associate professionals and customer service clerks, the shortages stem from demand factors (as fast-growing occupations outpace the supply of skills) and supply factors (as replacement needs rise with retirements and career changes). In contrast, expected shortages for personal service workers are mainly driven by supply factors.



SPAIN

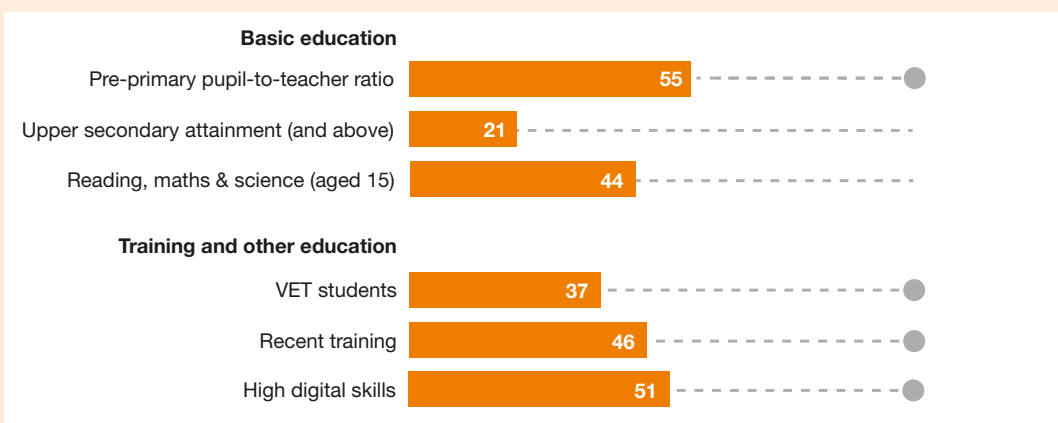
Jobs and skills in figures

Distribution of employment across sectors in Spain and the EU, 2023 (%)



Source: [Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool](#).

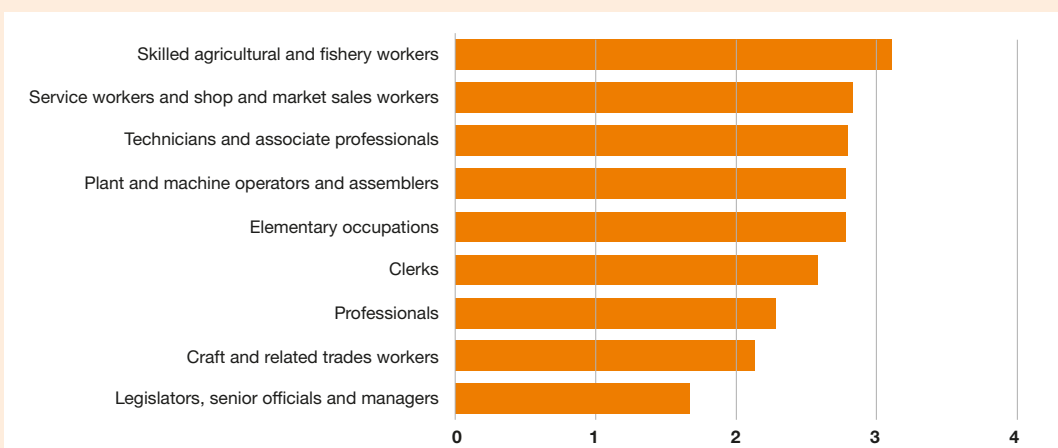
ESI skills activation pillar in Spain, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of seven years. The ideal performance is scaled to 100, with national scores computed and compared to that. Example: a score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65 % of the ideal performance, with 35 % (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: [Cedefop ESI](#).

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, Spain



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (IFOD). A score of 4 indicates a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quartiles of the occupation (here for all EU-27).

Source: [Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#).



Further information

- Cedefop. (2023). [Skills anticipation in Spain](#). Data insights series.
- Cedefop. (2023). [Skills forecast methodological framework](#).
- Cedefop. (2024). [Evolution of European skills systems: performance 2015 to 2022](#). Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop. (2025). [Skills forecast report: Spain](#).
- Cedefop. (2025). [Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024 – Spain](#). National VET policy developments 2023-24.

[Cedefop Skills intelligence tool](#)[Cedefop Skills forecast](#)[Cedefop Skills OVATE](#)[Cedefop European Skills Index](#)[Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#)

This Spotlight was drafted by Cedefop's Skills intelligence and foresight team.

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