



By: TA | AP Insight

Spain will grant legal status to thousands of immigrants



Spain's government announced Tuesday it will grant legal status to potentially hundreds of thousands of immigrants living and working in the country without authorization, the latest way the country has bucked a trend toward increasingly harsh immigration policies imposed in the United States and much of Europe.

The extraordinary measure will be implemented by expediting a decree to amend immigration laws, according to Spanish Minister of Migration Elma Saiz, bypassing a **similar bill** that has stalled in parliament.

Eligible immigrants will be granted up to one year of legal residency as well as permission to work.

In contrast to other nations that have moved to restrict immigration and asylum, many emboldened by the **Trump administration's policies**, Spain has moved in the **opposite direction** with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and his ministers often extolling the benefits of legal migration to the country's **economy** and aging workforce.

Spain "will not look the other way," Saiz told journalists during a press conference. The government is "dignifying and recognizing people who are already in our country," she said.

The measure could benefit an estimated 500,000 people living in Spain without authorization, Saiz said. Other organizations have estimated up to 800,000 people live in the shadows of Spanish society.

Many are immigrants from Latin American or African countries working in the agricultural, tourism or service sectors, backbones of Spain's booming economy.

Foreigners who arrived in Spain before Dec. 31, 2025 and can prove they have been living in the country for at least five months will be eligible. They must also prove they have no criminal record.

Saiz said she expects those eligible will be able

to start applying for their legal status from April until the end of June.

She added that resources would be in place to process them smoothly and efficiently after a union representing Spain's national police officers, responsible for processing applications, warned of a possible collapse.

Supporters call it a victory amid other countries' hostile policies

The Spanish government's move came as a surprise to many after a last-minute deal between the ruling Socialist Party and the leftist Podemos party in exchange for parliamentary support to Sánchez's wobbly government.

Irene Montero, a European Parliament lawmaker with Podemos who first announced the deal Monday, contrasted Spain's move with immigration enforcement in the U.S., where the Trump administration has come under intense criticism for its operations, particularly in **Minnesota**.

"If they kidnap children, murder and terrorize people, we give them papers," she said during a rally alongside migrant rights activists.

The news was celebrated by hundreds of migrant rights groups and prominent Catholic associations who had campaigned and obtained 700,000 signatures for a similar initiative.

"We are not used to these victories," said Silvana Cabrera, a spokesperson for the migrant campaigning group RegularizaciónYa, or RegularizationNow in English, as she held back tears.

The Spanish Episcopal Conference called the move an act of social justice

The movement was born in the COVID-19 pandemic when many vulnerable immigrants

worked essential jobs with little to no rights or protections.

In a statement Tuesday, the Spanish Episcopal Conference called the move an “act of social justice and recognition of so many migrants who, through their work, have long contributed to the development of” Spain.

“At a time when a hostile environment against migrants is spreading on both sides of the Atlantic, this move shows both humanity and common sense,” said Laetitia Van der Venet, senior advocacy officer at PICUM, a European network of migrant rights organizations.

Benefits for immigrants and the economy

It's not the first time Spain has granted amnesty to immigrants who are in the country illegally: It has done so six times between 1986 and 2005.

“There was a strong impact on the workforce, not only legalizing the status of workers but creating formal jobs,” said Anna Terrón Cusi, a senior fellow at the Migration Policy Institute think tank who previously worked on immigration policy for multiple Spanish governments, including Sánchez’s.

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The measure will allow Spain to “reset the counter” ahead of the implementation in June of the new European migration and asylum pact which relies heavily on deportations as a solution to irregular migration, she said.

Terrón added that by granting legal status to migrants in the country irregularly, Sánchez is giving rights and protections to undocumented workers while also benefiting the Spanish economy.

“In the end, telling people that immigration is bad may appeal to them, but deporting the woman who cleans their house is a different story,” she said.

Opposition slams the move

Center-right and far-right parties criticized the government's announcement.



Santiago Abascal, leader of the anti-immigration, far-right party Vox, wrote that Sánchez “hated” Spaniards and was “accelerating an invasion”

Alberto Núñez Feijóo, leader of the conservative Popular Party, accused Sánchez of trying to distract from a **deadly train crash** earlier this month that left 46 dead.

Meanwhile, Santiago Abascal, leader of the anti-immigration, far-right party Vox, wrote on social media that Sánchez “hated” Spaniards and was “accelerating an invasion,” echoing a racist conspiracy theory often used by right-wing extremists.

The Iberian nation — which saw millions of its citizens leave during and after its civil war — has taken in millions of people from South America and Africa in recent years. The vast majority entered the country legally.

Saiz said Spain will remain a “beacon” in the fight against the global wave of anti-immigration politics led by the far right.

“We will do everything in our power to stop it,” she said. “I believe that today is a great day for our country.”