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## SOCIAL NEEDS IN SPAIN

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# Labour market

Report  
**02**

June 2019



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## Credits

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# INTRODUCTION



One of the main problems in Spanish society is the inability of the labour market to satisfy the needs of households as their main source of livelihood. The social development of any country largely depends on how people of working age find employment, whether the type of employment found guarantees suitable working conditions and whether the remuneration received is enough to meet the needs of households in this regard.

This second report on social needs in Spain measures the degree to which these needs have been met in recent years. The main sources that enable assessing its performance in the three areas highlighted above are analysed using a broad set of indicators. These sources are the Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida (Living Conditions Survey), both cross-sectional and longitudinal data, the Encuesta de Población Activa (Active Population Survey), the Encuesta de Estructura Salarial (Salary Structure Survey), all from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (National Institute of Statistics), and the European Working Conditions Survey, from Eurofound.

A broad set of indicators is used for each of the three aforementioned challenges -access to employment, appropriate working conditions and adequate salary-, including some of those commonly used to assess employment, as well as other new ones which make it possible to have a view which better reflects the evolution of the labour market from a social-needs perspective. These new indicators make it possible to look at two key aspects in more depth: the low work intensity or

underemployment of a significant number of those in the labour force and employed and its concentration in certain households.

Furthermore, using information from different time points enables assessing how changes in the economic cycle have affected the social needs related to the labour market. These changes are illustrated with data from the boom prior to and during the crisis, and in the subsequent recovery phase. The different indicators all point in the same direction: practically all of them worsened in the crisis and the progress achieved in the short period of time since it ended has not been able to offset that damage.

The report also compares the situation in Spain with that in Europe by selecting indicators representative of each of the three challenges. The information analysed reveals that the crisis had more significant and lasting effects on the issues of underemployment, in-work poverty and long-term unemployment in Spain than in other European countries. In addition to these problems we find that the skills mismatch with the position held, is also greater than in the European context.

Another section of the report looks at how public policies have responded to the social needs related to the labour market. Different indicators are provided, which summarise the coverage of these needs provided by public intervention through different instruments. The information compiled shows that in relative terms

Spain is one of the countries in the European Union that spends most on employment policies. However, the protective intensity of this spending falls in the context examined, and there are significant issues with coverage of unemployment through monetary benefits.

Summarising the information through a basic system of indicators, leaving the data to almost speak for themselves and qualifying the narrative with brief specific comments that help to interpret them, represents a new approach in the landscape of social reality studies. It is now up to the reader to browse through the pages of the report and compile their own narrative, reexamining the usual opinions and assumptions in light of a new and broad set of objective information.

## LABOUR MARKET

The social needs related to the labour market are measured in this report. As this is the main means of social inclusion in contemporary societies, some basic rights and needs are at stake. **All people and households face three essential challenges:**



**1. Having access to employment:** is the most basic need related to the labour market, as it is only if you have access to a job that you can achieve the appropriate social and personal development in the work environment throughout your life.



**2. Having appropriate working conditions:** only if the jobs found are conducted in appropriate working conditions in relation to stability, number of hours, physical or psychological demands, and with the possibility of balancing work and family life, is the need for employment properly satisfied.



**3. Having an adequate salary:** one of the main characteristics of employment from the perspective of covering social needs, as well as being able to perform it in appropriate conditions, is for the hourly wage it provides to be enough to provide a decent quality of life, making it possible to avoid poverty and income insecurity.

# SPAIN

## All people and households face three major challenges:

(percentage of people out of the total population)

### First challenge:



Having access to a job

#### Workless household

2.9% ↑ 6.1%  
2005 2018

#### Youth unemployment

13.5% ↑ 24.4%  
2005 2018

#### Underemployment

3.3% ↑ 6.8%  
2005 2018

#### Discouraged people

3.4% ↑ 3.7%  
2005 2018

#### Long-term unemployment

6.0% ↑ 12.7%  
2005 2018

#### Job insecurity

12.4% ↓ 10.1%  
2005 2018

### Second challenge:



Having appropriate working conditions

#### Skills mismatch with the position

42.8% ↑ 44.7%  
2005 2015

#### Difficulties balancing work and family life

3.8% ↑ 7.2%  
2005 2015

#### Uncertainty about the work schedule

13.2% ↓ 11.8%  
2005 2015

#### General dissatisfaction with work

21.3% ↓ 18.4%  
2005 2015

### Third challenge:



Having an adequate and stable salary

#### Hourly wage below 2/3 of the median wage

12.3% ↑ 12.6%  
2006 2014

#### Monthly wage below 2/3 of the median wage

17.4% ↑ 22.3%  
2006 2014

#### In-work poverty

13.7% ↑ 15.7%  
2006 2016

#### Severe salary reduction

17.0% ↓ 13.7%  
2010 2016

· Compared with other EU countries, the Spanish labour market displays some of the most significant failures. During recessions the general unemployment rate increases significantly, and during expansions, the number of workers with short-term contracts, suffering significant job insecurity, increases.

· Practically all indicators linked to social needs worsened after the beginning of the recession, despite the progress achieved in the short period of time since the end of the crisis leading to a substantial reduction in these losses.

## What is most important

### UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment and underemployment rates in the Spanish labour market are significantly higher than those seen in most European Union countries, during both expansion phases and, especially, recessions.

In 2018, one in four young Spaniards aged 20 to 29 is unemployed.

### IN-WORK POVERTY

Both during the expansion and recession stages of the economic cycle, Spain stands out for its high levels of in-work poverty and job insecurity. In-work poverty is especially linked to a lack of working hours and the concentration of unemployment, more than to low hourly wages.

In the expansion phase of our economy, when 92% of the labour force were employed, the median hourly wage was lower than in the recession that came afterwards.

### OVER-QUALIFICATION

Almost one worker in every two says that their job requires higher or lower qualifications than they have, and the recession has only exacerbated this issue. With the recovery of the economy, over-qualification has decreased slightly.

Three in four employees whose skills are insufficient for the job say they are over-qualified.

### UNCERTAINTY

The general dissatisfaction with work is closely related to the economic cycle, increasing in expansions, when employment is abundant, and decreasing in recessions, when employment is limited.

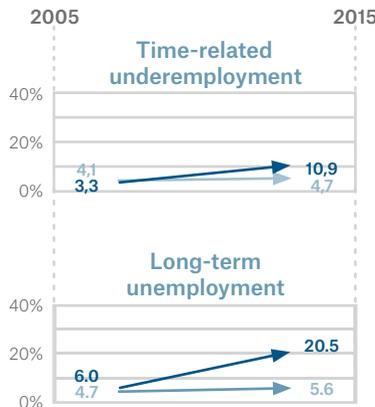
One in ten employees feel uncertainty regarding their work schedule, which makes it more difficult to balance work and family life.

# SPAIN vs EUROPE

## First challenge:



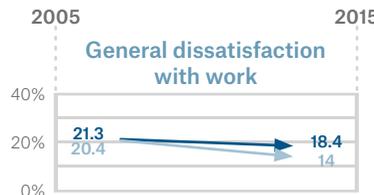
Having access to a job



## Second challenge:



Having appropriate working conditions

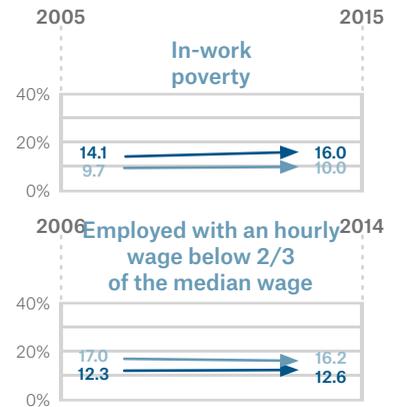


España → Europa  
(by percentage of people out of the total population)

## Third challenge:



Having an adequate and stable salary



What is most important

1.

In-work poverty and job insecurity among Spanish workers clearly exceed European averages, during both times of expansion and, especially, recession.

2.

The crisis led to an increase in unemployment, underemployment and in-work poverty. The current position in the Spanish labour market is much worse than the EU country average.

3.

General dissatisfaction with work is similar in Spain to the EU average during expansions and, given its procyclical nature, is currently lower than the European country average.

## PUBLIC POLICIES

1

Spain is one of the European Union countries that spends the most on employment policies relative to its GDP. However, spending per unemployed person is less than in countries with a lower income level.

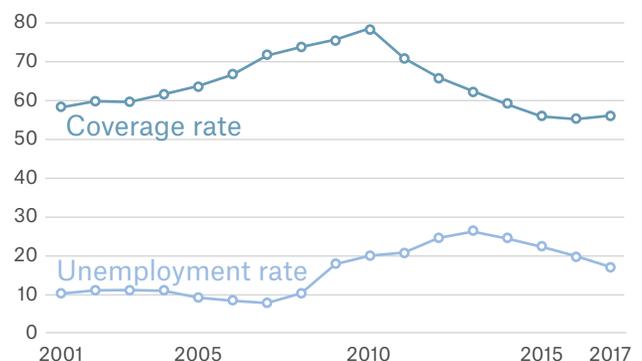
2

As the crisis progressed, the coverage of the unemployment benefit system decreased; the current rate is near a record low for the last two decades. The impact of these benefits on the poverty rate has barely changed, despite the drastic increase in unemployment.

3

During the crisis, the minimum wage increased only slightly in real terms between 2006 and 2010 (from €606 a month to €653, to then fall back down to €622 in 2014). Its real value remains well below the current minimum wage in neighbouring countries.

### Unemployment benefit coverage rate



Source: Compiled based on records of the Ministry of Labour.

# THE SITUATION IN SPAIN



The analysis of social needs linked to the labour market through a system of basic indicators, in accordance with the criteria defined in the methodological appendix, raises three different sub-dimensions (or challenges) that cover the essential aspects of what is to be measured: firstly, whether people can find a job; secondly, whether the jobs they can find have appropriate working conditions; and thirdly, whether the hourly wage that the job provides is enough to provide a decent standard of living.

The information gathered using the proposed indicators leaves little doubt about the significant problems that exist in Spain in all areas of the labour market. Practically all of the indicators have worsened since the recession began, despite the progress achieved in the short period since it ended managing to substantially offset the decline recorded during that period.

## First challenge: Having access to employment

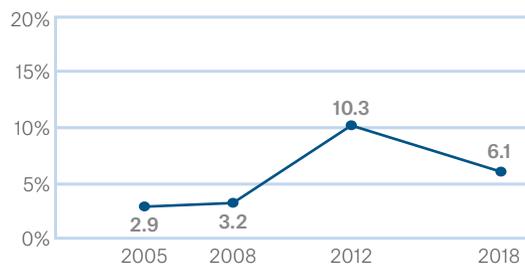


This challenge is measured using the indicators shown on this page. The meaning of the figures is explained in the remainder of the section.

### Key indicators on access to employment

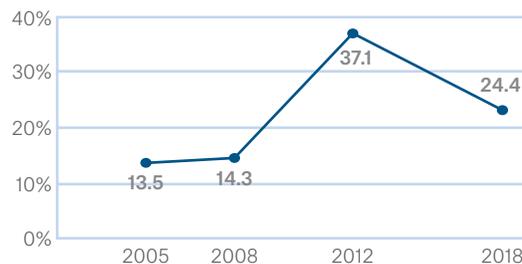
#### Workless household:

% of people who live in households in which all those in the labour force are unemployed.



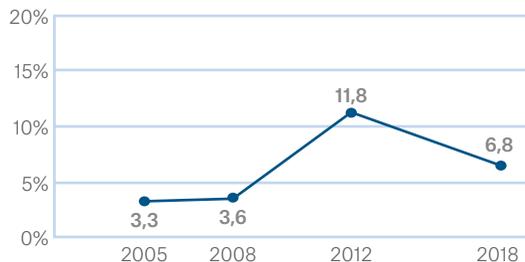
#### Youth unemployment:

% of the labour force aged 20 to 29 who are unemployed.



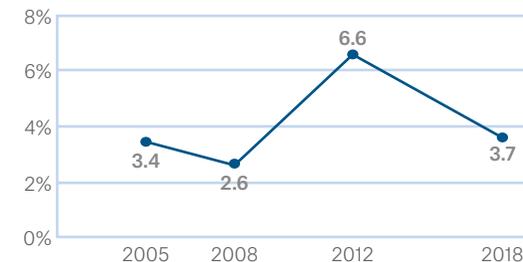
#### Time-related underemployment:

% of people who live in households with individuals aged 16 to 59 who are part of the labour force and employed <20% of their working potential.



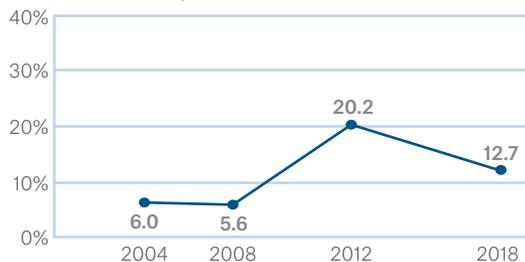
#### Discouraged:

% of people who, while available to work, are not looking for a job because they do not think they will find one.



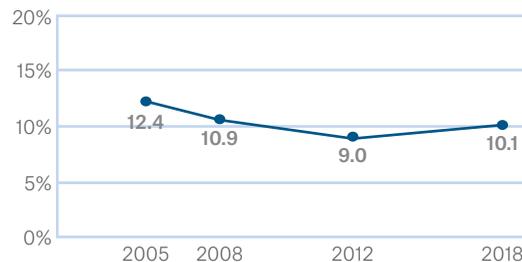
#### Long-term unemployment:

% of people who live in households in which half or more of the unemployed labour force have been looking for work for over a year.



#### Employment instability:

% of people who live in households in which all employed individuals have a temporary contract.



Source: Compiled using data from the EPA.

The employment well-being of the population is closely linked to the ability of members of the household to find a job. The ease or difficulty of joining the labour market is usually assessed using the unemployment rate (ILO, 2017), the most common definition of which calculates the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the total labour force of the population (those who are looking for a job and are available for work). This rate can also be calculated using a broader group of individuals which includes all those who are of working age (16-64 years). One of the ways in which this differs from the traditional definition is that it takes into account those who are discouraged due to the difficulties of finding a job in recessions.

The need of households to find a job is a much broader concept than the traditional unemployment rate is able to reflect. Firstly, in recent decades developed countries have seen a gradual concentration of unemployment in certain households. This is why access to employment is measured using the percentage of people who live in households in which all those in the labour force are unemployed. The crisis tripled the number of people in this situation in Spain, and even though the recovery has led to an improvement in this indicator, in 2018, still over 6% of households included those able and wanting to work, but who were completely excluded from the labour market.

Secondly, whilst having a job is, without doubt, necessary for any able person of working age, this is especially true for young people who have completed their education and who, without this first job opportunity, will have their professional and economic progression in the labour market hampered. The unemployment rate among young people aged 20 to 29 is seen as a good indicator of the coverage of this need in a key period of the working life. Between 2005 and 2013 this rate tripled, although the economic recovery has had a positive effect: falling from 41% to 24%. All the same, in 2018 almost 1 in 4 young active people aged 20 to 29 was unemployed.

## Individuals or households Why is the difference important?

In analyses of the labour market, the debate is usually focused around individuals. For example, when analysing unemployment in a specific area, the number of individuals who want to work and are looking for work (active) but cannot find it (unemployed) is assessed. However, the social interest in the socio-economic effect of the labour market among adults of a working age goes much further, and clearly affects more individuals in the population than those accounted for in an individual analysis using the official unemployment rate. Given that the population is organised into households, when focusing the analysis on the unemployment rate, and therefore on individuals, this assumes that the social effect is the same whether that individual lives on their own or lives with a dependent partner and minors. The social impact of unemployment is magnified in society if the well-being of a person depends on those in the labour force they live with having a job. In our analysis we have looked for indicators that offer specific information on this social impact, and we can therefore calculate the number of people in the population whose well-being is directly affected by a member of their household in the labour force being unemployed.

Another key aspect of the labour market becoming more precarious, and which is not reflected in the traditional unemployment rate, is the constant reduction in the work intensity of the labour force of many households, depriving them of the level of employment they would ideally like. This aspect is commonly referred to as "vulnerable employment", or even "underemployment". It is common for this type of employment to be linked both to involuntary part-time hours and work contracts for a fewer number of hours than are truly desired.

The information from the Active Population Survey (EPA) on the number of effective working hours and desired hours has been used to calculate the number of people in the population who live in households in which those in the labour force are working, on average, less than 20% of their working potential. The social need of those living in households to reach a minimum number of paid working hours increased significantly during the crisis. Between 2005 and 2013, the number of people living in a household with low work intensity tripled. However, as is the case with the other employment indicators, the recovery of economic growth from 2012 to 2018 has lessened the frequency of this social need, which has decreased from 11.8% to 6.8%.

Vulnerable employment can also be linked, according to the ILO (2017), with employment which does not include social security contributions nor does so in a limited manner, as well as with low-paid jobs which offer wages below the corresponding legal minimum. These aspects of employment vulnerability will be dealt with in challenge 3 of this area, when the challenge of having an adequate salary is addressed.

The significant increase in the unemployment rate during the recession also led to a significant number of people transitioning from being active to inactive, due to the "discouragement effect" caused by the continued lack of success when searching for a job. Despite these people wanting to work, they are not included as unemployed when calculating the traditional unemployment rate, or among those who are in the labour force but have low work intensity.

To overcome these issues, an indicator has been created for inactive people who, while being available to work, say that the reason they are not looking for a job is because they do not think they will find one. The evolution of this indicator is clearly related to the economic cycle, with a strong increase among this group between 2008 and 2012. Data from 2018 show that this indicator has once again decreased, although it is still not at 2005 levels.

Two other relevant factors that reflect the evolution of the population's need to find jobs are the duration of the periods of unemployment and job insecurity. To measure its social importance, on the one hand, the number of people who live in households in which half or more of their unemployed individuals have been searching for a job for over a year has been calculated, and on the other hand, the number of people who live in households in which all employed people have a temporary contract has also been calculated.

The crisis has caused a significant increase in the population who live in households with long-term unemployment. In 2012, one in five Spanish people lived with a person who did not have a job and had been searching for one for over a year. This percentage decreased between 2012 and 2018, but it still remains at a high level compared to the situation prior to the crisis.

In regard to insecurity, measured as all members of the household who work having a temporary contract, the recession had a significant effect in pushing those with this type of contract into unemployment, as has already been demonstrated by several specific reports on the Spanish labour market (Labour Observatory, FEDEA). This also led to a drop in the number of workers with a temporary contract in certain households. In 2012, only 9% of workers lived in households in which all the employed individuals had a temporary contract. The recovery of economic activity has again led to the generalised use of fixed-term contracts, with the indicator increasing from 8.7% in 2013 to 10.1% in 2018.

## Unemployment rate: What does it mean? How do we compare to the EU?

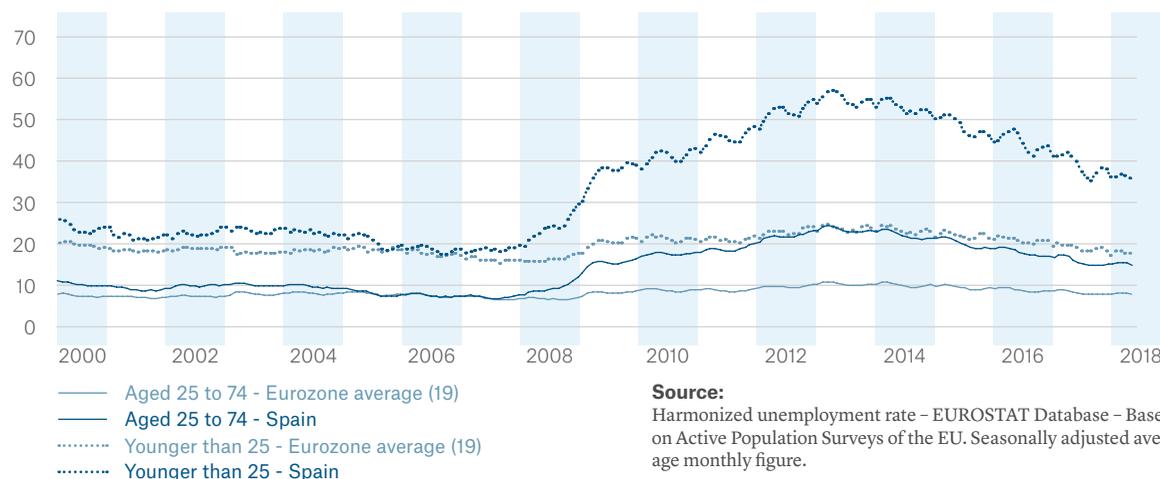
The unemployment rate commonly calculated by statistical offices in different countries around the world is based on the definitions of unemployment and activity determined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and adopted in 1982. The unemployment rate is the ratio of unemployed persons to the labour force in any given area.

The Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE), just like Eurostat, defines employed people as those aged 16 or over who during the week in question have had paid employment or have carried out a self-employed activity. Work of a sporadic or occasional nature that entails at least one hour in exchange for a wage or any

other type of remuneration, in cash or in kind, is included in the definition of work. Those who are unemployed are therefore people aged 16 or over who are simultaneously without a job during the week in question, who have been looking for a job (in other words, who have taken specific measures to find one) during the previous month, and who are available for work within a two-week period. Also considered to be unemployed are the people who during the week did not look for a job because they have found one which they will begin within the following three months. The total labour force is the sum of employed and unemployed people.

**Figure 2. Higher than Europe**

Unemployment rates over the years in Spain and the average for the Eurozone (young people under the age of 25 and all of the population 25 years of age and over).



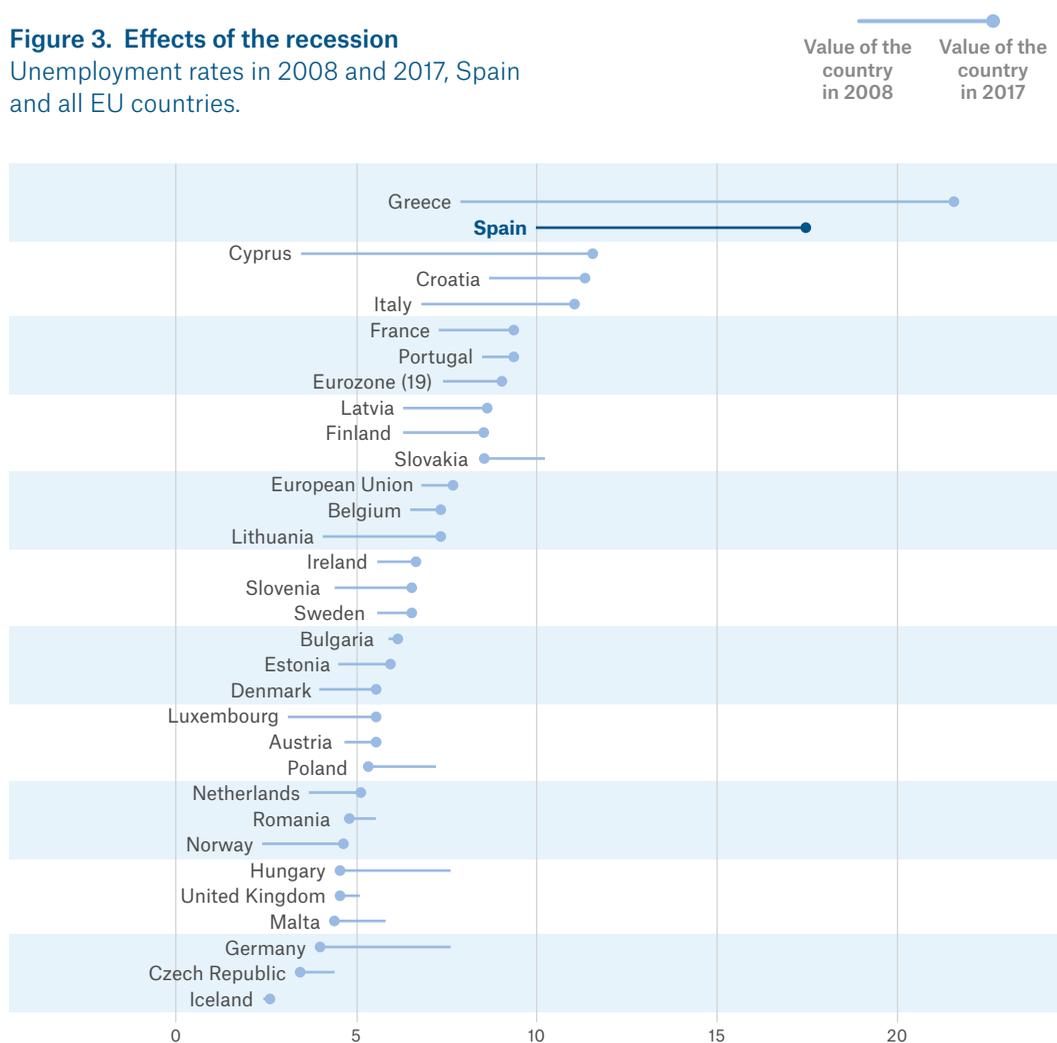
## Unemployment rate: What does it mean? How do we compare to the EU?

The unemployment rates in Spain are high compared to those in other EU countries, even in expansion periods, and they increase to drastically higher levels during recessions.

The last recession increased the unemployment rate in our country (as was the case with Greece) much more than in the other countries of the EU, especially for young people.

**Figure 3. Effects of the recession**

Unemployment rates in 2008 and 2017, Spain and all EU countries.



**Source:**  
Harmonized unemployment rate - EUROSTAT Database  
- Based on Active Population Surveys of the EU. Seasonally adjusted average monthly figure.

## Second challenge: Having appropriate working conditions

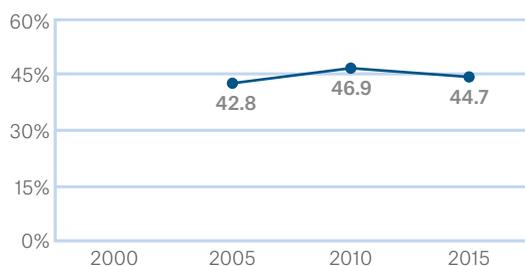


This challenge is measured using the indicators shown on this page. The meaning of the figures is explained in the remainder of the section.

### Key indicators on having appropriate working conditions

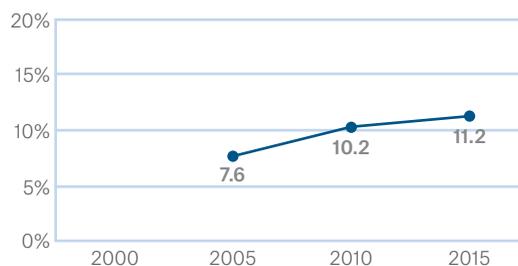
#### Skills mismatch with the position held:

% of people whose work position requires higher or lower qualifications than they have (skill mismatch).



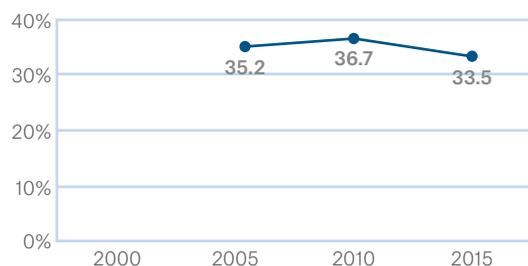
#### Under-qualification:

% of people whose work position requires more qualifications than they have.



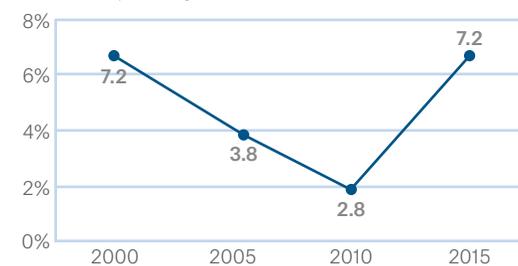
#### Over-qualification:

% of people whose work position requires lower qualifications than they have.



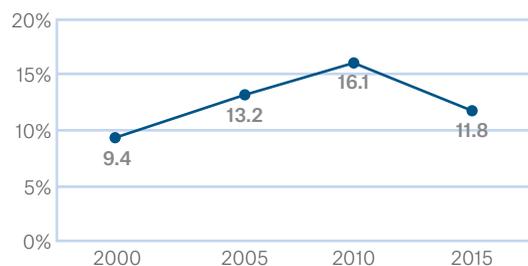
#### Work that creates difficulties in balancing work and family life:

% of people who often (more than twice a month) work bank holidays or night shifts.



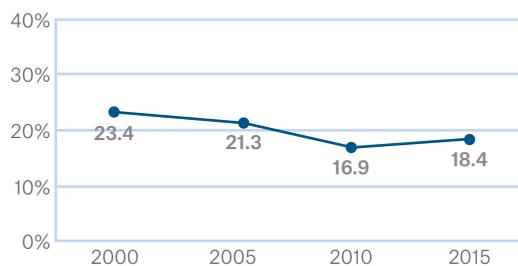
#### Uncertainty on the time of work:

% of people who repeatedly find out about changes to their work schedules very little in advance.



#### General dissatisfaction with the job:

% of people who are very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the working conditions of their job.



Source: Compiled using data from the European Working Conditions Survey, EWCS.

A second key aspect of the needs of the population in relation to the labour market is the quality of the jobs that workers have managed to find. It involves measuring whether the jobs found come with appropriate working conditions. Measuring the quality of a job is no easy task due to the various dimensions involved in any given job. Generally, studies on this subject take into account both salary and the intrinsic quality of the job depending on autonomy or social status, the quality of the contract as regards stability and professional development possibilities, as well as the physical risks and to what extent it allows a balance between personal and family life (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

The indicators for this challenge focus on several key aspects of the quality of a job (except for physical risks), and include the appropriateness of the worker's skills for the position they hold, an essential aspect that must be taken into account for the design and improvement of staff training policies in the case of over-qualification, and boosting professional development in the opposite case.

The results on the working conditions of the jobs indicate that the recession caused an increase in the skills mismatch with the position held. Almost half of workers (43% in 2015) say that they hold a position for which they have too much or too little training. The percentage increased by four percentage points during the first phase of the crisis, between 2005 and 2010. More than three quarters of these workers are over-qualified, while the opposite applies for one quarter.

The crisis also contributed to an increase in the number of employed people suffering from uncertainty regarding the working timetable. The corresponding indicator increased gradually between 2000 and 2010, from 9% to 16%, but decreased to 11.8% in 2015, to a level below the figure for 2005. The frequency of working night shifts or bank holidays follows the evolution of the economic cycle, increasing when the economy grows and decreasing when economic activity contracts. However, the indicator decreased between 2000 and 2005, despite the economic growth.

Finally, the last indicator for this second challenge is focused on the subjective perception of workers regarding the working conditions of their position. This indicator is clearly affected by how people in work per-

ceive their well-being when unemployment increases as significantly as it did in Spain. It is clear to see that, although around 20% of employees are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the working conditions of their job, this percentage dropped to 17% in 2010, when unemployment rose to very high levels, and increased again in 2015 when the recession started to subside.

## Third challenge: Having an adequate salary



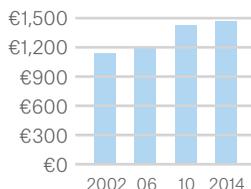
This challenge is measured using the indicators we show on this page. The meaning of the figures is explained in the remainder of the section.

### Key indicators for having an adequate salary

Median hourly wage (nominal)



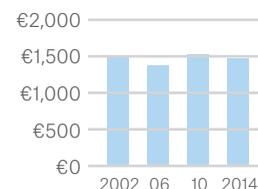
Median monthly wage (nominal)



Median hourly wage (real, in euros, in 2014)



Median monthly wage (real, in euros, in 2014)

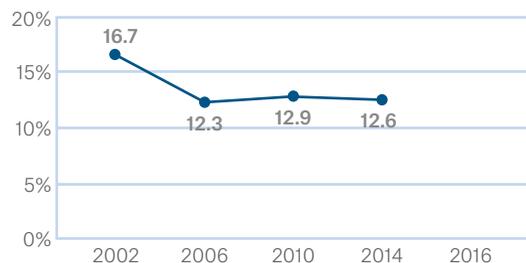


Source: Compiled using data from the Salary Structure Survey, EES.

### Wage conditions of the employed Spanish population (percentage)

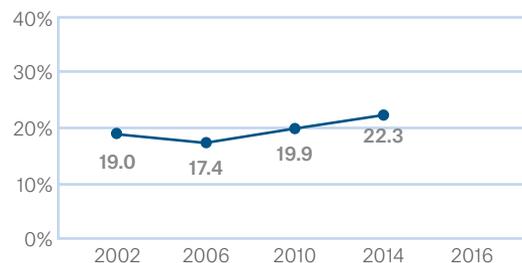
People employed with an hourly wage below 2/3 of the median wage:

% of employed people in the labour force with a gross hourly wage below 2/3 of the median wage.



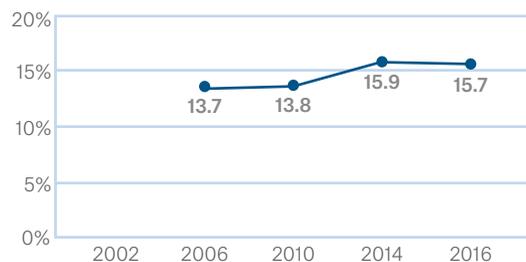
Employed people with a monthly wage below 2/3 of the median wage:

% of employed people in the labour force whose gross monthly wage is below 2/3 of the median wage.



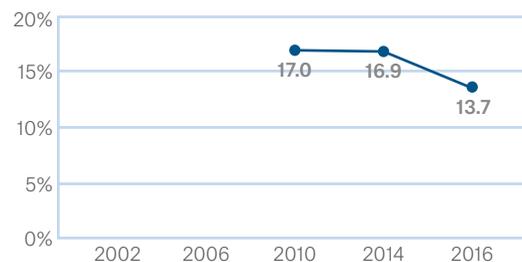
In-work poverty:

% of employed people who live in households whose family income is below the poverty line.



Severe salary reduction:

% of people employed for two consecutive years that have experienced a reduction of at least 20% of their net monthly wage in the last year.



Source: Compiled using data from the Salary Structure Survey, EES, and from the Living Conditions Survey, ECV, both cross-sectional and longitudinal.

The third challenge associated with the needs of the population in relation to the labour market is that the salary that the position provides is enough to have a decent standard of living in the society in question, so that it allows all members of the household to avoid poverty and at the same time reduces the uncertainty that comes with income insecurity.

This challenge includes three different aspects that operate within any concept of household income from employment and which must be differentiated: hourly wage, number of working hours and concentration in certain households of people employed with a low hourly wage and few working hours.

To identify the first of these aspects (hourly wage), we calculate the number of employed people in the labour force whose hourly wage is below  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the median wage. It is therefore a relative threshold which is constructed based on the salary distribution and which will change with increases or decreases in the unemployment rate which tend to affect the lower part of the distribution more.

The results of the wage conditions indicate that, in any phase of the economic cycle, approximately one out of every eight employed people in Spain has a low hourly wage (below  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the median wage). In the expansion phase of the cycle, when the unemployment rate was decreasing (between 2002 and 2006), the number of workers with low salaries also decreased from 16.7% to 12.3%. In contrast, during the recession the frequency of low salaries remained practically constant, between 12.3% and 12.9% of workers, which indicates that the adjustment came by way of a reduction in the number of employed workers and the number of working hours of employed people. In other words, despite the median hourly wage rising by 13% (from 8.4 to 9.5 euros) between 2006 and 2010, the number of people employed with low hourly wages remained at around one in eight during that period.

To better identify the importance of the number of working hours in the challenge of achieving an adequate salary, we have created another indicator with the same philosophy as the last, but which uses monthly wages instead of hourly wages. This indicator is closely linked to another from the first challenge in this chapter and which measures the weight of underemployment due to the insufficiency of hours. This indicator recorded a significant rise in the number of employed people who were underemployed between 2005 and 2013, and a slight recovery between 2013 and 2018. We can now see that the percentage of employed people in the labour market whose gross monthly wage is below  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the median wage increased significantly between 2006 and 2014 (rising from 19% to 22.3%). This confirms that the rise in the number of workers with employment difficulties during the recession is more related to a decrease in the number of working hours than with a decrease in the hourly wage. It is also important to note that the presence of this phenomenon was greater in 2014 than it had been in the entire preceding decade.

## Types of salaries

### **Nominal wage and real wage:**

The nominal wage is the amount of money that an employee receives as compensation for their work. The real wage is the nominal wage adjusted for prices (in other words, adjusted for CPI).

### **Median wage and average wage:**

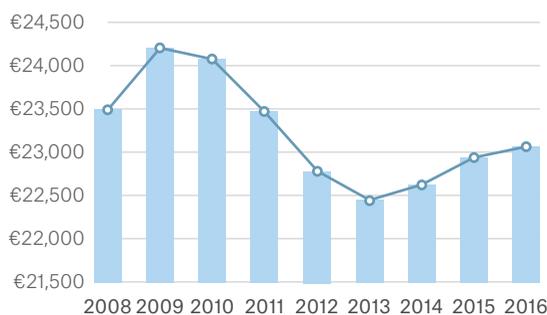
Median wage is that which divides the number of workers into two equal parts: those that have a higher wage and those that have a lower wage than that amount. The average wage is the sum of all the wages in a country, divided by the total number of workers.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SALARIES: ANNUAL SALARIES AND HOURLY WAGES

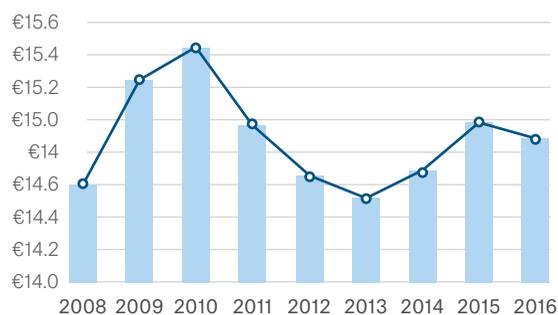
Real wages grew slightly at the beginning of the recession due to the loss of employment that affected a large number of temporary workers with a low level of education and with low salaries. From 2009 onwards, annual salaries experienced a strong decrease due to the combination of reduced working hours and a fall in hourly wages. They stabilised in 2013 but

in 2016 the real annual average salary had still not recovered the purchasing power it had in 2008. The hourly wage was higher in 2016 than in 2008, which indicates that the fall in the number of annual working hours is what prevents the average annual salary from reaching similar figures to those from 2008.

**Figure 7. Real annual average salary per worker in Spain, in euros, in 2016.**



**Figure 8. Real annual average hourly wage per worker in Spain, in euros, in 2016.**



**Source:**  
National Institute of Statistics. Annual Series of the Salary Structure Survey. The gross salary for the entire year in question is examined.

Lastly, to globally assess the challenge of having an adequate salary, it is necessary to take into account how employed people with low salaries or few working hours are distributed across households. If they are concentrated in certain households, the income from work will not allow them to escape poverty (particularly if members of the household do not receive other complementary monetary income, such as unemployment benefits or pensions).

The indicator of in-work poverty takes into account both employment-related income as well as the distribution of employed people in households and calculates the number of employed people who live in households in which the family income is below the poverty line. The results indicate that in Spain, in 2016, just over one in seven employed people lived in poor households, a percentage which increased by two points during the recession: from 13.7% in 2006 to 15.7% in 2014.

Another relevant dimension of labour well-being is to what extent the employed person can expect that their job or income will be stable in the future. One possible approach to this need for future salary stability is to analyse the recent salary changes experienced by employees, which can be done by measuring the number of people who, being employed for two consecutive years, have experienced a reduction of at least 20% in their net annual salary.

The results indicate that in 2010 and 2014, one in six employees had experienced a salary decrease of over 20% in the last year, although this percentage fell to a little less than one in seven between 2014 and 2016, which shows a pronounced sensitivity to the rhythm of economic growth.

## WHAT IS AN ADEQUATE SALARY? HOW HAS THE MINIMUM WAGE EVOLVED? HOW DO WE COMPARE TO THE EU?

Most of the countries in the EU regulate salaries in their labour market by using a minimum wage, which in 2018 ranged from €260 a month in Bulgaria to €1,613 in Ireland and €1,998 in Luxembourg. Spain, with €858.5 a month (in 12 payments), ranks behind these two latter countries as well as others such as the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, which exceed €1,400. If we compare the purchasing power of the minimum wages using purchasing power parities, our country ranked just ahead of Portugal, Greece and Eastern European countries in 2018. From 2000 to 2004, the Spanish minimum wage grew more slowly than the average wage, but after that date it experienced two significant increases: one between the years 2004 and 2005, and another in 2017, in two attempts by the corresponding governments to improve the pay conditions of employees with the lowest wages. In 2004 and 2005 the minimum wage experienced a double increase: by 6.6% in July 2004 and 4.5% in January 2005. These increases allowed the average wage to move closer to the median wage between 2002 and 2014.

More recently, the minimum wage increased by another 8% in 2017, which will probably entail an additional improvement in its comparison to the median wage.

**Figure 9. Ratio between minimum wage and median wage: 2002-2014.**



**Source:** Compiled using data from the Salary Structure Survey.

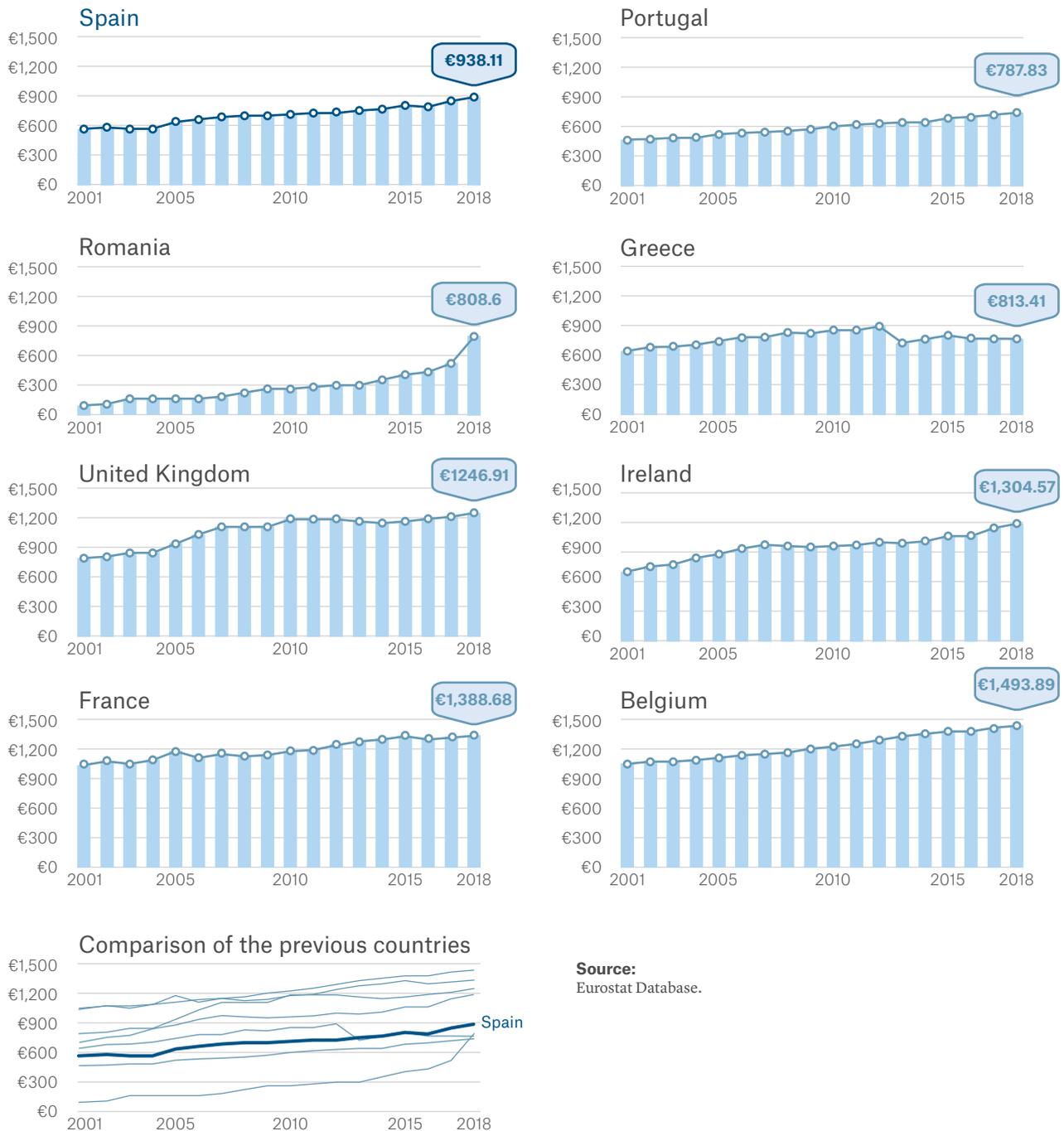
**Figure 10. Minimum wage in different countries of the EU in PPP, 2005 and 2018.**



**Source:** Eurostat Database.

## WHAT IS AN ADEQUATE SALARY? HOW HAS THE MINIMUM WAGE EVOLVED? HOW DO WE COMPARE TO THE EU?

Figure 11. Minimum wage in different countries of the EU by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).



Source: Eurostat Database.

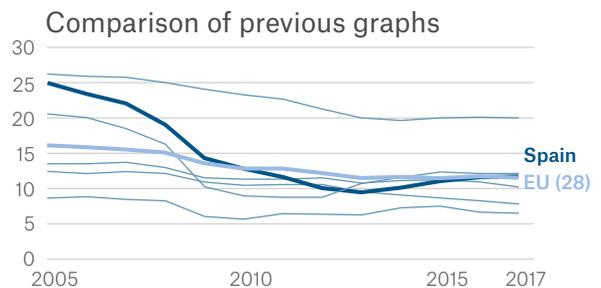
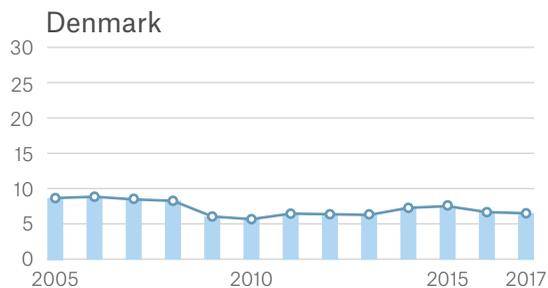
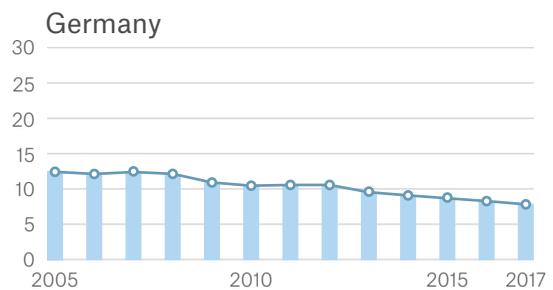
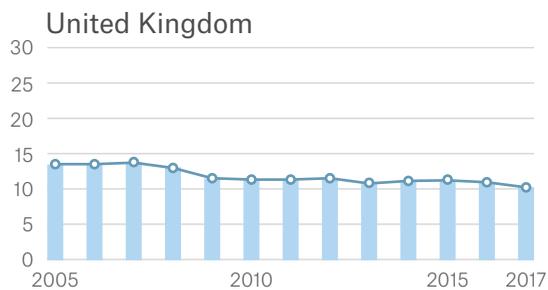
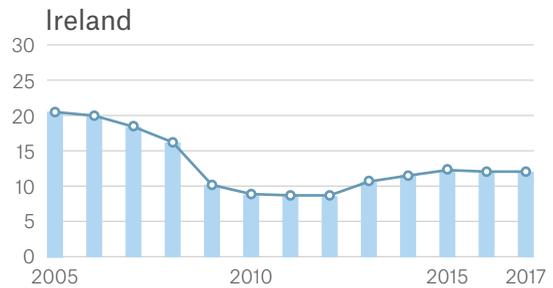
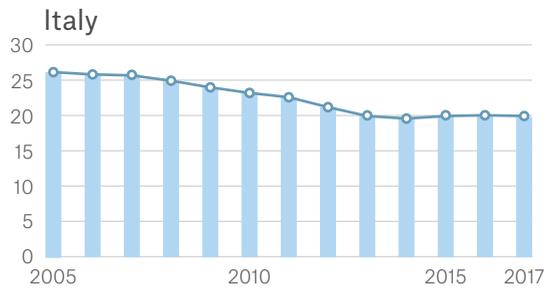
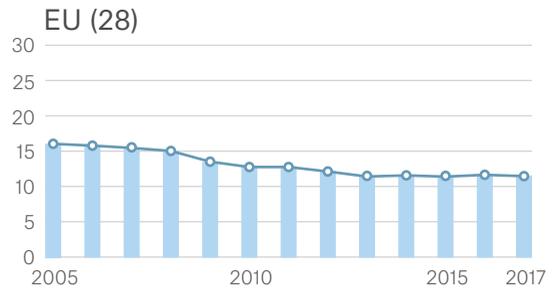
## Salary and employment gender gap

In the Spanish labour market, the differences between men and women have traditionally revealed themselves in a continued gap in employment and unemployment rates in favour of men, this is more marked with (often unwanted) part-time work and temporary contracts among female employees, as well as the salary discrimination faced by women and a significant segregation of women into jobs that pay less (Cebrián and Moreno, 2008; Gradín et al., 2010; Bárceña-Martín and Moro-Egido, 2013; Del Río and Alonso-Villar, 2014).

Figure 12 shows how the differences in the employment rates of men and women in Spain have gradually decreased between 2005 and 2013. Since then, the employment gap by gender has remained below 13 per cent. It is a similar level to the European average and significantly lower than in other Mediterranean countries such as Italy or Greece, similar to the United Kingdom and Ireland, but above the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark, which have the lowest levels with an employment gender gap of around 5 per cent.

Figure 13 compares the hourly wage gap between men and women. It must be taken into account that the figures have not been adjusted for other characteristics of the workers other than gender, so they also include differences in educational levels and average age. Calculated in this way, in Spain women earned 15% less than men in 2014, placing it within the EU-28 average. This is a good position compared to other European countries and the trend points to future improvement.

Figure 12. Employment gender gap: difference between the percentage of men and the percentage of women with a job (of the total population by gender).

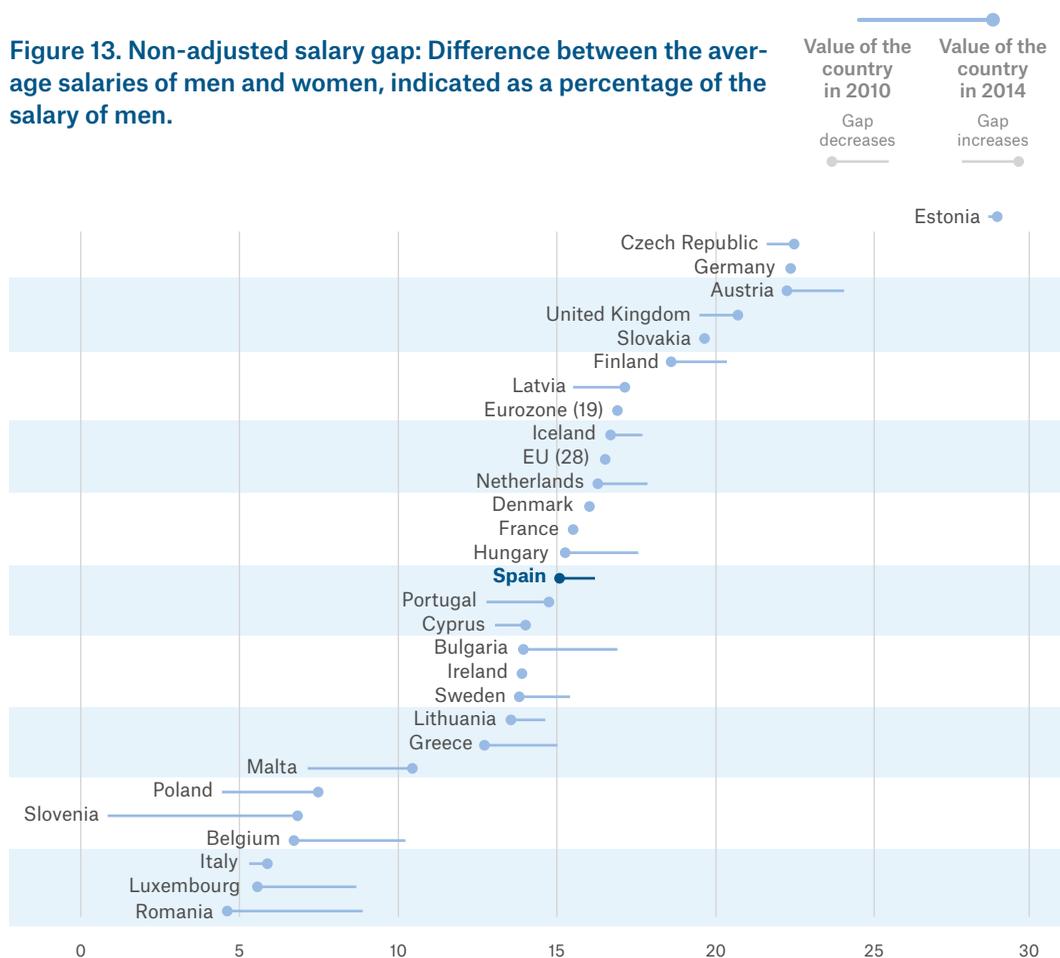


Source: EUROSTAT Database.

As Cantó et al. (2016) note when analysing the evolution of the risk of Spanish women living in poor households, in families with no income (extreme poverty) and in the households most excluded from employment (where all those in the labour force are unemployed), the gender gap trends in all these dimensions are not homogeneous by age bracket. Therefore, for example, the reduction in the gender gap between people who are at risk of poverty is largely related to a relative improvement in the economic situation of women over the age of 65 who receive pensions, in other words, income outside the economic cycle. However, the gap between the poverty risk of the youngest women and that of men of similar socio-economic characteristics has not decreased.

Therefore, the changes that the crisis caused to the poverty risk by gender are closely tied to changes in the distribution of income of women over the age of 65. In contrast, changes in the economic well-being of women who are active or of working age in Spain due to the crisis have come from an equalisation (downward) of the equivalent income level of women and men, while the recession has had very little effect on the differences in the poverty risk gap for the youngest women.

**Figure 13. Non-adjusted salary gap: Difference between the average salaries of men and women, indicated as a percentage of the salary of men.**



**Notes:**  
The population includes all people employed in companies with more than 10 workers in NACE Rev. 2 adding B to S (excluding O). This indicator is calculated from the data of the European Salary Structure Survey.

**Source:**  
EUROSTAT Database.

# THE SITUATION IN EUROPE



The performance of the Spanish labour market shows significant differences compared to that of other European Union Member States. In particular, there are marked differences compared to Eurozone countries. The most important differences lie in the difficulties facing the Spanish labour force in finding employment, this especially affects younger people, which makes Spain the country with the highest number of unemployed people and employed people with an insufficient number of hours worked (underemployed). In other words, it is the country with the highest number of people needing to increase their working hours. Additionally, those in the labour force with more chance of being unemployed or underemployed are concentrated more in some households than in others, which implies that we also have the largest number of workers who live in households in which family income is below the poverty line.

Two of the main reasons for the differences between the labour markets in European countries are the different productive structures and the labour policies implemented, both active and passive. All this affects the three key dimensions of the labour market: having a job, appropriate working conditions and adequate salary.

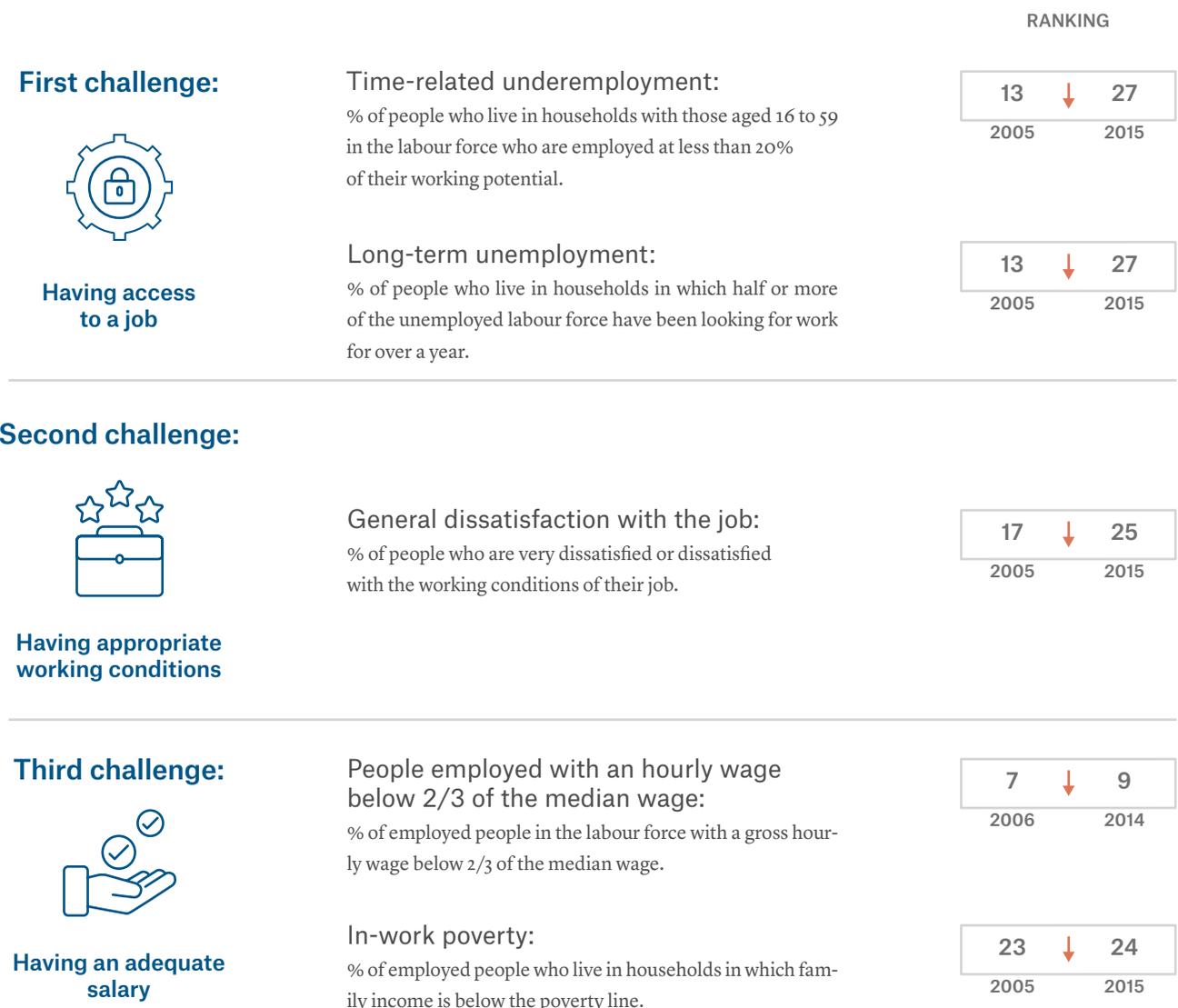
Two key indicators have been chosen in the challenge of having a job. The first measures the scale of time-related underemployment, and the second measures the duration of the unemployment. The first key feature is that Spain ranks among the lowest positions in both indicators, second only to Greece in terms of the duration of the unemployment. In 2005, with very low unemployment levels and strong economic growth, the Spanish position in the ranking was noticeably better, both as regards underemployment and the duration of the unemployment. Spain was in an intermediate position between the Nordic and Central European countries and Eastern European countries, with the latter being in worse positions than Spain.

The chosen indicator for the challenge of having appropriate working conditions is general dissatisfaction with the job. In this case, Spain's position in the ranking also worsened between 2005 and 2015, ending up among the bottom four EU countries in this area. Essentially, one in five Spanish workers is very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the working conditions of their job, whereas the normal level in the EU is around one in eight or ten workers.

The analysis is completed by comparing the need for an adequate salary in the different EU countries. Two indicators have been chosen for this: salary inequality, which is the percentage of workers whose hourly wages are below a threshold that depends on the (relative) salary distribution of each country, and the percentage of workers who suffer in-work poverty, meaning employed people who live in a household in which family income is below the poverty line.

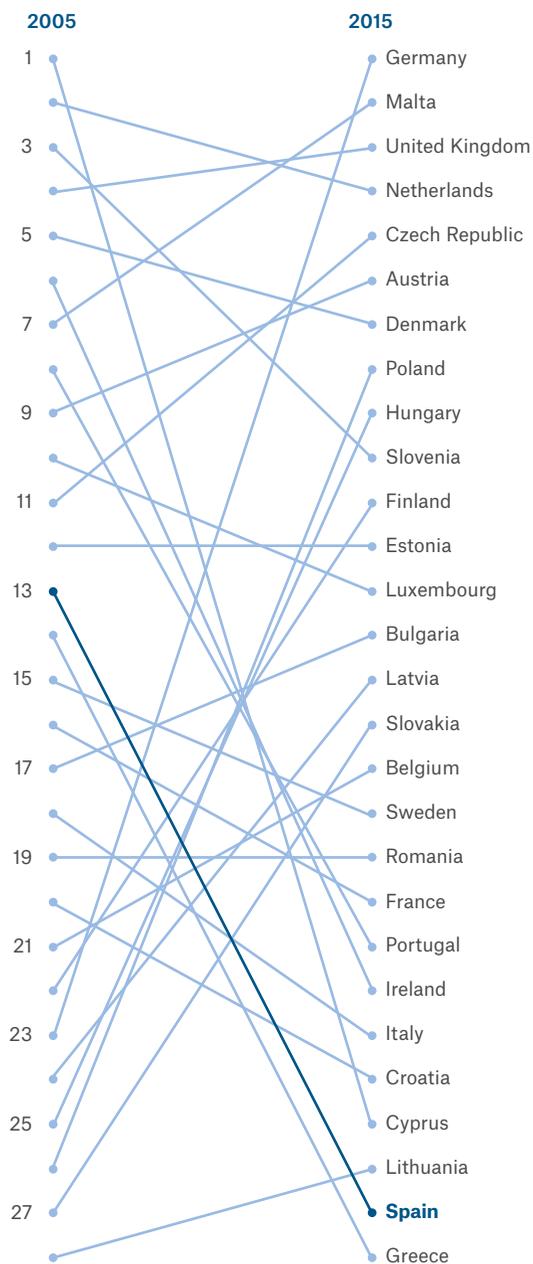
As we know, Spain ranks in an intermediate position in the European context as regards the number of people whose hourly wage is low, and during the recession its position worsened only slightly. However, both before and after the crisis Spain was at the bottom of the rankings in terms of in-work poverty, mainly due to the increase in time-related underemployment, involuntary part-time hours and the increase in the concentration of unemployment and underemployment in certain households.

**Figure 14. Summary of Spain's position in the ranking of social needs in relation to the labour market in the EU.**



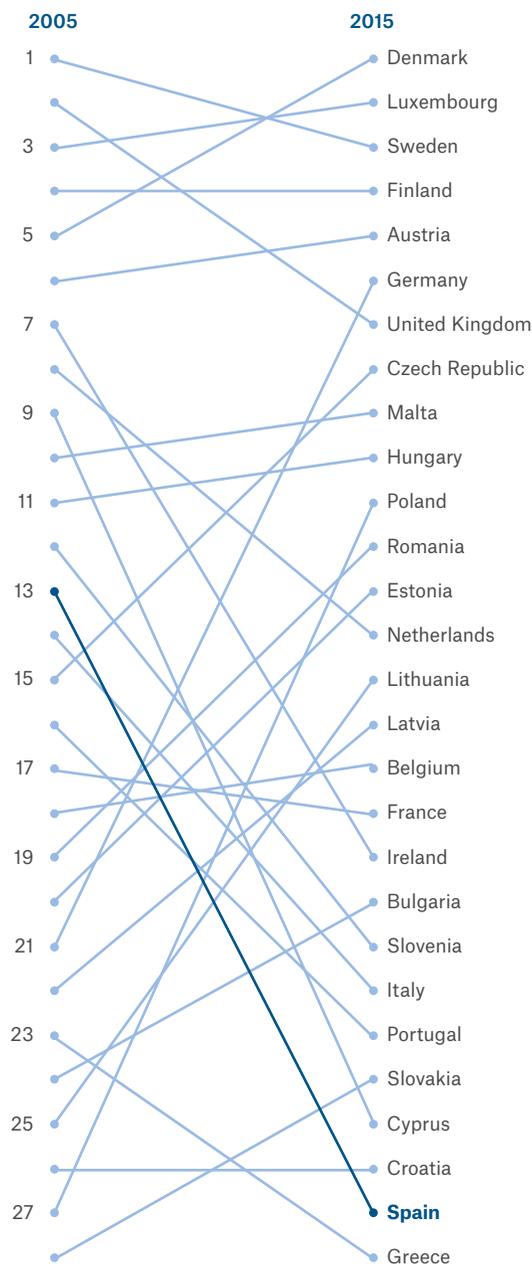
Spain's position in the ranking of social needs in relation to the EU labour market.

Figure 15. Time-related underemployment.



**Note:** The figure for Malta for the year 2005 corresponds to the year 2009.

Figure 16. Long-term unemployment.



**Note:** The figure for Malta for the year 2005 corresponds to the year 2009.

Figure 17. Dissatisfaction with the job

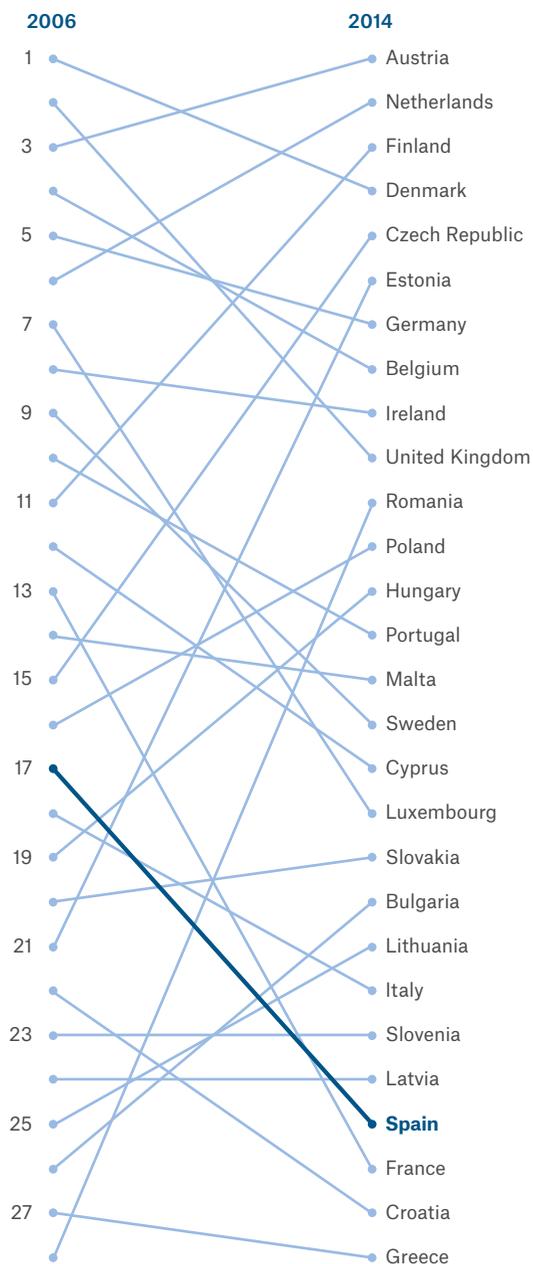
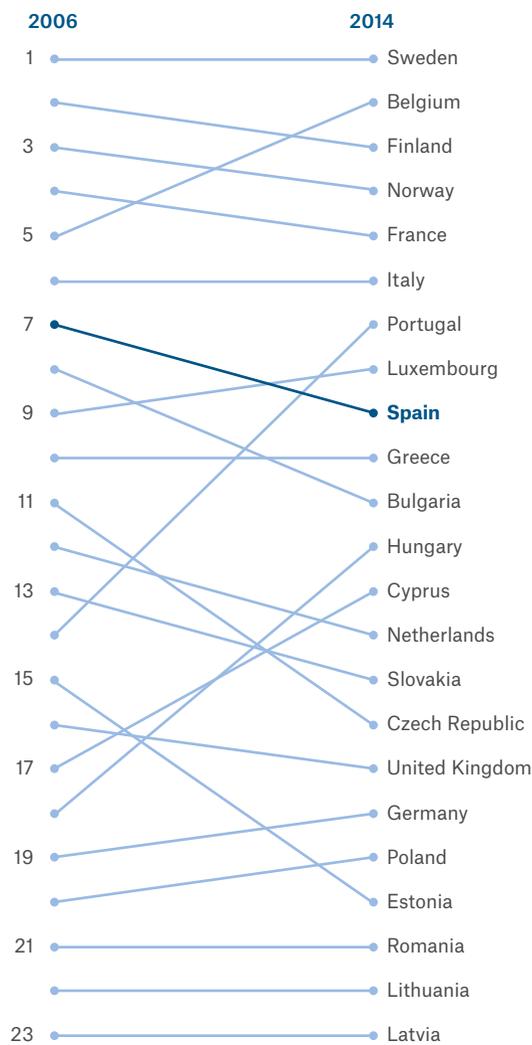
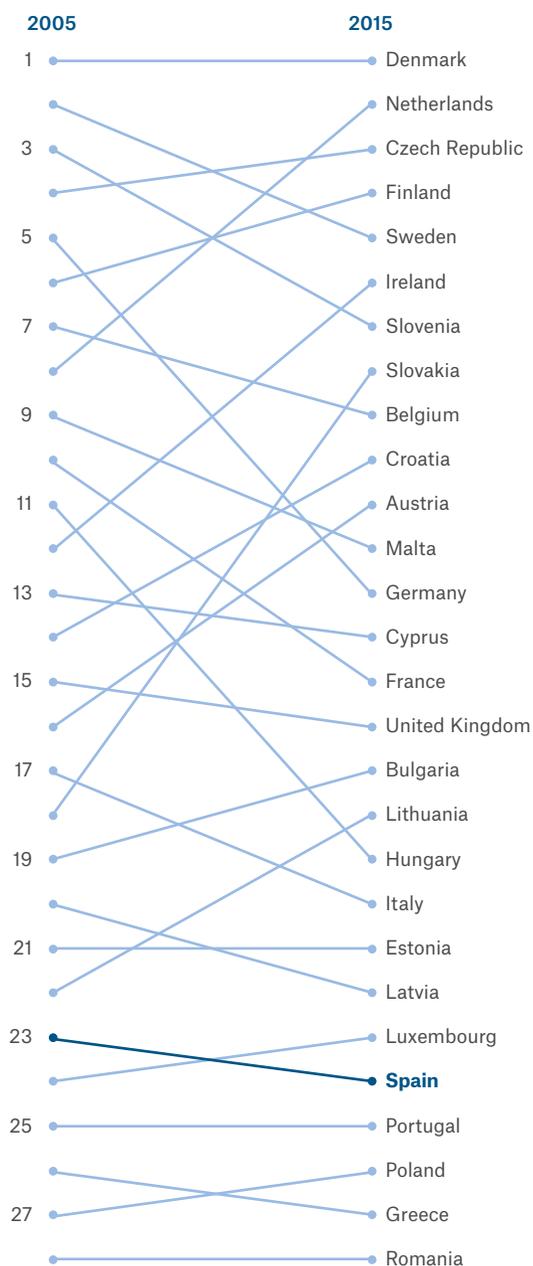


Figure 18. Employed with a low hourly wage.



**Note:**  
The figure for Greece for the year 2014 corresponds to the year 2010.

Figure 19. In-work poverty



**Note:**  
The figures for Bulgaria and Romania for the year 2005 correspond to the year 2007. The figures for Malta and Croatia for the year 2005 correspond to the years 2009 and 2010, respectively.

**Source for figures 15 - 19:**  
Complied with data from the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), the European Working Conditions Survey (ECWS), the European Union Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) and the EU-SILC cross-sectional.

# PUBLIC POLICIES



The relative position of Spanish society with regards to the European countries in the indicators of having a job, appropriate working conditions and adequate salary, forces us to reflect on the potential and deficiencies of public policies aimed at achieving the three studied challenges. It is difficult, however, to summarise the performance of the public sector regarding the coverage of these social needs using a set of indicators. Traditionally, the definition of these indicators has taken as the main reference the common distinction between active and passive employment policies, with the former intended to promote employability and recruitment through employment and training services, and the latter designed to provide coverage for the lack of income for unemployed people through monetary benefits.

The European Union, through the Europe 2020 Strategy, which is the reference framework for the coordination of Member State employment policies, has attempted to define a consistent system of indicators on which public policies can be based. These indicators are designed as a basic information system for monitoring the results of each country. Among them are specific targets for increasing the employment rate, improving education levels, reducing school dropouts

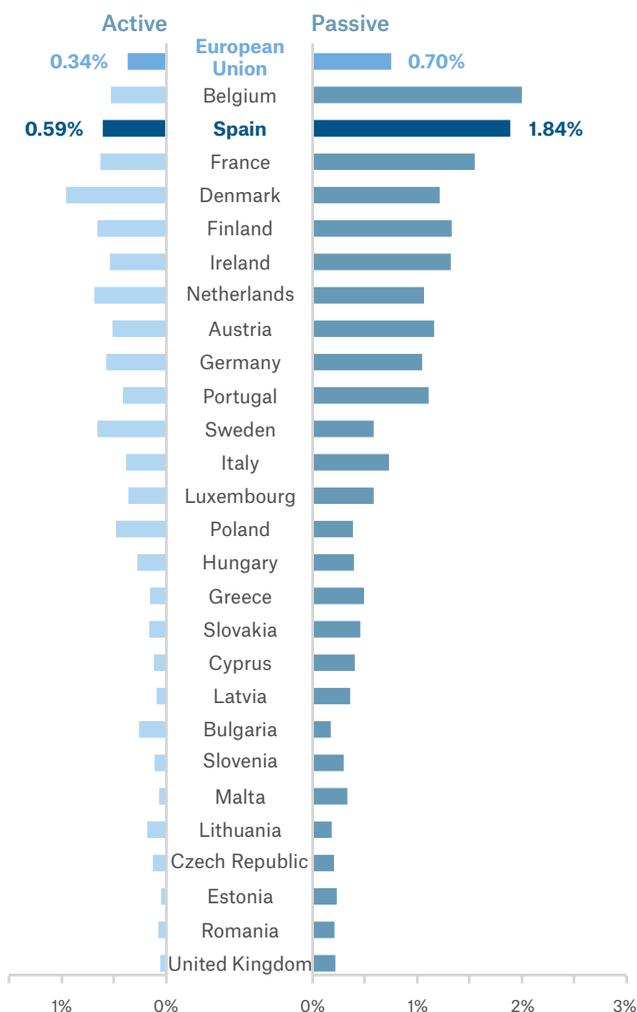
and decreasing poverty. They are, however, too general to be able to link public intervention with the results described in the previous sections.

In the absence of a sufficiently agreed system of indicators with which to assess the reach of the policies developed to cover the social needs related to the three proposed challenges, in this section some of the traditional indicators will be analysed, but adapted to the realities that have been described. To this end, the aforementioned distinction between active and passive policies could be useful, in addition to the policy of setting minimum wages since this is the main means of intervention to guarantee an adequate salary.

## Spending on employment policies

The analysis of the data on spending on employment policies as a proportion of GDP in European Union countries reveals some distinctive features about Spain. The first is that Spain is one of the countries with the highest spending as a proportion of GDP, both before the crisis began, when unemployment was at levels close to the EU average, and once it ended, when the unemployment rate in Spain continued being considerably higher than the average, despite the reduction registered during the period of recovery. The fact that relative expenditure in 2017 was practically the same as in 2008 (2.3% of GDP) is of note.

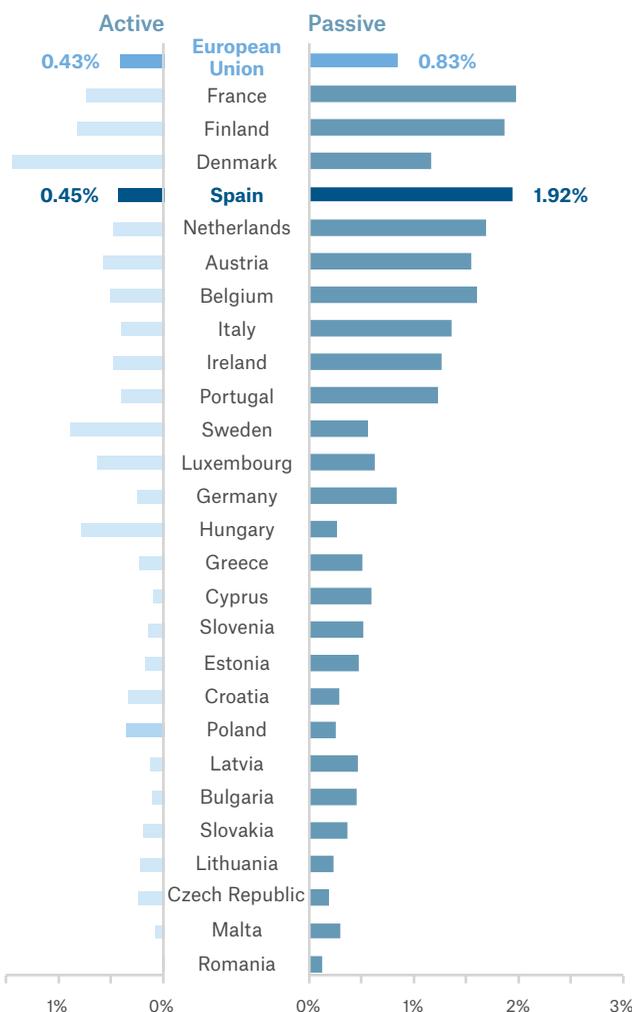
**Figure 20.**  
Spending on employment policies as a proportion of GDP, 2008.



**Source:** Compiled based on DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (European Commission).

The second feature is the comparatively greater weight of monetary benefits. These account for more than 80% of the total expenditure, compared to active policies which in European statistics include employment and training services, staff turnover measures, employment incentives, protected employment, the direct creation of jobs and incentives for start-ups. Spain is in the quartile of countries spending least on these latter measures, together with Cyprus and Romania. This feature was already present before the crisis; only Belgium, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta and Estonia exceeded Spain's use of passive policies as a percentage of the total.

**Figure 21.**  
Spending on employment policies as a proportion of GDP, 2016.



**Source:** Compiled based on DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (European Commission).

## HOW DO OTHER COUNTRIES PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM LABOUR MARKET RISKS?

The emphasis in Spain on passive employment policies and the focusing of efforts on protecting against labour market risks through the use of unemployment benefits contrasts with the methods seen in other countries. Some countries have opted to introduce salary supplements (low income benefits) to improve the incentives for labour participation and to ensure that workers with the lowest wages obtain an adequate salary. A very common plan in countries with the best results for this system consists of a first phase where the beneficiary receives a percentage of the complementary benefit; a second phase where they receive the complete benefit, and a third where, after having obtained an adequate salary, a progressive discount percentage is applied until the benefit is removed. These low income benefits, highly developed in the Anglo Saxon world, have hardly been applied in Spain.

Although these methods seem to have

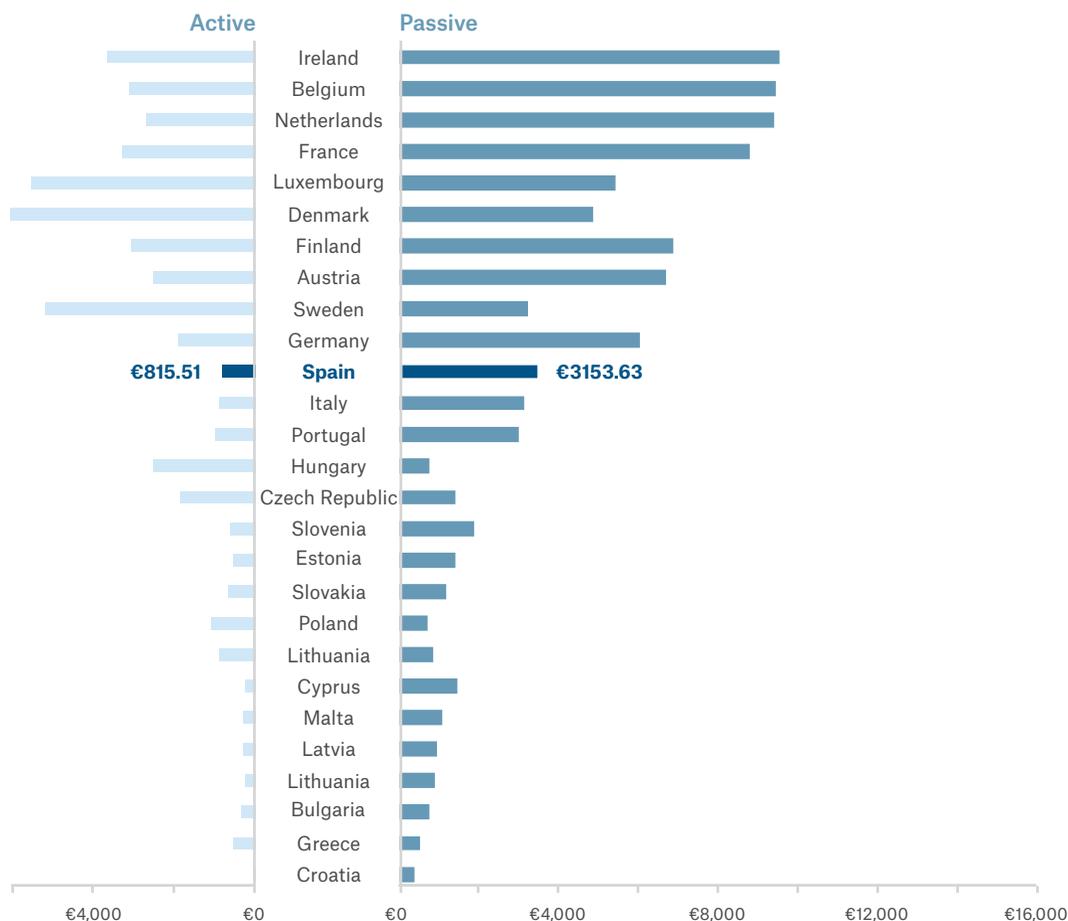
contributed to reducing inequality and raising the income of beneficiaries in the countries where they have been implemented most, they also present certain problems. They could create disincentives for some workers, such as those who have salaries slightly higher than the figure set to receive the benefit, and could especially have an effect contrary to the desired result if they are used by employers to reduce wage costs. Studies that have assessed individual responses to these methods show a certain consensus that, in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, with labour market characteristics that cannot be directly extrapolated to the situation in Spain, they favour the transition from inactivity to employment, but do not seem to have generated increases in the hours worked by those already employed. Some studies also reveal potential disincentives to labour participation for secondary household income receivers.

Spain's position among the countries with the highest levels of spending on employment policies should not be taken as indicative of greater unemployment risk coverage. The aforementioned fact of having an unemployment rate which is significantly higher than the average leads, almost automatically, to higher spending levels. An appropriate interpretation of the figures therefore requires standardising the aggregate indicator taking into account the number of unemployed people.

The available figures including this type of adjustment show a significant decline in the rankings for Spain, which falls to the mid-point of the rankings in what could be considered a Mediterranean group within the European Union, with noticeably lower levels of spend-

ing compared to the Central European and Nordic countries and Ireland (comparable figures for the United Kingdom are only available up to 2008). Particularly striking is the change in the case of active employment policies in Spain when using this criterion, with a level of spending providing a very low protective intensity compared to the European context, of €815 per year per person searching for a job. This is in contrast to the higher levels seen in countries with a lower GDP per capita, such as Latvia (€935), Portugal (€1,041), Poland (€1,100), Czech Republic (€1,500), Hungary (€2,550), and the very different figures for the Nordic countries (€3,150 in Finland, €5,280 in Sweden and €6,190 in Denmark), which are the strong leaders in terms of this type of policy on the European continent.

Figure 22. Spending on employment policies per person who wants to work, in PPP, in 2016.



Source: Compiled based on DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (European Commission).

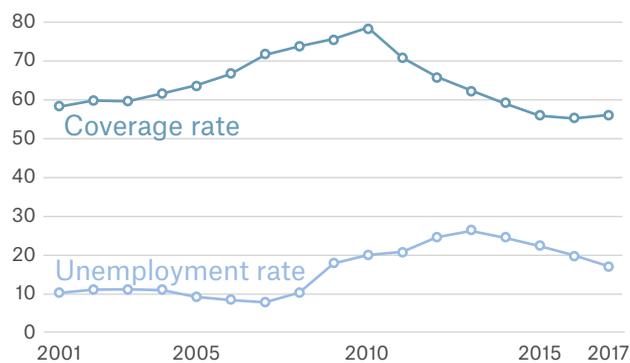
## The coverage of unemployment benefits and the effect on poverty

One of the most important indicators of the coverage of unemployment is the percentage of unemployed people who receive a monetary benefit. A few years ago, the Ministry of Labour defined a new coverage rate indicator, expressed as the ratio between the total number of people receiving unemployment benefit and the sum of the unemployed people registered with work experience and those receiving the temporary agricultural workers benefit (as this group used to be excluded from the calculation).

The coverage rate has registered significant changes in recent decades. In the 1980s, a progressive upward trend began, reaching the highest levels in the first third of the following decade. From that moment the process was reversed, with a sharp drop in the rate, which then remained stable at around 60% of the unemployed labour force. This reduction in the volume of population covered can be explained, mainly, by the implementation of several reforms. Legislative changes in the early 1990s entailed a restructuring of the people who could receive benefits, boosting the healthcare element of the benefit while establishing more restrictive conditions for receiving the contributory benefit, resulting in a loss of the protective intensity of the system.

In the following years, the tone of the reforms was even more restrictive, with new criteria that toughened the conditions of access, decreased the amounts and shortened the time during which they could be received. All this led to significant decreases in the number of beneficiaries, which took the rate of coverage to levels close to 60% at the beginning of the century. In the following years, the intense growth in employment during the phase of prosperity and the lower pressure on social protection spending caused a continuous increase in the coverage offered by the system, which reached its maximum values (close to 80% of the unemployed) right at the beginning of the economic crisis.

Figure 23. Unemployment benefit coverage rate.



Source:  
Compiled based on records of the Ministry of Labour.

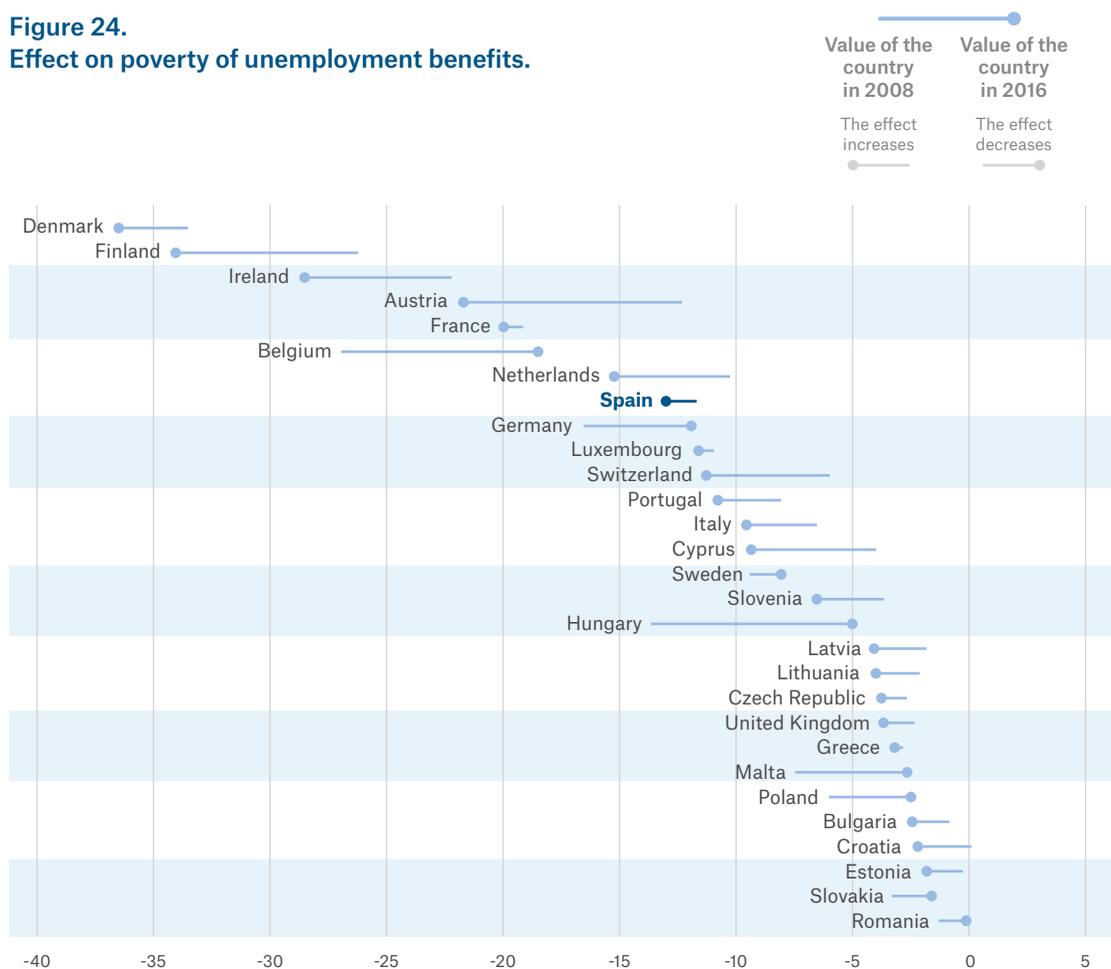
The subsequent evolution is highly unfavourable. After 2010, a new coverage reduction process began, just when the intensity of the economic crisis and job destruction made this type of protection more necessary. Between 2010 and 2014 the coverage rate dropped from over 78% to 55%, while in that same period unemployment went on to affect more than one in four of the labour force. The drastic rise in the number of unemployed people caused by the crisis overwhelmed the potential of a system whose only ability to offer coverage for the new needs generated by the change in the stage of the cycle had been eroded through different previous reforms. Today, the coverage rate (56% in 2017) is close to the record minimum for the last two decades.

As both the percentage of unemployed people covered by these benefits and the amounts received have been decreasing, it is foreseeable that their ability to mitigate the issues of low income in households with high unemployment will also have decreased. However, the sudden fall of income among the unemployed, which in turn has increased their dependence on government payments, should have resulted in the relative weight of these benefits growing during the crisis.

A common way of measuring this effect is to compare the available income of households to the income they would have had if these benefits had not existed, an effect that can be simulated by deducting the amount of the available income corresponding to benefits. It must not be forgotten however, that this procedure implies acceptance that households do not change their behaviour when they have the chance of receiving benefits. The absence of benefits could lead to the acceptance of low-paid jobs, or to the taking up of labour activity by others in the labour force in the household, so the real effect of these benefits on poverty could be overestimated.

The available data show that in Nordic countries unemployment benefits have a greater effect on poverty. Two other general features of the comparison of results between European countries are that in the vast majority of EU Member States this reducing effect has increased since the beginning of the crisis, and that there does not seem to be a link between having a higher unemployment rate and benefits having a greater impact on poverty. Spain ranks among the top ten countries in terms of unemployment benefits having a greater reducing effect on poverty. This position at the top of the rankings is mainly accounted for by the greater proportion of household income accounted for by these benefits compared to other countries. This is due to the greater level of unemployment in Spain and the little variation seen in the poverty reduction indicator despite the drastic fall in the income of households with longer periods of unemployment, which should have translated into a greater impact of these benefits.

**Figure 24.**  
Effect on poverty of unemployment benefits.



**Source:**  
Compiled based on the EU-SILC (Eurostat).

## The evolution of the purchasing power of the minimum wage

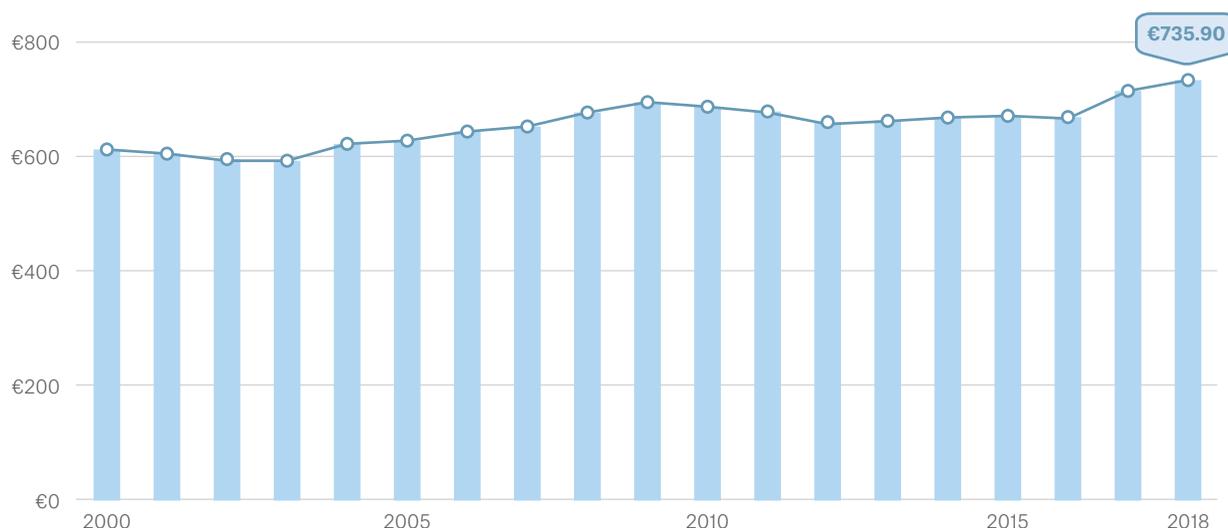
The last indicator to measure the effect of public intervention on the social needs detailed in the previous sections is the real minimum wage as the main means of regulation, as well as the determination of the types of entry, to recruitment systems, and exit from redundancy costs for the labour market.

The changes in the purchasing power of the minimum wage (MW), as described in the analysis of the effect of low-paid jobs, are a measure of the concern public decision makers have about setting an adequate income floor to cover the basic needs of those who have paid employment. However, in practice, only a few workers are directly affected by changes in the MW. For some authors though, the effects of the MW could be greater than those limited to the affected workers, since its effect could extend to the salaries agreed in collective bargaining agreements. In addition, as was emphasised in the previous analysis, many workers receive

insufficient pay, not only because of the salary but also because of the reduced number of working hours.

All the same, figures show that the evolution of the MW adjusted for the CPI has not been stable. From the middle of the past decade until the first years of the crisis, the trend was clearly upwards, with an improvement in the MW in real terms. During the crisis, this trend was reversed, registering a certain fall until 2012 and a very flat profile until 2017, the moment when an important process of change began, with nominal increases of 8% in 2017 and 4% in 2018. The value of the MW in this last year however, in terms of purchasing power parity, continues to be well below that of the countries with the highest income in the European Union. It is between 50 and 60% of the value for the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland.

**Figure 25.**  
Evolution of the minimum wage (in euros, in 2018).



**Notes:**

To be able to compare the value of the MW in different years, it is necessary to discount the effect of inflation; to do so, 2018 is taken as the benchmark year and the minimum wage is adjusted in each year for the corresponding CPI.

**Source:**

Compiled based on records of the Ministry of Labour.

# CONCLUSIONS

## 1 Failure in the labour market

The Spanish labour market has some of the most significant failures of all EU countries, both in expansion and recession phases of economic cycles. During recessions, the general unemployment rate increases greatly, and during expansion stages there is an increase in the number of employees with short-term contracts who suffer great job insecurity and frequently enter and exit the labour market. During the last recession, Spain was the European country experienced the greatest increase in the unemployment rate for each percentage fall in production. As a result, practically all indicators studied have worsened since the recession, without the progress achieved in the short period of time since the end of the crisis leading to a substantial recovery of the losses registered.

## 2 High youth unemployment

Youth unemployment in Spain is high in the European context and, despite it still being very concerning that almost one in three young Spaniards aged 20 to 29 are unemployed, the situation is clearly better than it was five years ago, when the unemployment rate for that age bracket was 41%.

## 3 Poverty and insufficient working hours

Both during the expansion and recession stages of the economic cycle, Spain has registered high levels of in-work poverty and job insecurity. The in-work poverty and job insecurity of Spanish workers greatly exceeds the European average both in expansion and, especially, recession stages. In-work poverty in our country is linked to two key factors: underemployment due to insufficient hours, and unemployment and its concentration in certain households.

## 4 Average hourly wages

The hourly wages of people employed in Spain are average for countries in the European Union, although it is important to note that during the expansion phase, in 2005 for example, when 92 per cent of the labour force was employed, the median hourly wage was lower than it was afterwards and during the recession. This figure indicates that periods of prosperity have a positive impact on employment for groups with low salaries, who in another economic environment would be unemployed.

## 5 High underemployment and long-term unemployment

The impact of the recession on the Spanish labour market has increased underemployment, in-work poverty and, in particular, the duration of the periods of unemployment compared to the European average. The number of people who live in households in which half or more of the unemployed labour force have been searching for a job for over a year has practically tripled from 2005 to 2017, increasing from 6 to 14.6 per cent. In these three aspects, the situation in the Spanish labour market is currently much worse than the average in other EU countries.

## 6 Educational mismatch

The level of skills mismatch with the position held among people employed in the Spanish labour market is high. Almost half of Spanish workers say their job requires higher or lower qualifications than they have. Of these, three in four say they have more qualifications than necessary for the job they perform. It is important to note that the recession has exacerbated this problem, although recently over-qualification has decreased while under-qualification remains the same.

## 7 Dissatisfaction with the job linked to the economic cycle

General dissatisfaction with work is closely related to the economic cycle, with dissatisfaction increasing in expansion phases when employment is abundant, and decreasing in recessions when employment is scarce. Furthermore, one in ten workers has uncertainty in relation to their work schedule, which increases the difficulties in balancing work and family life. Compared with Europe, what stands out is that in expansion phases the general dissatisfaction with work in Spain is similar to the European Union average, although this dissatisfaction is currently below average for European countries.

## 8 High spending on employment policies, but low spending on active policies

Spain is one of the European Union countries with the highest percentage of spending on employment policies relative to GDP. This feature can be seen both in expansion periods and in those with the destruction of jobs, and is linked to the fact that it repeatedly has an unemployment rate above the European average. This position in the European rankings does not however correspond to an equivalent protective intensity, as the figures on spending per unemployed person show. Especially noteworthy in the European context is the low Spanish spending on active policies per unemployed person, even below that seen in countries with a lower level of income.

## 9 Decrease in the coverage rate of the unemployment benefit system

The coverage of unemployment situations by the system of benefits specifically designed to cover this risk is strongly affected by the reforms implemented over the past two decades, which made entering the system more difficult, lowering both the amounts and the duration of the benefits. As the crisis progressed, the coverage offered by the system decreased, with the system becoming overwhelmed when the unemployment rate reached its highest values. The coverage rate is currently close to a record minimum for the past two decades, with just over half of unemployed people receiving benefits. One of the most negative results of this reduction in coverage is that the impact of these benefits on the poverty rate has barely changed, in contrast to what happened in most European countries during the crisis. This is despite the significant fall in the income of households most affected by unemployment in Spain.

## 10 Low, but increasing, minimum wage

Although the minimum wage directly affects few workers, its evolution reflects the concern of public decision makers to ensure a minimum level of well-being through wages. During the crisis, this fell in real terms and barely registered changes until 2017, when significant nominal increases were implemented. The real value of the minimum wage, however, is still well below the current figures in neighbouring countries.

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