

# Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

## City profile: Barcelona, Spain



**Population:** 1,636,762 (2019)

**GDP per capita:** \$32,830 (2018)

**Major industries:** services (real estate and financial), tourism

**Percentage of migrants:** 20.2% (2019)

**Mayor's name:** Ada Colau Ballano | **Next election date:** 2023

### Socioeconomic profile

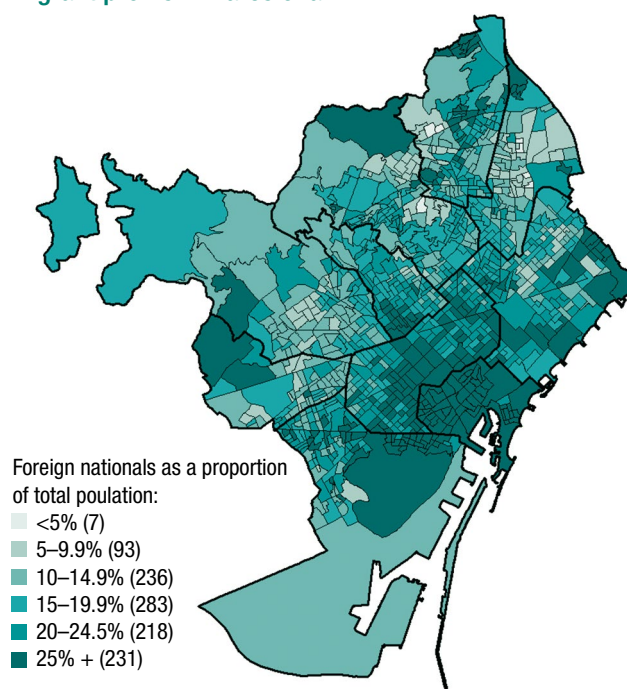
Barcelona is the second largest city in Spain, located in the autonomous region of Catalonia. The municipality proper is home to approximately 1.6 million people, with a total of 5.6 million residents in the larger urban area (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2019). The city grew by approximately 1.3% annually between 2000 and 2018 and exhibits fairly high population density at 16,160 people/km<sup>2</sup> (UNDESA, 2018). Such density has been a feature of Barcelona since its founding in Roman times, as has its gridded structure. The city demonstrates an uncommon lack of sprawl; most of its territorial expansions were explicitly – and centrally – planned (Roberts, 2019).

The city's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 3.6% between 2017 and 2018, with a 2018 GDP per capita of \$32,830.<sup>1</sup> The majority of urban economic activity (80%) is concentrated in the services sector, particularly real estate and public administration. The city also benefits from a large trade and tourism sector (Barcelona Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies, n.d.). In a 2017/2018 survey, just under 20% of the city's residents were recorded as being at risk of poverty, a slight rise on the previous year (ibid.). Housing costs are a significant challenge for many residents given that these have risen considerably in recent years (Barcelona City Council, 2019a). Around 11% of the population were unemployed in 2018, falling from a peak of 23.3% in 2013 (OECD Stats, 2018). The impact of the growth in visitor numbers to the city and access to affordable housing are two major issues of growing concern to residents, alongside unemployment and traffic, which are also highlighted in the city's resident surveys (Barcelona City Council, 2017). Despite these challenges, 94% of Barcelona residents say they are satisfied with their life in the city (European Commission, 2016).

### Migration profile

Barcelona has experienced dramatic recent growth in its migrant population. The proportion of residents that are foreign born has quintupled since 2000, to approximately one in five (20.2%) (Barcelona City Council, 2019b). Initial immigrant populations mostly stemmed from Latin America, but recently Asian and European arrivals have increased. Currently around one-third of foreign-born residents are from the European Union, while the other two-thirds are from outside the EU (ibid.). The six main countries of birth of foreign-born residents are Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Pakistan and Italy (ibid.). Asylum

### Migrant profile in Barcelona



Source: Barcelona City Council (2020)

<sup>1</sup> This figure is provided in nominal US\$ and is not comparable with other cities profiled. See OECD Stats (2018). Information is extracted in US\$, constant prices, constant PPP, converted into local currency using OECD PPP – local currency conversion rate, then converted into nominal US\$ using OECD's local currency to US\$ conversion rate.

requests have also risen in recent years: in 2017 Barcelona processed 3,437 applications, the second highest number in Spain and a three-fold increase from 2015 (OECD, 2018). Approximately 10,000–15,000 residents are estimated to be irregular migrants (ibid.). Barcelona's immigrant populations are concentrated in two main areas of the city (shown in the figure): the historical downtown (Ciutat Vella, where 43% of residents are foreign born) and peripheral neighbourhoods (ibid.). Although Ciutat Vella has been a major immigrant gateway since the 1990s, recent spikes in housing prices are pushing lower-income (typically immigrant) residents into outlying areas.

Immigrants have been key to Catalonia's demographic and economic growth. New foreign arrivals accounted for 85% of population growth between 2001 and 2008, offsetting a steep decline in the region's domestic population (Barcelona City Council, 2020). However, the 2008 recession hit Barcelona's foreign-born population the hardest: over 45% of immigrant males and almost 40% of females had to rely on temporary employment compared with approximately 17% and 21%, respectively, of the Spanish population (OECD, 2010). To this day, the risk of foreign-born Barcelona residents slipping into poverty is twice that of native-born residents. The city has prioritised a migrant integration strategy based on the key principles of (1) integrated support and rapid reception of newcomers;

(2) equal access to rights and obligations as residents of the city; (3) recognition of diversity as an asset for the city; and (4) promotion of interaction among diverse residents to preserve social cohesion. However, successfully integrating immigrants into local education and labour market systems remain important challenges.

## Governance structure

The city council of Barcelona comprises two separate organisational levels: Political and Executive. The former consists of the Mayor, the Municipal Council and the Municipal Government Commission; they define city strategy and are responsible for the decision-making functions of planning, scheduling and monitoring. The Executive is made up of managers' offices, run by the Municipal Manager, to implement specific policies in pursuit of defined goals across all the city council's management areas (Barcelona City Council, n.d.). Seven political parties are currently represented on the 41-seat Municipal Council: the 'citizen platform' Barcelona En Comú and the pro-independence ERC both hold ten seats. Due to Spain's decentralised government structure, the municipality of Barcelona holds multiple competencies including urban planning, public transport, social services, education, health, social housing and culture, and local migrant integration (many of the above in partnership with regional and/or national governments).

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